

# Incognito's Surreal 15th Trip: Interview With Bluey Maunick



“I’ve never doubted the power of music to cure, heal and make sense of things”

Jean-Paul “Bluey” Maunick has always given credit to the music from the beaches of Mauritius for being the nucleus of the Incognito sound. The Sega music he heard during his youth started his visceral understanding of music’s power to heal emotional weariness. His connection to the slave music of the island and that of African-Americans started the reinterpretation of a path most notably lead by Herbie Hancock into Incognito’s sound of curative joy. Maunick’s British based band of multi-cultural musicians hit their commercial peak in the ‘90s when “Always There” and “Don’t You Worry ‘Bout A Thing” charted and put them in center view with their American fanbase. The 33-year mark and 14 albums to date after working with such voices as Maysa, Jocelyn Brown and Chaka Khan made the recording of the current project seem like a dream after a dream hence the name *Surreal*. This phase of the band’s journey revitalizes the R&B/funk/ jazz style they have always produced but with the new voices of Mo Brandis and Natalie Williams giving the album a subtle edge. Maunick spoke to Kickmag recently about *Surreal*, the structure of the band and the power of music.

## **Why do you call this album Surreal?**

Well first of all, for several reasons, this fantasy world I live in making this music and 15 years later 33 years of Incognito and Iâ€™m really on top of my game and it felt really quite abstract because I really thought at some point in my life it would really stop and peter down. It felt surreal like I had a new lease on life I felt like I was producing in my own studio again and it just felt abstract every step of the way that I was making a new record again. The last album we had done *Transatlantic RPM*, I just felt that I had reached a peak at that point I was working with Chaka Khan, Leon Ware and Al McKay from Earth, Wind & Fire is on there and I felt it was a pinnacle album it marked the end of a chapter. I just felt that us beginning again was surreal.

## **Youâ€™ve talked a lot about how your travels influence the music and was there any particular place that set the tone for Surreal?**

The main journeys that were made in recent times Iâ€™ve been to Mexico and Guadeloupe like that part of the world. I spent Christmas and New Year in Los Angeles on the coast so once again Iâ€™ve been close to water as you can see the *Surreal* album cover contains me in an astronaut outfit the concept is kind of surreal like me being a fish being a Piscean. I think my journeys still inspire me because we are not just journeying to play a gig like for instance in Guadeloupe I stayed over for an extra week in Mexico I stayed over for an extra five days. In Thailand I stayed over for an extra week. I see my journeys to play music as not just being a travel date from a to b but a chance for me to live that life and feel the culture and make some of the journeys I wanted to as a kid.

## **Why did you make the choice to always change the bandâ€™s lineup versus sticking to a particular group of people?**

Because Iâ€™ve been in one of those bands that was going to be like â€˜We are this band and this is what weâ€™re gonna be till we dieâ€™ and in the end I was in the band Light of the World and theyâ€™re still suing each other since 1970 because theyâ€™re fighting over the name itâ€™s like one guy came in to replace me and he tried to get the rights to the band ever since. It just goes to show there is almost a gang mentality that exists in bands in their conception. Because youâ€™re young and you think itâ€™s going to be this is it forever and thereâ€™s no room to kind of grow thereâ€™s no room to be a man you are a boy and you stay a boy. Those bands are formed like boy bands always want to be boy bands again they want to reunite and play for their fans and itâ€™s like youâ€™re stuck as a boy inside and some of them only exist because the money is so big. I know some big bands that are still going which is great but they donâ€™t talk to each other. Lawyers speak to lawyers managers speak to managers even managers donâ€™t talk to managers. I once went to see three famous musicians who worked together many years just three guys and they had three separate trailers. They never went to each otherâ€™s trailer they only saw each other on stage and they held hands and took a bow for the audience and it was the most insincere thing I witnessed in my life and I refuse to buy any of their music since that day. You must either believe it and live it or youâ€™re portraying a lie. If I couldnâ€™t have that camaraderie with my friends on the road and be making a difference to their lives and them making a difference to mine that I wouldnâ€™t want it. Thatâ€™s why I chose this thing that would change where everybody would feel like there is family.



**You have also talked a lot about your upbringing on the island of Mauritius and how your experiences there shaped your music, are there any similarities between Sega music and African-American music?**

Yes, Sega music was born of an African rhythm we played the hand drum. You know recently because of the religion of Mauritius the people who found it the French, the British also the slave trade played a big part running through the south cape of Africa an African population that also mixed with the Indian population that came and the Indians in time had more children so the Indian and Muslim community is like the main community but when I was a kid it was more of an equal mix of the African people, the French, the Indians and the Chinese. The Sega music then was even more African. Now it changed into some kind of reggae meets Indian music which is not something I grew-up with at all. The Sega music that I grew-up with it was very African ethnic rhythm played on one drum and a hand drum.

**You’ve always said that the Incognito came from this kind of music you heard on the beach and the sound is always festive unlike some of the blues sounds from America.**

That music that travelled from Africa it was always going to

be for two purposes. The music that came to America it became jazz, soul, rock and it was either going to be for celebrating life or to show your pain. I always think that with Incognito there is a celebration of life and that my purpose has always been to use the music with the Sega rhythm and the that I learned in Mauritius that in some kind of way it's just a grown-up version of that same thing but it has the same effect that I saw when I first heard Sega when I was younger I saw it on the beaches so I saw the people come out of the fields and I saw their bodies broken from cutting sugar cane from lifting heavy loads on their heads. I saw the bodies of these women were tired and they were sitting there having a drink on the beach and then the music would start and they would come alive. And suddenly people who looked sick and broken were living life to the full in a way and they had smiles on their faces and they were laughing and giggling and this music brought that to them. Basically my function has always been to make people laugh, smile, dance it's the first reaction I expect to my music. That tribal thing to make people feel better about life what the things music can do. I've never doubted the power of music to cure, heal and make sense of things. The real power of music and you put words to it and it becomes even more powerful.

**What's been the biggest challenge in keeping the band together for so long?**

The biggest challenge is keeping a band this size going financially. You think if you make this a five or six piece band I could have a totally different lifestyle and I could be free of any financial worries. You were told by your accountant, your management but I would rather start up a new band but they want you to use whatever you built up for your fame. If I changed Incognito to a smaller unit it wouldn't be Incognito anymore because people come to hear the various voices, the horns, people want to hear the percussion and the drums. They want to hear that musicality and that big sound.

**Do you have the same goals you started with, how has that changed?**

Goals change all the time you consider all kinds of things like moving your base to another country. I don't have a time limit for Incognito this could be the last album or it could be the midpoint I don't know. I write from day to day but I might be writing for Mario Biondi or Leon Ware co-writing with someone for a different project there's all kinds of things that go through that thought process all the time. But the goal of actually travelling and playing music and seeing the world and being a teacher an entertainer combination that's the thing you want to keep alive.

[youtube]VA3zolfMhI4[/youtube]

**“The Way You Love” sounds like Chic, was that intentional?**

Yeah I kind of wanted to do something as a tribute to the clubs I use to go to in the late '70s and early '80s. Bernard Edwards played a massive part in the way I think bass. I construct a lot of my songs on bass and very often some of my basslines sound like Chic that Chic four on the floor rhythm and put it to the bassline a lot times people have said “that sounds Chic-ish.” But what really makes it sound like Chic is that I wanted to do something with all of the vocalists singing in unison and not harmony and not soloing and just chant everything. So that's the Chic thing. I produced some tracks for Sister Sledge and if you listen to those Sister Sledge tracks over the years in unison in order to do that you feel that's the Chic influence.

**What's next?**

We may do some more dates in America because the shows we did a lot of the early stuff and the crowd and was really read for it wherever we went. [Natalie](#) is working on a solo album and she's made solo albums before. [Mo Brandis](#) is also working on

a solo album [Maysa](#) is obviously all the time putting out solo stuff Iâ€™m producing her next album. [Vanessa](#) we plan to have an album ready for her.

**Is there anybody that you want to work with or anyone that youâ€™re listening to?**

I was humbled the other day when I went to Washington to do a radio interview. We went to this big radio station and to meet me in the lobby was a young singer called [Deborah Bond](#) *Madame Palindrome* is a fantastic album and Iâ€™ve been picking up this album and telling everyone. She was this girl working a 9-5 working the board at the radio station and I just felt so humbled that someone that was so talented was taking care of life. I thought Iâ€™m very very lucky to be doing what Iâ€™m doing so on the next album I want to do something with her. The thing about London and the scene is that three of the musicians on this album that play percussion are people Iâ€™ve been looking at, at jam sessions in the UK. Itâ€™s a real scene that Iâ€™ve been seeing since the â€™70s and this morning I just booked another one of them for three tours for Japan and Italy and a gig in Korea. So thereâ€™s a scene I always want to work with and sure one day I would love to work with Dâ€™Angelo because I love the way he writes I love his musical attitude. Thereâ€™s so many people I want to work with Dionne Warwick would be up there. Iâ€™ve been writing a song for Dionne Warwick in my head for seven years.