

SIX60 - 2021 biog

A critical and commercial sensation in their home country of New Zealand, Kiwi five piece SIX60 continuously break records for ticket sales, chart-topping albums & singles and new innovative ways of getting their music to their fans. But outside of their antipodean environs, they were less well-known. That is, until a string of concerts earlier this year changed the band's trajectory on the global stage forever. The nationwide tour known as 'SIX60 Saturdays' saw the band play to upwards of 20,000 people at each concert, but here's the rub: they were the only band performing live to crowds *anywhere* in the world at the time.

New Zealand's enviable position of almost zero cases of Covid-19 while the rest of the globe was in lockdown meant that Kiwi's national band, SIX60, were now the biggest band on the planet. Within days, the band were seen across news screens and papers throughout Europe, Asia, Africa and The Americas. Frontman Matiu Walters even found himself being interviewed live on UK TV alongside Jools Holland and Piers Morgan, being hailed as *"the hottest band in the world right now"*.

But SIX60's beginnings were far more humble than you might imagine for a multi-platinum selling stadium band. Friends first through university halls (the band's name comes from the apartment number of the student accommodation where they used to live) and playing in local Rugby sides, the 5 boys began jamming out covers of New Zealand roots songs and bands such as Fat Freddy's Drop and Trinity Roots, before playing shows at college parties, developing a devout fan following. Walters recalls of their quick rise to success: *"Then we booked out some time in a studio - not much time as I remember it - and went in there with a box of beers and went through everything, and made a record. We put it on Facebook and the next day - it just blew up."* They have since released three studio albums - all of which shot to number one in the album charts, spawning countless number one, multi-platinum singles too.

SIX60 have a composite sound which is borne of all the many influences - both musical and personal - each member brings with them. Bassist Chris Mac, brought up solely on classical music such as Beethoven and Chopin, had his musical awakening upon hearing punk for the first time: *"Dead Kennedys, The Sex Pistols and proto-punk like Costello: this was music that made me feel for the first time - feel something more than just skill and technique"*. Mac's classical and punk influences are met with a love of The Beatles and Kiwi roots/reggae bands in keyboardist Marlon Gerbes - but then other members of the band share a love R&B, soul, funk, hip hop - even drum & bass. This wide range of influences is reflected in the band's material: early mega-hit 'Don't Forget Your Roots' is a sundrenched, laid back reggae-tinged number, but live favourite 'Sundown' combines electronic sounds and syncopated afro rhythms to create a hybrid R&B pop sound. *"It's important to keep pushing...otherwise we get bored"*, says Walters - *"We find ourselves having a sound, but it's this combination of where each of us came from. It just happened naturally"*.

The stage is SIX60's true home; it's where they cut their teeth as a band and it is what they enjoy the most, to this day. *"We are meant to play live"*, says Mac. *"It's what we do best. And our fans deserve the best show they've ever seen - luckily we're just the band to do that."* And so it felt right that, in April of this year, after their sold-out national tour came to an end, that they do one last show to round off the tour. A performance to end all performances, one

for the history books. While the rest of the world was still in lockdown, SIX60 took to the stage at Auckland's Eden Park Stadium - a 50,000-capacity sports venue which hadn't hosted a musical act in recent memory. The magnitude of the occasion was not lost on the band: *"I went for a run the day of the gig", remembers Chris Mac. "I was just going for my normal run and I thought fuck it - I'll run around the stadium. And I thought about all these people who have paid their hard earned money coming to see us play there tonight - 50 thousand of them - and it was a real moment"*.

The show was a triumphant celebration of SIX60, Kiwi culture, and indirectly, freedom from the terror of a global pandemic. *"I just let my body watch it, like I was an audience member",* says Marlon about what it felt like on that stage. *"It was almost like being thrown into a river: you can't control it now, just make sure you don't hit any rocks and go with it."*

But there were rocks, lying in wait. A technical hitch on the night meant that, at numerous times throughout the show (which, along with the 50,000 people in attendance was being watched by thousands across the globe in a first-ever partnership with live streaming platform Veeps) - the band's sound cut out in their monitors, meaning none of them could properly hear the rest of the band play. *"The speakers were facing us, but there was this huge delay: I'd play something and you'd hear it seconds later. So I had to watch [drummer] Eli's hands or Matiu's foot-tapping to get the timings. I think I did that at least 5 times during the show!"*

Bassist Chris Mac interjects, asking the band's drummer: *"Wait, so could you hear any timings at all, Eli? I've never really asked you this since". "Not a thing",* confirms Eli.

Not that any of this was noticeable to the audience. *"We've been doing this too long to let things fuck us up. You can't stop the show!",* decrees Matiu. And so SIX60's Eden Park performance glowed with a warm, humble yet proud energy of a band who recognised they were seeing the rewards of the years of hard work they've put in to get this far. The audience were in the palm of SIX60's hands - singing the lyrics word-for-word, dancing and embracing each other in this singular, ecstatic celebration of music, Kiwi culture and freedom. The concert also had a wider impact, serving as a beam of hope and positivity to the rest of the world; a sign that live music can too return for them soon, as indeed it has begun to do.

And again, the headlines followed. Despite taking place on the same weekend as The Oscars - the images, footage and story of the band playing to 50,000 non socially-distanced fans in New Zealand captured the imagination of the entire world, and was the biggest entertainment story of the week, globally. They were on the cover of The Toronto Star, reported on Brazilian TV, interviewed for a German documentary, and written about by newspapers and sites in The Philippines, USA, South Africa, Finland, Croatia, France, Germany, The UK - the world over. The words "SIX60" and "New Zealand" trended across social media sites all over the world. With 190k tickets sold across NZ, SIX60 was Pollstar Magazine's highest selling band of the year and also responsible for the 5 highest selling venues of the year.

And now, people in Europe and The UK will finally be able to experience this live show previously exclusive only to New Zealanders. SIX60's UK & European tour begins in Paris

this November and sees them perform across the continent, including a landmark show at London's Brixton Academy.

"We can't wait", says Chris. "We love playing Europe - you get to meet so many different people, with different accents and languages and cultures. We absolutely love it". Marlon agrees, adding: "there's a freedom to playing shows in Europe: they will be more intimate, and more real". At which point Chris chimes in, adding "Exactly - in Europe, you'll see the real us".

Indeed, 'the real SIX60' is what has kept the band down to earth - and so likeable - for all these years, despite the huge success, awards and fame. Chris Mac reflects on this: *"Look - we are 5 people all with our own backgrounds and our own shit...you can't love each other all the time! But the moment you walk on that stage together, you have ultimate trust."* Matiu adds to the sentiment, suggesting the band identifies as much with a sports team as a band: *"our mentality is to keep pushing ourselves to see how high it will take us. And we won't stop going until we can't go any further."* Silence pervades as the rest of the band contemplate the grandeur of the statement. Before Matiu adds: *"We're here to be The Shit!"* The band erupt into laughter as they all reflect on the knowing grandeur of their lead singer's half-joking statement. But with hundreds of thousands of tickets sold and worldwide critical acclaim - he's not far wrong.

SIX60 are Eli Paewai (drums), Chris Mac (bass), Ji Fraser (lead guitar), Marlon Gerbes (keyboards) and Matiu Walters (vocals, guitar). Their tour of the UK and Europe begins November 18th. For more information and tickets, please visit <https://six60.co.nz/>

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