

Michael Hutchence exclusive

What really tore my brother apart

Michael Hutchence was one of Australia's brightest-burning rock stars when he was found dead in a Sydney hotel room nearly 20 years ago. Two decades on, writes **Chris White**, his sister Tina still harbours misgivings and questions about her brother's final years as INXS's incandescent, controversial lead singer.

There were no free tickets, no backstage passes. Tina Hutchence had to queue with the rest of the crowd, but she didn't mind – she was getting to see her brother's band again. INXS.

It was Los Angeles, 2005, at some "obscure venue", as Tina puts it, and it was to be the first time that she'd seen the boys – brothers Andrew, Jon and Tim Farriss, Kirk Pengilly and Garry Beers – since Michael's sad and lonely death seven years previously.

She'd tried to get in contact, but no one picked up the phone. In the end, Tina stopped calling. Now she was virtually the last person left at the gig.

"I tried to call someone to get tickets, couldn't [get them], so thought forget it, I'll go with my kids and just show up.

"The resident manager saw me and did a double take. He came over and said, 'Tina, why didn't you tell me you were coming?' I said, 'You're a difficult man to get hold of'.

"After the show, I stayed out there, and a couple of old fans recognised me, then we were shown into another room. I stood there with my children, and the band walked in one by one. Andrew, who has always been very sensitive, he just hugged me very tightly and began to weep. I said, 'It's okay.' He said, 'It's just, this is the closest I've been to Michael since he died.' The others were stand-offish, like I'd done something wrong. What is wrong with these people?" Tina says.



ABOVE: Michael's sister, Tina. **RIGHT:** As INXS frontman.

"I get the feeling that they feel they're the ones who are wronged, how dare he take his life? Hello, this is a guy who made them all millionaires. His face is still on the cover of their hits. The only time I could see them was as a fan."

Ironic that the group's most iconic lyric goes, *And they could never tear us apart...*

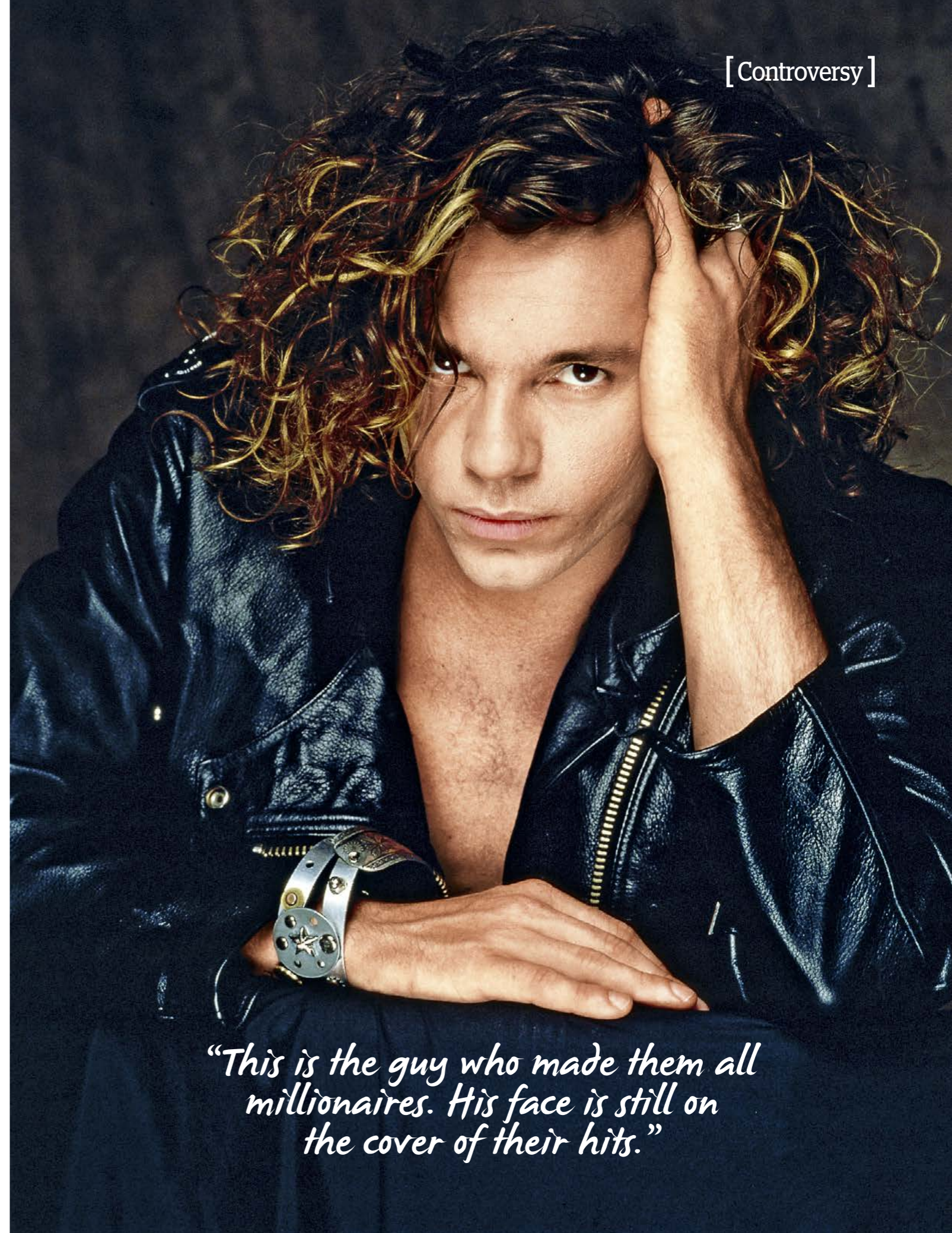
"They were very upset that he left them.

Andrew, I've known since he was 14 years old, [he] was always round my parents' house in Sydney. There's now this disconnect. I called Kirk seven or eight months after he died, I just wanted to ask him some questions. There's a missing piece, I don't understand it," says Tina.

Ultimately, there are many absent fragments to the tragic story of Michael Hutchence, who was found hanged from the door of his Sydney hotel room on November 22, 1997. Despite persistent rumours that his death was suicide, a NSW coroner was satisfied the cause of death was hanging.

The professional highs, such as performing to a packed out Wembley Stadium in London in 1991, seemed to come hand-in-hand with devastating personal lows: Michael's turbulent love life, an irreversible traumatic brain injury caused by a punch from an angry cabbie, and persistent mental health problems.

During the past two decades, so much newspaper space given to lies, rumours and half-truths, »



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and so little to the facts. And 20 years after the fact, and despite the findings of the NSW coroner, many people theorise that Michael's death was not simply a tragic accident. It seems almost a rock star cliché, but the obvious question is why would a man who supposedly had it all kill himself?

Michael's demons

His sister Tina believes she has at least some of the answers. The unpalatable truth is that Michael Hutchence – rock star, sex symbol, a man who lived up to the INXS name in every respect – may have had plenty of reasons to take his own life.

Firstly, he was desperate to leave the band. He tried. Many times. But he toured again and again, churning over millions of dollars for the INXS brand.

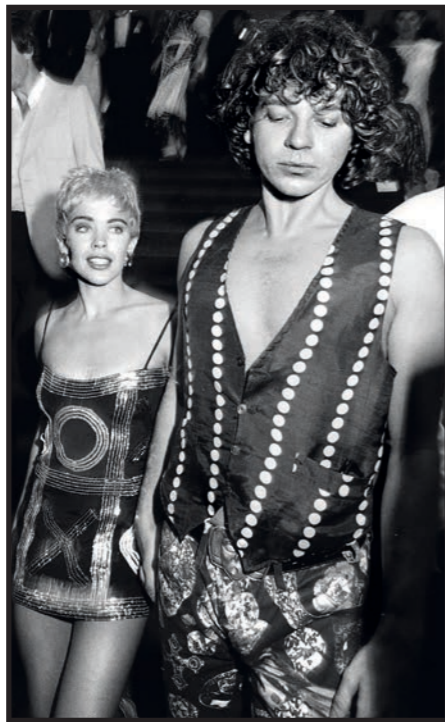
"He had said for a long time he wanted to leave the band, he wanted to do his own thing. I think he did the last tour out of guilt. Like any band, they were worried that the golden goose would fly away. When *Rolling Stone* wanted to put him on the cover, they didn't want the rest of the band on it so they said no. That was a major, major disappointment to Michael," says Tina.

We speak over lunch near to her home in Santa Cruz, a laidback California coastal town, so clearly contrasting with Michael's chaotic lifestyle. Tina has the same youthful charm as her half-brother – nine years her junior – and belies her 66 years.

"Every time he got ready to leave, there was a tour. That can really wear on you. If he'd gone solo, and come back to INXS, that would have made them bigger, no? At least five years before he died, he was wanting out."

You don't need to be a detective to figure out that Tina has issues with INXS. At the start of the interview, Tina told a story about being the guest of honour when Michael and co-songwriter Andrew Farriss were inducted into the Australian Songwriters Hall of Fame last December.

"They'd been trying to honour Michael for at least eight years or more; they'd never awarded it posthumously before, but they said, 'We are happy to



ABOVE: Michael and Kylie Minogue at a movie premiere in 1989. BELOW: As a new dad to daughter Tiger Lily. BOTTOM: With Paula Yates in 1996.



do this for Michael, but they just don't ever get back to us whenever we've tried.' INXS knew about this.

"Do you think the Stones are upset that Mick Jagger gets up there and does his thing? There's always been this thing that it was Michael who got all the attention. Michael used to say, 'The guys complain, but they're out playing golf, sight-seeing when we're on tour. I'm the one stuck in hotel rooms doing interviews. I don't mind, but at least acknowledge it.'"

Michael was exhausted by the band's relentless touring and suffered from depression when he died. Hutchence was on a night out in Denmark in August 1992 with his then girlfriend Helena Christensen when he was punched by a taxi driver.

Hutchence fell to the pavement, fracturing his skull and losing his sense of taste and smell. He never recovered from that punch which fractured his skull. Along with his sense of smell and taste, he also began a slow descent into a devastating psychological change.

INXS bass guitarist Garry Beers told a Seven Network reporter that Michael never fully recovered from the injury. "When Michael hit his head, he came back a different person and I'm sure doctors were prescribing all sorts of weird and wonderful concoctions," he said.

"He was a dick and it wasn't him, that's the thing. It wasn't the Michael we knew and that's what was so surprising. He couldn't smell, he couldn't taste, he was drinking wine by the bottle 'cause it was just like nothing to him." Guitarist Tim Farriss claimed Michael also became more aggressive.

Tabloid gossip and missing millions

At the same time, he was being hounded by the UK tabloid press for supposedly stealing Paula Yates from Bob Geldof. Their affair bore a child – Tiger Lily. It was a complete mismatch: the "Aussie Ruffian" vs "Mr Humanitarian".

"He had such an easy go with the press until London during that time," Tina says. "The change in attitude to him was horrible. It got to him, upset him, paralysed him. He would call me. We'd talk a bit, then I'd ask, 'Are you weeping?' 'You have no idea what it's like here,' he'd say, over and over. I'd say, 'People here know you are a good guy.'"

"The press love a bad guy and good guy and he was up against Bob, Mr Humanitarian. [The press] said he ripped this family apart, which is



The band (from left) Tim Farriss, Kirk Pengilly, Garry Beers, Michael, Andrew Farriss and Jon Farriss at the height of their fame. BELOW: Michael on the cover of the September 1991 edition of UK magazine The Face.

ridiculous. Paula had moved out months before. They would call him the 'Aussie Ruffian'. That wasn't Michael. He hated that, to be called names, to be told he wasn't a nice guy. "What had I done?" he said to me. "What does it matter who I go out with?"

"The idea of not being able to walk out of your house, photographers climbing over your fence, paying to stay in apartments to overlook your house. This was such a big shock. In Australia, he didn't get that."

With his mounting personal issues, traumatic brain injury, and the press, he wasn't in good shape, Tina says. "In April, he called my mum from Vienna, where the band was on tour, and said, 'I can't do this anymore, I can't take it.' I think it was both the press and touring. We told him to hold out to LA in three weeks. I was [going to be] there, my parents were there. When he finally got here, he didn't want to talk about it – it was only when he was alone that he would talk about it on the phone. He shouldn't have been on that tour. He loved his daughter, he should have stayed there [with her]."

Would he ever have settled down with Paula? "No", she says firmly, then adds, "I don't know what would have happened there. That was a conundrum."

The biggest enigma, which is yet to be solved, is the question of where Michael's

missing millions went. Three properties on the Gold Coast; a villa in the south of France; a house in London's most expensive suburb, Chelsea; an estate in Lombok, Indonesia; Bentley cars; Aston Martins; and the never-ending royalty cheques from INXS, which must still be pouring in today.

The Michael Hutchence Trust held the key to it all, a complex structure of offshore companies, from Liberia to the British Virgin Islands, and many nameless faces. It was designed to keep his taxes low and protect his fortune from falling into the wrong hands

– perhaps the most bitter of ironies.

A conservative estimate would put the Trust value at around \$100 million. Newspaper reports valued it at half that amount 12 years ago. For years, the family bickered over different wills while the executors stalled.

In 2005, a Hong Kong law firm handling Michael's estate sent a letter to his family saying he had \$506 in cash at the time of his death, while his share of INXS's bank balance was \$572. Even now, little is known about who the beneficiaries of Michael's millions are, and whether his daughter Tiger Lily will ever get any of his fortune when she turns 25 in 2021.

"I stayed in those houses, I drove his cars, I still have clothes at the villa," says Tina. "The idea was to look after the child >>>

"He hated that ... to be told he wasn't a nice guy."



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[Tiger Lily] over the years. Royalties add up really, really fast – that’s why Michael could buy a million-dollar property over here in cash, another one over there in cash.

“But it was all in a discretionary trust, which they [the Australian Government] stopped doing, as they realised people were getting ripped off.

“The attorneys said we could keep going but I’d seen my parents go down health-wise, it was just shocking. I encouraged them to get out of it,” says Tina.

Her tone is surprisingly conciliatory. She now wants to hold out an olive branch to the Estate as she needs their help to get a few projects off the ground for the 20th anniversary of Michael’s death, so that the country has a permanent memory of our most famous rock star. Tina is campaigning local and central government authorities to create a lasting legacy – a bronze statue to be placed outside the redeveloped Sydney Entertainment Centre, now called the ICC Sydney, in Darling Harbour.

It’s garnered the support of the music community, with letters from the likes of Cher, Dave Stewart, Richie Sambora, Billy Idol and, more bizarrely, Prince Albert of Monaco. Some of his old girlfriends got in touch such as Helena Christensen and Kylie Minogue, who was a besotted 21-year-old when she dated Michael in 1989 and, she says, he taught her “so many firsts in my life”.

“We have personal letters of support, dozens of them,” says Tina. “His Royal Highness Prince Albert sent one and I thought, why? But then I realised Michael had his villa in Monaco and we didn’t talk about things like that, ‘Oh, I’m just meeting the Prince.’ Dannii Minogue said it [the statue] seems like a no brainer, and Kylie...” Tina’s voice melts away, “... wrote a beautiful letter. She was just very personal, a loving, lovely letter. We promised to keep it private.

“He was so good with women. They felt he could talk to them, he made them feel important and smart. People talk about charisma – he’d be talking to you, looking into your eyes. He was never a ‘look at me’ person.”

Tina calls 2017, “The Year of Michael”, and

projects are being lined up thick and fast. A new documentary and album of music recorded before he died is set to be released later this year by Los Angeles producer Danny Saber, who was working with Michael on new material in the last weeks of his life. “It was wonderful to hear the music, just his breathing. People are going to be really surprised,” says Tina, who has given the projects her blessing.

Michael’s legacy

Don’t rule out Hollywood in 2018, as the rights to Tina’s book on her brother, entitled *Just A Man: The Real Michael Hutchence*, have been bought by a movie company. She adds, “I’ve been working with a scriptwriter for the last five or six years, he’s quite brilliant, and we’ve just signed a movie deal which will concentrate on a specific time in the last ten years of his life. It’s going to be an Australian/US filming combination; America has to be involved, as Hollywood does it best. I want to celebrate Michael. He was unique, he has a legacy.”

One can only wonder what a 57-year-old Michael Hutchence would be doing today. Would he still be in INXS? Would he still be Bob Geldof’s nemesis?

You might predict “yes” to both, but his elder sister says you’d be wrong. “I’m sure he’d be into film now,” she says. “He was working on a couple of projects, enjoying it so much. I could see him doing independent films, getting into the psyche of a role,” says Tina.

And “Saint Bob”?

“For Michael, after that much time [gone by], it wouldn’t even bother him,” she says. “He didn’t see Bob as a rival, not at all. It would all be blown over by now. Would he shake his hand? Yes, Michael had a good sense of humour like that!” **AWW**

If you or someone you know needs help, call Lifeline on 13 11 14.



TOP: Michael on stage in 1988. **ABOVE:** Michael with Tina and their mother, Patricia Glassop, Christmas 1989.