

LEFT TO RIGHT:
 Nathan, Jared,
 Caleb and Matthew
 Followill. Nathan
 wears coat, \$4,750,
 by Louis Vuitton;
 cotton T-shirt,
 \$325, by Rick
 Owens from
 Belinda Menswear;
 'Slim Kim' jeans,
 \$290, by Nudie;
 glasses and
 necklace, Nathan's
 own. Jared wears
 wool jacket, \$1,629,
 leather belt, \$393,
 both by Dior
 Homme; cotton
 stripe shirt, \$325,
 by Bally; tie, \$180,
 by Filippa K; 'Slim
 Kim' jeans, \$290,
 by Nudie; silver
 cuff, \$239, by Boss
 Black; all other
 jewellery, Jared's
 own. Caleb wears
 wool coat, POA, by
 Dior Homme;
 cotton shirt, \$150,
 by Polo Ralph
 Lauren; tie, \$180,
 by Filippa K;
 'Vanwinkle' jeans,
 \$260, by Ksubi.
 Matthew wears
 leather bomber
 jacket, \$4,179,
 by Dior Homme;
 cotton V-neck
 top, \$160, by
 Dead on Strings;
 'Vanwinkle'
 jeans, \$260, by
 Ksubi; jewellery
 and sunglasses,
 Matthew's own.



Royal family.

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*Words Nick Scott. Photographs Christopher Morris.
 Styling Melissa Boyle. Grooming Allison Boyle.*

Seafood platters in a hotel boardroom with Kings of Leon. As incongruous interview scenarios go, it's like vodka nips by a burning oil-drum with Martha Stewart. This is, after all, *The Kings*: the honky-tonk horn-dogs with the yen for mind-benders; all sweat 'n' leather hooks and rasped lyrical testimonies to tour-bus sexual mores. >

Not that there isn't a mild stench of debauchery in the air. A whiff of spliff hovers around the band's copious locks from their inter-snap chugging during the day's shoot; and besides, doesn't an aureole of sin always surrounds The Kings?

Caleb: "I'm gonna down some of these here oysters, so the ladies at the after-party tonight can [affects posh English accent] smmmell it on me. I tell you, that theory is true, man. Nathan and me did a tour-long study..." **Nathan:** "Oysters, Matt? No? When are you going to get some class, man?"

Caleb: "...and every night we ate oysters we — well, put it this way, after that we started pouring the juice into our hair. The way we were raised, we travelled around, and every church we got to we were the hot shit — girls were throwing themselves at us. We still think we're kings and should be able to fuck everything that walks, even though that ain't really the case."

The three Followill brothers (vocalist/guitarist Caleb, 25; drummer Nathan, 27; bass-player Jared, 20) and their cousin (guitarist Matt, 22) are in Australia to warm up crowds for Pearl Jam, in the process premiering their third album, *Because of the Times*. The title is a nod to an annual Pentecostal conference in Louisiana — chosen, according to Caleb, because the phrase "answers every question in the world". But what about the tunes? Well, expect another Dixie-rock wall of sound, each instrument battling to be the lead. ("The way we grew up in church, explains Caleb, "every instrument — yeah, it sounds corny and clichéd — is meant to be praising the Lord.") Don't expect more of the same, though. In 2004, Nathan described the band's gritty, peat-bog rock debut *Youth and Young Manhood* as "whiskey" and the more nuanced follow-up, *Aha Shake Heartbreak*, as "wine". So what's this one?

Nathan: "It's right here [smiles and taps the bottle of '58 Dom Pérignon that's been wheeled out to celebrate Jared's birthday]. No, make that a Black Velvet — half champagne, half Guinness. This was the first record where we've all had a chance to shine. In the live tour, the new songs stand out, not just because emotionally they're quite different but because you can't immediately say, 'That's Kings of Leon.'" **Caleb:** "We're learning stuff, and our balls are getting bigger. A lot of bands get stuck in a fucking rut — have a hit record and try to re-create that again and again. But we have a gradual plan towards becoming the band we want to be. Then, we'll go make a gospel album or something else off the wall..." **Jared:** "But not shit-hop. Or Christian rap, although I'm really into that right now." Right.

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Caleb has an alter-ego, based on the John Wayne character Rooster Cogburn. He surfaces when he sinks too much of the moonshine.

Caleb: "Ahhhh Rooster. How I miss that guy. I used to get so drunk that I'd black out, so whenever they told me stories I didn't remember, that was Rooster — 'It weren't me, I weren't there'. I got him on a leash now. Actually, he still lives in a sandbox outside a convenience store. He wears one roller blade, with his other ankle badly broken. He don't have a phone, he still has a pager. He's a crazy guy, but a fun guy."

Yes, the Kings love the juice, but they're far from being one-dimensional hedonists. They're men of contrast: vain popinjays with a streak of unkempt hillbilly; thoughtful, bookish even, yet mildly vacant; charming and congenial, but in a way that has teenage girls' fathers reaching for their blunderbusses. So it's fitting that their carousing approach to life is tempered with depth of character and a capacity for lucid reflection.

Caleb: "In this album, I'm saying things about myself that are very hidden, but put it all together and it's kind of like *The Da Vinci Code*, a puzzle about myself. It's also trying to go back to the old story-telling days; the cowboy way of life, what it's like to be a man. One of the new songs, 'On Call', that's all about the being in a relationship aspect of life. >



THIS PAGE:
Cotton jacket,
\$1,790; leather
belt, \$940, both by
Prada. Cotton knit,
\$1,040, by Louis
Vuitton. 'Slim Kim'
jeans, \$290, by
Nudie. Jewellery
and glasses,
Nathan's own.

OPPOSITE PAGE:
Cotton belted
jacket, POA, by
Dior Homme.
Cotton T-shirt, \$77,
by Dead on Strings.
'Slim Kim' jeans,
\$290, by Nudie.
Silver cross
necklace, \$154;
silver finger
necklace, \$121,
both by Zuitton.

I almost drowned a couple of times when I was young — canoeing, stuff like that — and out of nowhere would come my dad and pull me out of the water; just when you think you're going to die someone's there, so it's almost religious, thinking, 'Despite my trials and tribulations, I'm on the call of duty — I'm here to take a bullet for that person.'

For those who don't know about "dad", Caleb, Nathan and Jared's father, the eponymous Leon, was a United Pentecostal Preacher (and bottle-hitting womaniser). Until he was de-frocked, the kids would provide musical backing at his holy knees-ups around the Deep South.

Jared: "Dad used to play the bass, and he'd make up gospel songs based on the blues..." **Nathan:** "Oh Gaaad... God God Gaaad... You've been so good to meeee.' All blues music." **Jared:** "...so the people who pioneered the way for us, we come from what influenced every one of them: rock 'n' roll, it all started from gospel and blues, and instead of listening to The Rolling Stones, we went to those churches that started that whole thing." **Nathan:** "How's the lemon risotto, Matt?" **Caleb:** "I used to want to be my dad; I was going to be the second one, a preacher. He was trying to say something, and we still have a voice inside of us we're trying to get out. Our family is very proud, because we took the family name and did something with it. Our last name is now known around the world, and ain't because of my uncle's painting company."

Talking of families and lineage, The Kings have an announcement to make. Turns out there's more to their genetic make-up than the native-American blood in their veins.

Caleb: "Our grandfather's name is George Travis Washington. His dad was a George Washington, and so on right back to the George Washington's brother. Maybe that's how we got a record deal. We haven't talked about it much, because we're afraid someone's going to research it and it ain't true."

What America's founding father — a stickler for clean-living civic virtue — would have thought of his descendents' peccadillos is anyone's guess. But then, they have knocked the hard stuff — of the lab-refined variety, anyway — on the head...

Nathan: "We've had our fill of drugs. People come to our shows trying to hook us up with stuff..." **Caleb:** "...and if they could see the way their mouth is contorted, how they're chewing their lips — ughh. The worst is when it's a beautiful girl, and they're all 'Yang-ga-yang-ga-yang'." **Nathan:** "You don't think things through with that stuff. You end up looking back on decisions, with your career, with your music, I might not have worn that outfit, or fixed my hair that way, or talked to that..." **Caleb:** "...that girl with the Adam's apple that was bigger than her balls." **Jared:** "That was my girlfriend you sons of bitches." **A pause. Cutlery clatters. Nathan:** "Please have your goggles on tonight, brothers."

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The Kings were exposed to pop culture late in life, after daddy left the cloth. Their initial reaction was one of disgust. So where do they stand now?

Caleb: "America's dumb as a fucking brick, as far as music goes. You still hear Nickelback — I mean, what the fuck are people thinking?" **Jared:** "There's a major lack of originality out there, because all the industry will back is: 'We've heard this before, let's do it again.'" **Caleb:** "A band should be able to flip their shit — it's an art form." **Nathan:** "Creativity is doing what you want to do and not giving a fuck who gets it. Pass the ginger jelly, Matt..."

Around this point, the recording dissolves into a cacophony of nonsense, culminating in a slurred round-table rendition of The Pogues' "Fairytale of New York". Certain fragments of conversation on the tape are intelligible — Nathan: "South Germany was where I murdered my first prostitute." **Caleb:** "Bono's wife? Stiiiiil smokin'" — **but the time for serious engagement has passed. Shortly, to an unlikely hotel muzak soundtrack, rock's royal family, their string-bean waistlines packed with fish and champers, head off for another night of vice. GQ Because of the Times (Sony BMG) is out on April 7.**



THIS PAGE: Cotton knit cardigan, \$110, by Brent Wilson. Cotton singlet, \$66, by Dead on Strings. Leather belt, \$393, by Dior Homme. 'Slim Kim' jeans, \$290, by Nudie. Long silver necklace with wooden hand, \$242, by Zuitton. Rosary beads, \$85, by Santos Wish. Silver cuff, \$239, by Boss Black. Ring, earring and sunglasses, Jared's own.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Black wool jacket, POA, leather belt, \$393, by Dior Homme. White cotton shirt, \$325, by Bally. 'Slim Kim' jeans, \$290, by Nudie. Jewellery, Matthew's own.

