

INTERPOL - EL PINTOR

There were no guarantees that Interpol would make another record. Following the departure of bassist Carlos Dengler at the end of sessions for their 2010 self-titled LP and a relentless marathon of more than 200 shows in support of it, the band's remaining members—guitarist Daniel Kessler, singer/guitarist Paul Banks, and drummer Sam Fogarino—took a two-and-a-half year break. For the first time, they all lived in different cities, providing both geographic and mental distance from all things Interpol.

Technically speaking, all things Interpol began at NYU in 1997, when Kessler recruited Dengler and Banks to form a band. "I didn't care so much about talented musicians or having similar tastes in music as finding people with a certain sensibility," he remembers. In 2002, with Fogarino on drums, the band signed to Matador and released 'Turn On The Bright Lights,' which Pitchfork named the year's #1 album. Over the next decade, they would go on to release a trio of records that found them cracking the Top 5 on the Billboard 200; earning rave reviews from Rolling Stone to TIME along with performances on Letterman, Conan, Leno, and more; headlining major festivals like Lollapalooza and All Tomorrow's Parties; and touring with iconic bands including U2 and the Cure. They explored side and solo projects during their time apart, but ultimately found themselves drawn back together again, not by any expectations of returning to the studio, but rather by that same unshakable urge that brought them together in the first place, to let the music lead them where it may.

"Paul and I got together for a short spell in August 2012, which was the first foray into seeing if we should do something," remembers Kessler. "We had no plans whatsoever. I certainly didn't have anything in my brain saying we had to do this. It was just us playing music to see if there was something there."

It quickly became apparent that there was indeed something there, something urgent and compelling, something revitalized and reenergized by their time apart.

"Paul started singing in that first day or two, which is great, because it doesn't always happen like that," remembers Kessler, who composes much of the music. "I think he had the chorus melody for 'My Desire' right off the bat, so there was this good energy. It felt very exciting, like this was the beginning of something."

Those hot August days spent sweltering in an AC-less rehearsal space belonging to fellow NYC band Battles proved to be the birthing ground for 'El Pintor,' Interpol's fifth and most exhilarating studio album. It's a driving, relentless record, taut and epic in equal measure. It's also an album of firsts.

"Carlos was a gigantic part of our band, and he contributed greatly to our records," Kessler explains. "So recording without Carlos was definitely a change. But we didn't spend much time thinking about it, we just closed our circle and dealt with what was on the table."

That meant Banks stepping in to write and perform the bass parts for the first time.

"[Playing bass] came up organically as a result of having writer's block when I was working with Daniel with just a guitar," Banks told Rolling Stone. "He was playing me

the music he'd written, and a lot of these chord progressions are open to interpretation in terms of music theory, and I found it very difficult to get any ideas on guitars or vocals. We had three rehearsals booked, and it was like, 'We're not doing anything because I can't think of anything on guitar, so either we cancel this or I bring a bass tomorrow and see what happens.' I brought a bass the next day and we were off and running. We wrote, 'Anywhere,' which is a pretty big song on the record, the following day."

With Banks on bass, "the songs started growing in identity," explains Kessler, who frequently found exciting and unexpected counterparts to his guitar riffs in Banks' bass lines during those early writing sessions. "It was sort of like a new band in that sense."

Fogarino joined rehearsals later, adding his resolutely tenacious percussion to the arrangements Kessler and Banks had worked up, and he immediately found himself surprised by what he heard.

"Daniel and Paul had been hashing out some stuff and had early arrangements when I came in," remembers Fogarino, "and within that week we had maybe three rough recordings of the songs. The fidelity wasn't so good, but the performances were, and that was the first time it was just the three of us. It became apparent at that moment that this is what happens when you're a band for over ten years. I wasn't expecting to be taken aback by it, but the marked change by our abilities as a band kind of punched me in the face. Just jumping into the fray not knowing what they'd been doing, that spoke volumes about how it's meant to be, how right we are together."

Recorded at the legendary Electric Lady Studios and the brand new Atomic Sound in NYC, 'El Pintor' kicks off with "All The Rage Back Home," a song that was actually born on the final day of the band's last tour, as Kessler stood on a balcony overlooking Buenos Aires. It's likely no coincidence, then, that the song signals a return to what Interpol does best, layering pulsing bass, bursts of guitar, and driving drums beneath Banks' instantly recognizable voice.

"My Desire" fell into place almost instantly during rehearsals with a throbbing beat and insistent guitar riffs that shoot off like flares into the night, while "Same Town, New Story" took on an entirely new identity in the studio, as Banks crafted up an unexpected melodic context for Kessler's laser-sharp guitar lines.

Lyricaly, there's an air of darkness that weaves its way throughout the record. "This kind of shit don't heal in a week," Banks sings on "My Blue Supreme," and titles like "Twice As Hard" and "Everything Is Wrong" hint at a struggle for acceptance during difficult times, to not be "beaten by the weight of it," as he laments on "Ancient Ways."

In contrast with previous records, Interpol took a step back on 'El Pintor' and "let the songs happen," as Fogarino explains, embracing the patience it took to see where the music would lead them in its own due time. There may not have been any guarantees that they would record again, but the result is as accomplished and thrilling a collection as the band has ever released.