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Chino Moreno and Shaun Lopez on the Return of ††† (Crosses)

The Deftones frontman and former Far guitarist discuss their first two original tracks together in nearly a decade, as well as the future of the electronic duo.

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One of the standout releases of 2014, the self-titled full-length album from **†††** (Crosses) set the expressive vocals of **Deftones** frontman Chino Moreno against subtly propulsive electronic soundscapes created by guitarist/keyboardist Shaun Lopez (formerly of the band Far) and bassist Chuck Doom. But following a tour to promote the record, the project went silent, finally re-emerging in 2020 with a surprise cover of “The Beginning of the End” by ’90s synthpop group Cause & Effect, which was followed last year by a cover of Q Lazzarus’s mysterious “Goodbye Horses,” best known for its appearance in Jonathan Demme’s films *Married to the Mob* and *Silence of the Lambs*.

Now, over eight years since their last release of original material, †††—now just a duo of Moreno and Lopez—have served up two new songs of their own, “Initiation” and “Protection.” Both tracks are very much in keeping with the project’s established aesthetic, mixing darkly cinematic vibes with electronic textures that are at once retro and futuristic. We got in touch with Moreno and Lopez to discuss the new music, as well as their shared Sacramento pasts and what the future holds for †††.



What inspired you guys to start making new music of your own again?

Chino Moreno: We had kind of shut down for a little bit, but Shaun and I always keep in touch and hang when we're in town. At one point, Sean came up to visit my place in Oregon, and we went into my studio and started jamming on some stuff, just for fun. We didn't have the mindset that we were going into making a new ††† record, per se, but just playing. He was there for almost a week, and we had four or five pretty neat ideas that we were into; at that point, we decided that maybe we'd start working on it again.

After that, Shaun would send me little snippets of music here and there, like a 30-second drum loop or a sample or something, and I would send it back with a little vocal melody over it, and then the next time we got together, we'd start fleshing it out and building it from that foundation. And we kind of did that for two or three years, but it wasn't until a little less than a year ago that we actually started making sessions. I was coming down here for Deftones rehearsals, because we rehearse in LA; I'd rehearse with them in the daytime, and at nighttime I'd go to Shaun's house and we'd hang out in his studio.

Shaun Lopez: A lot of times it would just start with a track, and then if Chino was inspired by it, he would go in and freestyle some melodies. And then I would say, "Oh, what if you did *this*?" or, "That sounds like a good chorus melody," or whatever.

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— Chino Moreno

Do you guys generally get inspired just by messing around with samples and loops, or are there other things that play into it?

Chino: Usually we're inspired by a sound or a beat or a chord sequence—or even listening to music [by other artists], we'll be like, “Man, I love that synth sound there, let's try to find it!” And we'll dig and find out what kind of synth it was, and then we'll just start messing with it. There's no preconceived idea of what we're trying to make, no underlying theme other than just going with the mood that we create when we put our heads together.

But is the mood itself at all preconceived?

Chino: Not really, no. We try not to put it in a box; I don't look at it as like a “retro” project, although we're obviously inspired by stuff from the '80s. It's more or less just following our instincts; if anything sounds too close to anything where it will get pigeonholed, we kind of try to take a left turn at that point. I think that keeps us on our toes.

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– Shaun Lopez

The video for the song is really cool. It has almost a kind of *giallo* vibe.

Chino: Once we’ve got the song, Shaun takes over on the visual stuff. Since the inception of this project, that part has always sort of been his brainchild.

Shaun: I put some headphones on and listen to the tune, and just sort of go where my mind takes me. We’re both such big fans of film, and we always have something visually cool on in the studio when we’re writing. Every now and then you’ll look up and somehow the song you’re playing syncs up perfect with what’s happening on the screen, and it’s so cool.

Where did your other new track, “Protection,” come from?

Chino: That was one of those ones where we were looking at specific sounds. I mean, I hate to give away our secrets, but I think it’s not really secret that we love Depeche Mode—a lot. [Laughs.] On those early records, they were using those E-MU synthesizers that came with stock sounds on floppy discs. We found some E-MU samples and started going through them; that one that starts the song, it almost seems like it could be something percussive, like mallets. We arpeggiated it and made a loop out of it, and that was it. For drums, well, another one of our secrets—even though it’s not so secret—is that we love Art of Noise...

Shaun: I remember you saying, "What if we put some finger snaps on, like that Art of Noise song ["Moments in Love"]?" And I was like, "I already know what you're talking about!" We got some snaps in there, put the reverb on it, and it was like, "Oh, that's hot!" [Laughs.] You know, one thing that I don't think even Chino realizes is, when we did that Cause & Effect cover, it's almost like Chino discovered a new part of his voice—that real low register. When we put that song out, I remember reading all the comments and everyone was like, "Who's singing?" I'm like, "What do you mean? That's Chino singing!" So I think that kind of influenced where we went with this song.



Goodbye Horses



Can we expect to hear more new ††† stuff in the near future?

Chino: Yeah, we already have a lot of finished stuff, and we're sort of planning out the releases. And we're continuing to write new stuff, even though we have plenty enough as it is, because when we get together it's really easy to start working on something new. I feel like we just keep unlocking these different doors to how we create. We have the next release in line already, mastered and ready to go with artwork and everything; and then in the next couple of weeks we'll be planning the next one, and hopefully getting on a certain schedule. There's a lot of different rooms that this project lives in, and I think with each release the picture gets wider, you know what I mean? I'm really excited for people to hear this as a whole, once everything's out there—we'll eventually release it as a whole album, sort of like what we did with the last record.

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You guys go back a long way. What are some of your earliest memories of making music together, or even just digging on music together?

Chino: It's funny because Shaun and I were coming up at the same time in our bands. Sacramento wasn't the biggest music scene, but there was a lot of different types of bands—ska, reggae, punk, metal. And it was kind of crazy that our bands were very similar, both in that we had heavy rock and metal influences, and in the way that I sang over our music and the way Far sang over their music.

Shaun: I remember the first time I saw Deftones play. We didn't even have a singer in Far at that point, but I remember seeing Chino and being like, “Man, that singer!” I couldn't figure out why I really loved it—but thinking back now, I really loved Duran Duran and Chino really loved Duran Duran, and that showed in how he sang. He was *singing* over these heavy guitars, and not just sort of growling like the Cookie Monster.

Chino: When we met, we kind of had an immediate kinship, and we pushed each other a lot creatively; I remember I'd see Far live or hear their new demo, and I'd be like, "Damn, that shit's good!" Or I'd be like, "Shaun's tone is killer—Steph, you need to step your game up on your guitar rig!" [*Laughs.*] **FL**