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## dUg Pinnick of King's X

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Ask the average headbanger to name the most underrated metal bands of all time, and chances are King's X will be high on the list.

Responsible for such classic albums as *Gretchen Goes to Nebraska*, *Faith Hope Love*, and *Dogman* (as well as the anthems "Over My Head," "It's Love," and "Black Flag"), the group managed to build a loyal fanbase, despite never scoring a true breakthrough smash.

The group's singer/bassist, dUg Pinnick, is quite a prolific gentleman, as he has just released his latest solo effort, *Naked*, in addition to additional work with King's X, and a seemingly endless array of side projects.

Here, dUg discusses *Naked*, as well as an impromptu recording session with the late Dimebag Darrell, picking up pointers from producers Brendan O'Brien and Michael Wagner, and the stories behind several King's X classics.

**Greg Prato (Songfacts):** Let's start with discussing your new solo album, *Naked*.

**dUg Pinnick:** It's been about three years. I write a lot of music all the time, and I haven't put a solo record out in a long time, and King's X hasn't done much in a long time. But I have been writing a lot of music.

I moved out to LA about three years ago and just decided I needed to change my life. There's nothing happening in Houston where I live musically and career wise, so I thought I'd move to LA and just see what's out there, see if I've got any value in the marketplace.

So I got out there, and like everybody who goes to LA, it's really tough at first. It's a new city and it's a hard city to crack. If you don't know somebody, you're nothing. LA is like that, we all know that. I realized that when I got out there.

It was a bit strange for me at first, because I didn't know what was going on or why I even moved out there. Everybody tells me that when you first move to LA, you spend about a year and a half kind of freaking out, no matter what. And then sooner or later, you finally settle in. So in my three years of freaking out I wrote a record.

The other thing, too, is I really wanted to make a big change in my life, so I literally let my brother move into my house and I packed up some clothes and my guitars and my Pro Tools, and I headed to LA. I lived at a studio tracking room for like a year. I just slept there, made music, and hung out with people.

And I realized that I know more people in LA than I know anywhere else in the world. So as I realized that, everything's okay now. I feel like I'm home now out here, and there's never a dull moment. But at first, it was pretty rough. I wrote that record out of it. That's why I call it *Naked*, because it's pretty deep and revealing.

**Songfacts:** What are some of your favorite songs on *Naked*?

**dUg:** It's hard for me to say favorite songs, because all the songs are real emotional for me, and lyrically, they were all really situations that I was dealing with or seeing someone else go through it, or just the way I looked at life. So I can't look at the songs by this is my favorite or not.

The other thing too is, I don't know how any other musician feels about this, but I have a hard time listening to myself back and judging it for anything of value. [Laughs]

But the songs are pretty heavy. I've always loved a big, fat groove and I've always loved really heavy, low tuned music, so it's a continuation of the way dUg pounds music, and with the same kind of melodic stuff that I put on top. I don't think it's anything new or different from what I've been doing. But for me personally, because of all the emotion attached to it, it's a new beginning for me.

You can say dUg is a workaholic, as evidenced by his multitude of side projects over the years (not including many appearances on assorted tribute albums, and one-off performances/recordings) - in addition to his King's X and solo album releases. Only the most diehard dUg admirer would be able to keep track of all of them... but we'll give it a shot to chronicle them here. Here we go:



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**Poundhound** - Essentially a dUg solo band, with King's X drummer Jerry Gaskill guesting. Eventually led to dUg forgoing the "Poundhound" name and just going by his own name.

**Supershine** - dUg has always dug Black Sabbath, and with Supershine, he enlisted the aid of two members of Trouble (a group that has also never been ashamed of their Sab admiration) - guitarist Bruce Franklin and drummer Jeff Olson - on their 2000 self-titled release.

**The Mob** - King's X was one of the few bands that was able to appeal to the hair metallists of the '80s, as well as to those who were all for the changing rock musical climate of the early '90s. But with the Mob, dUg joined forces with Winger guitarist Reb Beach and Night Ranger drummer Kelly Keagy, for some melodic metal - as evidenced by their 2005 Kip Winger-produced self-titled disc.

**The Jibbs** - A band which sees dUg joined by King's X guitarist Ty Tabor, as well as two members of the Galactic Cowboys (Wally Farkas and Alan Doss).

**Razr 13** - An Austin, Texas-based band, for which dUg contributed lead vocals to their debut album, *Reflections*.

**Tres Mts.** - After many years of speculation, dUg's collaboration with Jeff Ament of Pearl Jam and Richard Stuverud of the Fastbacks, Tres Mts., finally issued a recording in 2011, *Three Mountains*.

**Pinnick Gales Pridgen** - Equal parts soulful, bluesy, and rocking, Pinnick Gales Pridgen sees dUg joined by guitar wiz Eric Gales and ex-Mars Volta drummer Thomas Pridgen.

**Songfacts:** In addition to your solo work and King's X, I know you've done a lot of side projects in the past. What would you say were some of your favorite side projects?

**dUg:** My last one, called *Strum Sum Up*, was my favorite side project. It was my solo record. I had all my friends who I really love as musicians play on the record. People that when I would go see them, I would get goosebumps at the vibe that they created. So I picked them all to be on my solo record, and I was pretty happy with that. It came out really, really good. I can actually like that record, because everybody else put their thing to it.

But side projects, I've got so many of them right now. There's PGP, which is the thing that's out with Eric Gales and Thomas Pridgen. That's a lot of fun because it's an all-black three piece rock band - it's sort of like Jimi Hendrix on steroids.

I'm driving home from San Francisco right now from doing the second PGP record, so it's fresh on my mind, the whole 15 days of the experience and what I went through personally in myself and my mind. I'm always searching my soul, trying to figure out why dUg is dUg and how can dUg be happier. So I had a couple of epiphanies up there in the hills. I got some good songs to come out of it. So we'll see.

**Songfacts:** I remember the last time I spoke with you, we talked about the project with Pearl Jam's Jeff Ament.

**dUg:** Yeah. That came out about two years ago. It's called Tres Mts. We put the record out, we played Jimmy Fallon, we did a really small tour, and everybody went home and I don't think anybody noticed. [Laughs]

I've got another project right now that we've got a demo we're shopping around. It's with Ray Luzier from Korn who plays drums, and George Lynch from Lynch Mob. We've got a three song EP so far that we're shopping around trying to figure out what we want to do with it. I'm pretty excited about that, it rocks pretty hard.

**Songfacts:** And does that project have a name?

**dUg:** Yeah, JXM.

**Songfacts:** Cool.

**dUg:** We've got another project called Grinder Blues, and we've got an eight song record coming out soon. We haven't decided how we want to distribute yet, but I just got all the mixes yesterday and I've been listening to it. It's about two guys in Vegas that I've been hanging with, a guitar player and a drummer, and they're called the Bihlman Brothers. They're like backup artists for blues players. I hooked up with them and we just tried to put a band together and make a straight up really low fi blues record. So we're done with that, and I'm really excited about that, too. It's going to be fun. Don't know when it'll be out, but it's done and we're shopping it now.

**Songfacts:** I always thought your voice would fit very well in the band Velvet Revolver. I interviewed Duff McKagan from that band a while back and I even told him that he should try to get in contact with you and discuss that.

**dUg:** Well, thanks, man. I actually even tried out for Slash's Snakepit a long, long time ago. The problem I had was that I had a real hard time making up melodies to Slash's riffs. He's genius at it. He and Axl, he said for some reason, the two of them had this magic. But his riffs are kind of difficult to make melodies out of.

But yeah, it would be fun to be in Velvet Revolver just to make some money, if anything. [Laughing]

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**Songfacts:** When I mentioned it to Duff, he seemed like he thought that was a pretty good idea and he said he'd try to get in contact.

**dUg:** Cool. I'm mature, I think I can make him better melodies now. [Laughs] I hope.

**Songfacts:** And something else I always found interesting, you also recorded a song with Dimebag Darrell at one point.

**dUg:** What happened was I was heading back to Chicago to visit my family, it was around Christmastime. I had just shaved my hair off, too. I was bald. I left Houston, I was driving through Dallas. And I knew that Dime was having his New Year's Eve party, so I thought, "Well, I'll stop by and hang out for a while on the way up."

So I stopped off. And everybody was doing X, it was insane. It was the full house, everybody was on X. There was Christmas presents everywhere. Everybody was drinking. The typical Dime party, as usual.

Later on that night, Dime said, "Hey, dUg, would you sing on this song, 'Born Under a Bad Sign'?" And I said, "Sure." Because we had always talked about doing music together, doing a side project, but we never ever had a chance to do it. We went into the little studio in his garage and sang "Born Under A Bad Sign." He had already tracked it with the drum machine and everything. I sang it, and then we got done and kept on partying.

One day, after he had died, I found it in my belongings. I was sitting there, going, "Wow, I forgot about this." So I put it on a YouTube clip just for fans.

**Songfacts:** Who would you say are some of your favorite songwriters?

**dUg:** People don't ask for songwriters, they always ask for my singers. Which is cool, and I like that - nobody asks for songwriters. That's awesome. A songwriter? Jeez, they're in every era. You've heard of Coldplay? Everybody's heard of Coldplay. I think they write amazing songs all around, because they move me emotionally. I cry to their songs. They make me get up and want to jump around and dance. Whatever mood I'm in, it brings it out of me. And that's magical, when you can do that to somebody no matter what mood they're in, you can enhance that mood.

There's something about the way Chris [Martin] sings and the way they put the songs together. The simplicity of it just blows my mind.

Yes is another band that I'm crazy about when it comes to songwriting. Actually, the first three records are the templates of basically everything that I write these days. They just had a way of taking you on an adventure and bringing you back around without taking you way out there and leaving you, just dropping you off.

And the Motown writers, the classic black pop music of the '60s. Every song, every lyric was like a saying: "I heard it through the grapevine, not much longer will you be mine." "The girl's so fine." Everything was really simple and to the point, and the hooks were just gigantic. You just can't forget that.

Bob Dylan. I would say lyric writing more than songwriting, the man could abstractly say things that were so common in life, and it was genius how he did it.

Jimi Hendrix, the first two records, especially, the songwriting sensibility; if you really sit down and listen to the structure of the songs and how he wrote them, pretty genius. I used to take pride in my songwriting until I started really dissecting Jimi Hendrix's first two records and realized that all I do is steal from him. [Laughing]

Sly and the Family Stone, great songwriting because of his groove attitude. The way he could write a song and piece all the instruments so they didn't step on each other, but yet everyone had a real groove identity. The magic of Sly and the Family Stone still mesmerizes me, and the magic can't be duplicated. It has to be the original band. Each one had a certain thing they did in the band, a certain tone that set up what Sly did when he wrote the melodies. The combination was just amazing.

One more. Led Zeppelin. You've got to talk about Led Zeppelin. They just took you all over the place and did it genius-ly and sloppily. That's what I loved about them, it was haphazard and just perfect. Jimmy Page was such a hack at lead, but every note he played had such meaning. That just taught me something about how important it is to place your notes over tone. I've played with too many guitar players that have such great tone that you don't hear their notes anymore, because the tone overrides it. Jimmy Page, you sit there and laugh and appall at how horribly he executes things, and then you just get goosebumps at the note placement that he put in and the genius of how he did it.

**Songfacts:** And who are some of your favorite singers?

**dUg:** Singers, there's Mark Farner, Paul Rodgers, Sly Stone, Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, Buddy Miles, Mahalia Jackson, Mavis Staples, and the lead singer for Coldplay. Those are some of the ones that really, really affect me when I sing. And there's probably more. But those are some of the few. Ray Charles. Little Richard.

**Songfacts:** How do you compare songwriting when you're writing for your solo albums to when you're writing for King's X?

**dUg:** I write everything the same. I write the way I feel at the moment, never any different. I've

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only tried twice to write for somebody else, and both songs I didn't like, because I didn't feel it was real. I was writing what I thought they might want to hear, and as a result of it, the response wasn't what I wanted. So I felt like the only way I can do it is to be 100% honest no matter how much it sucks.

**Songfacts:** And what is King's X currently up to?

**dUg:** We're going to do some shows in about three weeks. Seems like the show offers are coming in slowly, so we're getting ready to gear up to be doing weekend shows. We'll go to an area, play for the weekend, fly out, do the whole thing and then fly back, everybody flies home and we're at home for a week. We're not really doing the "tour thing" anymore with the tour bus. It's just, basically, you can't afford it.

But we're gearing up to do those shows. And then we're talking about doing another album. It's about time. I think it's been five years. We haven't toured in the US - really any serious touring - in three or four years, maybe more. So I think it's time for King's X to gear it up and get out and do it.

**Songfacts:** How is Jerry [Gaskill, King's X drummer] doing health wise, after suffering a heart attack last year?

**dUg:** I just talked to Jerry yesterday and Jerry said to tell everybody he's doing better than ever.

**Songfacts:** Very happy to hear that.

**dUg:** Me, too.

**Songfacts:** Let's discuss the genesis of some King's X songs. What do you recall about writing "Over My Head"?

**dUg:** I remember when I wrote it, I thought it sucked, and I didn't play it for anybody for five years. And the guys accidentally heard it when we were listening to old demos for the *Gretchen* album. I remember the tape started and the first riff came on, and I stopped the tape, and said, "I'm going to pass that one because that's just an old song I wrote a long time ago, and it sucks." And Ty [Tabor, King's X guitarist] said, "No, let's hear it." I played it, and they all loved it! And we put it on the record.

What I was thinking of when I wrote it, I was thinking of Lenny Kravitz's "Let Love Rule." The way Lenny Kravitz wrote that song, it was real "Beatle sensible." It had this real Beatle vibe to it, but when you got to the chorus, the song was building, building, building up for the chorus. But all of a sudden, he comes into "Let love rule," and it didn't bring it up, it brought it down. That was the first time I ever heard a chorus that was anticlimactic, but it works.

So when I wrote "Over My Head," when I got to, "Music, oh, oh, oh, lord," I purposely left it at that level just to be like Lenny Kravitz. That's probably why I didn't like it.

The other thing is, when I went [sings], G minor or whatever it was, I thought it was a stupid chord and didn't fit the riff. So I thought that I had ruined the song. I just kind of gave up on it.

Also, when I came up with the lyrics, it was about my grandmother, remembering Gran at night. I wrote spiritual: "Over my head, I hear music in the air." So I just threw it all together.

I remember also, I wrote it on a Mattel drum pad, and I had a cassette player with a speaker and a boombox. I recorded the cassette, two parts. Then I took the cassette player and played it, and recorded it live onto the other cassette player. So it was playing along with myself with no timer, nothing, with a speaker. I don't know if you understand what I'm saying, but it was basically two cassette players that I just put next to each other and recorded the two together till I got four tracks on the song. It was just crazy. [Laughs]

I actually have the demo. I'm going to throw it out one day and let everybody hear how horrible it was.

**Songfacts:** I would definitely be curious to hear how that song started compared to what it wound up becoming.

**dUg:** The funny thing about it, though, is the riff and arrangement never changed.

**Songfacts:** And what about the song "Summerland"?

**dUg:** Ty Tabor wrote that song. He told me he wrote it about Jackson, Mississippi. He had gone home for the holidays and had realized that it was really... how do we want to talk about the South in a nice way? Saying sort of behind it or sort of racist or just that whole mentality. It's not that the whole South is like that, but you can say that country redneck, uninformed type of people. He was around that kind of thing, and it made him feel weird. He loved this place, but he realizes that that is who they are and that's who they'll always be.

**Songfacts:** How about the song "Black Flag"?

**dUg:** Ty wrote that one, too. And basically all I know is that it's about having a bad day and realizing that you need to just take that fuckin' flag off your head and cheer up. I'm not that type of person, I don't write those kind of lyrics, because I'm a manic depressed person, and if somebody tells me there's a black flag on my head, it is not going to help me feel better. I've got really bad problems way back from childhood, so I don't relate to that song. I play it and sing it the best that I can, I think it's a badass groove.

**Songfacts:** And what do you remember about "Dogman"?

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**dUg:** Ty wrote that one, too! I've written most of the songs of King's X, but people love those songs and I love them, too. That song Ty said he set out to write the baddest riff that he had ever written in his life. He said he felt like he did it, and I agree with him. It's a song that we'll probably always do in our repertoire live. I don't think we'll ever not do it. It's like "Over My Head" - those two songs you have to do.

This is right around the time that our manager, Sam Taylor, left us, so Ty had taken over management of the band, which is a big deal. We were trying to find a manager, so we were having all these big time managers fly in from LA to meet with us, and it was just really overwhelming. And Ty wrote that song during that period. It's all about handshaking, glasses shaking, and the whole deal, just cutting the grass and trying to figure out what to do.

The chorus was going to be, "To be a good man," and all three of us said, "There's no fuckin' way that we're going to put on the record, 'to be a good man.'" So we kept thinking, "What can we say?" And Jerry said, "Black man?" I go, "No, we can't do black man. Do a green man, that's stupid. Do a red man, you know, what the fuck?" We just kept coming up with names until it got so ridiculous that somebody said, "Dog man." And we laughed so hard, we said, "That's the one!" Whenever King's X has an artistic decision to make, if we can't come up with anything, whoever comes up with the stupidest thing, we'll go for. "Gretchen Goes to Nebraska." That was hilarious. We fell on the floor when we came up with that one. And we kept that name under our belts for five or six years, until that record came out and Sam said, "What do you want to name the record?" And we said, "*Gretchen Goes to Nebraska*. Why not?"

**Songfacts:** I feel bad that I just named all songs that Ty wrote. What is your favorite King's X song that you've written?

**dUg:** I like "Black the Sky." I like it because King's X had dropped-D tuning, and then about a year later seems like everybody had dropped-D tuning. Then grunge came along and all of a sudden everybody was downtuned and grooving. And I kind of didn't know what else to do, because that's what I had been doing for a while. So I got pissed and decided to tune my guitar lower. I tuned it down to C flat. And as far as I'm concerned, that's the first song I ever heard tuned to C flat.

But anyway, it was a really low tuned song that I came up with and put that melody over top of. And that was in the middle of a deep kind of depression and midlife crisis. I was just trying to figure things out, so I poured my heart out in that song about how I was feeling. So it captured it.

And I liked that when Brendon mixed it, he mixed it exactly like I wanted to hear it. That song to me was the perfect mix of any King's X song that I've ever heard, because for some reason Brendon nailed it right on the head. That's my perfect mix. And that's my standard - when I'm mixing anything or playing anything, I'll put that song up, because the tones on it to me are just perfect.

**Songfacts:** Cool. You just mentioned Brendon O'Brien. King's X has worked with some great producers, with Brendon and also with Michael Wagner. What would you say that you learned from working with people like that?

**dUg:** With Brendon what I learned was don't spend a whole lot of time on something. And don't be afraid to turn the knob to the point where it explodes. Everything that I learned with Brendon was don't be afraid to use compression. But that was back in '94, very few people were doing that, and Brendon had created this whole new sound with compression. So I learned a big deal about compression through him.

It gave me comfort to know that after a month of working with the band, he's pretty much lost interest and he's ready to move onto the next one. I'm that way, too. When I'm in the studio after like four-and-a-half weeks, I kind of don't care anymore. And if there are really serious decisions to be made at the end, I let everybody just deal with it, and then I regret it later. But my attention span is about a month making a record and that's it. So when Brendon said that, it made me feel good, because he's made a great living at it.

**Songfacts:** Did you pick up anything working with Michael Wagner?

**dUg:** Michael Wagner was just great, great, great, great to work with. He was very challenging. Michael was a legend. He's from the old school. I learned a lot from the old school. It was really nice to have two different producers, one from the old school, one from the new school. And I learned a lot from both of them.

I think with Michael, too, he really, really taught me the importance of tubes.

**Songfacts:** And lastly, what are your future plans?

**dUg:** I've got another band called Third Year Experience. We just put a record up on iTunes. It's a jam band that I have out in Joshua Tree with a guy named Robbi Robb from a band called Tribe After Tribe. We get together and we do our long songs, we jam for an hour and we get different people to come out. We start at like 3:00 in the afternoon and go till 3:00 in the morning, and we record it all. We have hour long jams and we cut them up and we put the first album up. It's four songs, they are like 20 minutes apiece. But we have a proper album, what we just did, and it's going to be coming out in a few months. All these bands that I've just mentioned we will do some shows, but nothing's planned right now. We're just trying to get everything out and we're trying to coordinate everything. Because for me to have five projects out in one year is insane. I've got to space it a little bit, and then go back to King's X, because in the next couple of months I'm getting back with King's X. So everybody's just doing what they can to get all these

projects out and let everybody know what's going on.

May 21, 2013.

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