

**BEN GILLIES & CHRIS JOANNOU**

**WITH ALLEY PASCOE**

# LOVE & PAIN

**THE EPIC TIMES AND CROOKED LINES OF LIFE  
INSIDE AND OUTSIDE SILVERCHAIR**



**FROM A NEWCASTLE GARAGE TO WORLDWIDE RECOGNITION,  
THE REMARKABLE STORY OF BEN GILLIES AND CHRIS JOANNOU,  
TWO TEENAGERS WHO GREW UP IN SILVERCHAIR,  
ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S GREATEST ROCK BANDS**

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## RECIFE, BRAZIL, 2003

We're trapped in our hotel. There's a thick crowd of people waiting outside the lobby to get a glimpse of us. Better yet an autograph, or a photograph, or a sniff of our hair. We don't know.

The only thing keeping us from being engulfed by the masses is a heavy glass door, a bemused hotel security guard and an unspoken rule that says you're not allowed to enter the grounds of a hotel that you're not staying at. It's not a binding law, but there's something taboo about it. Do not enter. No trespassing. Private property.

The hotel lobby is sacred ground guarded by the threat of a raised eyebrow from the receptionist. For us, today, it's a safe haven from the chaos outside.

We're all here: Ben, Chris and Dan. Those aren't the names we've checked into the hotel under, though. We have aliases. Ben is Mr Landers, Chris is Mr Rockwell and Dan is Mr Diggle. We think we're hilarious referencing the cult film *Boogie Nights*. Who knows what the hotel staff must think?

It's 2003 and Silverchair mania is peaking. Here in Brazil, it's off the charts.

We're playing in front of a packed crowd at Classic Hall in Recife. Here we are: three scruffy-haired boys from Newy at an arena on the other side of the world. It's 11 pm and the stage is dark. A countdown starts and the 10,000-strong crowd pushes forward towards the front. The lights come up as Dan launches into the opening bars of 'After All These Years'. It's hard to hear the music over the screaming.

When we jump into 'World Upon Your Shoulders', the crowd knows all the words. They scream the lyrics back to us and the words hit us like bricks. This is the real wall of sound.

Ben keeps time. Dan closes his eyes as he belts out the chorus. Chris bends his body over his bass concentrating on every note. The crowd screams some more. Some of them have been waiting outside the venue since 5 am, trying to get a front row position. They've waited hours, days, years for this moment. The anticipation fills the air, which is sticky with sweat and smoke from the stage.

This is our third time in Brazil. Two years earlier, we were standing on the Rock in Rio III stage performing to 250,000 people, our biggest ever crowd. We watched as hundreds of thousands of people moved to our beat like an enormous synchronised-swimming act on dry land. What a rush.

For some reason, we have a huge fan base in Brazil, hence the adoring crowd surrounding our hotel.

'How are we meant to get out of here?' someone asks.

It's a valid question. We've got a flight to catch, places to be, people to see, gigs to play and all that.

A plan is made. We're bundled into the back of a car with dark tinted windows. Cutting through the crowd, we can see red and blue lights in front of us and can hear sirens following us.

'What the hell is going on?' we ask.

'This is for you guys. We've had to organise a police escort to get you to the airport safely and on time.'

We've been carrying a Handycam Camcorder around and recording the tour. One of us sticks the camera out the car window to capture the madness outside.

'Hey, you better pull your arm in. Someone will chop your hand off to get that camera,' warns a rep from the record company.

It's like a scene out of a movie, but we're living it. We weave through people and traffic led by a procession of police cars.

When we arrive at the airport, we pull straight up to the tarmac. There are no queues, security checks or customs forms. We walk straight onto the plane and take our seats. Heading where? We can't remember. The details have faded from our memory, but we'll never forget the surreal feeling of being swarmed by people and needing a police escort to drive down the street. It's all very rock'n'roll.

There is a collection of moments in our lives where we've thought, 'How the fuck did we end up here?' This is one of them.

For a long time, we thought our success in Brazil was to do with their serious grunge scene in the '90s when we broke into the industry as teenagers. We had the right sound at the right time, we figured, and we weren't wrong, but there was more to it.

It was only recently that we learnt the full truth. Our popularity in Brazil is thanks to a parallel import scheme. Back when people still listened to – and bought – CDs, it was cheaper for the Australian music store chain Sanity to import albums from Brazil than to buy directly from the Australian record company. When our third album, *Neon Ballroom*, was released, Sanity bought 20,000 copies from Brazil. We can imagine the conversations that were had at the Brazil HQ of our label.

'Holy shit. What's going on with Silverchair? Check out these numbers, they're really blowing up,' we bet someone said. 'We should put a stack of marketing and publicity money behind them.'

And so, our mistaken popularity became a reality. It was a self-fulfilling prophecy. Sanity unintentionally launched us into a new market. The numbers said we were a big deal in Brazil, so we became a big deal in Brazil.

Of course, we didn't know this at the time. We didn't know much about anything. We were just three young Aussie guys riding a wave. We could never have predicted how big the wave was going to get. We could never have known that it would swallow us whole.