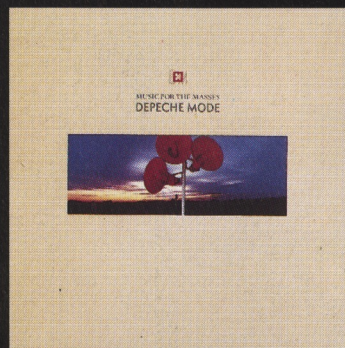


FORMED SYNTH AND TWO GUITAR TRIO WHILE STILL AT SCHOOL 1976 • BAND'S NAME COMES FROM PHRASE MEANING "FAST FASHION" IN FRENCH STYLE MAGAZINE • ALBUM "VIOLATOR" • "PERSONAL JESUS" WAS FIRST SINGLE FOR TWO YEARS • PRECEDED BY CONTROVERSIAL NATIONAL ADVERTISING IN PERSONAL COLUMNS USING WORDS "YOUR OWN PERSONAL JESUS" • GAVE WHICH, WHEN DIALLED, REACHED UK NO. 13 • SINGLE IN U.S.A. • 12" AND MADONNA • ALSO THE SILENCE" AND "POLICY 1988, LOS ANGELES 75,000 DENA ROSE BOWL STADIUM • UK • QUOTED AS SAYING OF MUTE WE'VE HAD A CHANCE AT OUR OWN PACE" • TWENTY • COMPILATION 85" FEATURED A GATEFOLD THE BAND'S BAD PHOTO- ("DON'T LOOK BACK", MAJOR FILM OF TOUR • GADGET AT BRIDGE HOUSE ORIGINAL BAND LINE-UP FLETCHER, MARTIN GORE, "DREAMING OF ME" FEB. '81 C ART AND NO. 54 ON UK SINGLE "NEW LIFE" JUNE CHARTS AND NO. 11 ON SINGLE "JUST CAN'T GET CLARKE • CLARKE LEFT BAND AND FOR MED BAND WITH FIRST LP "SPEAK AND SPELL" MADE TOP 10 IN ALBUM REPLACED VINCE CLARKE ON SOLD OUT NIGHTS AT ODEON • FIFTH SINGLE "THE '82 REACHES NO. 12 • MASSES" WAS RELEASED IN



DEPECHE MODE

NO. 10 UK AND BECAME A PLATINUM SELLER WORLDWIDE • TWO MORE SINGLES FROM ALBUM WERE "NEVER LET ME DOWN AGAIN" AND "BEHIND THE WHEEL" REACHING NO'S 22 AND 21 RESPECTIVELY • SUCCESSFULLY TOURED AMERICA • SECOND ALBUM "A BROKEN FRAME" • ALL TEN SONGS WRITTEN BY MARTIN GORE • FOLLOW ALBUM RELEASE WITH A SELLOUT TWO MONTH EUROPEAN TOUR • SEVENTH SINGLE "GET THE BALANCE RIGHT" JANUARY '83 SHOOTS STRAIGHT TO NO. 13 • SPRING '83 PLAY BIGGEST TOUR YET CANADA, USA, JAPAN AND HONG KONG • SINGLE "EVERYTHING COUNTS" BY MARTIN GORE REACHES UK NO. 6 • THIRD AGAIN" BRINGS CRITICAL ALBUM "BLACK CELEBRATION" "PEOPLE ARE PEOPLE" AND WHICH REACH NO'S 4 AND 9 "SO THE GREAT REWARD" HITS THE SINGLE "STRANGELOVE" IS

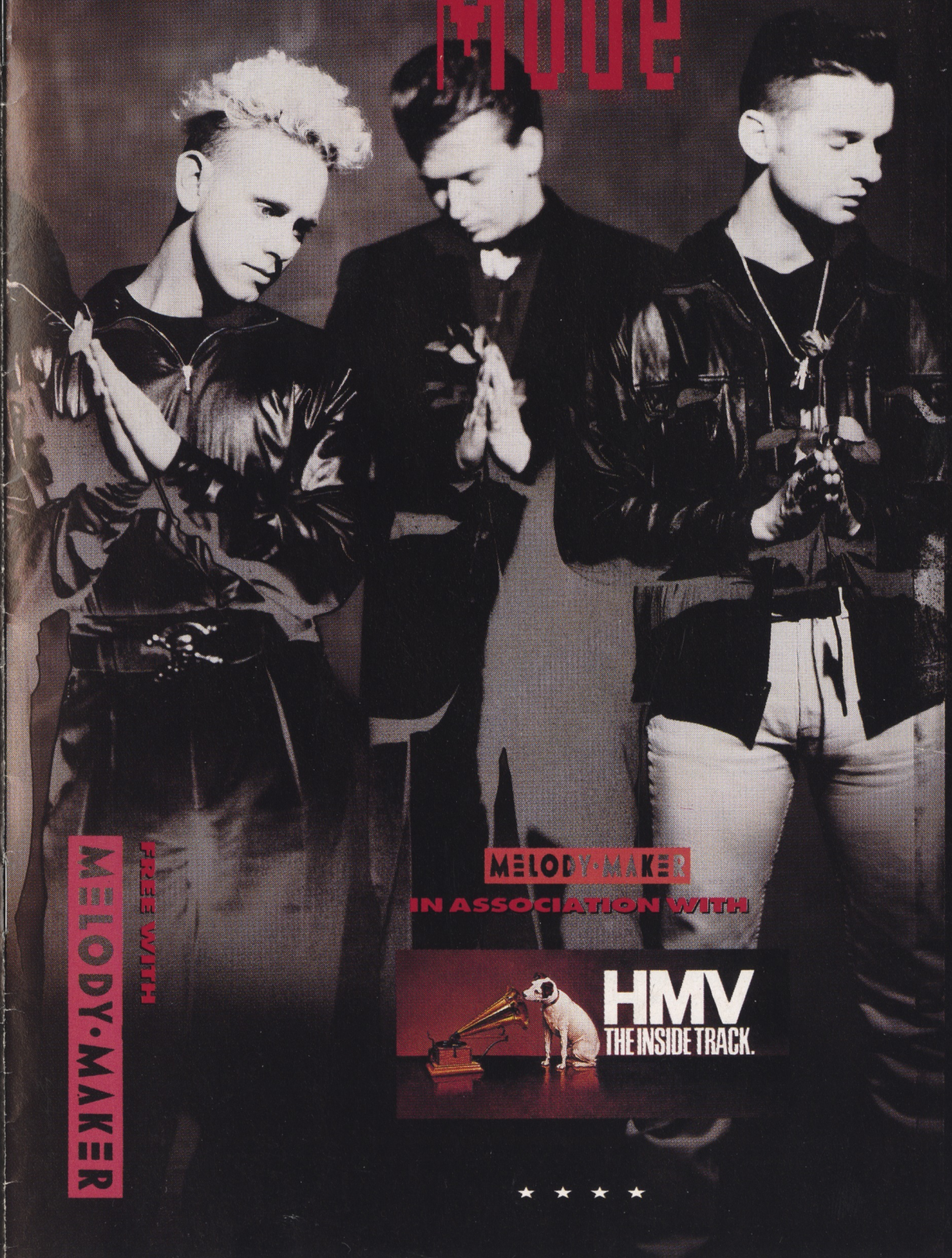


HMV
THE INSIDE TRACK.

PHONE NUMBER IN ADS PLAYED THE SONG • SINGLE BECAME BIGGEST SELLING SINGLE OUTSOLD PRINCE FEATURES SINGLES "ENJOY OF TRUTH" • JUNE 18TH, PEOPLE PACKED OUT PASA-EIGHT TOP TEN ALBUMS IN RECORD COMPANY "WITH TO DEVELOP OUR OWN STYLE NINETEEN SINGLES IN TOP ALBUM "THE SINGLES 1981-SLEEVE WITH A COLLAGE OF GRAPHS • D.A. PENNEBAKER "MONTEREY POP") MADE FIRST GIG SUPPORTING FAD PUB IN EAST LONDON 1980 • WAS DAVID GAHAN, ANDY VINCE CLARKE • FIRST SINGLE • MADE NO. 1 ON INDIES NATIONAL CHARTS • SECOND '81 • MAKES NO. 1 ON INDIE NATIONAL CHARTS • THIRD ENOUGH" WRITTEN BY VINCE IN '81 NOT WISHING TO TOUR ALISON MOYET "YAZOO" • RELEASED OCTOBER '81 CHARTS • ALAN WILDER KEYBOARDS • PLAYED TWO LONDON'S HAMMERSMITH MEANING OF LOVE" APRIL ALBUM "MUSIC FOR THE SEPTEMBER '87 REACHING

ALBUM "CONSTRUCTION TIME ACCLAIM FROM ALL SIDES • BREEDS TWO CLASSIC SINGLES "MASTER AND SERVANT" RESPECTIVELY • OCT '84 LP UK NO. 5 • ON APRIL 17TH '87 RELEASED REACHING NO.16 •

Depeche Mode



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“STOP THAT BLOODY CLACKING!”

VINCE Clarke's mum would regularly interrupt early Depeche Mode rehearsals to complain about the noise.

“Stop that bloody clacking! I'm trying to watch the telly! Why can't you find normal hobbies?”

Back in the summer of 1980, Depeche Mode were about as far from Pasadena Rose Bowl glory as it is possible to be. Rehearsing in Vince's draughty garage, their ambitions extended no further than hustling a gig at a newly-opened club called Crocs in Rayleigh, so called because a live crocodile inhabited a pool in the middle of the dance-floor.



The three founder members all lived in Basildon, a plain and characterless Essex town with a population of 180,000.

Vince Clarke (born 3.7.60) had formed one half of a gospel duo. He had also played, apparently without enthusiasm, in another band called No Romance In China, who were once described by one

witness as, “an unlikely cross between The Monkees and Uriah Heep with a little George Formby thrown in for good measure!”

Andy “Fletch” Fletcher (8.7.60) attended Boy's Brigade meetings with Vince. He was an obsessive Deep Purple fan. His burning ambition as an adolescent was to possess one of Ritchie Blackmore's plectrums. Martin “Curly-Top” Gore had attended the same school as Fletch. His schooldays were distinguished only by his prowess on the cricket field. A regular member of the school cricket team, his spin-bowling was apparently the toast of South Basildon. Gore's musical obsessions included Roxy Music, The Rubettes and Sparks. He had played guitar for two local bands, The French Look and Norman & The Worms, the latter of which performed a new wave version of “Skippy The Bush Kangaroo”.

Clarke, Fletcher and Gore decided to form a band the day Johnny Logan's “What's Another Year” made it to Number One in the charts, in



May 1980. Vince played guitar, sang and operated the drum-machine, Fletch played bass guitar, Gore played lead guitar.

Initially, they were undecided as to their direction. Their shilly-shallying was perhaps typical of new bands starting out in the first months of the Eighties, a time of endless musical cul-de-sacs. By the end of the Seventies, punk's hectic charge had violently diffused. The post-punk hinterland was littered with reckless experimentalists, skinny-tie new-wavers, dim traditionalists, waggish absurdists, hopeful stylemongers, earnest politicists...

1980 was the year of Curtis' death, Lennon's assassination, massive youth unemployment, riots in Switzerland, CND and music biz recession. It was the year of Talking Heads' “Remain In Light”, Dexy's “Young Soul Rebels” and Echo And The Bunnymen's “Crocodiles”. It was also the year of Oi, Spandau, Ze, Postcard, Factory, Adam, new rockabilly and new HM. A confusing, bewildering 12 months of crazed transition.

Most importantly for three unworldly Basildon striplings it was the year when electronic went pop in a big way.

Before Vince, Fletch and Gore discovered the synthesiser, they first had to choose a name. Early possibilities were The Lemon Peels, Changes, Airport Coffee, Peter Bonetti's Boots (they were all Chelsea FC fans), The Runny Smiles and The Glow

Worms. Eventually, after much prolonged debate they settled on Vince's favourite, Composition Of Sound. Under this name, they played their first gig as a three-piece, at Scamps in Southend.

By the time they were doing the rounds of local parties, both Vince and Gore had traded in their guitars for synthesisers. Through the summer of 1980, the Depeche Mode sound was forged. When Vince received a call from an old school-friend enquiring about the progress of the band, Vince would proudly announce, "We've just gone electronic."

By the start of 1980, synthesiser bands were beginning to edge into the mainstream. In a sense, the advent of the synth was an inevitable development of the post-punk years. It was cheap, convenient and (best of all) relatively easy to learn to play. The ultimate DIY instrument.

Synthesisers had been commercially available since 1964, but had made little impression on rock and pop until The Beatles added some very discreet synthesiser sounds to their 1969 album, "Abbey Road". The early Seventies witnessed the first truly innovative use of the synthesiser in rock, most notably in the music of Suicide, Can and Kraftwerk. We'll leave Vangelis, ELP, Pink Floyd, Tangerine Dream and Jean-Michel Jarre out of this. Ditto Hot Butter ("Popcorn") and Chicory Tip ("Son Of My Father").

It might be argued that electro-pop as we know it was born in May 1975, when Kraftwerk scored a hit with "Autobahn". Their revolutionary use of synths, electronic percussion, sequencers and tape loops would prove to have an enormous influence on the music of the late Seventies and Eighties. While Bowie and Moroder openly admitted their debt, Kraftwerk's hypnotic pulsebeat was used as a blueprint for electro, hip hop and House.

Firstly though, Suicide and Kraftwerk were to act as catalysts for many of the bands that emerged in the immediate post-punk melee. When Kraftwerk's Ralf Hutter said in 1977, "Already the guitar is a relic of the Middle Ages and the synth is the instrument of the future," he must have touched a crucial nerve in many bedrooms and garages.

As early as 1978, synth/electronic groups were making a considerable impression. Cabaret Voltaire, Dalek I (Love You), Deutsche Amerikanische Freundschaft (DAF), Ultravox, Yellow Magic Orchestra and (even) Tubeway Army might have been hastily shunned by punk purists but, together, they were rationalising the possibilities of electronic pop.

The following two years would see the emergence of Human League, Japan, Fad Gadget, OMD, Soft Cell and Blancmange. None of this could have escaped the notice of the three members of Composition Of Sound back in Basildon.

"We were learning fast," Martin Gore would say later. "We really started paying attention to what was happening out there. Out in Basildon, all we could do was watch, wait and learn. To us, the synth was a punk instrument. It was an instant DIY tool. Because it was still fairly new, its potential seemed limitless. It really gave us a chance to explore."

Composition Of Sound began gigging regularly, quickly achieving their ambition of headlining at Rayleigh's Crocs on its special Saturday night electronic showcase. Here they were spotted by Some Bizzare supremo, Stevo, then a

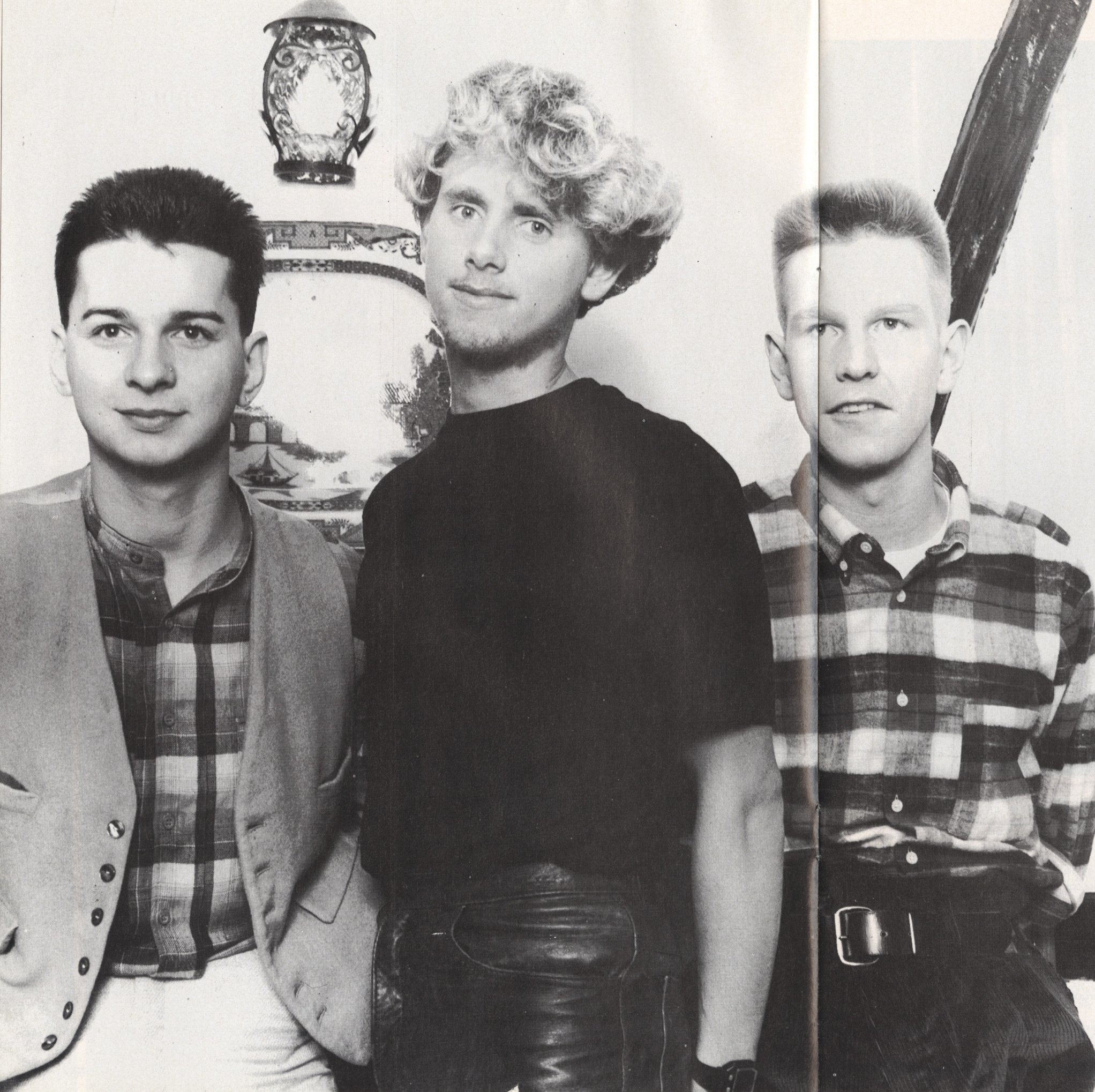
guiding light on the emergent Futurist scene. Only his fiercest exhortations could persuade them to contribute a track to the compilation of new and unsigned talent he was then putting together, eventually to appear as the "Some Bizarre" album in February 1981.

With Vince Clarke growing increasingly uneasy in his role as frontman it was decided to recruit a vocalist. The band were ignorant of the time-honoured small ad in Melody Maker process, so they decided to wait until the right man came along. While waiting to rehearse in a local scout-hut, they heard Dave Gahan crooning "Heroes" with another band. Andy Fletcher would later claim that they invited Gahan to join them there and then. Gahan himself would insist, "They only asked me to join because Vince thought I looked so pretty in my Marks & Spencer jumper and my corduroy trousers. Bastard!"

Gahan was born in Epping on May 9, 1962, and had lived in Basildon since early childhood. He passed through a largely, ill-spent youth, earning himself three appearances in juvenile court, "for nicking cars and motorbikes, setting cars alight, spraying walls, vandalism and loads of other wrongful doings!" After leaving school, he passed through 20 jobs in six months, including sweeping the floors in a supermarket, labouring on a building-site and office-clerk for North Sea Gas. When he joined the group, he was studying window design at Southend Technical College. His favourite groups at the time were The Lurkers, The Damned and Sham 69.

Shortly after joining, Gahan suggested a change of name. One afternoon in the rehearsal room, he was browsing through a French fashion magazine when he saw as headline that read, Depeche Mode, which roughly translated as, "hurried fashion".





“POSH CLOBBER COULD CLINCH IT FOR MODE” ²

DEPECHE Mode's first live performance as a four-piece took place at Martin and Andy's old school, St Nicholas, in Basildon. By this time Andy Fletcher had also traded in his bass for a synthesiser. Gahan's only previous stage experience was singing carols in the Salvation Army choir at the age of eight. It took 12 cans of Double Diamond to coax him out onto the stage that night.

By the time they entered a recording studio for the first time in October 1980, Gahan had been thrown out of college for non-attendance. Gore and Fletcher remained in their respective jobs as bank clerk and insurance clerk.

"When we went in to do our first demos," Vince said later, "I'd just bought this new synth. It was only afterwards that I realised you could change the sound on it. You know the sound that goes, 'WAAAAAAGGHHHHH'? I was stuck on that one for ages."

Having muddled together a three-song demo, they sent out the tape to every club and promoter they had heard about. They were rewarded with a booking at the Bridgehouse in Canning Town, then a popular haunt for mod revival bands like The Chords and The Merton Parkas. There was no immediate response except from a middle-aged Rastafarian who tried to persuade them to accompany him to Nigeria dressed in "Dr Who" outfits. The band politely declined, though it was rumoured that Vince was tempted by the proposal.

Vince and Dave began to visit London, dropping in, usually unannounced, on A&R men and forcing them to listen to their precious demo tape. They were once shown the door by 12 record companies in one day. Eventually, Rough Trade showed some interest but were not convinced that Depeche Mode were suitable for the label. One morning, Mute's Daniel Miller was visiting their offices and a Rough Trade employee played him the Depeche Mode tape. As legend has it, Miller exclaimed, "That is bloody awful", and walked out.

Miller had started Mute Records in 1978 with his own single, "Warm Leatherette", one of the very first minimalist synthesised pop songs. Grace Jones would cover the song for her debut 1980 album. Having gone this far, the retiring Miller was faced with the option of performing. He decided instead to produce and release his own records. His aim was to sign the ultimate electronic pop band.

Having dismissed Depeche Mode, he was offered the opportunity to reconsider when he caught them supporting Fad Gadget at the Bridgehouse in December 1980. This time Miller was impressed. While other major companies were beginning to show interest, he convinced them to join Mute in a 50/50 deal, whereby the group would pay half their bills and take half the profits. Not until 1986 would Mute and Depeche Mode actually draw up a formal written contract and then only because somebody pointed out that, should Miller suddenly shuffle off this mortal coil, the financial situation would be haywire to say the least.

1980 was ending promisingly for the group. In the middle of December, they entered a recording-studio to prepare for a single and album. According to their local Basildon Echo, all that stood between Depeche Mode and international pop stardom was the lack of a decent tailor. "Posh clobber could clinch it for Mode," argued their pre-Christmas front-page headline. "Some of these perfumed, ponced-up Futuristic pop bands don't hold a candle to these four Basildon lads," they enthused.



NEW LIFE!

IF Cabaret Voltaire were the Velvet Underground of the new electronic eruption and DAF were The Rolling Stones, then early Depeche Mode were surely Herman's Hermits.

Their early releases suggested that they had paid more attention to the trite electro-pop doodlings of OMD and Dalek I than their more seditious contemporaries.

"I guess we were listening to stuff like OMD, Tubeway Army and Human League when we were getting our sound together," they would say later. "People would ask us about Kraftwerk all the time but we never felt that's where we were coming from. I mean, we were influenced by everything we'd heard since we were eight years old. Every time you hear a record, on the radio, whether you like it or not, the influences combine. If we were influenced by Kraftwerk, we weren't really conscious of it. Suicide and Can? We'd never even heard about those groups. We always saw ourselves as a pop group. We listened to pop music mostly."

"Dreaming Of Me", their first single, was released in February 1981, produced by Daniel Miller. Despite a hostile reception in the press (one paper described it as "the musical equivalent of cold sick"), it won the support of Radio 1's Peter Powell and peaked at Number 57 in the chart.

Throughout the spring of 1981, Depeche Mode gigged regularly. As Andy and Martin still had day jobs, they had to turn down offers of tour supports with Toyah and Classix Nouveau.

Their second single, "New Life", was released in the second week of June. "Tinkly bonk excursion groping in the dark for the switch that will turn on the torchlight of success," scowled Sounds. After an appearance on "Top Of The Pops" squeezed between Ian Gillan and "The Whicker Rap", the single climbed to Number 11.

"It's really odd," Dave reflected. "At first you think, 'God! Imagine being on 'Top Of The Pops'!' Then you think, 'God! Imagine being in the Top 20!' Then we were pissed off because we didn't get into the Top 10. After it had gone down, we realised how little had changed. We were still travelling on the train and tube. We still had the same friends. We went to the same places. You expect success to change your life. But it doesn't. Your ambitions change. That's all. Pretty f***ing disappointing really!"

Stevo's "Some Bizarre" album had already come out in March, with Mode appearing alongside B-Movie, The Illustration and The Fast Set. They spent most interviews denying their involvement with the so-called Futurist scene. When they weren't doing that, they would be fighting against their supposed involvement with the spurious New Romantic movement (Duran, Spandau, Ultravox).

Eventually, Dave Gahan settled for what he saw as the lesser of two evils.

"OK, we're Futurists," he told Sounds. "We've always been Futurists. For me, Futurists were an extension of punk rock. We never had anything to do with New Romantics. They all looked the same. Bunch of flaming cissies! But call us what you like. Ultra pop. Futurist. Disco. Anything, as long as it's not New Romantic."

October brought their third single, "Just Can't Get Enough", which peaked at Number Eight. Now that Andy and Martin had finally given up their day jobs, Depeche were able to embark on their first full British tour which wound up at London's Lyceum at the end of November. The band were somewhat chagrined to discover that their audience consisted mainly of young girls in Miss Selfridge frilly shirts and Chelsea Girl pedal-pushers. The band themselves had surely distinguished themselves as the most ludicrously dressed pop act since Gore's beloved Rubettes. Perhaps acting on the Basildon Echo's advice, Mode had traded in their wardrobe of C&A/M&S wardrobe for an off-the-peg selection of frilly collars, poncey knickerbockers, chunky Arran Sweaters and foam-flecked trews. In a year of silly fashions, Depeche Mode were clearly the silliest of all.

Their debut album, "Speak And Spell", was released at the end of October, the actual date of release apparently chosen by the band's astrologer. Andy Fletcher greeted the release with the proclamation, "We're going to be The Beatles of the indies." The



gentleman from The Walsall Gazette who described it as, "OMD meets Sooty's Disco" was perhaps closer to the mark. The album, most of it written by Vince Clarke, was a gawky set of trite electro-pop irritants that merely established Mode as the synth brothers of Beckenham's Haircut 100. Next to the cool eroticism of Soft Cell ("Tainted Love", "Bedsitter" and "Say Hello Wave Goodbye"), the mutant funk of Heaven 17 ("Fascist Groove Thang") and the heady, edgy synth-pop of Human League ("Love Action", "Open Your Heart" and "Don't You Want Me"), 1981's Mode sounded hopelessly, cluelessly provincial.

By the end of the year, Depeche Mode were regarded as something of as national laughing-stock by the British press. NME's Paul Morley was virtually alone in hailing them as part of a bold new pop sensibility.

"Their literate, significantly glossy pop has a superficiality

that is contradicted by an inner consistency," he gushed, "hinting at emotion, tragedy, spirit, or perhaps an anticipation of impatience with the present format."

Whatever the shortcomings of "Speak And Spell", its release would be ominously overshadowed by the sudden announcement, at the beginning of December, that Vince Clarke was leaving the band.

"I was bored with the pop star thing," he said later. "I could see myself spending the rest of my life playing cute songs for little girls. Breaking the news was terrible, but I think they were expecting it. I'd been going through as gloomy phase. I just never expected Depeche to get as popular as they did. When it happened, I wasn't really ready for it. I no longer felt fulfilled. I just wasn't happy any more. When we started, we used to get letters from fans saying, 'I find your music inspiring'. Then we had a few hits and we got letters saying, 'I like

THE LANDSCAPE IS CHANGING

"I THINK 1982 has definitely been the year that people realised the possibilities and potential of the synthesiser as a 'real' musical instrument," said Soft Cell's Dave Ball at the end of '82.

Despite the efforts of the old softheads at the Musicians Union to ban the synth, 1982 was the year when electronic pop finally lost its novelty value and blitzed the mainstream. Records of the year were Dexy's "Too Rye Aye", Grandmaster Flash's "The Message" and The Birthday Party's "Junkyard". But the hardest sound to avoid all year was the plink-plonk-plink of a synth. Some of it was total crap (Flock Of Seagulls, anyone?). But Soft Cell had six great hits, Human League had four, Laurie Anderson had "O Superman" and Kraftwerk boomed back with "Computer Love"/"The Model".

It was a year of transition for Depeche Mode. With Vince departed, Martin Gore, whose previous experience amounted to two atrocious songs on "Speak And Spell", found himself elected chief song-writer. While their obituarists were still scribbling away, "See You" was released at the end of January '82. Lyrically, it surpassed any of Vince Clarke's previous efforts in terms of triteness. "I remember the days when we walked through the woods," it whined. "We'd sit on a bench for a while/I treasure the way we used to laugh and play/And look in each others eyes". Still, it was a hit all over the Home Counties with furry-diced Cortina owners and clawed its way to Number Six in the chart.

In the meantime, Alan Wilder, previously with The Dragons and The Hitmen, was drafted in as Vince's replacement, having responded to a Melody Maker ad which ran, "Name band. Synthesiser. Must be under 21". Born 1.6.59, Wilder was actually 22, but lied and got away with it. He would not become a full-time member of the band until the following year.

The second album, "A Broken Frame", was recorded as a trio. Released in October 1982, it received a savage mauling in the press. "Every bit as empty as 'Speak And Spell'," groaned Melody Maker's Steve Sutherland. "Just more miserable. The plain fact is that Depeche Mode are drowning."

With "Speak And Spell", Depeche Mode traded facile chirpiness for dour self-consciousness. Years later, the group would come close to disowning it.

"I think we all feel that it was our weakest album by far," Dave Gahan told Melody Maker in 1990. "It's very patchy. Very badly produced. That's when we got labelled as a very doomy band. It was very naive. Basically, we were just learning at that point. It was Martin's first album as a songwriter. He



was thrown in at the deep end to be honest. In many ways, we weren't ready to release an album so soon after the first. We rushed into it. It embarrasses us now to look back on."

Despite Top 20 hits with "The Meaning Of Love" and "Leave In Silence", they looked like going the way of other pop transients of the time - Blue Zoo, Marilyn, Haysi Fantayzee, Blue Rondo, Lotus Eaters. At the end of 1982, Depeche Mode looked thoroughly shagged out. In NME's Christmas issue Lynn Hanna assured us that, "Mode are the fast way forward to the future." In funny sort of way, she was right.

In many ways, Depeche Mode's entire career pivots on their first 1983 single, "Get The Balance Right". In one swoop, they toughened up, straightened out, discovered samplers, and crafted their first great pop single. By the end of the Eighties, Kevin Saunderson of Inner City, among others would claim that this was the first House record. The first record to feature Wilder, it welcomed a new determinism, a sense of self-possession. It was as though Mode had suddenly discovered the right switches on their synth toys. 1983 would prove to be the year when they first established themselves as a truly consistent singles act. "Get The Balance Right" would be followed by "Everything Counts" and "Love In Itself". In the space of six months they had mastered the art of the memorable chorus. There was little of the former irritancy.

Before the release of the "Construction Time Again" album, Alan Wilder announced, "When we were working on an idea for an overall theme, we came up with the word 'caring'. That's the main idea behind it. The general tendency of the album is very socialist."

The idea of Depeche Mode developing a social conscience overnight was faintly ludicrous considering that only a year before they were plumbing new depths in mawkish sentimentality ("What good is a photograph of you?/Every time I look at it, it makes me feel blue!").

Not that Gore had quite mastered the art of the succinct pop polemic. "Let's take a map of the world," they hollered. "Tear it into pieces/All of the boy and the girls/Will see how easy it is."

Still, SWP card-carrying rock critics queued up to poke microphones up the boys' noses. "There is nothing more beautiful," wrote X Moore in NME, "than seeing attitudes change, seeing scabs turn militant."

In a piece which still brings tears of mirth rolling down my leg, the ageing skinhead hack (who doubled up as lead-voice with Jam copyists, The Redskins) pursued the band to Belfast to talk Trotsky. It transpired that

Depeche Mode had not thought their new militant stance through entirely.

"What needs to be built then?" Moore demanded, picking up on the word construction in the album title.

After a full minute, Alan Wilder offered, "Whole new ways of thinking."

As the interview collapsed into a kind of surreal badminton game, with vacant platitudes instead of shuttlecocks, Mode got vaguer and woolier by the moment.

"It's no good sitting back and hoping things will change," said Gore, attempting to explain "Everything Counts" and coming across like an ITV sitcom writer's idea of a well-pickled bar-room philosopher. "You've got to actually work together. The material is there. It's like... there's enough food in the world to feed everybody, right, and half the world is eating three-quarters of it, so the rest of the world is starving. But the food is there. So there is a solution."

As if we needed a bunch of lower middle-class-lads-turned-rich-pop-stars to lecture us about wealth distribution... when Depeche were through with all that blatant bollocks, they attempted to explain the considerable difference in approach between "A Broken Frame" and "Construction Time Again".

"It's a conscious move to come across fuller and more definite and not just float through. It's a definite move to make something stronger, more lasting. We suddenly realised, 'Hey! What are we doing?' I guess we suddenly realised that, if we want to carry on, we've got to do something a little more lasting."

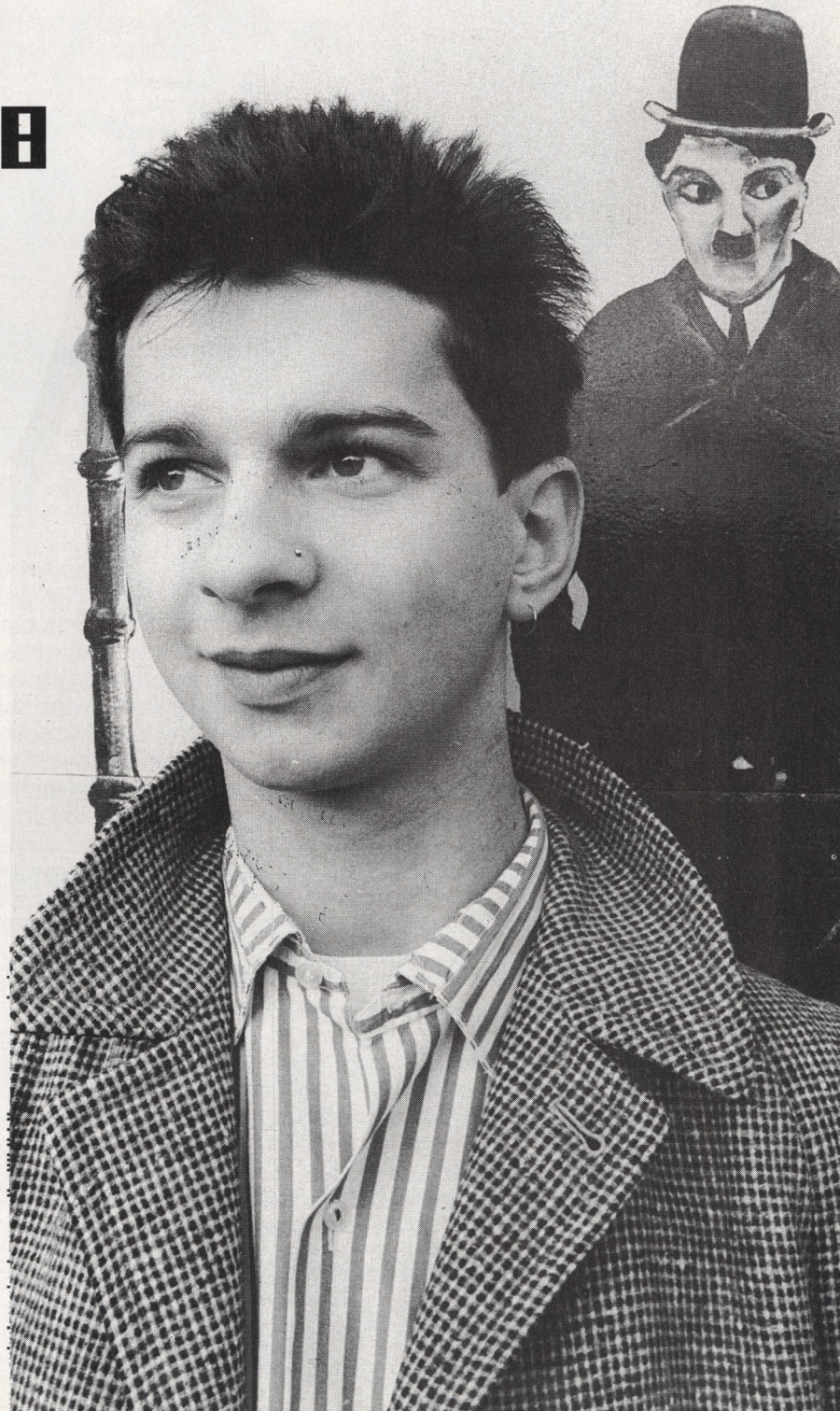
Ultimately, "Construction Time Again" ached under the weight of its own over ambition. With the exception of the two included singles ("Love In Itself" and "Everything Counts"), it sounded as hopelessly confused as the bands attempts to explain it, particularly when they followed Thompson Twins' lead in making a half hearted stab into the belly of the post-industrial, past-the-sell-by-date, metal dance (as hammered to death by Test Department, SPK, Neubauten).

"Despite its flaws I still think of that as one of our purer albums," Gahan said later. "Musically, I guess some of it was forced. Maybe we were trying too hard at the time. I dunno. It was a massive changing-point for us, both musically and lyrically. We were attempting to sample too much and trying to give a message without thinking so much of the structure of the song. We were missing the point really. We'd go out everywhere and spend days sampling the sounds of building-sites. Like kids with a new toy. We'd spend too much time and energy researching the

album, without really concentrating on the songs.

"At the same time, we faced the problem that other people wouldn't allow us to grow up and develop. We were still perceived as a silly little band for girls and kids. We came out in 1981 wearing these stupid clothes and found ourselves grouped with bands like Spandau Ballet and OMD. So we had to break away from that. It took us much longer than we thought. But that album was the first real change for us. In that sense, it was a success."

Depeche Mode were beginning to look beyond the suburban cosiness of Basildon. Having toured in Europe and America (where "Just Can't Get Enough" had become a huge club hit), they were starting to emerge from their shells and realise their own potential. The weird stuff was just about to start.





PERUY PERIOD

"I THINK this year is going to be sort of different," said Andy Fletcher at the start of 1984.

This was the year that Frankie brought controversy back to pop with "Relax", while Depeche did their best to keep up. 1984 was the year that Depeche Mode did the decent thing and weirded out a bit, almost getting banned twice.

In March, "People Are People" gave them their biggest British hit to date and their first American Top 40 hit. Once again, Gore proved that he could write the most dumb-assed lyric going and get away with it. One of the year's big talking points was whether Gore's "People are people/So why should it be/You and I should get along so awfully," was more or less punishing on the nerves than Boy George's, "War is stupid/And people are stupid..."

While Gahan was taking voice lessons from Tona deBrett (the woman behind Johnny Rotten and Adam Ant among others) in London, Martin was moving to West Berlin. Gahan's experiment would prove more short-lived than Martin Gore's. Gahan gave up his lessons when he

realised that deBrett "wanted to turn me into Barbra Streisand!" Gore would continue to live in Berlin with his girlfriend until 1986. The next two Mode albums would be partly recorded and mixed at Berlin's famous Hansa studios, where Bowie's "Heroes" was conceived and completed in 1977.

The release of the "Master And Servant" single in August was preceded by Gore's remark that, "After a few nice pop singles, you're entitled to a bit of perversion." The single, a blatant celebration of S&M ("You treat me like a dog/Get me down on my knees"), only escaped a BBC ban because the censor responsible was taking as holiday. Collectors might be interested to know that the Slavery Whip Mix of the single included the authentic sound of Andy spanking Martin with an

unidentified kitchen utensil.

When Mode appeared on "Top Of The Pops" the week the single peaked at Number Nine, with Gore dolled up to the nines in off-the-peg fetish gear, the band virtually lost their electro-wimp image overnight.

More surprises in October with the release of "Blasphemous Rumours"/"Somebody", double A-side single. The former was as slightly cumbersome but obviously sincere attempt to question the existence of God in the light of human suffering and misery. It was rumoured at the time that the song was a response to the suicide of Gore's sister. "I don't want to start any blasphemous rumours," ran the naggingly addictive chorus. "But I think that God's got a sick sense of humour/And when I die, I expect to find him laughing."

Though the BBC raised no objections to the lyrical content, having learned their lesson from the "Relax" fiasco, the song did incur the wrath of the IBA, The Sun, Mary Whitehouse and the Church itself. "If we can say God so loved the world that He sent his only son," wrote a Basildon priest to Southend's local paper, "He cannot have a sick sense of humour."

The tone of the song was a little surprising considering that all the band had previously talked openly about their religious upbringing. Indeed, it was once revealed that Gore attended Methodist School once a month as late as the end of 1981. If anything, it was a further indication of the group's intention to create something more abrasive. For the next couple of years, Gore particularly would exhibit an almost pathological desire to shock and disturb.

The reception for the "Some Great Reward" album was less than rapturous.

"This album suffers from too many missed grips on good ideas," NME concluded. "It ought to be an intelligent chart contender, a mix of commercial class and magpie manipulation of the unconventional. It isn't."

In Melody Maker, Colin Irwin paid the band as curious back-handed compliment. "Good God," he exclaimed, "I do believe that we're talking about a sparkling Eighties version of The Jam... It used to be okay to slag this bunch off because of their lack of soul, their supposed synthetic appeal, their reluctance to really pack a punch. 'Some Great Reward' just trashes such bad old talk into the ground and demands that you now sit up and take notice of what is happening here, right under your nose."

1985, on the surface of it, was Depeche Mode's least active year yet. Two singles ("Shake The Disease" and "It's Called A Heart") scraped into the Top 20. At the end of the year, with no new album in sight, they issued, "The Singles: 81-85". In between, it seemed as though the band's energies were spent largely in attempting to out-weird each other. Even the normally sound-minded Alan Wilder could be heard claiming, "I'm in a permanent state of being freaked out. I don't know who I am a lot of the time."

Meanwhile, Martin Gore was, at every opportunity, attempting to convince us that he was a few slices short of a loaf.

In a memorable interview with NME, he revealed, "I'm quite a pessimistic person and I see life as quite boring. So I kind of see our songs as Love and Sex Against The Boredom Of Life. Basically I want to represent life's boredom. If you take things to absurd extremes, you're not really reflecting life. Real life is not extreme, so we're not, nor is our music. Sometimes I do change things because they're too bright or summery or poppy. But, if I make boring records and people identify with them, then I've achieved my aim."

He also admitted that the other members of the band were growing increasingly concerned with his mode of attire, now featuring a nice line in leather skirts and frocks. It was as though Gore was attempting to take on the heart-of-darkness trappings and attitudes of Berlin's other infamous inhabitants (Bargeld, Cave and Thirwell). NME's Danny Kelly wasn't convinced. "Try as he might," he wrote in October 1985, "Martin Gore comes across as a viral pop YOP, a Reasonable Seed, a Chad Valley Nick Cave."

As if to silence his sceptics, Gore promptly disappeared for two weeks. When he finally got in touch with the band he explained, "I, er, got kind of lost."

In an interview with Number One at the time, he offered an explanation of this sudden and ludicrous sartorial shift.

"I like to dress up in woman's clothes," he confessed. "That doesn't make me a transvestite and it doesn't mean that I'm, turned on by wearing them. But effeminate clothes do appeal to me. I like the anti-macho combination of jacket and trousers with women's clothes. It disorients people. I'm looking for more interesting things to wear but there aren't that many new designs available in bondage stuff."

When Record Mirror's Nancy Culp caught up with him in Berlin, Gore insisted on being interviewed lying down in the street outside Woolworth's at midnight.

"I love black and I love leather in general," he said. "There's something about dirty leather trousers that I love. I love the idea of being tied up because I love the feeling of helplessness."

Gore would later reflect on this period with acute embarrassment.

"Looking back," he told Q's Mat Snow in 1989, "I'm not very happy about some of the clothes I've worn. Every interview we do, the skirt is mentioned. I actually think it's quite funny. But I regret that so much attention was paid to it and that, even now, there are still people who think I go round dressed like a tranny."

As 1985 drew to a close, there were severe doubts that Depeche Mode would carry on.

In interviews, Gore would complain that he was being given

insufficient space in the band's set-up.

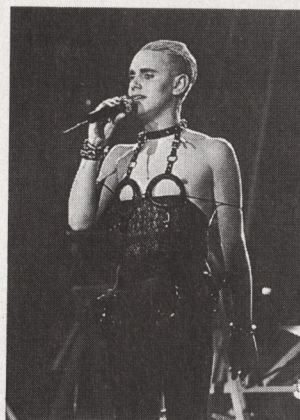
"I've been trying to get away from the softness of contemporary pop," he told Max Bell. "But I know we'll never be totally extreme. I know we'll never really go far enough. Depeche Mode is a democracy and it stops me writing what I really want to write."

"If ever we were going to split up the band," Gahan would say later, "it was at the end of 1985. We were really in a state of turmoil. Constant arguing. Very intense. We weren't really sure where to go after 'Some Great Reward' so we decided to slow things down. But it left us with too much time on our hands. So we spent most of our time arguing. Sometimes, it seems incredible that we came out of that period with the band and our sanity intact."

Some of the confusion was evident in their 1986 album, "Black Celebration". At least it showed though that Mode could craft music of throbbing metallic power when they forgot themselves. As Steve Sutherland noted in his Melody Maker review, "It's when Depeche are being unconsciously throwaway that they attain the sublime." In "A Question Of Lust", "Stripped" and "A Question Of Time", they achieved a near-perfect balance between light and dark, languor and lust. In many ways, these three singles marked their turning-point. For the first time, they sounded self-assured enough to take risks and succeed. For the first time others were beginning to sense that Depeche Mode were preparing themselves for the big push forward.

"If we are to have bands filling the world's stadiums," wrote John Peel in a review of their Wembley Arena show in April, "then let them be like Depeche Mode."

Not everyone was convinced. In a review of their show at Glasgow SECC, NME's Andrea Miller described them as "the most insane mediocrity to ever rise like scum to the top of the British pop business... Depeche Mode are talentless in the most comic way possible".



6

MUSIC FOR THE MASSES

THE problem with this country," Dave Gahan said about Britain in 1989, "is that we've always been underrated artistically. Earlier in our career we felt we had to be in every magazine and paper going, the more the better. We were very naive and because of that we were taken totally the wrong way. We've always been very honest. The British press have found it hard to understand Depeche Mode, though I don't think we're hard to understand at all. We've always had to justify ourselves to the press in Britain and that really offends us."

Elsewhere it was different. Around the world, Depeche Mode had seemingly risen without trace, commanding huge audiences in Europe, the Far East and America. From 1987, the Depeche Mode machine was to accelerate at a furious rate. By the turn of the decade, they would be threatening to surpass U2's commercial accomplishments in the States.

From the time of "Some Great Reward" in 1984, Mode had been headlining huge halls and arenas in California. But, before 1987, they had yet to gatecrash Top 40 radio and sell great quantities of records. Indeed, the "Music For The Masses" album was intended as an ironic comment on their inability to "break" America.

"People assumed that the title was a kind of arrogance on our part," Gahan would say. "But it was a total joke. We felt at the time that our music would never cross over to the general public. We thought we were on the edge between commercial and non-commercial and that's the way it would stay."

"Music For The Masses" was the sound of a group discovering its real potential. At last it seemed as though Depeche Mode were fully coming to terms with their own idiosyncracies.

Sumptuously produced, it showed them working within their limits, no longer straining for effect. Their songs were now full of big flashes, tantalising refrains, voluptuous flushes. They had discovered beauty in the balance of their parts.

In America, it became their first Top 40 album. For the next two years, they would tour relentlessly in the States.

In 1988 alone, they would play to almost half a million Americans, moving beyond cult status into the realm of stadium giants. Depeche Mode had become stadium rock without guitars. Stadium rock without the sweat. The world's first electronic stadium band.

Their 101st concert of the year was held before a 72,000 crowd at the Rosebowl in Pasadena, California, the event captured for posterity by DA



Pennebaker, the director responsible for the classic Sixties rockumentary, Dylan's "Don't Look Back".

"When Depeche Mode first approached me," Pennebaker told The Times' Robert Sandall, "the first thing I did was ring my kids and ask, 'Who the hell are Depeche Mode?' Then I went to see one of their American concerts. What I noticed that made me think there was a film here was the extraordinary relationship I could see between a bunch of well-to-do middle-class American kids and a group of working-class Brits with whom they had almost nothing in common. There was just this abstract, devotional need. In fact, I think Depeche Mode's audience in the States today is very similar to Dylan's in the Sixties."

Both album and video of the "101" show were released in March 1989. By this time, attitudes towards Depeche Mode were changing, even in Britain. A hugely influential feature in The Face by John McCready highlighted the kind of respect that the group was afforded by leading figures in the American techno and House scenes. The band themselves were more than faintly bemused at the idea of being regarded as a seminal influence on the new dance explosion.

"We don't consider our earlier stuff pioneering at all," Gahan told Sky Magazine. "We just did what we did and that was that. You can't deliberately make a record that you think will have a big impact on the future. It was purely an accident that what we did seems to have been picked up by the Acid and House scenes."

The Depeche Mode reappraisal was just beginning. In August 1989 came "Personal Jesus", their most physical pop record to date, a tensile Bolanesque pulse that rode roughshod over any

y the end of 1989, it seemed as though Mode were no longer regarded as part of the furniture in Britain. After 10 years, there was no longer a stigma attached to them. As they



entered the Nineties, they could be forgiven a touch of smug triumph.

"We've never jumped on any bandwagons or tried to go along with the trendies," Gahan would say. "We're going into our second decade but it still seems very fresh. We never wanted to be big for five minutes and that's it. Plus, we've changed, and all the changes have been natural. No one has ever pushed us in any direction. We've always done exactly what we want, the way we want. There's still that naivety of learning, of trying to better ourselves and it's all done with an intense energy, a power and an urgency that's lacking in so many other bands around."

"We're off in our own little world really. We've had all this success yet we're still quite anonymous as people. That's the way we like it really. We're the Pink Floyd of the Eighties and Nineties. A lot of people wouldn't recognise us by our faces at all, but if you were to ask them whether they'd heard of Depeche Mode, they'd say, 'Oh yeah!' Mind you, some people probably think we're some kind of disinfectant. But we wouldn't have it any other way. We like our music to do the talking."

With "Violator", their seventh studio album, Depeche Mode stripped themselves down and put themselves back together again.

"It feels like a new start," Gahan told Melody Maker. "We wanted this album to be very direct, very minimal, as minimal as Depeche Mode can possibly be. We've tried to take things as far as possible away from what we would normally do. I know it's a real head-up-the arse word but this is a very mature record, very solid, very uplifting. After this, people will definitely want to reassess us as a group. It feels right. Who knows where it will go from here."

With "Violator", Depeche Mode bulldozed their way through and at last found a permanent home on MTV and Top 40 radio in America. "Personal Jesus" was their first Top 40 single there since "People Are People" and their first ever gold single. "Violator" would prove to be their first ever million-selling album in the States. In 1990, they would become an astonishing phenomenon, their "World Violation" tour easily eclipsing their success of two years previous.

"We used to really worry how much life we had left in us as a band," Dave Gahan said in March 1990. "We'd wonder if we'd still be around in another five years, wonder if we were going to be left there with nothing to show for it. But we've carried on, album after album, tour after tour, and suddenly everything is right. We've been out there, niggling away, refusing to go away."

"In the last 10 years, we haven't really stopped. In future, we will definitely tour less and less. We'll also make records less and less. That's bound to happen. It's happened already actually. We're into three years between albums now. I think it will become more and more important to us in the future to make a record when we're ready to make it. It's becoming less and less important to do it because the time is right."

After 10 years of "bloody clacking", Mode look set to be weird populists for the Nineties.

"Y'know," says Gahan, "we've always been unique in what we've done. We've always been out on our own. We're just coming to term with that ourselves. Recently we were in the studio and Martin was listening to a lot of our old albums. He suddenly turned round and says, 'We're so f***ing weird!' It's true in a way. We are pretty weird. Not off-the-wall weird necessarily. It's just that our approach is weird for a band that's considered commercial. When we're writing and recording, we don't consider ourselves to be weird. To us, that's just the way we do it. That's normal for us."

"Basically, you have to take Depeche Mode as they come. It's all pretty straightforward really. People can knock it as much as they like, but the fact is that we've survived. Well, that's the wrong word. We've been constantly successful. Very straightforward. But f***ing weird when you think about it!"



DISCOGRAPHY

SINGLES

- "Dreaming Of Me" (Mute 013) February '81
"New Life" (Mute 014) June '81
"Just Can't Get Enough" (Mute 016) September '81
"See You" (Mute 018) January '82
"The Meaning Of Love" (Mute 022) April '82
"Leave In Silence" (Bong 1) August '82
"Get The Balance Right" (Bong 2) January '83
"Everything Counts" (Bong 3) July '83
"Love In Itself" (Bong 4) September '83
"People Are People" (Bong 5) April '84
"Master And Servant" (Bong 6)
"Blasphemous Rumours" / "Somebody" (Bong 7) October '84
"Shake The Disease" (Bong 8) April '85
"It's Called A Heart" (Bong 9) September '85
"Stripped" (Bong 10) February '86
"A Question Of Lust" (Bong 11) April '86
"Strangelove" (Bong 13) April '87
"Never Let Me Down Again" (Bong 14) August '87
"Behoind The Wheel" (Bong 15) December '87
"Everything Counts (Live)" (Bong 16) February '89
"Personal Jesus" (Bong 17) August '89
"Enjoy The Silence" (Bong 18) February '90
"Policy Of Truth" (Bong 19) May '90

ALBUMS

- "Speak And Spell" (Stumm 5) October '81
"A Broken Frame" (Stumm 9) October '82
"Construction Time Again" (Stumm 13) August '83
"Some Great Reward" (Stumm 19)
"The Singles 81-85" (Mute 1) October '85
"Black Celebration" (Stumm 26) April '86
"Music For The Masses" (Stumm 47) September '87
"101" (Stumm 101) April '89
"Violator" (Stumm 62) April '90

