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Milli Vanilli, the Real Story -- 20 Years Later

By Mike Hess Posted Jan 29th 2010 02:03PM

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Exclusive: Twenty years ago in 1990, Fab Morvan won what now very well-may be the most controversial Grammy Award ever given out. His group Milli Vanilli was given the Best New Artist award. Months later, when it was admitted that Morvan and partner Rob Pilatus weren't the ones who sang on hit songs like 'Blame It On the Rain' and 'Grl You Know It's True,' toeir Grammy was taken back and the media and music industry chewed them up and spit the rout just as fast as they built them up. Now, two decades after that tumultuous year, PopEater had the chance to coat with Morvan about those rocky days, and what his life is like now, and why current are using Auto-Tune are essentially doing the same thing Milli Vanilli did.

"People think they know the story with us, but they don't," Morvan told PopEater. Well, now you can.

Ken Sax

Throughout our interview, Morvan was open,

concise, warm and -- perhaps most surprisingly -- perfectly unbiased and not jaded by the industry that made him, but also broke him. Everything was open for discussion, from the inner workings of Milli Vanilli to the unfortunate passing of his bandmate Rob to his current projects as a dance artist. **Read the full chat below:**

What's life been like for you lately?

I've been living in America for quite some time, and since '07 and now I've been going back between Los Angeles and Holland. I felt like pop music was going in a circle. I was working with some people in the States, so I was like,

Fab Morvan's



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'Let me go to Europe and figure it out myself. I just love the freedom with which they were working with he studio. No rules allows you to just be as opposed to well this is the formula and you have to stick to it.

'Anytime'

I started working with different producers and working with a dude called Sean McCaff, and together we have a project called SMFM, which is our initials, but also stands for Supplying Mirages for Mankind (SMFM Web site here). It's a dance project and we're about to do some releases in the next few months

Given the history of Milli Vanilli, was it hard to get back into the music business?

I never had a problem creating music. Creating the art isn't the problem. It's always the business aspect, and people connected to other people in the business. I'm not on the black list -- the invisible black list -- but when I do come back and my name is mentioned, then we bring back a lot of things from the past that some people don't want to talk about. Because, in reality, the smallest two links in the chain, those were the ones put in front and had to take the fault for everyone when in fact, there was a whole machine behind Milli Vanilli. What about that? I'm not pointing the finger at anybody, but it's obvious that we couldn't handle things by ourselves, and ironically enough, we were the ones put on a pedestal and taking the fault for it all.

It's so obvious, everything now. The thing is, for me, you don't know me as a producer or songwriter. I'm very easy to hit. It's very easy to get on Fab Morvan, ex-member of Milli Vanilli. I'm really happy when I get a chance to say something and have it repeated properly and not out of context. Some of the people looking from the outside who don't get all the information.

People think they know the story with us, but they don't. I have to be patient, because patience is a virtue, and that's the way the life is. So, c'est la vie.

So you feel that yourself and Rob were set up as scapegoats when it was really a much larger operation?

Yeah. I'm taking responsibility for what I did. I'm saying right here: "Yeah, I did it.' OK. But I'm the only one. I'm not the only one in this, but people don't get and grasp that because it's never really been brought up to them in a concise way. A lot of people just go on what's being fed to them. I understand, some people are just looking for whatever's put in front of them. If it's put in a certain way, that's how they see it. I'm the kind of guy that's going to look at things from every different angle. People are sitting in their living room not even walking in my shoes like 'They're responsible! They were behind it all!" Well, somewhat, but to point the finger at two guys -- a lot of people made a lot of money. After all of it, the smallest link in the chain were the ones who were left hung out to dry and then having to fight to create something for yourself when everyone's pointing the finger at you. You're the guilty one, but in fact, there are a lot more. Things happen, there are consequences to any decisions and actions you make, and you have to be strong to say 'This is it.'

Let's make something clear, I was not the only one. A lot of people just ran away.

'Blame It On the Rain'

'Girl You Know It's True'

Were you ever tempted to call people out to expose the real story?



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I'm not that kind of guy. There's many ways to go about things in life. You can be the better man, be strong -- you fall and stand back up. You do your thing. It's about being the bigger man. I don't have to point the finger. I just want people to read between the lines, that's all I'm asking.

I love music. Music has been my inspiration and strength for years, and I'm going to keep doing it and doing it. I feel very lucky that I've been able to do what I love. Now I'm reinventing and recreating, because you never know what's going to happen. Life can come and strike you in the face. I don't know, I might die tomorrow. Look what happened in Haiti? Who would have thought that one of the places that needed the most help in this world would get hit. What's the reason? I don't know, but life strikes and sometimes you just have to be strong. Sometimes the harshest things in life can be a blessing in a way. It's all allowed me to really define who I was. I would have never become who I am today if I hadn't gone through this struggle. There's a lot of good in life, there's a lot of bad. If you balance both and keep growing and evolving, if you are an artist, everything lands itself into your music.

We see it with Haiti. What I love is to see how powerful music is. All the artists come together and with the power of music, it makes us focus and brings us together. When I went to see U2 once, I was amazed at the power those guys have. When you hear them sing those songs, you feel human. It makes you think, then it makes you evolve.

Your reputation took a beating, which must make it tough to break through now.

The only thing people see when my name is mentioned is tights. They have no clue what I am as an artist because nothing has been put out yet. You can go online and go to my Web site and my blog and see what is dear to my heart. No one is there to write it for me, so I write it myself. I'm trying to do the best I can to show people what I am. You remember someone in tights, but this person has evolved. Just like any human beings, you change, but some people don't realize that sometimes. They don't think that you can change or that you remain in that box.

It's been 20 years since the sudden success and aftermath of your Grammy win. Looking back now, what's the one thing that you took away from the whole situation?

The one thing I'll say is it's amazing how you can be the king at one point, quote unquote, and everyone loves you and the minute your time has passed and it's time for you to get torn down. When it's tear down time -- woah, it's harsh. There's no pity. They will hurt you however. Jabs, uppercut, hooks, and they want to see you on the floor knocked out. TKO. That's what they want. I saw it happen to some people, but when it happens to you, it's amazing how devastating it can be. When the negativity is directed at you, it hurts because you're there as an entertainer. You want to please your fans, have a good time and make them smile. You do the best you can on stage for them, and suddenly, you're nothing but a joke. Everything we did was from the heart. With all the effort we put into entertaining people, we got slapped back in the face by the mean jokes. I was surprised to see how things can turn so quickly. Usually, in the career of artists, it's gradual. It takes a few years and then 'Okay, well, he's done.' For us, it happened from one day to the next and that was shocking. Brutal! They are brutal! But, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, and you study all of that. I studied everything that happened about me. I have a lot of material, a lot of music, and in time you'll see what kind of an artist I am

Sometimes, when you're thrown in that fast lane life, you can get confused, and rightfully so. You're surrounded with yes people who agree with everything you say. You lose your bearings. There's no more people that you can count on as far as being honest and true to you, so you're pretty much alone. So when the train stops and you get off, you're really alone. You come in this world alone and you leave alone.

A lot of pop stars today lip sync during their performances and have other tools to help them sing. Since that's essentially what got you in so much trouble, how do you digest that?

The pop climate has changed. I'm not saying if it's for the best and for the worst. But authenticity of an artist has changed. Now, a great video is one of the most important things because this is your tool to promote. Your live show isn't your number one thing anymore, the video is what people are paying attention to. So there's a whole different string of artists that came along with what took place in the past.

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I have to say something and be clear about it. When people say: "Well, you didn't sing on the record"... OK, cool. I didn't. But to be technical, when someone records in a studio and Auto-Tune does your job, it isn't you anymore. It could be anyone, because you're not doing it anymore, the machine is doing it. So, are you doing it? When it comes time to perform it live, you can't replicate it. So when people say 'You should sing on the record, man.' Well, yeah, but now technically a lot of the people who are singing on the record with Auto-Tune aren't doing their job.

I'm not criticizing anyone in particular, I'm just observing what's going on, that's all. I see some comments saying we didn't sing on the record, but I just want to be precise because I've never gotten a chance to say that clearly. It's like, what's the point of singing with Auto-Tune? It's not you! Then you got the video, but that's the way things are now. People don't seem to care. The new generation doesn't seem to care about music now, because a lot of people are stealing it ... but that's whole other thing.

Once your voice has been doctored to a point where we don't even know it's you -- I'm not talking about people who do it as a style or to fit a certain song, because the goal was to make it sound like that and it's a gimmick. I'm talking about singers, pop singers, who without it -- ain't nothing going, baby. I'm trying to have people look at them. I'm just trying to bring up another point for discussion. I'm tired of people always pointing the finger at me and criticizing when in fact, look a little closer at everyone out there and inform yourself more.

There were rumors about Milli Vanilli not singing even before the Grammy win. Were you prepared for the word to get out there?

Yeah. That's the difference between Rob and I. Rob maybe thought it was a never-ending story, and when you walk in our shoes, that's really how it felt. Everything is just moving, moving, moving. You go around the world three or four times over, but it seems like it's never going to stop. In the back of my mind, I was thinking this can't go forever. It's going to crack eventually. I'll use an analogy. When you fight and you know a punch is coming, when the punch lands, you'll feel it but you anticipate the punch and you won't fall. When you don't anticipate the punch, it hurts and that's when you fall down. I anticipated it, Rob didn't, and I think there lies the difference in how we were hit by it.

Fab and Rob Give Back Their Grammy

Rob sadly passed away due to a drug overdose. Do you think the Milli Vanilli scandal was the primary cause of his demise?

No, this is not essentially the cause, but it was a big part of it. When it comes as a shock, people lose

Wedding Gown!

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respect for you and that's hard. Especially if you didn't see it coming and suddenly you have to deal with it. There were other elements to the story to what Rob was involved with at the time, and that didn't help. The pain was deep.

There was no more support system. You're like that little kid on the playground that everyone picks on. The bullies are coming around and circling, but there's nobody around to protect you. And we're not Americans -- so our families and support systems were abroad and not here. We were trying to just face the music and remain strong at the time, not really aware that the grand scheme of what had happened and that it affected the world as well. It was big news. Only in time, I noticed how many people knew me, knew of me and knew the story. We bridged a gap in generations as a result of what happened.

And you're documenting your life and story in a movie, right?

There will be a movie. When it's done, you'll see the true story. Kathleen Kennedy is involved and there's more people coming to the table. When we're happy with everything, it'll go. I'm a consultant on it. The problem is, in 2.5 hours, how much can you put in there? That's the challenge. Everything you want to put ... it's not just the story on Rob and Fab, but society and generations. Desert Storm was happening. It's a picture in time you're taking, not just Rob and Fab.

What's the biggest lesson you took away from it all?

Like I said, I lived the life of 100 men and I'm thankful for it because I have more insight on life as a result. I wouldn't be who I am today if I hadn't gone through what I've been through. Life is all about living. You live to learn. Whether you're a painter, or whatever you create ... everything has a certain weight to it. Living life as an artist in important. The way up is not easy, but it goes. On the way down, you see what you're made of. It's how you fall and how you stand back up on your feet, because you become an example for others. Be a student for life and keep evolving. Life is too short man, so do the best while you're here. Again, look at Haiti. That really rings like a bell -- wake up people. Those people have nothing. Look at the conditions they're living in, and by looking at them and the crying and the help getting over there, us giving through charity -- you look at life very differently. You see what's important to you and you go back to basics.

There's a lot of bull---- in this world, and what happened to me humbled me. When you haven't been humbled, you look at life as a whole different way. Things happen for a reason. I know it sound philosophical, but that's the way it is.

What's helped you get through the tough times?

For me, as an artist, your salvation is your music. If you pull yourself into it and connect to it and this is the most important thing to you -- what gives you your strength and balance in life -- that's salvation. You'll find happiness. It's all about being happy in the end.

For aspiring artists looking to get into the music business, what lessons or cautionary tales would you share with them?

Fame is the confusing element of the life of a pop star. You have to be very clear on what that is, and if you don't separate your job and yourself, you're bound to fall. Sometimes people play with fire, but it's still fire. It will bite you and burn you in the ass.

Make sure to surround yourself not with yes people, but when you're in the studio, you need people to tell you: 'That sucks.' That's very important. Second, representation. You need trust, whether it's in management or an attorney. Whatever you sign, you have someone professional look it over. Then, keep on developing yourself. Do it from the heart. Give it all you've got, because you never know. Nothing is for sure in life, so come from the heart. Things will take their turn for the best or for the worst. Hop on the ride and just be ready. Whatever decisions you make, you have to stand behind them and deal with the consequences.

Those are very simple, but if someone would have told me that before, I'd be in a different situation. (laughs) But I guess, you live and learn. You have to have a certain sense of humor about life and

what life does. Life gets in the way and sometimes knocks you over your head, but not too hard -- hard enough that you can take the heat.

So with your sense of humor, can you look back at Milli Vanilli and all of the drama and laugh?

I can smirk. A little smirk, like 'Wow, that was crazy.' I can't even believe that it was me. We're talking about a much younger man with a different thought process thrown into this thing. Things were moving so fast you're not really aware of what's going on and what you're doing. People around you are much older, who know about how to play your youth. They just know how to play you. The artists of today, people are much more business-minded. They've studied and learned from the other people's mistakes.

The one thing I've learned, a lot of things are very controlled. When it comes to answering questions, and because I went through what I went through, being open is the best way because in the end, what is always comes out. What isn't always comes out. If you're not what you are, it will always come out and I learned my lesson the hard way.

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Check out how Britney "Miss Milli Vanilli" Spears sing in her live concerts.

Sunday 31 January By scrabblequeenbee Highest Rank

Also, Miley Cyrus, Taylor Swift to name a few more.

Sunday 31 January By Dovie

I think they should all have to sing there on songs that is they can realy sing

Friday 29 January By slicric13 Lowest Rank

Milli vanilli, who cares?...20 years later

Sunday 31 January By Becca Highest Rank

I care. I remember when all that happened. They were a big deal at the time.

Sunday 31 January By jaguar02 Highest Rank

It is due to people like you with that attitude of not caring & being judgmental of others you do not know, is why our world is in such despair now.

Sunday 31 January By bunnybhutt Highest Rank

Milli Vanilli was great, I loved the sound, the look, the moves....I was sad when it was over. I was very sorry for the guys. I dont care who was singing, personally. Has anyone taken the time to listen to Taylor Swift's voice? She is talented, but she cant sing! It was rumored back then they couldnt sing....but it sounds to me from the clip that Fab CAN sing. It's just too bad, what happened to them, and so obvious they didnt do all that alone. I'm so glad to see he has moved on and I look forward to hearing more from him. Milli Vanilli brought joy, even if it was short lived.

Sunday 31 January By LYdia Lowest Rank

Jaquar: Take a freaking PILL! I can understand what she means when she says "who cares?"...that doesn't make her an insensitive person who doesn't care about real issues.God, I can say the same thing about you..it's because of people like YOU that are so damned nosy and have to know about EVERYTHING that happens in these loser "stars" lives that makes the paparrazzi and the media so out of control now. Give me a break.

Sunday 31 January

Lowest Rank

By Taylor

I also agree to "who's cares"...especially since haiti just lost so many people to an earthquake....i couldnt give a s***t about pop singers from 20 years ago.....what about our economy and homeless people...hello!!!!!

Sunday 31 January By gobluespartyon Highest Rank

If you don't care then don't click the headline and ignore it Slicric13, Lydia, Taylor. Lydia people like entertainment there going to click the headlines or watch the entertainment show and I don't think people that want there entertainment don't believe there feeding the paps I don't and I like the paps, other than TMZ there the good paps and I think TMZ is funny and entertaining to watch. Who cares isn't opinion it's a saying.

Taylor it is sad what happen in Haiti about the earthquake if you don't care then don't click the headline and ignore entertainment news that easy as I said before. I just don't want to hear about doom & gloom 24/7 about econmy or the homeless it's sad I don't like to dewell on those things I like the up beat stuff like entertainment to get way from the ill's of the world and take my mind off of it.

Tuesday 02 February By colorcartucho08

They for me are the best artist in Hollywood and after all many fake artist today make the same mistake in USA but Milli Vanilli they are from another country in that time.

Friday 29 January

Highest Rank

They should have gave credit to the people that sang those good songs in the 90's, unfortunately people in the United States only care about the money and when that's gone, the people run for the hills. Good Luck in the future and follow your dreams.

Friday 29 January By Bella Jean Highest Rank

If you listened to the Youtube interview - Rob did mention the real singers and said the award should go to them. I always felt sorry for these guys - they were just performers, doing what they were hired for in order to make a living. Rob was really a beautiful man with a sad childhood and a tragic end to his life. I'm glad Fab found his peace with the situation and is doing well.

Friday 29 January By RCA Highest Rank

Many artists use backup vocals to enhance their singing ability or lack of ability. Miley, Brittney, Simpson (both of them) and a whole host of other signers. Many artists lipsync in concert because they are unable to remaster the original vocals. In studio vocals are enhanced to extream measures that there is no way they can be reproduced by the singer. Their voice is

simply not that good. Singing rarely has to do with singing ability. There are more professional singers than Brittney singing at the local bar or in the car.

Sunday 31 January By whatever

There are other reasons performers lipsync too. Sometimes a song is tough to sing and the repetition of it can hurt their vocal chords. A lot of performers will sing some songs live but lipsync the ones that are more difficult. When they have rehearsals and shows every night, they have to take care of their voice.

Friday 29 January By ron Highest Rank

Why is it that the real singers on the Milli Vanilli records were never identified or interviewed? Also if the grammy was for the songs/music why was the grammy not given to the people who actually did the signing once the truth came out?

Friday 29 January By souldust

Highest Rank

The singers were identified. Two men and a woman. But since they were part to the scam, they wanted to lay low also. They went along with it, so they were afraid it would affect their careers.

Saturday 03 December By jo

they were identified at large.

frank farian (the producer of milli vanilli) released the second album with the original singers fronting the band and named them "the real milli vanilli" and they toured and performed for a while.

it wasn't a big hit to say the least...

the original singers used to say that they made millions for Rob & Fab, but the truth i think is that Milli Vanilli never would have made a penny if it started out without Rob&Fab posing as the singers. Frank Farian knew this, it was the situation in which everybody could get the most benefit & money, but well...he never thought it would have blown up to be that big!

Friday 29 January By sclaymore9 Lowest Rank

An idiot in denial. Denying as "an artist", of course, which he still claims to be, apparently.

Friday 29 January By laricee Highest Rank

while i'm not a milli vanilli fan or hater, for that matter, they were no less talented than some of these so-called "artists" today. miley cyrus, the jonas brothers, hilary duff, spice girls, all no talents.

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