

# POLLSTAR

*The Concert Hotline*

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INFECTED MUSHROOM



Greg Waiteman



Amit Duvdevani & Erez Eisen

## Infected Mushroom

If the foundation of a long music career is the ability to evolve, Infected Mushroom is a band that's built to last.

Erez "I.Zen" Eisen and Amit "Duvdev" Duvdevani have transformed it from two guys playing instrumental psychedelic trance into a full-blown electro-metal juggernaut that consistently sells out shows and can count Perry Farrell and Korn's Jonathan Davis among its fans.

The Israeli-born duo began studying piano while in grade school, with Eisen gravitating toward electronic music in his teens and Duvdevani turning toward metal and punk.

Before he was 18, Eisen co-founded a successful psychtrance band called Shidapu, but Duvdevani's conversion to electronic music didn't come until 1991 when he "went to a trance party and got addicted." In 1996, he returned home after traveling in India for a few years and met Eisen.

Although both had lots of experience, things didn't go so smoothly.

"We said, 'Let's try to make a track together' and we did," Eisen told *Pollstar*. "We thought it was a great track, but it was horrible. But we had good chemistry and had a lot of laughs in the studio."

Eventually they worked out the kinks, becoming one of the biggest names in the Israeli music business and making a name for themselves on dance floors around the world.

In 2004 they decided they were "stuck in Israel" and emigrated to the U.S. to take advantage of the broad range of opportunities. It soon became clear their country of residence wasn't the only change they needed to make.

"We'd played live for a long time, but it was only the two of us," Eisen said. "Duvdev never sang or did any vocals; we just did keyboard stuff and that was it. We were watching some videos of ourselves and it was boring — two people standing behind machines."

"We called a guitar player in Israel, Erez Netz, who agreed to work with us. And then we slowly evolved, adding a drummer and another guitar player."

Duvdev told *Pollstar* the additions gave Infected Mushroom a big boost.

"The guitar and drums really helped us in the American market because besides Daft Punk, who took their shows to another level, people do not understand two guys standing on a stage tweaking machines," he said. "They just don't understand it."

"When we added guitar and drums and vocals, a lot of people reacted differently to the live show. It's still the same music, but with much more intense power so it connected with more people."

It also helped land JAM Inc.'s Jeff Jampol, who manages the legacy of The Doors and the estates of several late musicians and teaches music business at UCLA. Jampol told *Pollstar* that when a student in his class first brought Infected Mushroom to his attention in 2006, he wasn't interested.

"She was like, 'You must check out this band,'" he explained. "I said, 'Why would I do that? First of all, it's not my genre. Secondly, I don't do living touring artists. Third, I hate the name and fourth — no.' Finally, after about six months she told me 'They're Israeli, but they live in L.A. They'll do a showcase for you.' I said, 'Fine. I'll go see a showcase.'"

The next day, the student called Jampol and told him the showcase would be the following night at 10 p.m. When he asked why so late, he got a surprising answer. The band had arranged to play for him at House of Blues and put tickets on sale for the show, completely selling out the venue in one day.

"I said, 'OK, I'll be there.' So I go with a couple of my staff members and the place is mobbed. There were like five or six hundred kids who couldn't get in. And these guys come out and the entire audience starts bouncing up and down with them and yelling out their lyrics. I said, 'Oh my God, I'm so in.'"

Securing the services of Coast II Coast's Ron Rivlin was a little easier. Rivlin's cousin is the owner of Infected Mushroom's Israeli label, so he signed them a couple of years before they moved to the States as a favor — at first.

"At the time, my agency repped a totally different genre," Rivlin told *Pollstar*. "It was bad timing and I wasn't really interested, but we ended up booking a couple of dates

for them. So I went to see the band perform in Mexico and there were like 5,000 people there. They weren't all there for Infected, but when they went on stage, they won over the crowd. The promoter offered more money to keep them on. It ended up making his career."

Needless to say, Rivlin was impressed and had discovered he really enjoyed working with the band, so much so that he sponsored their move to the States.

With Jampol and Rivlin firmly behind them, Infected Mushroom has continued a steady climb from the underground club scene into the mainstream, racking up impressive box office numbers along the way and catching the eye of people who normally don't notice electronic acts.

And with guest vocals from Farrell and Davis, as well as a dance-meets-symphonic-metal sound, the band's latest release, *Legend of the Black Shawarma*, is likely to accelerate that move.

Infected Mushroom has a handful of U.S. dates on the books this fall and then they'll head abroad to continue what they call their "neverending tour," eventually returning to the States early next year to play larger venues.

While some artists might balk at being out on the road perpetually, Duvdev said it suits Infected Mushroom just fine.

"Our main goal is to deliver the music, especially trance music, to as many people as we can. So we're especially happy in that respect."

[Jim Otey] ★

## CONTACT

### Booking Agency Coast II Coast

Ron Rivlin  
213.471.1100

### Management JAM Inc.

Jeff Jampol  
310.274.8471

### Record Company Perfecto Records

44.20.7343.5678

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