

THE HISTORY OF

75p

# Rock

116



OUR  
FRIENDS  
*ELECTRIC*

# THE HISTORY OF Rock

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Irving Klaw:** Is the *nom de plume* of a journalist who has been writing for one of our leading music weeklies for the past eight years.

**Peter Clark:** A freelance journalist and editor, he has contributed to various publications including *New Music News*, and presented a weekly rock radio show for LBC.

**Julian Petley:** Lectures on film and television at Newcastle Polytechnic. He is the author of a book on Nazi Cinema and has contributed to *The Movie, Films And Filming, Time Out* and *Framework*.

**Bob Woffinden:** Formerly associate editor of *New Musical Express*, he was co-author of the *NME Encyclopedia Of Rock* and wrote the recently published *The Beatles Apart*.

**Mike Nicholls:** Former assistant editor of *Record Mirror* and features editor of *Penthouse*, he is a regular contributor to the *Daily Express*.

**Dave Crombie:** Author of *The Complete Synthesiser*, he regularly contributes to UK consumer and trade magazines.

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**WHAT'S  
PLAYING NEXT  
WEEK**

Ever since Elvis Presley's unscheduled hip-wiggling antics set the United States buzzing with controversy in the mid Fifties, rock and the visual media had enjoyed a controversial yet fascinating relationship. The late Seventies saw the advent of video, a breakthrough that led to increasing television exposure, while rock had been giving the theatre a box-office boost for some years through such 'rock operas' as *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Godspell*.

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# Electronically Yours

How the synthesiser eclipsed the guitar as the dominant sound in early-Eighties rock

By 1984, ELECTRONIC instruments had become an integral part of rock and pop music; it seemed hard to imagine that barely three years earlier, the Human League had been acclaimed as innovators when they reached the top of both the UK album and singles charts with two totally electronic records, *Dare* and 'Don't You Want Me'. During the early Eighties, the music industry absorbed and assimilated the new technology to the extent where the electronic hitmakers of 1983 – Blancmange, Eurythmics, Howard Jones – took synthesisers more or less for granted, blending them with more traditional instruments to produce a less stridently synthetic sound.

For all practical purposes, the synthesiser entered rock music in 1971 with the launch of Dr Robert Moog's Minimoog. Unlike his earlier models, it was small, compact and portable, and although it was monophonic – only capable of playing one note at a time – it caught on rapidly. The Minimoog was soon followed by the ARP Odyssey and the first British synth, the Putney (later EMS) VCS-3.

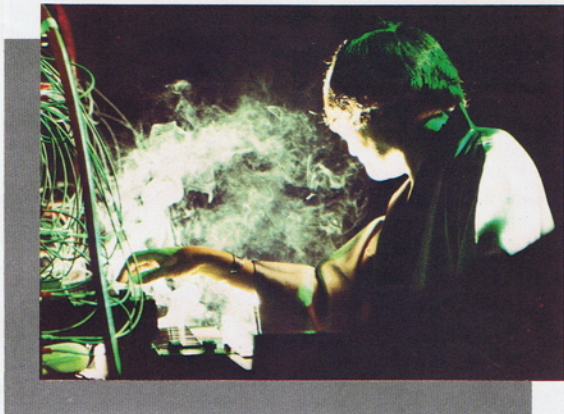
## Europe and Japan

The new instruments were soon taken up by rock keyboard players like Rod Argent, Rick Wakeman, Keith Emerson and artists like Yes and Frank Zappa. But the first true synthesiser player was probably Brian Eno of Roxy Music. While his often classically-trained contemporaries transferred their piano or organ techniques to the new instruments, Eno began his musical dabblings on the VCS-3, using it to create startling new sound effects.

By the mid Seventies, electronic music had become both widespread and diverse. There was increasing interest in synths from jazz players like Chick Corea, George Duke and Herbie Hancock, and there was the growth of keyboard-oriented groups like Barclay James Harvest and Supertramp. There was also, from Germany, a group called Tangerine Dream, who converted to keyboards and grew to become one of the early giants of the genre.

Other significant events of this period included the release in 1973 of Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* – an instrumental album which, although it did not use synthesisers, was based on the electronic treatment of other instruments – and, in 1975, of Tomita's *Snowflakes Are Dancing* and Kraftwerk's *Autobahn* albums. Isao Tomita from Japan, who used synthesisers to interpret the work of classical composers like Stravinsky or Debussy, was undoubtedly one of the early masters of electronic music. In Germany, Kraftwerk and producer Connie Plank exploited the cool modernism of electronic technology, creating a new kind of music that reflected the contemporary urban, industrial environment.

The second half of the Seventies was a period



of development both in the technology and the music which it could be used to create. Between 1976 and 1978, however, this growth was almost entirely overshadowed in Britain by the phenomenon of punk. Punk's message was that anyone who could afford £30 for a second-hand electric guitar could be in a band. But there was no such thing then as a £30 synthesiser – or a usable £300 synthesiser for that matter – so keyboards had little role to play in the movement and electronic music remained in the hands of established names like Vangelis, Patrick Moraz and Jean-Michel Jarre.

## Sons of the silent age

In 1977, however, David Bowie collaborated with Brian Eno to produce two widely influential electronic albums, *Low* and *Heroes*. These records influenced and inspired a whole new wave of post-punk bands which were not afraid to use keyboards. Magazine, founded in 1977 by former Buzzcocks vocalist Howard Devoto, featured the intricate and dramatic keyboard-playing of Dave Formula. Along with bands like Ultravox! and the Human League (in their original line-ups), Magazine paved the way for many later developments. Jazz-rockers Landscape, meanwhile, traded their traditional instruments for synthesisers and became highly influential in the field.

The late Seventies also saw a number of technological innovations that paved the way for the musical developments of the Eighties. It was during this period that the first polyphonic-performance synthesisers – Moog's Polymoog, Sequential Circuits' Prophet 5 and Oberheim's OB-8 – came onto the market. Electronic rhythm machines, meanwhile,

*Isao Tomita, the Japanese synthesiser pioneer, specialised in thoroughly modern interpretations of classical works. As synths became more accessible during the course of the Seventies, their influence extended into the field of commercial pop.*





became more sophisticated and flexible. Much of the new equipment was programmable, allowing the user to create sounds or rhythms and store them on integrated-circuit memories. Sequencers, which could store whole passages of music, became more commonplace, particularly the remarkable Roland MC-8 Microcomposer (favoured by producer Martin Rushent, who was largely responsible for the Human League's phenomenal success). Drum synthesisers enjoyed a brief vogue at the beginning of the Eighties, when they saturated the pop and disco charts for a while.

But it was not until the introduction of the Electronic Dream Plant's Wasp in the late Seventies that there was a usable synthesiser comparable in price to a cheap electric guitar. It was the Wasp – and the spate of Japanese products that followed it – that brought the principle of punk to the keyboard scene, and made the instruments widely accessible. The availability of sequencers took the principle a stage further, for very little musical expertise was needed to play the instruments. An inexperienced musician could programme their tunes into the machine, note by note, and the sequencer would play them back in 'real time'.

#### Magic melodies

By the beginning of the Eighties, Japanese products dominated the popular market for synths and electronic instruments. The new interest in keyboards as a first instrument prompted electronics firms which had not previously been involved with music technology to launch their own products. The most notably successful company in this field was Casio, whose miniature and full-size keyboards were equally suited to use at home or on stage. Japan also produced a notable electronic group in the form of Yellow Magic Orchestra, who blended the 'industrial' influence of Kraftwerk with a high degree of skill and an awareness of their particular ethnic background to create a unique and very stylish strain of music considered by many to be consistently ahead of the field. YMO were to be a big influence on British groups like Japan, and were to work with them and other pioneers in the field of electronics, notably Bill Nelson.

The UK, meanwhile, produced Gary Numan with his juvenile techno-fantasies, and a whole host of young 'electro-pop' outfits. Many of them first appeared on record on the *Some Bizarre* album early in 1981, including Soft Cell, Blancmange and Depeche Mode; these three went on to have major chart successes in their own right. The style of the new music was strictly danceable – an inevitable consequence of the level of the musicians' skills combined with the availability of drum computers and sequencers which could be most easily programmed to play strict dance tempos.

Among the new, keyboard-based bands of the early Eighties were the re-formed Ultravox, with Midge Ure on vocals, who enjoyed a massive hit in 1981 with their pseudo-classical 'Vienna', Visage, Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark and the Human League, now transformed from Kraftwerk-influenced experimenters to a classy, glamorous pop group in the



Abba mould. These bands were soon joined by Depeche Mode, Yazoo, the Thompson Twins, Yello and Eurythmics.

In America, the influence of electronics was more apparent in disco music, a notable milestone being Giorgio Moroder's production of Donna Summer's 1977 hit 'I Feel Love'. The next major development was the wave of electro-funk artists like Planet Patrol and the Jonzun Crew, the rappers and scratchers like Grandmaster Flash and Whodini, producers like Arthur Baker and the eccentric soul star Prince. The American developments fed back into British rock when New Order went to New York in 1983 to work with Arthur Baker on their single 'Confusion'.

By then, it had become extremely difficult to talk about 'electronic music' as a style apart from mainstream rock and pop, so completely had it been absorbed into the system. The self-



*Opposite: Erstwhile jazzman Herbie Hancock combines vocal phrasing with his keyboard dexterity via a vocoder. Above: Brian Eno's pioneering work on a VCS-3 with Roxy Music showed that anyone could play synth. Right from top: European keyboards wizard Vangelis; the influential Japanese Yellow Magic Orchestra; and Depeche Mode, English popsters who chose synths over guitars.*

conscious adoption of a cold, 'futuristic' sound and image, of which Gary Numan had been a classic example, had for the most part been abandoned in favour of a warmer, more 'natural' sound, and synthesisers were often used unselfconsciously alongside acoustic instruments. Despite a significant revival of guitar-based rock in the shape of Big Country and U2 in 1983, the synthesiser had become a standard feature of rock music.

IRVING KLAW





# ROCK '81

1981 was a watershed year for pop in the UK. While the country was stricken with unemployment and torn by riots, the music scene polarised dramatically. On the one hand, there were the new romantics and their fellow travellers ABC, Soft Cell and Adam and the Ants, who wholeheartedly embraced the traditional escapism of the entertainment industry. It was the year of *Antmania*, of Soft Cell's 'Tainted Love' – the year's best-selling UK single – of nightclubbing, cocktails and outlandish clothes.

On the other hand, bands like the Specials, the Beat and UB40 preferred to confront the serious problems facing the country. Rejecting the froth and the fashion of the new romantics, the Specials scored an uncannily topical Number 1 hit with 'Ghost Town' that summer.

In the US, however, it was business as usual, and the charts were dominated by disco or arena-rock acts like REO Speedwagon and Air Supply. But there was a hint of things to come as UK bands like the Clash began to enjoy chart success in the States, presaging the new British Invasion of the following years. The New York scene, meanwhile, was producing flamboyant new

non-mainstream acts like Grace Jones and Kid Creole and the Coconuts – although both, ironically, were to find far greater success in Britain and Europe than in the US.

## January

9 Jerry Dammers and Terry Hall of the Specials are fined £400 plus £133 costs at a Cambridge court for using threatening language and behaviour while trying to break up a fight at one of their shows in the

city the previous autumn.

10 In the wake of John Lennon's murder, his classic song 'Imagine' reaches Number 1 in the UK chart.

12 The Sex Pistols' LP *Never Mind The Bollocks* is among 800 records given to the White House by the Recording Association of America.

16 Stevie Wonder plays in Washington DC as part of his campaign to have assassinated Civil Rights campaigner Martin Luther King's birthday (15 January) made a national holiday.

## February

7 'Woman', by John Lennon, reaches Number 1 in the UK chart.

9 Bill Haley, one of rock'n'roll's founding



*Left: In February the clock finally stopped for rocker Bill Haley. Above: April brought Eurovision success for Bucks Fizz, Britain's answer to Abba.*



figures, dies of a heart attack at the age of 55 at his home in Harlingen, Texas.

13 Island Records release their '1+1' series of cassettes, featuring one side of music and one side of blank tape. This is soon condemned by the music industry watchdog the BPI as a 'blatant invitation' to home taping.

15 Blues guitarist Mike Bloomfield is found dead of a suspected heroin overdose in his car in San Francisco.

21 Joe Dolce's novelty song 'Shaddup You Face' reaches Number 1 in the UK.

## March

14 'If it wasn't for people like us with ambition,' says Judas Priest's Kenny Downing, 'we'd all be on the dole like the other millions scavenging off the country.'

28 Shakin' Stevens, the Welsh answer to Elvis Presley, hits the UK top spot with 'This Ole House'.

## April

4 British entry Bucks Fizz win the Eurovision Song Contest with 'Making



Your Mind Up', which goes to Number 1 in the UK the same month.

5 Canned Heat singer Bob Hite dies of a heart attack in Venice, California.

7 Kit Lambert, the Who's original manager, dies of head injuries after falling downstairs.

18 Progressive rockers Yes split up, although they were to reform in 1983.

20 John Phillips of the Mamas and the Papas is sentenced to eight years' imprisonment for dealing in drugs. All but 30 days of his sentence was suspended, however, on condition that he did community service and attended a drugs centre.

25 Guitarist Denny Laine leaves Paul McCartney's band Wings.

27 Ringo Starr marries actress Barbara Bach at London's Marylebone Register Office.

## May

2 'I think England is very quickly falling out of love with me,' laments electro-pop star Gary Numan.

9 Adam and the Ants' 'Stand And Deliver' enters the UK charts at Number 1, the first record to do so since the Jam's 'Going Underground' a year earlier.

11 Bob Marley dies in a Miami hospital on his way home to Jamaica at the end of a long battle against cancer.

15 Fans riot at New York's Ritz Club as Public Image Ltd play behind a video screen, refusing to show themselves.

30 'I hope there will be time for a new romantic age,' says the Beat's singer Dave Wakeling, but it will be after young people have done something. Once we've made sure the world's going to last another 10 years, then we can all dress up and have a party.'

## June

17 Singer Pauline Black plays her last show with the former 2-Tone band the Selectors.

21 Steely Dan's Donald Fagen and Walter Becker admit that their 14-year partnership has ended.

26 Bob Dylan plays the first of six nights at London's Earls' Court arena - his first UK dates since his conversion to Christianity.

27 Motorhead's *No Sleep Till Hammersmith* enters the UK album charts at Number 1.

30 Jerry Lee Lewis is rushed to hospital with a ruptured stomach and assorted ulcers.

## July

3 A gig by skinhead band the Four Skins at the Hambrough Tavern in West London's predominantly Asian community of Southall provokes a riot, the first of many that month.

11 The Specials reach Number 1 in the UK charts with 'Ghost Town', a song that eerily captures the unrest of the times.

13 A black teenager is stabbed to death during a concert by reggae group Black



Uhuru at London's Rainbow Theatre.

16 Singer-songwriter Harry Chapin dies in a car crash on Long Island. A committed left winger who raised millions at benefit concerts, he had a worldwide hit with 'W.O.L.D.' in 1974.

## August

1 'Green Door' gives Shakin' Stevens his second UK Number 1 single this year.

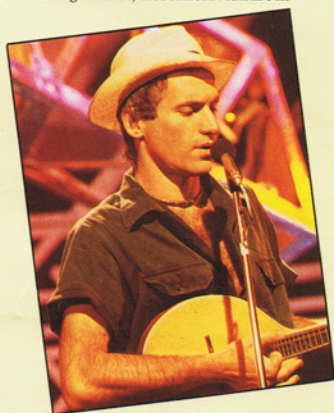
26 Lee Hays, co-author with Pete Seeger of 'If I Had A Hammer', dies of a heart attack at the age of 67.

29 Scottish folk singer Mary Sandeman scores a UK Number 1 hit with 'Japanese Boy' under the name Aneka.

## September

5 'Tainted Love' by Soft Cell is Number 1 in the UK.

14 Walter 'Furry' Lewis, the bottleneck blues guitarist, dies of heart failure in



Top: Bob Marley's funeral was held at the National Arena, Kingston, on 21 May. Above: Mandolin-toting Joe Dolce.

Memphis at the age of 88.

18 'Prince Charming' by Adam and the Ants is Number 1 in the UK.

20 Wigan Casino holds the last of its legendary Northern Soul nights.

## October

10 'Birdie Song' by the Tweets is Number 2 in the UK singles chart.

'I'm disappointed,' Jerry Dammers says after Terry Hall, Lynval Golding and Neville Staples quit the Specials to form the Fun Boy Three, 'but I'm glad they stayed in the band long enough to record "Ghost Town".'

17 'It's My Party,' by Dave Stewart and Barbara Gaskin, tops the UK chart, while 'Arthur's Theme (Best That You Can Do)' by Christopher Cross heads the *Billboard* listings.

30 'The Fun Boy Three release their first single, 'The Lunatics Have Taken Over The Asylum'.

## November

14 'Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic,' by the Police, becomes their fourth UK chart-topper.

'I don't identify with electronic music,' says Orange Juice's James Kirk, 'cos I once got a shock from a plug.'

21 'Under Pressure', a one-off single by David Bowie and Queen, is the new UK Number 1, while Olivia Newton-John's 'Physical' tops the US Hot Hundred.

## December

6 Michael Dempsey, a publisher and former manager of punk band the Adverts, falls off a chair while taking a light bulb. He is found the next day and taken to hospital, where he dies of internal bleeding and a punctured liver.

12 'Don't You Want Me' by the Human League becomes the UK Christmas Number 1.

25 Christopher Tyrer, a heavy-metal fan from Staffordshire, dies in hospital. Eight days earlier he was paralysed and unable to speak after head-banging for three hours at a Saxon gig in Wolverhampton. A verdict of death by misadventure is recorded.

27 Broadway songwriter Hoagy Carmichael dies of a heart complaint at the age of 92 in California.

ANNETTE KENNERLEY, CHRIS SCHÜLER



# WHO DARES WINS

## The Human League: programmed for stardom

WITH ELECTRONIC POP music firmly entrenched in the charts and the public consciousness in the early Eighties, it was easy to forget that the form was a comparatively recent development. During the Seventies, the purposes to which electronic keyboards were put were self-consciously grandiose and their exponents were invariably trained musicians. At the end of the decade, however, a number of complete amateurs found success in the music business by tinkering with synthesisers and computers. This phenomenon was fostered by the prevailing attitudes of

punk rock, which had preached that anyone could write and play music. The Human League and its offshoots were in the vanguard of this new development.

### Logical songs

The Human League were formed in Sheffield in June 1977. The founders were Ian Craig Marsh (born 11 November 1956) and Martyn Ware (born 19 May 1956), a pair of computer operators with no musical training or experience but with a burning desire to start a modern electronic pop group. They were refreshingly blunt about their credentials for this undertaking: 'We're not musicians and we can't play guitars or anything like that. Instead we approach synthesisers using maths and logic.' The

pair next approached an even more unlikely candidate – Philip Oakey (born 2 October 1955), who was working at the time as a hospital porter. The original quartet was completed by the arrival in March 1978 of Adrian Wright as 'visual director', a position merited by his deep interest in gadgets and obscure science-fiction films.

Their early live shows were chaotically engaging – triumphs of intent over technique. Marsh and Ware would stand lost in the gloom at the back of the stage, coaxing sounds out of a variety of machines, while Oakey maintained just enough of a profile to deliver some words. Meanwhile the focal point of the audience's attention was a screen on stage, upon which Wright pro-



*The Human League started life as a highly experimental, multi-media group (opposite), but subsequently mutated into a more orthodox pop outfit (above).*

jected a constant succession of slides from his 700-strong collection. The group's rationale for using the slides bordered on the pompous: 'We use the slides because they don't dictate a train of thought. They leave room for the imagination.' Nevertheless, this strange visual cocktail proved most effective and the group soon began to gather a sizeable cult following.

### On the boil

The Human League formed an association with Bob Last, who had just formed the Edinburgh-based independent record label Fast Products. Accordingly, two tracks from among a number the group had recorded on a Sony two-track recorder were chosen for release as a single on Fast in June 1978 – 'Being Boiled' and 'Circus Of Death', collectively known as 'Electronically Yours'. Shortly after the release

of the single, they played their first London gig at the Music Machine. They supported the Rezillos, who contained within their ranks guitarist Jo Callis, later to become a member of the Human League.

The group got their first big break when they were invited to join Siouxsie and the Banshees on their UK tour. On 1 June 1979, the Human League released their second single for Fast entitled 'The Dignity Of Labour'. Like its predecessor, it made a respectable showing in the independent charts both in the UK and abroad. The group had signed to Virgin Records in April 1979, just after the completion of the second Fast single, and released their debut LP on Virgin in October 1979 after a European tour. Entitled *Reproduction*, the record sold poorly, a fact attributed in no small part to the group's peculiar choice of cover photograph – a selection of babies seen through broken glass. The rhythm tracks for the album were recorded at the group's own four-track studio, with producer Colin Thurston adding final overdubs at Red Bus studios. However the





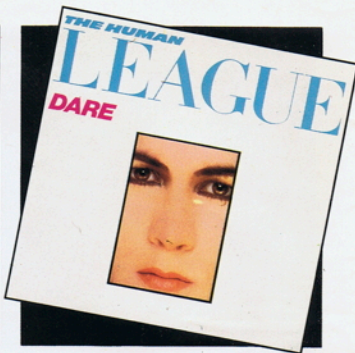
group still lacked the technical and musical ability to express its ideas fully – a fault that was amply demonstrated by a single taken from the LP, 'Empire State Human'.

In April 1980, the band released their second Virgin 45, a double single entitled 'Holiday 80' that contained five tracks: 'Nightclubbing', 'Dancevision', a new version of 'Being Boiled', a cover of Gary Glitter's 'Rock'n'Roll' and 'Marianne'. 'Holiday 80' reached Number 56 in the UK charts, representing a hopeful sign of things to come. In May, Virgin released the second Human League album, *Travelogue*; shortly afterwards, 'Empire State Human' gave the League a second, albeit lowly, chart entry at Number 62.

Although the Human League seemed to be poised for greater things, experienced observers of the group had long been aware of the friction, creative and otherwise, that had existed within their ranks. The band could be difficult – if entertaining – interviewees, often preferring to talk about films rather than music and refusing to be photographed because they had their own man in charge of visuals. One of the group's more controversial ideas was its 'disappearing' live act, whereby the audience would be entertained by pre-recorded tapes and slides while the band mingled with the audience or simply stayed at home in Sheffield. When news of this idea leaked out, it cost the group their support slot on a Talking Heads' UK tour.

On the eve of the Human League's UK tour in October 1980, it was announced that the group had split down the middle. Founder members Ware and Marsh left to form the British Electric Foundation and

*Above: The band in the late Seventies, from left Phil Oakey, Adrian Wright, Ian Craig Marsh and Martyn Ware. Above right: Dare. Below: The Eighties League; (back row, from left) Jo Callis, Ian Burden and Oakey; (front row, from left) Joanne Catherall, Wright and Susanne Sulley.*



subsequently Heaven 17, while Oakey and Wright were left with the rights to the Human League name. Oakey's reaction was predictable: 'I thought we were finished. The split wasn't very amicable and it was just rivalry that kept us going. We wanted to show the other two we could survive.' As events were to prove, the pair did rather more than that.

#### Boy meets girls

With an impending tour and only two band members, neither of whom could play anything, drastic measures were called for. Oakey immediately called on the services of Ian Burden, an old bass-playing friend from Sheffield, and recruited two girls, Joanne Catherall and Susanne Sulley, whom he met in Sheffield's Crazy Daisy





disco, as backing singers, dancers and all-round centres of attention. The girls' initial response was hardly enthusiastic: 'There wasn't anything else that we'd set our hearts on doing. It was an opportunity to take a few weeks off school.'

This new line-up somehow managed to complete the tour. 1981 began with the release of a new single, 'Boys And Girls', which reached Number 44 in the charts, but more importantly established the new Human League sound. A follow-up single 'Sound Of The Crowd', released in April 1981 made Number 12, then July's 'Love Action' hit Number 3. By this time ex-Zeppelin Jo Callis had joined the group; his composing debut was marked by the release of 'Open Your Heart', a Number 6 hit. Meanwhile, the Human League had been hard at work on their third LP with former Buzzcocks producer Martin Rushent.

#### Do or die

Released in October 1981, *Dare* was a pop classic. The material, written with one exception by combinations of Oakey, Burden and the experienced songwriter Callis, provided the hooks, while producer Rushent backed Oakey's tremulous bass voice with insistent Linndrum electronic percussion, repetitive keyboard riffs and synthesised basslines to create the necessary tension. The girls' voices were sparingly used, taking the lead only on 'Don't You Want Me', where the male-female duet inspired thoughts of a synth-pop Abba. This track was released as a single in November and became a Christmas chart-topper, while the album also reached Number 1 in the UK.

A successful tour of the UK was followed by tours of Europe, the US and Japan as the Human League broke big all over the world. The originality of their material had finally been harnessed to a first-class production, courtesy of Martin Rushent. The Human League subsequently kept a low profile, putting out only one LP, *Love And Dancing* (basically a dub instrumental version of *Dare* concocted by Rushent), and just two singles - 'Mirror Man' (released in November 1982) and 'Fascination' (April 1983), both of which reached Number 2 in the UK charts.

While Human League were rocketing to success, Martyn Ware and Ian Craig Marsh were hard at work with their first project under the BEF umbrella, Heaven 17. Named after a group in Anthony Burgess' novel *A Clockwork Orange*, it featured Ware, Marsh and vocalist Glenn Gregory, a former photographer and stagehand. The group put out its debut single in March 1981 - the astonishingly assured 'We Don't Need This Fascist Groove Thang' - which instantly established Heaven 17's musical credentials as well as their political viewpoint. It was followed in May by 'I'm Your Money' and then August's 'Play To Win', but none breached the Top Thirty.

Success came finally with the appearance of a debut LP, *Penthouse And Pavement*,



Above: Heaven 17, from left Ware, vocalist Glenn Gregory and Marsh.

*ment*, which reached Number 14 in the album charts after its release in October 1981. Singles success still eluded the group, however, despite the release of the LP's title track as a single; another 45, 'At The Height Of The Fighting (He La Hu)', released in February 1982, was also ignored by the public.

#### Heaven can wait

At this point, Heaven 17 was put into cold storage for some months as Marsh and Ware took on the production mantle of the British Electric Foundation in order to produce an extraordinary LP of cover versions, wherein a variety of famous singers gave personal interpretations of classic songs. *Music Of Quality And Distinction* was released in April 1982 to a mixed critical reception. It featured items such as Tina Turner's version of 'Ball Of Confusion', Billy McKenzie of the Associates doing Roy Orbison's 'It's Over' and Gary Glitter's treatment of 'Suspicious Minds'. Although the LP was a somewhat hit-and-miss affair, *Music Of Quality And Distinction* marked a brave departure for Marsh and Ware. The concept was repeated more successfully when their production of Tina Turner singing Al Green's 'Let's Stay Together' became a Number 6 UK hit in late 1983.

A preview of Heaven 17's second album appeared late in August 1982 in the form of the single 'Let Me Go', which once again failed to provide them with a decent-sized hit. Finally in April 1983, the group's efforts were rewarded with the release of

the single 'Temptation' and the LP *The Luxury Gap*. The 'Temptation' single was fuelled by a magnificent guest vocal by Carol Kenyon, a one-time backing singer with Isaac Hayes. It provided Heaven 17 with their first elusive hit, reaching Number 2 in the UK charts. The album was similarly successful, with nine powerful tracks featuring a host of outside talent - notably John Wilson and Ray Russell on guitars, Nick Pyltas on piano and the Earth, Wind and Fire horn section. Two further singles from the album made the Top Twenty, 'Come Live With Me' and 'Crushed By The Wheels Of Industry'.

Although Marsh and Ware had proved the more prolific of the two factions, it seemed unlikely that their own recordings would approach the success of the Human League's *Dare*, an album that remained the top-selling synth-pop record of the early Eighties. The absence of a follow-up LP, however, saw the League's status as synthesiser superstars undermined by such competitors as Eurhythmic; having parted company with Martin Rushent, it remained to be seen whether they could reclaim their crown.

PETER CLARK

#### Human League Recommended Listening

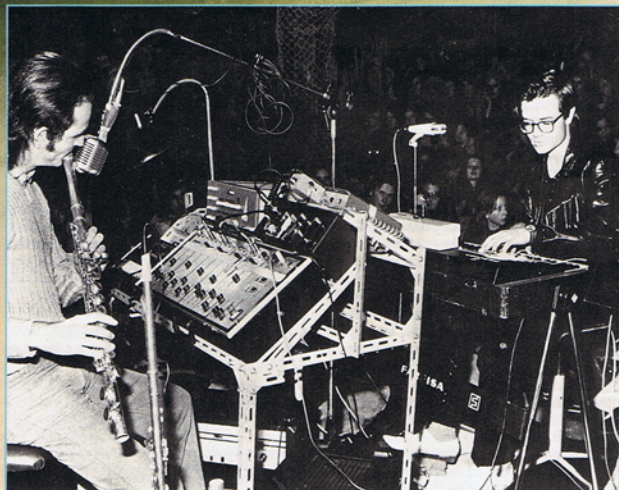
*Dare* (Virgin V2192) (Includes: I Am The Law, Don't You Want Me, Love Action, Second Sound Of The Crowd, Get Carter).

#### Heaven 17 Recommended Listening

*Penthouse And Pavement* (Virgin V2208) (Includes: We Don't Need This Fascist Groove Thang, Penthouse And Pavement, Play To Win, The Height Of The Fighting (He La Hu), Geisha Boys And Temple Girls, Lets All Make A Bomb).



# KRAFTWERK



## Locked in the lab with rock's new technocrats

OF ALL THE BANDS to use synthesisers in the early Seventies, perhaps the most influential and innovative proved to be the German band Kraftwerk. While 'progressive' rock musicians like Rick Wakeman and Emerson, Lake and Palmer used the new electronic instrumentation to recreate the sound of a nineteenth-century orchestra, and the Who and Pink Floyd used it to enrich the textures of traditional rock, Kraftwerk pioneered a totally new, overtly electronic sound.

Kraftwerk was formed by Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider, who broke away from the five-piece band Organisation. The duo's first two albums – released in the UK as a double LP called *Kraftwerk* in 1973 – were recorded in Connie Plank's studio in Düsseldorf, with Plank, Hütter and Schneider co-producing. They showed

Left: Florian Schneider (left) and Ralf Hütter in an early Kraftwerk incarnation. Above: Now we are four . . .

Hütter and Schneider casting around in various directions, exploring the different electronic means at their disposal and making adventurous use of the studio, with both electronic and acoustic instruments – such as woodwind and violin – coming in for highly unorthodox treatment. All sorts of influences were being assimilated, from avant-garde musicians like Cage and Stockhausen through to Pink Floyd and Tangerine Dream. There was even a hint of Can in the albums' hard-driven, pounding rhythmic passages such as 'Ruckzack' and 'Stratovarius'.

Given Düsseldorf's location deep in German industry's heartland and the fact that the band's name translates as 'power plant', it became commonplace for reviewers to label this set as 'industrial music', but this assessment stressed only its harsher aspects. While tracks like the powerfully atmospheric 'Vom Himmel Hoch' almost seemed to look forward to Throbbing Gristle or Cabaret Voltaire at their bleakest, the influence of Pink Floyd and Tangerine Dream were very much to the fore on 'Megahertz' and throughout the quieter, second record, on which the

melodic 'Klingklang' provided the clearest indication of Kraftwerk's future direction.

Hütter and Schneider produced their next album, *Ralf And Florian* (1974), themselves, but retained Connie Plank as engineer. Made partly in their own Kraftwerk studio, it was considerably more unified than its predecessors: the numbers were shorter and more homogeneous, and there was a lot less dissonance and spaciness; instead there was a springy, danceable beat and a fresh, almost open-air feeling. Particularly attractive were the sparkling, 'Kristallo', the album's one long track, 'Ananas Symphonie', which featured an electronically treated voice, very much a harbinger of the future, and the peaceful 'Heimatklang'.

## Road work

It was later that same year that Kraftwerk really established their own personal musical style and also came to wide public notice through the hit single 'Autobahn', taken from the album of the same name. Produced by Hütter and Schneider at Connie Plank's studio, *Autobahn* marked the addition to the group of Klaus Roeder

(violin and guitar) and Wolfgang Flür on electronic percussion. Rather like the previous year's *Tubular Bells*, this was one of those rare records which seemed to be accepted by easy listening, AOR and more 'progressive' audiences alike.

Kraftwerk, however, made nothing from the massive sales, having sold complete rights in the album to Phonogram for 2000 dollars. Most of all, though, *Autobahn*'s title track, like Bowie's *Young Americans*, appealed to the growing disco market – Wolfgang and Ralf were habitual disco-goers. As Steve Taylor pointed out in the *Face* in 1982, 'Kraftwerk pulled off a trick that has never been equalled or imitated yet – to make synthetic and obviously synthetic percussion sound warm and dynamic enough to be irresistibly danceable.'

But *Autobahn* was also important for its German lyrics at a time when most German, indeed most European, pop music relied solely on the English – or rather the American – language. 'Everybody said that singing German lyrics was crazy,' Ralf recalled. 'Can you imagine that 75 per cent of our radio programmes were in





English? In the clubs when we first started playing you *never* heard a German record, you switched on the radio and all you heard was Anglo-American music, you went to the cinema and all the films were Italian or French. We needed our own cultural identity.'

#### Ohm sweet ohm

*Autobahn* was followed by *Radioactivity* (1975), on which Klaus Roeder was replaced by Karl Bartos, another electronic percussionist, to form the guitarless lineup that survived into the Eighties. Produced at the group's own Kling Klang studio, it was less immediately danceable than its predecessor, although its title track contained one of the most glorious melodies Kraftwerk ever produced. Director Chris Petit made effective use of the track 'Ohm Sweet Ohm' in his 1979 film *Radio On*.

*Radioactivity* was the first of Kraftwerk's albums to be unified around a theme (in this case, radio waves of various kinds), although they managed to avoid the pretentious philosophising of many pomp-rock 'concept albums'. 'It's not really songwriting,' Ralf explained, 'it's more symphonic the way we write, part of our German musical culture, the orchestral tradition. That's why we use our voices as sound, not really as singing. The words just slipped into the music. We always try to plant lyrics like clues, use them as codes.' Particularly interesting was Kraftwerk's extensive use of 'found' radio material (briefly prefaced on *Autobahn*), pre-dating better-known examples by people like Eno and Cabaret Voltaire.

*Trans Europe Express* (1977) took up the theme of travel, and also contained 'Showroom Dummies', a track that enjoyed a long and successful life as a single. As an album, however, the project was far less innovative and interesting than its successor, *Man Machine* (1978). With its overall theme of robotics and its utterly contemporary electronic sound, *Man Machine* was Kraftwerk's most thoroughly 'technological' album to date. Their music did not, however, represent a simple-minded



Top: Kraftwerk – humans or showroom dummies? Above: Their 1977 album.

fetishisation of machinery: Kraftwerk were very much the masters, not the servants, of technology, and *Man Machine* posited not the domination of man by machine but, as Chris Bohn wrote in *New Musical Express* in 1981, 'a proper working relationship between man and his urban environment, perhaps recognising for the first time the splendid, brittle beauties of new cities and industrial scenery.'

#### The work ethic

Kraftwerk saw themselves more as studio technicians than as musicians in the conventional sense. They referred to their studio as a laboratory, rejecting the whole notion of individual artist and the star system. They even utilised uncannily realistic dummies for photo sessions, freeing them to get on with their work. (These dummies were also used to premiere *Man Machine* in New York and Paris in 1978.)

Kraftwerk regarded themselves less as creative artists than as a mouthpiece for the spirit of the age: 'It's not really us who make the music, because it's not me personally, or Karl or Florian or Wolfgang,' Ralf told *Melody Maker* in 1981. 'It's just coming through to us. It is a result of research. I think it is a more scientific attitude.'

#### Ghost in the machine

To keep pace with recent technological developments, Kraftwerk decided to rebuild and computerise their studio, a process that was to take three years. The result was *Computerworld* (1981), an album with computers as its central theme; it received a Grammy nomination, while the single 'Numbers' was so danceable it even became a hit on the *Billboard* soul charts. Interest in the band was higher than ever, generated partly by the synth-pop boom which they had influenced in the first place. They undertook a highly successful European tour, quite literally taking their new studio out on the road with them, and had a UK Number 1 with 'Computer Love'/'The Model' – their biggest hit since 'Autobahn' had made Number 11 six years previously.

'Music? I don't think it's that important, honestly speaking. We concentrate on our day to day work; we don't feel a part of the traditional music scene. We go to the studios six days a week for eight or ten hours. Music must be work like anything else – that's actually how it is done, like a workshop.'

Ralf Hütter

*Computerworld*, for all its technological brilliance, was no mindless hymn to high technology. The title track, for instance, stressed the sinister ways in which computers can be used for surveillance and control by 'Interpol and Deutsche Bank, FBI and Scotland Yard'. Here, as ever, Kraftwerk were quite subtly subversive in intent. 'Our idea is to take computers out of the context of these control functions and use them creatively in an area where people do not expect to find them,' Ralf explained. 'Like using pocket calculators to make music for instance. Its about time technology was used in resistance, it shouldn't be shunned, reviled or glorified.'

Kraftwerk saw themselves as bridging the gap between music and technology – they once called their studio the Electronic Garden – emphasising that computers can be used just as much for pleasure as business. 'We're creating a softer attitude, exposing how you can do other things, because computers are like blank tapes,' Kraftwerk's greatest achievement is to have harnessed sophisticated modern technology to essentially popular, danceable music, paving the way for the synthesised pop sounds that were to dominate the charts in the early Eighties. JUAN PETLEY

#### Kraftwerk Recommended Listening

*Autobahn* (EMI EMI 2003) (Includes: Autobahn, Kometsmelodie 1, Kometsmelodie 2, Mitternacht, Morgenspaßgang); *Trans-Europe Express* (EMI E-ST 11603) (Includes: Europe Endless, The Hall Of Mirrors, Showroom Dummies, Trans-Europe Express, Metal On Metal, Endless Endless).



# REACH FOR THE SKY

## Flights of fantasy from Gary Numan

SOMETIMES THE PATH to fame is long and tortuous; sometimes the route is short and direct. Gary Numan took the quick way. When his group's second album was released in April 1979 he was barely known outside (or even within) his record-company offices; by the end of June he had been catapulted to the top echelon of contemporary rock stars. He then sweated in the white-hot glare of superstardom for two years before announcing - at the age of 23 - a retirement that turned out to be as phoney as most other 'retirements' from the popular music stage.

Born on 8 March 1958, Gary Webb had reportedly been an 'isolated' and 'intropective' child, albeit one raised in a middle-class home with strong family bonds. From his early teens, he had

*Numan, an enthusiastic pilot, reaches himself to become a warrior of the airwaves.*







decided to be a pop star when he grew up; at 18, his dismal record of academic achievement had left him few options. As the punk bandwagon careered through London and the provinces in 1976-77, he leapt on board, performing with a group called the Lasers. Gary, like Cliff Richard before him, decided he'd be better off without the plain surname Webb, and so became Numan.

The Lasers' act was totally derivative, but the primary objective of obtaining a recording contract was realised. The band, by then known as Tubeway Army, released its eponymous debut album in 1978. But Numan was already planning ahead, and he used record-company support to further his acquaintance with synthesisers and virtually withdrew from gigging. This may have been hard on fellow group members Paul Gardiner (bass) and Jess Lidyard (drums) but guitarist/keyboardist Numan had never felt comfortable in live performance. He spent much of the next year developing his studio skills, and the resulting *Replicas* was released in April 1979.

Although still credited to Tubeway Army, the album was virtually a Numan solo record. He had written all the material, handled all the crucial synthesiser parts and produced the entire album. It was in this latter respect that his talents seemed at their most precocious; despite his lack of experience, Numan's tyro production was emphatic and assured. 'Are Friends Electric?' sounded particularly effective and became the single, reaching Number 1 in the UK charts at the end of June 1979. It stayed there for four weeks, while *Replicas* dominated the album charts in similar fashion.

Numan had worked hard on his image. He had dyed blonde hair and used make-up, which only accentuated his natural pallor. Otherwise, he appeared entirely in

*Above: Despite little sign of life from the musicians, Numan's show was a neon spectacular. Opposite: Crooning Numan.*

black – black clothes, black eye-liner, even black fingernails. He portrayed himself as the emblem of a bleak, de-personalised future in which machines and monotony had replaced people and passion.

#### Sci-fi superstar

Numan's pose aroused passionate loyalty in those who overlooked its superficiality, and equally vehement loathing in those who did not. He immediately seemed to gather an army of devoted fans, including many look-alikes, who ensured that his follow-up releases later in 1979 were also well-received. These – the album *The Pleasure Principle* and the single 'Cars' – were ready for early autumn release, and soon topped the UK album and singles charts. By that time, his hair was jet-black and the records were issued under his own name; otherwise little had changed. Numan emphasised the stark, futuristic aspects by giving all the tracks one-word titles. His approach was just right for the time: 'I realised that what the audience needed was a synthesiser star' he explained – so that was what he became.

Numan was a potent phenomenon. Harsh and simplistic though his music was, and however thin his vocals, his production expertise compensated for everything, and the records that he made at this time showed that he understood perfectly how to record synthesisers. His songs may have lacked melody, but they carried a rare punch. He found an adolescent audience which believed in him and claimed him as its own. His image was derived primarily from Bowie, his music from Kraftwerk, Ultravox! and Brian Eno, while a smatter-

ing of science fiction completed the persona. There was an intellectual veneer, but that was all. This was perfect for his audience – it was all they needed. The fact that there was no real depth to his music alienated only the music press.

In fact, press reaction became unremittingly hostile, partly because Numan was essentially an adolescent phenomenon and partly because the press suspected, correctly, that Numan's success had all but invalidated them. As one *Melody Maker* journalist ruefully admitted, Numan's elevation had been an object-lesson in the irrelevance of the music press. Further, Numan, the star, ignored the media as it had once ignored him. Requests for interviews were frequently declined. There was a perfectly good reason for this; his conversation tended to undermine his carefully-created persona, as he talked fondly of his home background and of the assistance his parents had rendered: on tour, his mother acted as his hairdresser, his father as general factotum.

Once his records had established him, Numan – who had not performed at all for 18 months, and then in small venues – was quickly booked for a headlining tour at all the major UK halls. Of his band, only Gardiner had been with him throughout. The others, dubbed Dramatis, were Ced Sharpley (drums), Chris Payne (keyboards), Russell (sic) Bell (guitar, keyboards) and Dennis Haines (keyboards). Numan, inevitably, designed the concert sets, which were structured to represent a world in which machines had superseded man. The Touring Principle tour, as it was called, covered the UK in autumn 1979, boosting the next single, 'Complex', to Number 6, and went on to cover the remainder of the globe in stages. By mid 1980, Numan had become an international star, with 'Cars' reaching Number 9 in the US Hot Hundred.

#### Messages to humanity

By the autumn of 1980, another of his bleak messages to humanity had been unveiled: *Telekon* was the album, and 'I Die, You Die' the single. Neither demonstrated any real development of Numan's technique, though *Telekon* immediately topped the album charts. There were signs, however, that Numan's appeal was on the wane, with empty seats at his Teletour concerts and the single peaking at Number 6 in the UK charts.

Even then, Numan was beginning to refer to the prospect of retirement, and the following spring he undertook what he claimed were positively his final concerts. He intended to concentrate exclusively on films, video and recording, and had already put down a marker in the inchoate video market by putting together a video of the September 1979 Hammersmith Odeon concert, released in May 1980.

The music from this concert was released as a live album in May 1981, as was that from the following year's equivalent date, to coincide with the farewell concerts



at Wembley Arena. Available either as a double set, entitled *Living Ornaments 1979-1980*, or separately, they were on sale for only a month – after that, they were deleted. On the one hand, such instant obsolescence was perhaps a fitting metaphor for the future of Numan's imagination; on the other, it represented a crude marketing ploy, the album set reaching Number 2 in the UK charts.

#### Flying high?

The concerts were breathtakingly staged, with a complicated and expensive set (Numan reckoned that he would finish up £150,000 out of pocket) inspired by the finale of 1977's cinematic epic, *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*. Numan then quickly completed work on his next recordings before indulging his love for flying, and piloting his own aircraft round the world. In his absence, the album *Dance* reached Number 3, and the single 'She's Got Claws' climbed to Number 6.

The redundant members of Dramatis stayed together after the farewell concerts, signed a contract with Rocket Records and recorded a debut album of their own, *For Future Reference*, released towards the end of the year.

Having returned

safely from his travels, Numan himself sang lead vocals on 'Love Needs No

Disguise', a song the group had written about their stint as his backing band. It became a Number 33 hit as a single.

The Numan devotees remained numerous; the ranks of the press remained solidly critical. Numan continued to attain regular Top Twenty singles success even after the electro-pop field in which he had been so influential had been invaded by so many others, while his 1982 album, *I, Assassin*, made Number 8. By autumn 1983 he seemed to be gathering fresh respect among the music-business fraternity, and recorded his album *Warriors* with contributions from ex-Bebop Deluxe guitarist Bill Nelson and veteran jazz saxophonist Dick Morrissey.

The same backing band of musicians who had accompanied Numan on the album – John Webb (keyboards, percussion) and Joe Hubbard (bass), as well as Sharpley and Bell from Dramatis – accompanied him on the extensive tour to promote it, thus ending his brief period of retirement. Despite the critical scorn to which his music had been subjected, the pioneer of synthesised pop was still in business.

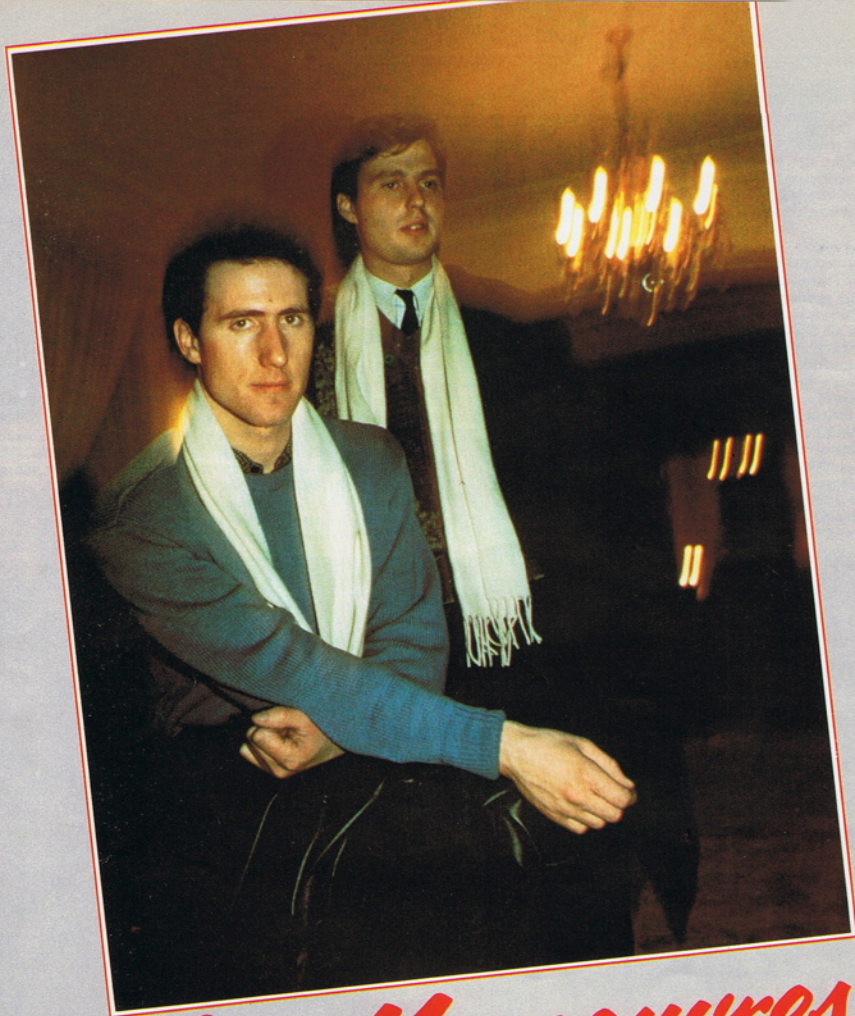
BOB WOFFINDEN

#### Gary Numan Recommended Listening

*Replicas* (Beggars Banquet BEG 50 638) (Includes: You Are In My Vision, I Nearly Married A Human, Down In The Park, Praying To The Aliens, Are 'Friends' Electric?, The Machman); *The Pleasure Principle* (Beggars Banquet BEGA 10) (Includes: Airline, Cars, Complex, Metal, Films, Observer).







## On Manoeuvres

### OMD's orchestral journey through the past

WHEN THE LIVERPOOL ROCK SCENE took off in the late Seventies, few people could have expected Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark to emerge as the city's most commercially successful group. The prevailing

pattern among Merseyside bands was best personified by the likes of Echo and the Bunnymen and the Teardrop Explodes: acid-tinged tunes and doom-laden lyrics inspired by American bands like the Doors and the Velvet Underground.

In stark contrast to the prevailing mood, the two members of OMD, Andy McCluskey and Paul Humphreys, took

their inspiration from a different source altogether, namely Germany's Kraftwerk. 'The two of us went to see them when they played the Liverpool Empire in 1975,' McCluskey later recalled. 'I was only 16 and Paul 15. When they dropped in on one of our European dates a couple of years ago it was like meeting our parents.'

Round about the time they first set eyes



on their heroes, Andy and Paul were members of a 'more rock-oriented' group with a drummer, Malcolm Holmes, who was subsequently to rejoin them. Tired of being part of a traditional rock band, they struck out as a duo-plus-tape-recorder. Both confessed to being unable to play an instrument; McCluskey taught himself to play bass as well as sing, while Humphreys bought a Selmer Pianotron for £25.

It was on the latter instrument that Paul Humphreys composed the incredibly catchy 'Electricity', which was released on Manchester's Factory Records in the spring of 1979. Factory's Tony Wilson had been suitably impressed by the band's gigs at Eric's, the now almost-legendary Liverpool club, and offered them a one-off release. Within a couple of weeks 'Electricity' had sold out its initial pressing of 5000. The duo performed for delighted audiences at shows as diverse as the first Futurama Festival in Leeds, headlined by Public Image Ltd, and a Factory Records package tour on which they were sandwiched between Joy Division and A Certain Ratio.

#### Doubts and discs

Before long, the band were approached by major record companies, and eventually signed to Virgin subsidiary DinDisc. Their first DinDisc releases showed promise: 'Red Frame White Light' could only make Number 67 in the UK charts, but 'Messages' reached Number 13, while the band's self-named debut album appeared in the LP Top Thirty at Number 27. The label's £25,000 advance had enabled them to buy their own studio, the Gramophone Suite, where OMD recorded their first four albums. They spent about six months of each year in this Liverpool hide-out, the rest of the time being taken up by gruelling tours. Realising the musical and visual limitations of using pre-recorded tapes in their live shows, the pair drafted in Holmes on drums and Dave Hughes on keyboards and bass for their first headlining tour in 1980.

The resulting pressures led to the pair experiencing frequent bouts of disillusionment; although outwardly confident and full of blunt northern humour, McCluskey often gave the impression that, artistically, the pair of them were riddled with self-doubt. 'Paul and I constantly wonder if we're doing the right thing, if our integrity's intact. The danger lies in repeating yourself because then you just get bored with what you do.' It was this uncertainty that inspired the radical change in their approach following the band's Number 8 UK hit, 'Enola Gay', the success of which McCluskey ascribed to the fact that 'everything in it was hooks, from the rhythm part out. We were perfectionists with everything on that album [1980's *Organisation*] but the style could very easily have become a formula.'

OMD were also aware that following their second LP, a whole crop of electro-pop bands had sprung up. In the autumn of



1981 McCluskey admitted 'We haven't got that freshness anymore - it belongs to Depeche Mode at the moment.' They still managed to come up with a masterpiece, *Architecture And Morality* (1981) - perhaps the most exquisitely lush study in nostalgia ever released by a rock band. The LP yielded the atmospheric hits 'Souvenir', 'Joan Of Arc' and 'Maid Of Orleans (The Waltz Joan Of Arc)', singles which made Number 3, 5 and 4 respectively in the UK charts. Lyrically, their obsession seemed to be with the past; when on the road, the two had a penchant for visiting museums and castles.

'We've never rabbitied on about unemployment or nuclear weapons,' said Andy McCluskey. 'We consider those to be trivia, symptoms of a larger problem... the entire mental framework of the human species - genetics.'

Perhaps because of their tendency to view life in a serious light, their fourth LP, *Dazzle Ships* (1983), came close to being an embarrassing failure. The two 45s taken from it - the witty 'Genetic Engineering' and the raucous rock-out, 'Telegraph', were fine, if nowhere near as commercially successful as former singles; much of the rest of *Dazzle Ships* was pretentious and disposable.

The pair seemed to have been carried away by the infinite aural possibilities of

*Opposite: OMD's Andy McCluskey (left) and Paul Humphreys out on the town. Above: Paul tinkers on synth. Below: Andy pulls out all the stops.*

the Emulator synthesiser, a machine into which any sound - from a lawn mower to a banshee - could be programmed and then slowed down or speeded up. By writing lyrics about robots in Czechoslovakian industry and composing another 'song' solely comprising a montage of international clocks ('Time Zones'), OMD concocted a recipe for disaster.

Hopefully the band's fifth album, recorded in late 1983 on the Caribbean island of Montserrat, would prove *Dazzle Ships* a temporary aberration. With saxophonist Martin Cooper replacing Hughes - thereby introducing a fresh sound into the group's music - there was still a good chance that OMD would get back on course and dazzle their fans again. MIKE NICHOLS

#### Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark Recommended Listening

*Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark* (DinDisc DID 2) (Includes: Bunker Soldiers, Almost, Electricity, Messages, Dancing, Red Frame/White Light); *Architecture And Morality* (DinDisc DID 12) (Includes: Joan Of Arc, The New Stone Age, She's Leaving, Georgia, The Beginning And The End, Sealand).





# IN THE MOOG

## The whys and wherefores of synthesised sound

THE FIRST MUSICAL instrument that could conceivably be classified as a synthesiser was American inventor Thaddeus Cahill's gargantuan Telharmonium. It took Cahill 10 years from 1896 to 1906 to build the instrument – a relatively modest period when one considers that the device weighed over 200 tons and six railway trucks were required to transport it.

The Telharmonium used rapidly spinning alternators driven by banks of electric motors to produce the required electrical signals; two people were needed to play it and so great was the noise produced by all the motors that the speakers had to be set up in a different room to the main body of the instrument.

Inspired by Cahill's pioneering work, others began to strive for new ways to make music, and over the first half of the twentieth century many novel electrical musical instruments were to appear. The Aetherophone, the Ondes Martinot organ, the Trautonium, the Therman and the Meissner Piano were among the most successful new devices, but it was not until the mid Fifties that the synthesiser proper emerged as a professional instrument in its own right.





1955 saw the birth of the RCA Music Synthesiser, a monophonic instrument (one that can only play a single note at a time) that was soon to be updated by a Mark II machine which was polyphonic – capable of playing of chords. Several session musicians immediately saw the potential of these instruments and sounds from the RCA machines were to grace many a radio advert and sci-fi film of the Fifties. However, the RCA machines were studio tools more than musical instruments as they were so unwieldy and prohibitively expensive. It was not until 1964 when Dr Robert A. Moog developed an electronic musical system that utilised voltages as the method of control that the synthesiser became an acceptable instrument within the financial grasp of most musicians.

Moog's first synthesisers were modular systems, comprising separate units of oscillators, filters, amplifiers and shaping circuits, which had to be linked up together using connector leads. These systems were fairly expensive and cumbersome and often looked more like an old-fashioned telephone exchange than a musical instrument.

#### Bach to mono

One of Moog's early customers was a young composer named Walter Carlos who, in 1968, used one of Moog's modular synthesisers to produce what was to become the biggest-selling classical album ever – *Switched On Bach*, a selection of the composer's best-known works performed on synthesiser. The modular synthesiser Carlos used was still only monophonic, obliging him to record every part separately using a multi-track tape recorder, but the project's success more than justified the time and effort spent producing it – and it also drew considerable attention to Moog's electronic devices.

Moog was now increasingly pressured to produce an instrument that could be taken on the road and played live, and in 1971 he unveiled a device that was to become the instrument of the Seventies – the Minimoog. Compact and portable, the Minimoog had a warm, rich and full sound which slotted in admirably with the techno-rock requirements of the day.

Many companies now moved in on the monophonic synthesiser market, but Moog had been in there first and had got it right first time – most other instruments that were to come along were pale imitations of Moog's brainchild. But the Minimoog (and its imitators) had two shortcomings: it could still only play a single note at a time, and it was a time-consuming business altering the controls to get a different sound. One way around this problem was to have a bank of Minimoogs all preset to

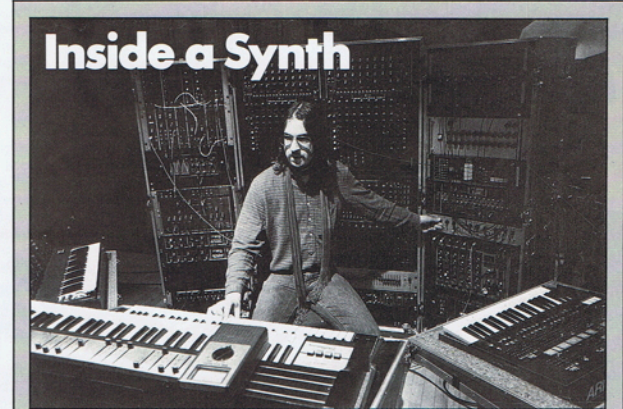
produce different sounds – Rick Wakeman, at one point, had six Minimoogs on stage.

Two further developments were required in order that the synthesiser might become a versatile, all-round instrument. The most pressing was that of producing a polyphonic synthesiser – one on which chords could be played. Moog Music Inc,

the company that produced the Minimoog, was one of the first to come up with such a device (although Dr Moog himself had little to do with the project) when, in 1977, they introduced the Polymoog. This was a fully polyphonic synthesiser – one on which all the notes could be played simultaneously – but in effect it owed more to organ technology than to developments in the synthesiser field.

#### Poly themes

Yamaha simultaneously released their CS-80, a smaller version of their GX-1; the latter, an enormously expensive instrument, had been used only by a few top players – Keith Emerson played it on ELP's *Fanfare For The Common Man*, and Stevie Wonder, Led Zeppelin's John Paul Jones and a few others had one. The CS-80 itself was a large polyphonic synthesiser that utilised a principle known as voice assignment; inside was the circuitry of eight synthesisers and, as a key was pressed, it was assigned one of these voice circuits. The CS-80 could play just eight notes at once – but this was enough. The



A musical note can be defined by three basic parameters – pitch (the quality that makes one sound seem 'higher' or 'lower' than another), timbre (the tone colour of the sound) and loudness. A synthesiser is an instrument that specifies these three parameters to create virtually any sound. By using electrical currents moving in a circuit, the synthesiser simulates the vibrations that form sound; most types use a voltage-controlled oscillator (VCO) to set the pitch, a voltage-controlled filter (VCF) to determine the timbre and a voltage-controlled amplifier (VCA) to set the loudness.

The most usual method of control for producing the voltage is a keyboard. Each key on the board produces a dif-

*Tangerine Dream's array of synths include ARP and Moog instruments.*

ferent voltage, which is fed to the VCO – the higher the voltage, the higher the resulting note pitch. In addition, when each key is pressed, a trigger pulse is produced as a signal to the VCF and VCA.

Another important feature of the synthesiser is the performance controls. These enable a player to change certain characteristics of the sound while he is playing a note. The most widely used performance control is the pitchbender which enables the player to raise or lower the pitch of a single note in order to achieve a similar effect to a guitarist bending a string.

*Above left: Unveiled in 1971, the Minimoog proved a widely-used monophonic synth. Left: Dr Robert Moog (right) helps keyboard-player Roger Powell unravel his machine. Top right: Switched On Bach.*





Far left: Duran Duran's Nick Rhodes serenades Andy Warhol on a Roland. Left: Yazoo/Assembly mainman Vince Clarke and Fairlight. Bottom: Devo play Moog.

instrument was a great success, and was featured on many records of the time, most notably Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Variations* (1977) and 'Argentinian Melody', the theme for the 1978 World Cup football tournament.

Having perfected polyphonic systems, manufacturers set about the problem of how to alter controls quickly and easily. One method that had been used for some years was to have a set of 'patches' (pre-arranged settings) programmed into the instrument at the factory so that the player just had to touch a button to obtain a required sound, but this restricted the number of sounds the instrument could produce. Eventually, with the aid of microprocessors, manufacturers developed programmable synthesisers which could store a collection of sounds in its computerised memory, to be recalled by the user/programmer as and when necessary.

#### Prophets of the future

The best example of this type of instrument was the Prophet 5, launched by Sequential Circuits Inc in 1978. This, like the Minimoog, became a classic instrument, and soon almost every rock band with a keyboard player had a Prophet 5 tucked away somewhere. Following the appearance of the Prophet, the only major development in the synthesiser field was in terms of cost – better instruments at lower prices. Microprocessors made electronic instruments cheaper and more reliable than they would otherwise have been.

With the boom in computer technology during the late Seventies and early Eighties, computer-based musical instruments themselves started to come into their own. The Fairlight CMI, an Australian product based on a business computer, was used by many studio players, as well as by such notable musicians as Geoff Downes of Asia and Larry Fast of Peter Dinklage's band. One of the more useful facilities that such an instrument allowed the performer was the ability to 'sample' a sound and have that sound made available over the entire span of the keyboard – pitched accordingly. So if one were to sample the sound of a girl singing a note (via a microphone), the instrument would automatically transpose the sound to all pitches of the keyboard, and allow the player to play her voice polyphonically. Machines such as E-mu Inc's Emulator were specifically designed for just such a task, and have been featured on many recordings.

With devices such as these on the market, there seemed to be little left to 'discover' or 'revolutionise' within the field of synthetic music. Yet there was little doubt that further advancements in musical technology were still to come.

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