

Q&a

October 13, 1997

BOYS ON FILM

Duran Duran's journey from "Rio" to "Medazzaland"



**Duran Duran:
New moon on
Medazzaland.**



In a Capitol Records conference room, Duran Duran's Nick Rhodes sits and fidgets with a high-tech video-conferencing system that looks straight out of the movie "Sliver." Staring at the image of himself onscreen, Rhodes splits it, creating a picture of himself within a picture of himself. Eventually, there are 10 pictures of the fashion-conscious keyboardist staring back from the outsized monitor.

Rhodes' dominance of the screen is nothing new. Beginning with the controversial film short they created in 1981 for "Girls on Film," Duran Duran remained on the cutting edge of video for the better part of a decade. "Hungry Like the Wolf," "Rio," "Union of the Snake" weren't only hits, they were essential images of the '80s. One look at a compilation of the band's videos put together by their publicity company makes it obvious how far the medium has fallen since then.

Duran Duran haven't done too shabby in the music department either, selling over 40 million albums worldwide. But it has been four long years since the band rekindled its career with "The Wedding Album" and the hit singles "Ordinary World" and "Come Undone." All of a sudden, it was again hip to be a Duranie. And though the band is now down to only two original members following the departure of guitarist John Taylor, it's even hipper now. A Duran Duran tribute album and concert are slated for Wednesday and a band-endorsed line of nail polish is on its way. And, oh yeah, "Medazzaland," the group's spirited electronica-meets-classic-1980s-pop album, is some of the best stuff it has done since its '80s heyday.

Watching the "Girls on Film" video the other day, I was wondering: What were you guys thinking?

Nick Rhodes: We did it for the clubs. As far as I know, we were the first band to ever make a rock dance twelve-inch. There were a lot of these rock clubs springing up with massive video screens so we just said, 'Let's go all out -- get as close to getting banned as we can without actually getting banned.'

Even today, it looks extremely risque.

Simon Le Bon: You really couldn't do it today. Not only would you get banned by the TV companies, you would have feminist groups after you. But mind you, we did then too!

Was John Taylor's departure from the band amicable?

Rhodes: It was sad for us, but we saw it coming. John has been living in L.A. since '92 and he really wants to live and work there. That was a big conflict for us, because we were recording "Medazzaland" in London. In the end we just said, 'Look, this is not working.' And he said, 'Yeah, I have given it a lot of thought and it is time for me to leave.' It ironically acted like a catalyst for us to complete the album. Simon, Warren and I said, 'Now where do we go? Let's throw out all this rubbish and write some new songs.'

I read on the Web that "Buried in the Sand" was written for John.

Rhodes: Yeah, that's sort of my little postcard to him. When he left, a layer had been peeled away, actually. Suddenly it made us more sensitive.

You're now down to two original members, but there are a lot of reunions happening lately. Will there ever be a Duran Duran reunion with the original lineup?

Le Bon: I can't perceive it. I mean, never say never, but I can't perceive it because we have always about moving forward. We are pop-experimental. It doesn't appeal to go back.

[To Nick] Back in 1983, you were quoted in Jim Henke's Rolling Stone cover story as saying, 'We're not looking for pity, we're looking for hit songs.' Has that changed?

Rhodes: We have been very fortunate that, whilst we have not always received critical acclaim, we usually manage to get through to the public, to our fans. We're here to entertain people really, in one way or another. We all like to think of it as art but at the end of the day, if it makes someone smile, then it has done something positive.

So what exactly is "Medazzaland?"

Le Bon: The title actually came from a dental drug called Medazzlin. I came back from an operation on my jaw and I was late for singing and I floated in on this cloud of narcosis. It's very strange -- it renders you sedated, but conscious, so you are able to respond to the instructions of the surgeon. But at the end, it wipes your memory -- you forget all the time you were under -- so I lost three hours. I was in Medazzaland. Now you get a sense of our bad humor.

What happened to your jaw?

Le Bon: When I was 18, I went to this party and got blind, stinking drunk. I was walking home and fell over a hedge into someone's driveway. The problem was that the driveway was four feet lower than the pavement I was standing on! I broke my jaw and two teeth as well. One of the teeth had recently formed an abscess.

What were you drinking?

Le Bon: The bar!

Besides that, do you guys have any regrets?

Rhodes: I don't like looking back -- I'm not very nostalgic but I wish we never had a lawyer or an accountant.

Le Bon: I wouldn't have let Jim Henke see me in my underpants!

KEVIN RAUB



Copyright © 1997 by Straight Arrow Publishers Company, L.P. All rights reserved.