

FEATURES

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PHOTO: EPA

Nine Inch Nails: sharper than you know

The Wave Goodbye Tour is a swan song to life on the road, but there's no end in sight for Trent Reznor's darkly alternative future

BY ALITA RICKARDS
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Too often, news that a rock star whose debut album came out 20 years ago is coming to Taiwan can unfortunately mean that someone needs to pay the mortgage. Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor — who plays here Aug. 12 for the first and last time — is a refreshing deviation from that trend.

Reznor's stubborn refusal to sell out is coupled with a drive to aggressively experiment with levels of public interaction using the most modern forms of media, making him more relevant as an artist today than ever before.

"It makes me feel complete when I do it," he said. "It's nice to have fame and I'm not going to bullshit you, it's nice to not worry about the gas bill — and I've been there — but I'm not interested in making money."

Nine Inch Nails' Wave Goodbye Tour sees a more balanced, positive frontman firmly in control of his music and his brand. The lyrics from *Head Like a Hole*: "Black as your soul/ I'd rather die than give you control," are realized in his current business model — you can't steal his music, he's giving it away.

'ROBOTS ON STAGE'

The newest Nine Inch Nails album, *The Slip*, is available as a full-length download, free of charge, on the band's Web site (www.nin.com). Reznor split with his record label, Interscope/Universal in 2007 (which now only has the option of putting together a greatest hits compilation) and encourages other artists to do the same.

"If you are trying to change the world," he said, "what [blows] your mind? What movies, books, music does that? If you just want to be a rock star or be on MTV and show how much shit you have, do whatever is big right now and sell it." This is not something he is interested in, and never has been.

Reznor has even posted torrents on Pirate Bay of the masters of songs so people can remix them. The album *With Teeth* has multitracks available to this end. *Ghosts I-IV* was released with a video contest in which people could make sound tracks out of the instrumental music. Despite his power-to-the-people mentality, however, Reznor's own sound tracks, for *Lost Highway* and *Natural Born Killers*, may be hard to live up to.

Midway through an intensive tour schedule, Reznor still has the energy to crack jokes, though he wasn't positive where he was calling from (Madrid). When asked how he has the stamina to perform night after night, he said: "Actually it's robots on stage. I rarely go up there myself."

Though in the early days, "playing live was the reward for all the agonizing over the music," these days "it's reversed," and he prefers to be in the studio doing the "more important work, creating and sculpting" the music. The performance side is "execution," he said.

Reznor said he is "stopping Nine Inch Nails as a touring entity" after he completes his current tour. He wants time to work on other projects, most notably a television series based on *Year Zero*, a concept album released in 2007.

Set 15 years in the future, the album broke the mold for interaction with fans through a *V for Vendetta*-style genre game without a main character — or, rather, with players in the

alternate reality game created around the album becoming the main characters. Reznor teamed up with 42 Entertainment, best known for *Halo 2*, to create the interface, which he said was "easily the most creative and fun collaboration" he had ever done.

TUNE IN TO THE RESISTANCE

USB drives were left in bathrooms at concerts with previously unreleased songs on them, and Web sites gave out clues listing secret locations for "resistance meetings." Fans who showed up were spirited off in unmarked vans to unannounced free concerts.

The game is set in a vaguely defined dystopian future where things have gone horribly wrong as a result of contemporary government policies (think the Bush Administration and the Patriot Act). Players receive e-mails and links to Web sites sent back in time from 2022 that warn about what happens when, in Reznor's words, "a culture gets lazy and [does] not question corruption."

"Art changes the world, changes your perception and how you see things," Reznor said, "whether you are tuned in or you are a drone affected by the TV you watch."

Art is Resistance (www.artisresistance.com) is one example of an online group from the future dedicated to preventing the realization of this Orwellian nightmare. The site offers free templates in its tools menu for making stickers, posters and graffiti stencils.

"People need to pay attention and question things," Reznor said. "That is the key" to avoiding the apocalyptic vision of *Year Zero*.

Nine Inch Nails is on a grueling schedule and has been touring Europe and Southeast Asia non-stop since May, with minimal gaps between performances. James Chen, an Australia-based Taiwanese promoter, is bringing the band here through his company Straight Music House, which is also putting on this weekend's Terminal Festival.

"We are taking this tour not really for money," Chen said, but because it would be "too bad if kids in my country miss [the last chance to see Nine Inch Nails in concert]."

Reviews of the tour indicate that Reznor's macabre stage mania is still as raw and powerful as ever. Stunning light displays and the artist's dystopian Goth-industrial auditory journey create a haunting experience that makes you want to dance your way through the shadows and into the future with eyes wide open.

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Nine Inch Nails — Wave Goodbye Tour, with Digihai and Dynatec

WHEN: Aug. 12 from 8pm to 11pm. Doors open at 6pm

WHERE: Nangang 101 (南港101), 71 Xingnan St, Nangang Dist, Taipei City (台北市南港區興南街71號)

ADMISSION: Tickets for Section A are sold out. Before Aug. 8 tickets for Section B are NT\$2,100 and tickets for Section C are NT\$1,500. After Aug. 8 add NT\$100 per ticket. Tickets are available through ERA ticketing outlets, online at www.ticket.com.tw or by calling (02) 2341-9898

ON THE NET: www.nin.com

