



# N SYNC ON ICITY

WITH THEIR SECOND ALBUM, "NO STRINGS ATTACHED," N SYNC CUT THE TIES THAT BIND AND STEP OUT ON THEIR OWN | BY ANTHONY BOZZA

**HE MEMBERS OF 'N SYNC ARE AT THEIR VERY OWN NEVERLAND Ranch: the 32,000-square-foot (and growing) lakeside Orlando home of their manager, Johnny Wright, which also serves as the headquarters for his company, the Wright Stuff. The living room is packed with arcade games ranging from Ms. Pac-Man to Mortal Kombat, an old-fashioned Coke machine, a pool table, foosball, two varieties of air hockey (with and without little plastic men) and a sound system bookended by six-foot speakers. Next door, a two-lane bowling alley is under construction in a wing that will also house a dance studio.**

Teen-dream décor abounds: a Lucite banister lit from within, a seven-foot glass palm-tree trunk topped by a fern, a dining room dominated by a giant fish tank and a black monolith running-water sculpture. Outdoors, a sand volleyball court awaits, along with a putting green (with sand trap), a boat and Jet Ski for lake-sport frolicking, a basketball court, a tiki bar, a hot tub and a pool with a waterfall. The only thing missing is a ticker board.

At the moment, though, those diversions are about as important to Lance Bass, Justin Timberlake, Chris Kirkpatrick, Joey Fatone Jr. and JC Chasez as extra credit is to a graduating senior. The 'N Syncers—who range in age from nineteen to twenty-eight—are gathered in a loose semicircle to listen to final mixes of songs from their second album, *No Strings Attached*. Wright cues up "Space Cowboy," a fast-paced party track with a round-emp-up refrain that goes something like, "yooo-yippie, yippi-yippi-yoo." As the beat kicks in, the band members begin to gesticulate as if onstage, starting to work out their moves for the number. Chasez, who splits lead vocal duties with Timberlake, fibillates lead to toe as the song kicks into the first chorus. Timberlake, meanwhile, sits and sings his lines sedately as he head-bobs along. Bass leans back in a chair, his finger moving up and down as if following a bouncing lit-in white ball. Fatone hunches over, nodding to the ground, while Kirkpatrick grooves along abstractly.

The song ends, and Wright breaks out gifts for his wonder boys: platinum and diamond 'N Sync pendants to commemorate the diamond status—so million sold—of 'N Sync, their debut. A few boxes erupt, and a discussion of the proper chain to hold such a piece ensues. Timberlake looks at his and stands up. "We are diamond," he says mock-righteously. "Screw all of you, I'm done. Forget this boy-band thing."

For his sake, he'd better be kidding. His next batch of time off is scheduled for sometime in 2005.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: CHRIS KIRKPATRICK, JOEY FATONE, JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE, JC CHASEZ, LANCE BASS



**'N SYNC ARE HIDING HIGH.** In the past year, they've worked out-of-court royalties settlement with their former management company that left them rich. They also successfully jumped labels, generally increased creative control and their second album along the way. But they're a hungry bunch. An eye-of-the-tiger-like desire to prove oneself emanates from each one of them.

"This album is really in your face," says Chasez. He speaks deliberately, punctuating statements with mid-level volume changes and jabbing hand gestures. He is friendly but focused, clearly somebody uneasy when aimed. "Nothing is a safe parody by every thing is chopped and punched. You can definitely hear a Michael Jackson influence in the way the sounds chop off—that's the way Michael does a line."

"There's a little more edge to this album, a little more grit," agrees Timberlake, who's laid-back Tennessee drawl and homeboy delivery belie an attentive, guarded persona. "We're pissed off now—'that's what it is. We're angry with ourselves who didn't get our props. No, I'm kidding. I'm kidding."

He may not be. 'N Sync were pissed off enough to take legal action against Trans-Continental Management, the Lizard!Chippendale dancers' boy-band empire of Orlando entrepreneur Lou Pearlman, who, like a pudgy Kerblor off, has churned out boy bands like so many Fudge Stripes Cookies. To date, he's brought the world the Backstreet Boys, LFO, C-Note and Phoenix Sings, and he's grossed more than a billion—enough to finance a small nation. Convinced they weren't seeing their share of the profits, 'N Sync announced they were leaving Trans-Cont and RCA. Pearlman responded with a \$50 million lawsuit. 'N Sync counter-sued for \$25 million. The two parties settled out of court. The band left RCA, in spite of the fact that they owned the label one more album.

The group recorded much of *No Strings Attached* in their own studio, making its own calls on producers and songwriters. "We hired the people we wanted to hire," Chasez says. "It's our record. The record is completely theirs and any one to sue. It was risky situation. A lot of creative people we approached didn't want to work with us. We didn't have a contract saying that any of these songs would make it on the album when we did get a new deal. So the people who worked with us were straight up about the music. And that was amazing."

"I think we really made history," says Timberlake. "You know, the only other group I can think of that jumped the way we did—recording in our own studio on the outside, but if they're not right on the inside, you don't need it. But we did it just to each other. 'Wait a minute, we're running, from here? We've

dark, but we learned how people can take advantage of you."

Other bands have jumped labels besides Boston, but never mind—'N Sync are now on Jive Records, home of the Backstreet Boys and Britney Spears, and, according to Chasez, they're ready to boldly go where no boy pop has gone before. "What makes us special is that we sing love songs, but we throw people off guard because we're in your face. So many bands just sing about meeting the coolest girl, but in me, that's not the way we get our love. It's a real story. Don't just be a Tude in a club picking up chicks."

"There are a lot of digital, electro-type sounds on our new younger ballad, 'And, on the other hand, the ballads are so silky and deep. It's really incredible how we can go from that to that—you know what I mean?"

Checking the ingredients—five teenybop boys, cannot pop beats, love songs—'N Sync seem no different from Backstreet, 03 Dogzboys, five and the rest. But they aren't. Though the boy-band haters out there would never admit it, 'N Sync are more serious about their craft and psychosocial anxiety at the heart of much darker stuff, like teen horror movies and grunge. Their songs, like their labelmate Spicys', aren't just sappy, loveless ballads, they're sappy-loveless ballads brimming with the

**"I ASK FANS ALL THE TIME: 'WHY DO YOU JUST GO BERSERK?' SAYS LANCE BASS. 'IT'S OVERWHELMING, YOU KNOW?'"**

post-up tension of testosterone, the urgency of unfiltered, misunderstood desires, bubbling hormones and unbearable, overwhelming feelings. "I lay awake in bed at night, thinking, 'God, and I'm singing about love. I'm singing sweetly, wanting you the way that I do.' And even worse: 'It's tearing up my heart when I'm with you.' But when we're on stage, I feel, 'no, no.' (They also cover Christopher Cross' megahit 'Mama Didn't Know' and the Rolling Stones' 'Eighties hit 'Sailing,' just to think they're totally heavy.)"

In the video for "Drive Myself Crazy," the fellas croon in an insane ayyam, and in one scene, Chasez crouches desperately in a straitjacket. (Help him! Somebody help him!) Their next clip, for the aggro breakup song "Bye, Bye, Bye," is a mini action flick, featuring the members running atop a train and sporting a high-speed car chase as they flee the video's villain—gorgeous *Teen*'s model Kim Vinnik.

"We're running from her because we're stupid," says Chasez with a chuckle. "No, she's the villain. It's a shame that she's evil on the inside and good-looking on the outside. That's just the way it is—sometimes she's beautiful on the outside, but if they're not right on the inside, you don't need it. But we did it just to each other. 'Wait a minute, we're running, from here? We've

got to change this concept."

"It was fun," says the seventeen-year-old Smith. "I had seen videos for 03 Degrees and all those people, and there's all ways rolling on the beach with their girlfriends. I was like, 'I don't want to be nowhere near me—they're just running away the whole time. I'm chasing them and laughing at them about breaking their hearts and controlling them.' Help them! Somebody help them!"

**THERE ARE SHELVES OF books on 'N Sync,** some suited for the fiction rack, but all agree on one thing: Twenty-eight-year-old Chris Kirkpatrick got the group together. He's the oldest of three children, and his parents have been married for twenty-five years. When he was young, his father was drafted, but to pitch for the Kansas City Royals and to serve his country in Vietnam. "I was a little scared of him," says Chasez, and Chasez's father never played in the majors. Plus Chasez now works in computers, and JC's mother edited an international trade magazine, and unbeknownst to them, they trained JC for a life on the road. "Every summer we used to caravan wherever for a few weeks," the twenty-year-old Chasez says, smiling. "We'd just pick a direction and go. We'd spend days in the car, playing games and watching the sights. I've never stayed at a hotel. I've come from the car. I've seen the World's Largest Ball of Twine, the Largest Rubber Band Ball, the Largest Mac Farm—I've seen 'em all, dude."

calls. "But I really started to find myself there. It was a good experience. After that, I went back to school for a year and got into trouble—mostly bashing and just being a delinquent. I'm just glad I don't have to go to regular high school. I would have gotten arrested by now. I was kind of like Ferris Bueller."

When Kirkpatrick contacted him, Timberlake had been recording demos and writing songs with Chasez. He was born and raised in Maryland. He is the eldest of three children, and his parents have been married for twenty-five years. When he was young, his father was drafted, but to pitch for the Kansas City Royals and to serve his country in Vietnam. "I was a little scared of him," says Chasez, and Chasez's father never played in the majors. Plus Chasez now works in computers, and JC's mother edited an international trade magazine, and unbeknownst to them, they trained JC for a life on the road. "Every summer we used to caravan wherever for a few weeks," the twenty-year-old Chasez says, smiling. "We'd just pick a direction and go. We'd spend days in the car, playing games and watching the sights. I've never stayed at a hotel. I've come from the car. I've seen the World's Largest Ball of Twine, the Largest Rubber Band Ball, the Largest Mac Farm—I've seen 'em all, dude."

In the seventh grade, Chasez entered

a talent contest on a dare and sang Richard Marx's "Right Here Waiting for You" (an in-a-it-ironic fact: Marx wrote and produced a song on No Strings Attached for the band, earning six figures from his friend Chasez, and had all these girls start calling me). Chasez says, "I was like, 'Are you kidding?' In 1993, Kirkpatrick began to look for voices to fill out a new group.

He found Justin Timberlake through an agent. Timberlake was born nineteen years ago in a small town in Iowa. Just before a singer from the time he was eight, he'd sing in his Baptist church, in his mother's car, anywhere with an audience. "I was always into music, but I got my mother, Mr. Lynn, encouraged him with voice lessons and let him try his skills on Star Search. He just loved to be on stage," she says. "He started singing all the time. After he auditioned at the mall for Star Search, we went down to Orlando for the show, and that's where he learned about the 'N Sync Club. At twelve, he was chosen for The Mickey Mouse Club.

"JC was the cool older guy, and Justin wanted to be just like him," Christina Aguilera recalls. "He was very goofy back then—now he's the serious one. One time he tickled me off so much. I went into his room and always tickled him the biggest pain—just a childish eleven-year-old—and he turned to me and said, 'Go play with your Barbie dolls.' I was like, 'You're kidding me. You're like, 'Screw all of you, I'm done. Forget this boy-band thing.'"

"We all know everyone there was talented, but we all could have gone back into regular lives," Chasez says. "I knew Britney and Christina would blow up. Britney was like a little Janet Jackson, and Christina was like a little Celine Dion." Chasez notes that the two future teen stars, Justin, Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Felicity Krus, Russell and Timberlake's future *Sync* mate Chasez, "I was a little pudgy," Timberlake re-

stopped over at Timberlake's house in Memphis and before he knew it, he was playing with a friend in Nashville, recording demos and writing songs. A month later, Chazese was back home, working his first waiter job at a strip mall and saving money for his next recording trip to Nashville, when Timberlake and Kirkpatrick snagged him for the band.

The three moved to Orlando, scouted the town for a baritone and found one on Seventies night at the club Measure 5 in West: Brooklyn-bred Joey Fatone Jr. When he was thirteen, Fatone's family moved to Florida, where he discovered extracurricular activities. "I went to Catholic school in Brooklyn," he says, rolling out his sentences with a New York inflection. "They didn't have any extracurricular activities. I mean nothing." So when I got to high school here, I started doing plays, acting, dancing, everything." His father, who sang in a Fifties doo-wop outfit called the Orions, encouraged his son. Fatone was soon on the Disney University Showcase show circuit, where he met Kirkpatrick. "I did characters - you know, Pluto," says the twenty-three-year-old, "I moved to Universal after high school, and Chris sang

seems to record a demo. They landed a deal in Century Square a year in Europe and Asia - and the rest is shrieking-fandango, diamond-studded history.

**J**'N SYNC SWEATED OUT the last year waiting for their strings to be cut and their record to be released, but right now they've put the album on hold for one man: She'kspere, the Grammy-nominated producer responsible for TLC's "No Scrubs" and Destiny's Child's "Billie Jean King." At Jive's suggestion, the band has hit the studio to record one last song. "It Makes Me Ill," an uptempo rant about an ex-girlfriend and her new boyfriend, which will replace a ballad. Sample 'til' lyric: "His style is wack/Clothes are bad/C'mon, girl/Let him go/Want you back!"

On a sunny and humid Orlando afternoon, She'kspere sits at the mixing board in Parc Studios, looking like Puff Daddy's doppelgänger, complete with small, dark shades, black sweat-drenched clothes and a large platinum cross. All of the boys will show up today and well into tomorrow to finish their vocals, after which Chazese and Timberlake will work with She'k-

"Do you be-leave in life after love?" he belts, perfectly imitating Cher. "Did you like that?"

He improvises fluidly over the melodies, and the take goes well. "I can give it a little more Michael if you want," he tells She'kspere. "A little more 'ehh' at the end."

"It's hot like it is; it's gravy," the producer replies.

They play back the song's breakdown, which requires Timberlake to break down, calling to an ex-girlfriend, "Come back to me!" "Do that line real, real high," She'kspere says. "The little girls love that shit." It imitates a screaming crowd.

Timberlake wails through it like a pro, pulling out heartfelt emotion as if it's attached to the long Tommy Boy key ring hanging from his pocket.

"That was tight!" the producer hollers. "It don't need any more, no less."

Afterward, Timberlake needs some air. He heads out to his new BMW W Roadster, a purple-blue two-seat convertible that looks like it's moving even while parked. "I got a ticket last night at 2 A.M., after being at the studio," he says as we turn out of the lot. "I was doing eighty in a fifty, but no one was around. Hold on." He nails the pedal to the floor, and the car leaps to sixty miles an hour before the word on his left his mouth.

He slows down only when the taillights of a car up ahead begin to fly toward the windshield. "I think there's a sense of reality that surrounds us," he says. "We don't try to make ourselves do cute, we just are who we are. We're boys. We burp and fart, just like boys."

Most other boys don't have the same toys, however. The Beemer is Timberlake's second car - his first was a Mercedes jeep. Fatone has a new black Cadillac truck and a house full of Superman memorabilia, a hobby he picked up because he liked the Superman insignia. He, Kirkpatrick, Fatone and Timberlake have also all built or bought houses in Orlando this year. "My living room is all white, like something from that Lauryn Hill video for 'Ex-Factor,'" Timberlake says. "There's a white grand piano, a white couch and a tapestry of knights on horses, and I have this beautiful acrylic statue of a nude man and woman that my friend got me."

A beautiful piece: You shine a light on it and it shines right through. I've got a game room that we call the Jimmy Buffet room, because it's Orlando tropical, and I have a country kitchen to remind me of where I grew up. The bedroom is a whole safari motif, with a Japanese screen and a big sleigh bed."

Don't worry, they haven't spent it all. Most of the boys in the band have also started business ventures. Bass founded Freelance Management to develop country-music artists. "Country is something totally different than I had no clue about," he says. "My mom's im-

olved, and my sister is an artist, so it's nice to have your family involved with your business." Timberlake started the nonprofit Justin Timberlake Foundation to aid music and arts education in public schools. "I grew up in the bookends, and there just wasn't a good musical program at school," he says. "I've thought about it a little bit - this and the whole Columbine incident. Music is another way for young minds and young souls to express themselves, to find a way to get all those negative thoughts and energies out." Timberlake's mother, who left her job to manage her son back in his Mouse Club days, has founded a management company and developed a girl group, Innosense. "Our company is called Just in Time Entertainment, named after Justin," she says in a strong Southern accent. "I am so fascinated by the business - you get sucked in being around it, creativity, you know? After helping the boys, I was like, 'I can do this; it's my thing!'"

Chazese has been producing tracks for another all-girl group, Wild Orchid, while Kirkpatrick has started a music production/fashion line called Fuman Skeeto. "The name came up as a joke one night, real late," he says. "I was with a buddy, and one of the buddies I used to wear had been cut off and had fallen by a big dead mosquito. It looked like it had a Fu Manchu mustache, so I called it a Fuman Skeeto. And that's why the thing went from there." Kirkpatrick is currently producing Canadian singer-songwriter Ron Izrazay.

All of these grounding gestures are a response to the giddy effects of sudden fame. "It's been a little tough," Timberlake says. "There's definitely been times when I was totally depressed. But, you know, my spirituality helped me through that. I just feel like there's two of me: the public-eye me and the guy who brushes his teeth twice a day. We're getting along all right now. Sometimes brush-his-teeth doesn't get enough attention, but it's worth it."

"It's funny," Bass says about being on the other side of the fame fence. "You realize what hard work it is and that it's not glamorous. It's like going to Disney World, going into the tunnels and seeing Cinderella smoking a cigarette. The whole magic is gone."

There are also tabloids to contend with, as if the minds of 50 million inquiring fans weren't enough. It is this a group of young men who claim to be engaged in relatively clean fun. "We don't hide anything," says Bass. "We'll go out and have a glass of wine at dinner - you know, whoa. We do have a responsibility to try to be morally correct. I'm not going to say we're perfect, but we don't do cocaine or go like, 'Hey, let's shoot up.' But if we want to go to a club until five in the morning, we don't care who knows about it, because in the end we

## "WE DON'T TRY TO MAKE OURSELVES DO CUTE," SAYS JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE.

### "WE BURP AND FART, JUST LIKE BOYS."

in one of the places over there," Fatone was in, but the group still needed a bass.

They started rehearsing with a guy named Jason, but when he couldn't quite cut the mustard, Timberlake phoned his vocal coach back in Tennessee for a recommendation and found Lance Bass (pronounced like the fish) of Clinton, Mississippi. Bass, every bit the congenial Southern gentleman, was well prepared. "I started singing in church," the twenty-year-old says in his deep, resonant voice. "My best friends and I were in a group called the Showstoppers that traveled all around the state, singing songs by Mississippi artists." The former jock ("Now I can't play anything worth a crap") was ecstatic to get the call from Timberlake and hopped a plane to Orlando for the tryout. "I didn't think I'd ever get the chance to do something like this," he says. "The opportunity is just not there in Mississippi."

Bass became the new bass, but there were moniker troubles. The group name had been coined by Timberlake's mother, where Jason was still in the group. She came up with 'N Sync - her description of their singing - using the last letter of each member's first name. So for promotion's sake, Lance became Lansten. With the lineup set, the group pulled in favors from former Mouse Club engi-

ners and the engineers until 5 or 6 A.M. on the final mix of the track.

At first up in the vocal booth is Chris Kirkpatrick. He's wearing a red Fubu T-shirt and a floppy black hat, and he's gargling some tea in hopes of soothing a hard-partying weekend's worth of gravelly throat. It's not helping. On his first take, the fella responsible for the helium-high parts of 'N Sync's five-part harmony sounds like a chipmunk with the flu.

"That was so good," She'kspere chides, "if I think we'll ease it." Eventually, Kirkpatrick nails a passable take and finishes off with a big belch that resounds in the control room. "Is that all I'm doin'?" he asks incredulously, throwing down the headphones and then giving everyone a just-shit-in'-ya grin as he leaves. A few clicks of the mouse later, Kirkpatrick's voice comes back through the speakers doubled and digitally sweetened. It's smoother and stronger, and She'kspere is satisfied.

Timberlake comes into the control room, and She'kspere plays the mix for him. He begins to sing along beautifully with the blasting backing track, ad-libbing and moving in time with Chazese, who jumps around jerkily behind him. Fatone is across the room, asleep on a couch. "Let's go," the producer says. Timberlake heads into the recording booth. The engineer adds a vocoder sound to the microphone.

"Wait a minute," Timberlake says.

Assistant editor ANTHONY BOZZA profiled Steven Van Zandt in RS 85.

answer to our families. My mom still has control over me, and she knows it. She'll ground me on the road if she reads about me getting into trouble."

"You don't want to say or do too much," says Fatone, who is the boy most likely to be spotted by the gossips while clubbin' it up all night. "You know, it's like breaking the fans' hearts if there's something out there that they don't know about and might get upset about."

At present, Kirkpatrick is the only member whose relationship with his girlfriend (now in its second year) survived 'N Sync's liftoff. Bass' nine-month stint dating actress Danielle Fishel, better known as *Boy Meets World's* Topanga, didn't stand a chance.

proved the ridicule she got when she came out was to be consistent."

"I think the next couple of years will separate the boys from the men," Timberlake says, then chuckles at his pun. "What worries me is the overstatement of the market."

"This group has a work ethic like I've never seen," says its manager, Johnny Wright, who has worked with New Kids on the Block and Backstreet Boys. "Usually at their level, they start saying, 'You're working me to death. I need more time to spend my money, more time to spend with my girl.' It's not like that with them. And as long as they want to work, I'm with them."

Former New Kid, J'wan McIntyre

that makes the girls go crazy?" Bass wonders. "I asked Britney about it one day, and she said her guy fans go much more crazy than the guys. I ask fans all the time, 'Why do you just go berserk?' It's overwhelming, you know?"

Not as much as it is for them. "The hysteria is a particular way for girls to express their pleasure," says George Washington University professor Gayle Wald, author of *Just a Girl?* "They are responding to boys who are offering themselves as sexually desirable and visually pleasurable objects of consumption. It produces a girlish masculinity that allows girls fans to negotiate their own gender identification."

The reality for the objects of this

Lynn Timberlake. "They freak out, and we kinda laugh at it. It's strange sometimes - it's a little stranger when it's the boys screaming. But you know, those kind of boys buy a lot of records. They appreciate good music - what can I say?"

Todd Dukas has seen it all. The mountainous man worked security for New Kids back in the day and for Backstreet for the last three years; he now heads up the 'N Sync guards. "It can be nuts," he says. "U.S. fans are buck wild, but it's worse in Europe and worse than that in the Spanish-speaking countries. Over there, they know what hotel we're in before I do." Dukas organizes the fans for autograph signings, but often that's not enough: "The parents are generally a problem. They won't take me for an answer, and an autograph is never enough. They want them to come to dinner." Dukas has heard all types of sob stories at the door to afterhour meet-and-greets. "If the story is good - like if the kid's sick - I'll get them in, but usually there's already too many people inside. No one offers us sexual favors, which is good, because they're kind of young. But I did have a girl offer me her mother for a set of tickets." He chuckles. "Mom was cute, but I can't do that."

The phenomena of these not-exactly-macho guys engaging in anti-macho activities and being rewarded with the adoration of a zillion nubile women predictably wins them plenty of enemies among the dudes. "There is an anxiety among the detractors on the Internet," says Wald, "in regard to whether these boy bands are masculine enough - are they 'queer,' both in the sense of being gay and also in being 'off' in their masculinity. Their lyrics are not overtly sexual like some of the R&B singers are, and the fact that they don't play instruments is an issue as well. They're really not bands per se, they're boys doing things with their hands. The musical denigration of the boy groups intersects with a sense that what girls like is dismissible. It devalues girls' pleasure."

All this lofty academic talk isn't lost on Timberlake. "It might be better if it wasn't such a spectacle," he says quietly about the overblown, *Mission Impossible*-esque stage show that the group will soon undertake. "Maybe people would respect it more."

"To me," says Chazee when the respect issue comes up, "good music is good music, and somebody will buy it. When our fans go off to college, I don't think they'll have our posters on the wall, but that's not to say they won't like our music. We'll be older, too, and talking about different things. Grunge was mad in six years ago, but Pearl Jam is still making and selling records." He shifts restlessly and reflects for a second before offering up the pop star's eternal prayer: "You know, the good groups stick around, and the other stuff fades away." O

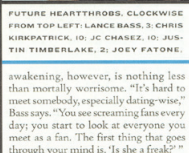
## "MY MOM STILL HAS CONTROL OVER ME, AND SHE KNOWS IT," SAYS LANCE BASS. "SHE'LL GROUND ME ON THE ROAD."

"It was so impossible," he sighs. "We never saw each other because of our schedules, but we tried to make it last. It's hard when you're both in the spotlight. She came home with me to Mississippi, and we went Christmas shopping - we got so mobbed, we stayed maybe ten minutes." Bass figures he will be able to date seriously again in about ten years' time.

Timberlake is another story - he has been linked repeatedly to Britney Spears. Is it true, Justin? "Britney's a good friend of mine; I've known her since I was twelve," he says. Yeah, but is it true? "I don't like to comment on my personal life anymore. Everything gets blown out of proportion. I've been in the tabloids, and I don't enjoy it." Well, who would? But is it true? "If I do decide to have a personal relationship with someone, I think it's best to keep it that - personal."

Trends change, fans grow, and the pop stars of yesterday end up on VH1's *Where Are They Now?* But the members of 'N Sync have been pursuing further preventive measures, mainly acting. Bass has already made his debut, on the Christian family drama *7th Heaven*, where he also logged his first screen kiss. "It was easier than I thought it would be, considering there's, like, fifty people staring at you," he says. "We had that you can't use your tongue. We went to do the scene, like, ten times, so you slip it in there sometimes out of habit. That was really the hardest part."

Two movies are in the works for the boys: One is a big-screen rendition of Sid and Marty Kroff's *Bugulose*, and the other is a comedy in development by Tom Hanks' company, Playtone. 'N Sync are not worried about becoming next year's Vanilla Ice. "Luckily, people like what we're doing," Chazee says. "The thing that makes us special is, we don't care about what's hot and what's not - a lot of groups do. We will prove ourselves by being consistent - like Madonna. The only way she dis-



FUTURE HEARTTHROBS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: LANCE BASS, 3; CHRIS KIRKPATRICK, 10; JOEY FATONE, 10; JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE, 2; JOEY FATONE

agrees. "All of the new groups aren't doing anything different than we were," he says. "But 'N Sync is my favorite. I look in their eyes and I see that they're at the point where they've got the world by the balls and they're having a good time. It's all about hanging onto that and seeing if you can. I actually think they can transcend the whole boy-band thing."

If 'N Sync disappear tomorrow, there is one thing that won't change: the glass-shattering cries of female teen fandom. "Is there some gene or something

awakening, however, is nothing less than mortally worshipping. It's hard to meet somebody, especially dating-wise," Bass says. "You see screaming fans every day; you start to look at everyone you meet as a fan. The first thing that goes through your mind is, 'Is she a freak?'"

"We have girls that drive twelve, thirteen hours to follow us," Fatone says. "Those are die-hard. They'll pay, like, \$700 for a ticket if they have to. One of our guards once asked them why they did it, and they said, 'Everyone needs a hobby.' Fatone says his biggest fans tend to be the mothers. "I don't know, maybe it's the facial-hair thing. It's not that I'm mature - I'm probably the most immature. But I'd rather have that. Can't be dating no twelve-year-old. That's jailbait."

"These girls are just bawling," says