

INCOGNITO

Profile

From the earliest years of his life Jean-Paul Maunick was literally surrounded by music. Born in the late 1950s on the small island of Mauritius (off the coast of Madagascar), Maunick was the son of Edouard Maunick, a distinguished African poet and writer, who was his country's ambassador to South Africa after Nelson Mandela became president. Young Jean-Paul – nicknamed Bluey at an early age – immediately gravitated to a different kind of lyric and verse. He spent the first decade of his life listening to the various folk bands that played around the bonfires and cookouts that sprang up on the nearby beaches.

His family moved to London when he was only ten, but by then, the music had made its way under his skin. By the early '70s, Bluey sought out every available opportunity to check out U.S. bands touring in the UK, like Earth Wind & Fire, Weather Report, Kool and the Gang, Tower of Power and the Doobie Brothers – many of whom played at London's legendary Rainbow Theatre, which he still considers "the best music venue ever." In addition, he hung out with bands from the UK's emerging jazz funk scene, like Gonzalez, FBI, Kokomo, Hi Tension and the Average White Band. He would often help them load in their equipment, then stay outside for the duration of their shows because he was underage and penniless.

Bluey and Paul "Tubbs" Williams formed a disco-funk group in the 1970s known as Light of the World, a disco-funk group that scored a few moderate UK hits, including a cover of Bob Marley's "I Shot the Sheriff." After three LPs, Bluey and Williams made a few personnel changes and renamed the band Incognito.

The band released *Jazz Funk* in 1981, but was generally inactive for the remainder of the decade. In that time, however, Bluey continued to write for the group, while at the same time writing and producing for a variety of other artists, including George Benson, Philip Bailey, Maxi Priest and Brenda Russell. During this time, Williams left the project, and Bluey became the sole driving force behind Incognito.

Ten years after *Jazz Funk*, Incognito released the long-awaited *Inside Life*, a 1991 album that spawned the single, "Always There," which became a top ten hit in Britain's burgeoning acid jazz scene, thanks in large part to the song's vocal track by Jocelyn Brown. *Inside Life* boasted a large cast that included some of the best funk players in England at the time.

Since then, the band has released a consistent string of high-quality recordings, beginning with *Tribes Vibes & Scribes*, a 1992 album that marked the first appearance of American vocalist Maysa Leaks in the lineup. Maysa would reappear on several Incognito albums for the remainder of the '90s and beyond. Along the way, they've generated numerous hit singles on either side of the Atlantic, most notably "Always There" and a cover of Stevie Wonder's "Don't You Worry 'Bout A Thing."

More than just a band in the traditional sense, Incognito is an ever-changing collective of musicians hand-picked by Bluey from a worldwide pool to capture whatever vibe he is seeking on any given project. The result is a dynamic musical entity that spans a vast range of styles and cultures. He claims to have used more than 1,000 different musicians and vocalists

during the band's 30-year career, with lineups varying in size from eight pieces to fourteen to even larger configurations.

Given this approach, Bluey is the leader of what is probably the most multicultural band in Britain, with current and past members hailing from all corners: Mauritius, England, Scotland, Ireland, South Africa, India, Brazil, Argentina, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, Jamaica, Grenada, St Lucia, Barbados, Israel, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, China, Australia, New Zealand, Tanzania, Ivory Coast, Ghana, USA, Canada, France, Germany, Holland, Russia, Poland, Portugal and Belgium.

Many of the current key members, however, have been in place for several years, including drummer Richard Bailey, bassist Francis Hylton and keyboard player Matt Cooper. Vocalists Tony Momrelle, Joy Rose and Imaani have also been regulars for the past four years.

Since January 2007 alone, they have performed in more than 25 countries – in some cases taking the roads less travelled. In addition to playing almost all the European countries, the U.S. and Japan, Incognito has played in Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Mauritius and Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean. The Mauritius concert was Bluey's first time performing on the island since leaving for London at age 10.

Incognito entered a new phase in its ongoing musical odyssey by signing with Heads Up International in early 2008. The band will make its Heads Up debut with the June 24, 2008, release of *Tales From The Beach*. Recorded in Italy, Germany, Indonesia and London (and mixed in Jakarta), the album is a refreshing and uplifting set that captures the best elements of the band's classic sound: driving rhythms, high-impact horns and stirring lyrics delivered by an array of expressive vocalists.

At the heart of *Tales From The Beach* – even in its melancholy or bittersweet moments – is the same message of hope and positivity that has been the consistent trademark of Incognito's live shows. "When people come to Incognito gigs, they come as if they're in need of some kind of healing, or some kind of wisdom," says Bluey. "I'm not a doctor or a prophet, so all I can do is give them something through the music and the message in the music. That ends up being part of the band's greater goal, whether we're on stage or in the studio – to bring people together, to be a platform to energize people."

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