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## New Kids on the Block: Hangin' Tough, Refusing to Let Go

[8 October 2009]

By [Monte Williams](#)

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*In 1989, I loathed the New Kids on the Block with a passion and intensity that only junior high-aged children can bring to their study of popular culture, yet when Hangin' Tough Live hit DVD, I had to see it.*

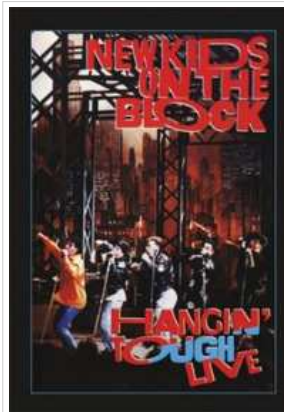
I'm not sure who was supplying leads to the gossip circles of Oroville, California in 1989, but it was common knowledge at Central Middle School that Metallica had physically attacked the New Kids on the Block backstage after a concert. A lone physical detail was included to provide credibility for the more suspicious in our ranks: an enraged James Hetfield had wielded a pair of hair scissors and had cut off the tail of... whichever the hell New Kid wore a tail.

My buddies and I delighted in spreading the word about this vital pop cultural event, because the girls in our grade, New Kids-obsessed banshees to the last, could usually be relied upon to cry at the news.

In retrospect, I wonder whether the mysterious source of this juicy bit of gossip had meant for us all to conclude that the New Kids and Metallica were touring together. (I'd love to see the collaborative souvenirs from such an unlikely tour.) But of course it never occurred to us to ask a question like this back in seventh grade, because we never had enough time to ponder such "news" in detail, for there was always some new item to distract and delight us: Jon Bon Jovi has AIDS! Vanilla Ice went to the hospital and had his stomach pumped and they removed a gallon of semen!

This last rumor was recycled for many a despised celebrity, including two or three of the New Kids; it's like those stupid quotes that get passed around via e-mail, including "It's not pollution that's harming our environment, it's impurities in the land and water." These quotes were attributed to Dan Quayle in the late '80s, and I've seen them attributed to George W. Bush and Al Gore in recent e-mails.

Twenty years later, I'm too out of touch with the pop cultural landscape to overhear any of its pretend gossip, but I find myself flipping through the MVD Entertainment Group catalog, earmarking those pages containing DVDs I cannot live without (mostly Iron Maiden and Eminem



### New Kids on the Block

#### Hangin' Tough Live

(DHERRY RED / MVD; US DVD: 14 JUL 2009)

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on the Block DVD. (*Hangin' Tough Live*, for the record.)

I surprise myself by deciding immediately that I must see it.

Understand: I was never a closet fan; I loathed the New Kids on the Block with a passion and intensity that only junior high-aged children can bring to their study of popular culture. A decade later, I observed with bemused bafflement another generation's teeth-gnashing disdain for N\*SYNC and the Backstreet Boys, about whom I harbored feelings of polite indifference when I could be bothered to even remember that they existed.

But it's precisely because the New Kids were such an affront to my younger self that I now feel compelled to take a second look; I felt a need, during the '80s, to defend my beloved AC/DC, Suicidal Tendencies and Dead Milkmen from these pretty boy poseurs at all costs, but now I harbor no more resentment for the New Kids than I feel for the overweight and freakishly tall jock who tried to pants me in the junior high library; that was another life, after all.

The New Kids, who were treated to such clever nicknames as New Skids on the Block and New Lips On the Cock, experienced a level of fame that few groups have ever enjoyed. They had their own cartoon, and their images were emblazoned on everything from T-shirts to pillow sheets and, in the one example that delighted me and my friends, a spread in *Mad Magazine* featuring a damning caricature which offered long-suffering prepubescent boys some small sense of vengeance.

"Hangin' Tough" was their first big single, and much to my embarrassment, I was able to sing some of its lyrics from memory before I even started the DVD. And as I sang, something terrible occurred to me: "Hangin' Tough" begins with the lyric, "Come on, everybody, if you wanna take a chance." I swear to god, I think the New Kids, in their opening salvo, in their bubblegum equivalent to a call to arms, were trying to evoke Eddie Cochran's "C'mon, Everybody," much like the riff in Poison's "Talk Dirty to Me" dares to mimic Cochran's "Something Else."

Suppressing my gag reflex, I placed the DVD in the tray. The menu loaded instantly, with no FBI warning; the only two options were to play the feature or select a chapter. In defense of the MVD Entertainment Group, I doubt that even the most nostalgic New Kids fans were clamoring for a Criterion Edition of *Hangin' Tough Live*.

Now, Lowbrow Literati has seen many an installment wherein I visit a maligned old property and happily eat crow. I expected the same here, but apparently I was pretty much spot-on where my late '80s critical reaction to the New Kids was concerned. My wannabe-stoner mullet has long since been shaved, and my Anthrax *State of Euphoria* T-shirt is lost to the ages and I've misplaced all my posters advertising Tim Burton's *Batman*, but having listened to them again, my feelings about the New Kids on the Block are the same now as they were in 1989; I had to pause the DVD ten seconds into the first song to place my face in my hands.

The New Kids on the Block suck. Like, seriously: they suck even worse than you remember.

Still, I said to my wife that what strikes me most now is how *generic* their music sounds. She replied that what struck her most was "how ugly they all are." She's right, but time makes hags of most any angel; pop idols of the past are like a yearbook that shames the whole country; haircuts and wardrobes aside, you look back and marvel that anyone was attracted to such awkward, asymmetrical faces.

Meanwhile, I was barely aware of N\*SYNC and their late '90s ilk, but I suspected, as I prepared to watch the New Kids DVD, that the Backstreet era featured music that was more shamelessly overproduced than their '80s predecessors. I see now that I was right, but that said, part of all the excessive studio tinkering that made N\*SYNC more overproduced also made them simply more competent-sounding. A surprising portion of the *Hangin' Tough* set list is disarmingly awkward. It sounds like a band auditioning for pop idol status, not reaping its rewards.

Isn't *Entourage* at least loosely based on Mark Wahlberg's experience as a burgeoning pop and movie star? With Donnie presumably playing the has-been role of Johnny Drama? (Incidentally, I wrote down their names during the opening credits: Jonathon Knight, Jordan Knight, Joseph McIntyre, Donnie Wahlberg, Danny Wood. You're welcome.) If this is correct, and if *Entourage* is even half-true to their real-life experiences, than these talentless, preening, obnoxious little jackasses scored sex at Vincent Chase levels in their late '80s heyday. Nothing can set right such a karmic disaster.



  
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Today, one's inclination is to dismiss the New Kids as forgotten hacks whose fanbase abandoned them along with their training bras, but apparently the band is releasing albums again. And hell, a google search for "New Kids on the Block" yields 69,200,000 hits. But then, "mustard seed" gets 1,730,000 hits, and "herpes" gets 12,200,000 hits, so how much does that really count for?



The New Kids all grown up - reunion tour

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Monte Williams has a Bachelors Degree in Communications. Would you like fries with that?

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#### COMMENTS

They do not suck.The are better than before you are just jealous of them and you cannot accept that!Get over it loser!

Comment by Lori — October 8, 2009 @ 8:11 am

this article followed by Lori's impassioned misspelled reply. a perfect match!!!

Comment by loser — October 8, 2009 @ 11:22 am

The statement that you made above, "forgotten hacks whose fanbase abandoned them along with their training bras" is a perfect match!!!

looked at ticket sales for their tours in the past year or two? Did you see that they sold out not one but two cruises they booked to perform for their fans? They are NOT forgotten by their true fans. The fact is they have put the excitement back into their fans from the 80's and added to it! They didn't make their comeback because of people like you, they made it because of their TRUE fans...

Comment by Sara from Sevierville — October 8, 2009 @ 11:50 am

Sara, let's be honest. They made their comeback because they figured there's enough people who are nostalgic for their (pre-)teenage years to allow them to make a good sum of money by touring again. And more power to them for that.

But their actual music is so dull and uninspiring, I can't believe Monte even had the patience to do this write up!

Comment by pogopop77 — October 8, 2009 @ 3:02 pm

"these talentless, preening, obnoxious little jackasses scored sex at Vincent Chase levels in their late '80s heyday" um jealous much? These guys came from nothing and worked their way to the top, they sold over 80 million albums and at one point topped Forbes list of highest paid entertainers, has that ever happened to you? Whether you liked them then or not they had a part in music history. The success they achieved was beyond even their expectations. 15 years later they were able to return better than ever, selling out arenas and had their latest CD debut at number 2 on the charts. This time around NKOTB is in control of their own music and career choices. It's sad most people, like you, assume because its a pop act they can be dismissed and not given any credit. There is such a stigma when it comes to boy bands, lets not forget they were the 1st commercial pop boy band. New Kids on the Block may not be your music of choice but don't dismiss them like that.

P.S. Donnie is not Drama, if you did your research you would know Drama is based on Mark's cousin who Donnie hired to keep Mark out of trouble.

Comment by Nancy — October 8, 2009 @ 5:37 pm

NKOTB kicks ass, saw their reunion concert and it was the best concert EVAH.

Their music (old and new) is awesome.

Comment by Andrew — October 9, 2009 @ 11:01 pm

I understand NKOTB is not for everyone. But what I've never understood is why there's such hatred for them. I can't imagine putting so much effort into the bands/groups/singers that I don't like. This is a general comment - not solely a response to this article.

Comment by Jen from Toronto — October 10, 2009 @ 10:19 am

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