



San Cisco rocking on from 'really sad' Groovin' The Moo cancellation

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IF you deep dive on YouTube you'll stumble across a backstage interview with San Cisco at their first Groovin The Moo festival at Maitland in 2012.

The then four-piece are all aged 18 and 19 and dressed in colourful indie shirts. Baby-faced frontman, Jordi Davieson, is effortlessly cool with his cap backwards, sunglasses and lollipop protruding from his mouth.

It was a massive occasion for the Fremantle band, whose quirky brand of indie-pop had caught fire with their call-and-response single, Awkward, the title track of their second EP.

So 12 years and five albums later San Cisco were naturally ecstatic to be lining up for this year's Groovin The Moo as one of the Australian headliners to support their latest record Under The Light.

News last month that the touring regional music festival had been cancelled due to poor ticket sales naturally came as a body blow.

Groovin The Moo's cancellation followed the demise of Newcastle's other major music festival, This That, last September.

"I think it's really sad," Davieson tells Weekender from his home in Fremantle.

"Groovin The Moo has been such a big part of my generation's [culture of] going to festivals. Groovin The Moo, Falls, Splendour In The Grass are big Australian-wide festivals and they're slowly falling apart.

"We were asked recently why is it happening and how can you fix it? But I really don't know. I think it's a changing landscape. The music industry is changing a lot.

"The price of everything is going up. Even to put a show on is extremely expensive now and there's huge risks taken by promoters."

Rather than wallow in self-pity, San Cisco's Davieson (vocals, guitar), Scarlett Stevens (vocals, drums) and Josh Biondillo (guitar) moved quickly to find the positive in Groovin The Moo's cancellation.

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The trio booked an 11-date east coast regional tour to support Under The Light, which includes a May 23 show at King Street.

"Because of a lot of Groovin's exclusivity rules, it wasn't allowed to happen - we weren't able to book anything around it," Davieson says.

"So as soon as it got cancelled I was like, 'let's book a regional tour and a rather extensive one', because we haven't done it for a while.

"It's fun to play smaller venues and get out to parts of Australia that you won't normally get to, and play more intimate shows, which are often very rowdy."

Davieson says San Cisco, due to having more than a decade of music behind them and a well-earned fan base, are better placed than younger Australian bands who depend on the opportunities and the financial support of music festivals.

"I think you probably just have to be pumping social media," he says. "That's the platform.

"It's probably one of the reasons festivals aren't doing what they need to because all the 17 to 23-year-olds are mainly absorbing their music through TikTok.

"That's a minute-long part of a song you fall in love with, as opposed to falling in love with an artist and an album and seeing them play live for the first time.

"It's a different way to access new music."

San Cisco's members, who are all in their early 30s, have grown up personally and musically since their Awkward days. That maturation is clearly recognisable in the smooth dance sounds of Under The Light.

Steven Schram (Paul Kelly, Little Birdy, Crowded House) produced their previous four albums, but for Under The Light Pond drummer James Ireland manned the sound desk.

Davieson says Ireland's influence was most readily heard on the electronic-laden Honeycomb.

"We were like, 'let's make a UK G [garage] beat' and he just produced this UK G beat and we started playing the song," he says.

"Whereas in the past, when we were trying to do something, it would fall somewhere quite different, which is a good process as well.

"It would end up a little different to where we were heading. But with James it's a very accurate representation of what we were looking for."

The circumstances during the recording of Under The Light couldn't have been more different from their 2020 album Between You and Me, which was tracked in a "big blue shed" crawling with "insects, mice and snakes" outside the northern NSW town of Mullumbimby.

It became so uncomfortable Stevens flew in and out during the sessions, leaving Davieson and Biondillo to finish the tracks.

Under The Light was recorded in the comforts of home in Fremantle, which presented the band with the opportunity to get real time feedback on their half-finished songs from family and friends.

"It can be very confusing, but it can also be really good," Davieson says of getting feedback.

"The people who know you really well and them deconstructing what you're doing is quite an interesting thing to watch."

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San **Cisco** bring their Under The Light Tour to Newcastle's King Street Band Room on May 23.

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