



O, yeah!  
Karen O  
rocks at Big  
Day Out in  
Sydney on  
Jan. 18.

SPRING  
PREVIEW  
2013

“Despair”—Karen O insists the album isn’t preoccupied by death. “The vibe is definitely up, but it wouldn’t be a Yeah Yeah Yeahs album if there wasn’t some sort of confrontation or aggression,” she says. Zinner adds, “It’s about expelling those angry feelings.”

Nowhere were those angry feelings more glaring than on the band’s second album, *Show Your Bones*—which, despite having been a nightmare to make, entered the Billboard 200 at No. 11 and sold 56,000 copies in its first week, according to Nielsen SoundScan. “That was a really hard time,” Chase says of recording what was nearly the Yeah Yeah Yeahs’ last album. Internal strife and the sophomore curse nearly caused Karen O, on more than one occasion, to quit.

“It crossed my mind a lot of times,” she says of abdicating the throne as rock’s most conflicted queen. “But I felt like I had to finish the record, even though it was really difficult and we were going through intense hardship. Nick and I were on really bad terms. We were forced to support the record, and we had to be around each other a lot—at the shows, on the bus.” The long, confined hours in each other’s company actually helped purge their demons. “It was like alchemy. And now we’re still here to talk about it.”

If *Show Your Bones* portended the death of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, then *Mosquito* heralds the resurrection of their electric sting. Their rekindled solidarity was fostered, at least according to Chase—who has said, “It’s important for us to do other things to stay healthy musically”—by their time spent apart.

Karen O contributed a Golden Globe-nominated score to her ex-boyfriend Spike Jonze’s film “Where the Wild Things Are,” played shows as her lo-fi shadow Native Korean Rock and staged what she refers to as a “psycho-opera,” “Stop the Virgens,” in 2011. That same year, she married award-winning video artist Barnaby Clay.

Zinner, who has collaborated with everyone from Scarlett Johansson to Ronnie Spector, honed his skills as a photographer. In addition to showing pieces—many of them depicting the adoring throngs who sell out Yeah Yeah Yeahs shows—across galleries in New York, he unveiled “1,000 Images” during the Noise Pop music festival in San Francisco.

Meanwhile, Chase, Karen O says, “does more in a month than Nick and I do in a year—no exaggeration.” The avid Ashtanga yogi released an album as half of an improvised jazz duo with multi-instrumentalist Seth Misterka, wrote an article about synesthesia for *Modern Drummer* and went in search of the world’s best baked goods.

Despite the band’s many achievements—*Fever to Tell*, *Show Your Bones* and *It’s Blitz!* were all best alternative music album nominees at the Grammy Awards—Karen O says, “We have really conservative expecta-

tions when we make a record. It’s a continuing theme for us. We’ve never really been on top.” The Yeah Yeah Yeahs hit the peak of their commercial success with *Fever to Tell*, which has sold 640,000 copies. In comparison, the White Stripes’ *Elephant*, released the same year, has reached closer to 2.1 million.

“There’s always been another band above us,” she says. “For a long time, it felt like we were trying to convert people to our cause. We’ve been really lucky, but we have an extremely low, totally underdeveloped sense of self-esteem. This album, in particular, was probably the lowest our self-esteem has ever been. The stakes are still high. Is our new album going to be a drop in the ocean?”

Interscope Geffen A&M vice chairman Steve Berman says that *Mosquito* is poised to be a watershed moment for the arena rockers who have, until now anyway, teetered between the mainstream and the underground. “When it comes to a new release from a band of the Yeahs’ stature, you really want to appreciate the work: ‘Did they really roll up their sleeves? Did they really push?’” he says. “And when I heard the music, the answer was ‘yes.’ It’s such a beautiful, rich, layered evolution of their sound. I know this will spread. I know people will be talking about it. It’s just that good.”

Mike Kaplan, director of programming at alternative KNDD Seattle, played *Mosquito*’s first single, “Sacrilege,” 23 times by its third day of release. “Seventy percent of the listeners who’ve texted us weighing in on that song like what they hear,” he says.

The big question now is how to spread the word. For the first time in the band’s history, it’s expected to engage with fans through social media, a reality that’s not lost on Karen O, who misses the innocence of a live

In December, the Yeah Yeah Yeahs announced the arrival of their new album through a just-christened Instagram account, which has more than 5,000 followers despite boasting a scant 13 photos.

On Jan. 18, the album’s cover art was released to a deafening chorus of online commenters. To call the 3-D illustration divisive would be an understatement—for every critic who called it “horrible,” “awful” or “mediocre,” there were as many fans who championed the image of a floating, naked boy preparing to be stung by a demonic bug as “subversive” and “kick-ass.” The cover’s creator, South Korea-born animator Beomsik Shimbe Shim, says, “We didn’t want to just make a good-looking image that would be ignored.” Shim, who will also be animating the music video for “Mosquito,” adds, “No matter if it’s good or bad, it’s totally Yeah Yeah Yeahs.”

The album’s title also stems from a place of provocation. “Personally, mosquitoes are one of my least favorite things,” Karen O says with a shudder. “But everything about this album was done to evoke feeling—we want people to feel *something*.” Whether the album matches or supersedes the glory of the band’s previous offerings remains to be seen, but Zinner isn’t worried: “The fact that we did it makes it a success for me.”

Recorded in the same studio where the members laid down tracks for *It’s Blitz!*—Sonic Ranch, on the border of the Rio Grande and Old Mexico, Texas—*Mosquito*, which was produced by longtime collaborators Dave Sitek and Nick Launay, forced the band to re-embrace the blithe DIY attitude that permeates *Fever to Tell*. “It was about playing for the sake of playing,” Zinner says.

Launay, a prolific British producer who’s worked

“Where has all the charisma and the sexuality and the gnarl gone? This album is about bringing that back.” —Karen O

show unburdened by cellphone recordings. “I don’t even have a Facebook page,” she says. “I’m pretty out of the loop when it comes to that stuff.” That’s where Zinner, who shares updates with the band’s 1.7 million Facebook friends and 115,000 Twitter followers, comes in. “We’re definitely much more open to marketing than we were on our first album,” he says.

In addition to strategically sandwiching *Mosquito*’s April 15 release between the first and second weeks of Coachella, where the band will be headlining with the Stone Roses and Blur, the group has confirmed appearances on “Late Show With David Letterman,” “Jimmy Kimmel Live!” and “Late Night With Jimmy Fallon.”

### Team Yeah Yeah Yeahs

**ALBUM** *Mosquito*

**LABEL** Interscope

**RELEASE DATE** April 16

**MANAGEMENT** Ciulla Management

**TOURING** Webster Hall, New York (April 7); Stubb’s, NPR South by Southwest showcase; Coachella, Firefly and Sweetlife festivals

**BOOKING AGENT** Jen Adler, Creative Artists Agency

**PUBLICITY** Jennie Boddy, Press Here

**SITES** YeahYeahYeahs.com, Facebook.com/yeahyeahyeahs, Instagram.com/yeahyeahyeahs

**TWEETS** @YYYS

with acts like Arcade Fire, Kate Bush and Talking Heads—not to mention the Yeah Yeah Yeahs’ 2007 EP, *Is Is*, and *It’s Blitz!*—says, “There was an incredible will to do something really wild on this one. It has a beautiful chaos, which is closer to the energy that they started out with. We very deliberately tried to make it sound like it was recorded in a really ghetto studio.” He attributes the album’s less-polished sound to its dub reggae influence and the incorporation of both vintage equipment and “new gadgets” that Zinner had delivered to the studio every other day.

“We didn’t want this to feel like a studio record, like we were in a pressure-cooker,” Karen O adds. “Starting out by saying, ‘We’re gonna make a cohesive record!’ is about as effective as me saying, ‘We’re gonna make a hit!’ You can want to do it and you can aim to do it, but it never happens if you try—so we’ve just stopped trying.”

Cohesive, the record is not. Instead it’s all over the map in the best way possible, pinballing among bitter-sweet balladry (“Subway”), in-your-face hostility (the mantric “Suck Your Blood!”) and dancefloor-friendly rap. (The legendary Kool Keith even makes an appearance on “Buried Alive.”)

The Yeah Yeah Yeahs can’t wait to share the new music at live shows. “The rest of the world sort of fades away when I’m onstage, rocking out,” Chase says. “I’m a little different,” Zinner adds. “I have extreme anxiety and fright. But it’s good—I’d worry if that went away.” Karen O smiles wide and nods. “He paces all over the place,” she says of the wild-haired guitarist. “For me, well, I’ve changed a lot since we started. I’m much more settled down and mellowed out. The way I keep in touch with the crazier side of me is through my music.” ●