

Duran Duran't

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It's a beautiful cool Fall day today, Saturday, and I'm trying to get this newsletter underway a day early. Grace and I were planning an activity with everyone today. We were going to take the whole crew to the grand opening of the Michigan Folk School, out on Plymouth Road. It's one of those places that has an Ann Arbor mailing address, even though it is closer to Plymouth, Canton, or Ypsilanti than it is to Ann Arbor. The Folk School is at Staebler Farm County Park, which is a brand-new park – this was also the park's opening day – and barely developed yet.

I will not go into a lot of detail about our morning spent arguing with the kids about finishing their chores, but the upshot was that only one kid actually did his part in cleaning up the kitchen and family room without complaint. So I put on shorts and a t-shirt, grabbed a long-sleeve denim shirt to put over it in case I got cold, and drove Sam out Plymouth Road to see what was going on.

It turned out I was the only one wearing shorts, which I had selected because I was way too hot and wanted desperately to be outside and cool down in the Fall weather. I felt great at first, and it took me over an hour to actually cool down and feel comfortable. But then unfortunately the temperature had started to drop and a breeze had kicked up. Since the sun gets low early on these Fall days, I couldn't warm myself by standing in the sun, and soon I was too cold.

In other words, I handled my wardrobe choices with my usual practicality and, of course, keen fashion sense.

The Michigan Folk School

The Folk School will teach all kinds of traditional farming and crafts. There were a number of exhibits. As we approached the small cluster of farmhouse and tents and outbuildings, I thought I heard a very nice sound system playing a traditional string band. As we came around a corner I realized that in fact it was a live band. They sounded that good! There was a display of herbs, and a hands-on exhibit where you were invited to smash them and rub them and smell them. The best-smelling one by far, to me, was an anise hyssop. We really need to grow a bed of that. The lemon balm was a close second, though. There was a small exhibition of blacksmithing, a display of very fine hand-made

hats including some in gorgeous “flapper” styles, a woman spinning, and a man demonstrating wood-turning. We waited in line for a while behind a couple of other kids, as they each got to work on the same piece of wood, and then Sam got to try his hand. The piece of wood was getting kind of skinny at this point. It looked like they were making a toothpick the hard way, but it actually became a Harry Potter-style magic wand, and Sam got to keep it. (Sixteen inches long, apple wood, stiff as a board, light as a feather, Snallygaster heartstring perhaps?)



Figure 1: an older man in a wood shop showing a teenage boy, who is wearing a face shield, how to use a lathe

So, we had a good time. I amused myself looking at the young people and asking myself whether they were Brooklyn “dirtbag left” podcasters or Michigan blacksmiths, small local farmers, or beekeepers – the clothing and hairstyles seem nearly identical. And we watched the ribbon-cutting ceremony. When you’re standing in a field, the ribbon-cutting ceremony consists of two people unrolling a ribbon and holding it up, and a third person cutting it with a comically large pair of scissors. The Staebler family was well-represented at the opening, and several people spoke about Donald Staebler, the patriarch who lived on the property, and died in 2017 at the age of one hundred and six. (Wow! I don’t hear of very many people, especially men, who outlived my grandmother, Marcella Armstrong, who made it to one hundred and two.)

Some thoughts were running through my mind as I looked over the exhibits and activities at the Folk School. I’ve long thought that we have to prepare for a future that is going to look a lot more like our past than like the high-tech future

we were promised. I've been saying for a number of years that all of us need to have global warming victory gardens, and we have to plan to "down-shift" to a more local, less carbon-intensive life. Unfortunately most of us have made almost no progress towards this goal, and it certainly isn't even possible for most people to "opt out" of driving, or using electricity, or buying carbon-intensive products. With most elected officials either actively promoting denial, or blathering about clean capitalism or a carbon-neutral military or offsets, we are making some sort of crash, rather than soft transition, increasingly inevitable.

I think the recent abject infrastructure failure in Northern California suggests a useful thought experiment for the rest of us. Imagine if you learned that in 2020, your residence would only receive electricity six days a week, and in 2021, it would only receive electricity five days a week, and so on, and so you knew that starting in 2027, you simply wouldn't have any power from the grid. What could you do to plan for this, as an individual or a member of a family or extended family? If you are like me, not all that much – you could come up with a plan to prepare by installing solar panels and a full-house battery, putting in a wood stove, getting a wood lot ready, and all that, but you probably couldn't pay for it. And if you're a renter, with no access to land, and you don't even own a mortgage – then what do you do? Just continue to separate your trash and recycling, and stop using plastic straws? That ain't gonna cut it.

That seven-year scenario may not be very likely – the failure of our electrical infrastructure isn't going to be nearly that organized – but here is one I think is more likely: many of us will no longer be able to reliably be able to rely on carbon-intensive, massive, and distant truck farms to supply our produce and proteins, and cheap shipping so that we can continue to purchase poorly-made clothing from overseas sweatshops. We won't all be able to put in our own permaculture food jungles, raise livestock, or start finding everything we need to eat locally. But a lot of us can do **something**, even something as simple as learning to grow microgreens in containers in a sunny window. And we all really, really need to get together with other people in our community who know what's coming.

This Weak Week That Was

It wasn't a great week – again, I worked too many hours and didn't get enough sleep. I'm pleased to say that I'm continuing to make good progress on the products I'm developing; the weeks I spent building up a new software infrastructure – writing the low-level drivers, and writing tests that could run overnight, or over a weekend, to prove that they are reliable – are paying off now. Those were weeks in which I didn't have a lot that I could actually show to my boss or co-workers, except as a pile of code which is as illegible to most people as ancient clay tablets inscribed in cuneiform.

I'm feeling a little discouraged, though, because management has informed us that the trade war and sagging economy are affecting the business. We've been

asked to tighten our belts, as far as expenses go, and to push as hard as we can to get our products into production by the fourth quarter. As an employee, I usually only hear things like this from management when they are trying to prepare people to accept a disappointing bonus, or lower (or no) raise, or some kind of reduction in benefits, such as a switch to a cheaper health care plan or an increase in the amount deducted from each paycheck towards health care. That, or to prepare them for layoffs.

I don't expect the Ann Arbor team to lay anyone off. In fact, we're trying to grow. And I don't think that my job is at risk. I'm contributing critical work to several of our most profitable flagship products. But I've come to count on my end-of-year bonus, even though I probably shouldn't. If it is canceled, or reduced drastically this year, we're going to be in trouble. I won't be able to make the next payment on Joshua's braces, or the kids' choir, or pay for any of the car repairs we still need to do. And I don't know what I will do, in that case. Learn to spin wool?

This is all really because we are still buried in debt – we're just beginning to dig out from the debts we accumulated while we were carrying two mortgages. Because money has been so tight for the last couple of years, we haven't really done Christmas; instead, I've used a bit of the end-of-year bonus to buy the kids, collectively, a New Year's gift they can play with together while we have some days off together, like a big LEGO set. We might have to skip that.

It's a valuable reminder that you should never love your job, because a job can never, ever love you back.

The Constitutional Crisis is Here

So, things happened this week. There is so much I'd like to write about. I have a whole pile of notes. But I *need* to write about how The White House sent a letter:

The White House on Tuesday rejected an impeachment inquiry launched by Democrats in the House of Representatives as “constitutionally invalid...”

Spoiler: it's not.

The White House argued that the three other impeachment inquiries in American history, against presidents Andrew Johnson, Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton, all included House votes, and that this should serve as precedent for the impeachment of President Donald Trump.

There's a big difference between “different than precedent” and “unconstitutional.”

The letter argues – a contention denied by the Democrats – that the impeachment effort is simply aimed at reversing the result of the 2016 presidential election and influencing the 2020 election.

That's actually true, in a sense; I mean, impeachment combined with *removal from office* would, effectively, overturn an election. (Sort of; Trump is most of the way through his first term). And, of course, if he *is* impeached, this very well could influence the *outcome* of the 2020 election. Would the Republican party run a candidate that had been impeached? What about a candidate that had been impeached and removed from office? That could be interesting. And what if the impeachment hearings happen, but the vote fails? It's hard to believe that wouldn't influence the election, but I'm really not sure which way it would influence it.

But none of this really has any bearing on constitutionality of the impeachment proceedings. The Constitution doesn't dictate just how it has to happen, and it doesn't say that it can't influence an election. In fact the Constitution is quite terse on the subject of impeachment:

The President, Vice President and all civil officers of the United States, shall be removed from office on impeachment for, and conviction of, treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors.

And:

The House of Representatives shall choose their Speaker and other Officers; and shall have the sole Power of Impeachment.

Wikipedia [explains] that

The Constitution does not specify how impeachment proceedings are to be initiated. Until the early 20th century, a House member could rise and propose an impeachment, which would then be assigned to a committee for investigation. Presently, it is the House Judiciary Committee that initiates the process and then, after investigating the allegations, prepares recommendations for the whole House's consideration. If the House votes to adopt an impeachment resolution, the Chairman of the Judiciary Committee recommends a slate of "managers," whom the House subsequently approves by resolution. These Representatives subsequently become the prosecution team in the impeachment trial in the Senate (see Section 3, Clause 6 below).

But all that just describes how it has been done – matters of House rule and parliamentary procedure. These things aren't actually matters that have any bearing on the constitutionality or unconstitutionality of the proceedings *per se*.

Section 3, Clause 6 reads:

The Senate shall have the sole Power to try all Impeachments. When sitting for that Purpose, they shall be on Oath or Affirmation. When the President of the United States is tried, the Chief Justice shall preside: And no Person shall be convicted without the Concurrence of two thirds of the Members present.

So, the House proposes, and the Senate disposes.

And clause 7 reads:

Judgment in Cases of Impeachment shall not extend further than to removal from Office, and disqualification to hold and enjoy any Office of honor, Trust or Profit under the United States: but the Party convicted shall nevertheless be liable and subject to Indictment, Trial, Judgment and Punishment, according to Law.

And so, actually, impeachment (carried out) *can* be used to disqualify a person from holding elected office in the future, which of course would qualify as “influencing an election.”

While Trump has certainly embodied corruption, profiteering from office, and abuse of power from day one, and has harmed a lot of people and threatened others by his administration’s policies, this to me represents the most blatant attack on the Constitution by his administration to date. He’s staking out the position, in writing, that the executive branch can simply opt out of the impeachment investigation, and advise all his staff that they can do the same, up to and including, apparently, ignoring subpoenas.

This is exactly the kind of thing that the “inherent contempt” process was designed to counter:

Under this process, the procedure for holding a person in contempt involves only the chamber concerned. Following a contempt citation, the person cited is arrested by the Sergeant-at-Arms for the House or Senate, brought to the floor of the chamber, held to answer charges by the presiding officer, and then subjected to punishment as the chamber may dictate (usually imprisonment for punishment, imprisonment for coercion, or release from the contempt citation).

And it’s been used before, although not very often:

After a one-week trial on the Senate floor (presided over by Vice President John Nance Garner, in his capacity as Senate President), William P. MacCracken, Jr., a lawyer and former Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Aeronautics who was charged with allowing clients to remove or rip up subpoenaed documents, was found guilty and sentenced to 10 days imprisonment.

And it’s been found constitutional:

MacCracken filed a petition of habeas corpus in federal courts to overturn his arrest, but after litigation, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Congress had acted constitutionally, and denied the petition in the case *Jurney v. MacCracken*.

Pelosi, though, is not the kind of leader who is willing to take such a stand. She’s said that she hopes to bring impeachment to a vote quickly:

In narrowing the investigation, from a wide-ranging examination of the lengthy Trump-Russia investigation, Pelosi is said to be hoping for a quicker resolution to the impeachment inquiry. The Washington Post, citing Democrats and congressional aides, said Pelosi has instructed House committees to file the results of their individual investigations within weeks.

That could build towards a vote around Thanksgiving, reports suggested. The celebration, always on the fourth Thursday in November, falls on 28 November this year.

Watergate took more than two years.

Whatever Pelosi's doing, it doesn't seem that she is really taking her role as leader of the House, and the rights and duties of the House, seriously. And we should be wondering why that is. If she won't wield that gavel, we need someone who will.

Trump's actually been calling for *Pelosi* to be impeached. But that isn't a thing; it's been held that impeachment doesn't apply to senators and representatives. However, they can be removed from office. And that isn't even really a remedy that is necessary; we just need a new speaker.

And again, we should really be asking ourselves why the Democrats are cooperating with the Trump administration to allow the every-growing power of the "unitary executive."

Meanwhile, Trump's rallies are growing ever more deranged and dangerous, and Fox News is fracturing. It's bad, folks.

I'm just an unfrozen caveman computer programmer, and I really don't claim to know much about this stuff, but I'm looking forward to hearing what Corey Brettschneider has to say about it; he'll probably discuss it on the David Feldman show. I'll post a link next week if there is a conversation I can recommend.

Meanwhile, you can watch Jonathan Coulton's video.

And now, for something a bit lighter.

***Duran Duran* and the Not-so-masterful Remastering (or, Why *Duran Duran Duran*'t Sound Good No More)**

For no good reason that I can explain at all, I've recently become interested in Duran Duran again after many, many years. In particular, their first album, which I still think is their best album. I never had this first album on vinyl, although I did have a copy of the band's third album, *Seven and the Ragged Tiger*. That album has a lot of ear candy in it, but most of the songs just aren't very memorable songs. Almost every one of them has too few good musical ideas repeated too many times.

So, their first album. This album is actually densely packed with musical ideas. Duran Duran was also heavily promoted as barely-legal teen icons, almost like a boy band. That portrayal together with the obnoxiously sexist and scornful music videos produced for their second album, *Rio*, colored my opinion of their music back in the day, so much so that I don't think I could really *hear* the music properly. It isn't just bubblegum pop; I'm quite serious when I say that there is a lot going on in the album, *musically*, and that it has held up a lot better than one might expect.

Almost forty years later, it is still hard to hear Duran Duran's first album properly, but for different reasons.

On my birthday, I ordered myself a copy of that first eponymous album, *Duran Duran*. It's strangely hard to find CD pressings of this album. There are 151 versions of the album, according to discogs.com. Most of these are just various overseas pressings of the same tracks, but the track listing has also been tinkered with several times, and the album has been remastered several times as well. When looking for a copy on eBay, I was particularly interested in the most recent remastered version, done in 2010, the three-disc set with a number of unreleased tracks. The eBay seller I bought it from didn't ship for a week – it shipped on the day it was supposed to arrive – but it eventually got here.

The Album

Duran Duran, the album, was of course a highly packaged and produced recording. The band, like David Bowie, and clearly heavily influenced by David Bowie, seemed at least as interested in fashion as they did in music. But unlike a number of the other relatively vapid bands of the era, Duran Duran could actually play, despite their youth. Synthesizer player Nick Rhodes was only about eighteen when the first album came out, and the baby-faced Simon Le Bon was actually the eldest, about twenty-two.

I recall that they got a lot of crap for their emphasis on fashion and their music videos. Le Bon's face was just a little bit pudgy, and when he put on a little bit of weight – just a few pounds, probably mostly gained from drinking too many bottles of wine on tour – Chris Farley on Saturday Night Live did a brutal impression which was at least as abusive to Farley as it was to Le Bon.

But this album is documentary evidence that the band could play, and not only could they play, but they had really started to develop an aesthetic that combined the music and the fashion; they were inseparable, as they were for Bowie. It's an appealing aesthetic, mostly, although in 2019 it has an even stronger stench of sexism and self-destructive nihilism. But the music was cool as hell. Every track on this album is at least good, and a few are great.

“Girls on Film” opens the album with a motorized camera shutter – a sound that most people these days will only ever hear because their cell phone emulates it. The song evolves with a very punchy, popping bass line and an interesting drum

part, with a lot of little fills and hits. I love the slashing, heavily compressed, shimmery guitar chords that come flying in; it's an iconic eighties sound. I'm guessing that it is an old "Dyna Comp" MXR compressor pedal, like the one used by Jamie West-Oram of The Fixx. And the song has one of the great virtues that a pop song can possess – it's not too long.

While "Girls on Film" still sounds great, the lyrics are pretty disturbing:

*The diving man's coming up for air
'Cause the crowd all love pulling dolly by the hair
By the hair
And she wonders how she ever got here
As she goes under again*

I'm not sure just what is going on in this song, but I don't think "dolly" would really consent to it, at least not if she had other options.

The second track, "Planet Earth" still lives in a zone with Flock of Seagull's "I Ran," somewhere right at the intersection several genres: the end of punk, and the beginnings of both new wave and electronic dance music. And there, it will live forever. The music video to this song is laughably dated, with shirtless Le Bon and ridiculous "new romantic" Byronesque costumes. The video-toasterish setup has the band performing on a tiny plateau with unconvincing precipitous drops on all sides. As an expression of the band's nihilism, at the very end of the music video, Le Bon appears to leap off. Perhaps he just wanted out of the video.

Songs like "Anyone Out There" and "To the Shore" are decent pop tracks, showcasing the bass and layered vocals. "To The Shore" features an interesting synth intro, with some sounds that will come back on the band's second album, in the best track on that album, "The Chauffeur." But I'm getting ahead of myself. "Careless Memories" is one of the better tracks, aggressive and dark, with grinding guitars, and pretty decent lyrics describing the wreckage of a smashed relationship:

*So soon just after you've gone
My senses sharpen
But it always takes so damn long
Before I feel how much my eyes have darkened
Fear hangs in a plane of gun smoke
Drifting in our room
So easy to disturb, with a thought, with a whisper
With a careless memory, with a careless memory*

My personal favorite song on the album is the next track, "Night Boat." It's a weird, weird track – with a lot of very cool, now-vintage synth sounds, layered with a melody and guitar and bass. The melody is in an oddball musical mode. I'm not sure just what mode it is in, but it seems to also bring in some some dissonant intervals that pop out of the bass line and vocal now and then,

emphasizing the spooky feel. The rhythm of the song is intriguingly weird, too, and during the breakdown it slows down several times in a way that really throws off the ear, and the bass line brings in some nice tapped harmonics. The lyrics a vaguely evocative of someone waiting to cross the Styx, but “vague” is the operative word here. I don’t mind it, though – the interplay between percussion, bass, guitars, and synthesizers is enough.

The rest of the album is competently done, but “Sound of Thunder” and “Friends of Mine,” both too long for radio, just aren’t as memorable as the others. The album closes with an instrumental, “Tel Aviv.” This starts out interesting, blending a lot of string sounds and including some vaguely (there’s that word again) ethnic wordless singing. But at over five minutes, it wears out its welcome a bit; David Byrne and Brian Eno did this kind of cultural appropriation much better on their landmark album *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*.

The Mastering

This mastering was controversial:

Just days after the discs were released, Duranies were filling messageboards with criticism of the mastering, citing audio “level-bouncing” and other problems. “These new remasters have lost all of their dynamic range, have been compressed into a big brick wall of garbage, and the high range/treble’s pushed so high that it’s literally painful on the ears to listen to,” wrote one fan on Amazon.

Even the band’s guitarist weighed in:

On Twitter, Duran Duran guitarist Andy Taylor slammed the new releases. “Sounds like it was done down the pub,” he wrote. “Permission will be buried in a 30-year old contract, but I can express my utter disgust & the remastering’s crap.”

Taylor is correct. Not all the tracks on these discs, but just the nine original album tracks, have been remastered, and the remastering job is bad. The tracks were heavily compressed. This type of compression is known as “brick wall” limiting – every sound is made louder, but the individual audio samples are chopped off so that they don’t exceed the maximum CD audio level. So this avoids one type of digital distortion, that comes from exceeding the maximum volume level a CD can hold, but this ignores the fact that digital-to-analog converters, when trying to reconstruct chopped-off peaks like this, will create a lot of harmonic distortion that isn’t there when playing older versions.

The result is *surprisingly* bad. On my somewhat exotic Pelosi (no, not Nancy) studio monitors, it sounds a little more bearable than it does on less capable speakers. But audio engineers know that they really should listen to the tracks they are creating on several different speakers; the challenge is not to create a track that sounds good in the studio, but a track that sounds good in a car or through less capable speakers. Played through my old Rotel CD player, Onkyo

receiver, and Sony bookshelf speakers – which really do a very good job with a lot of stuff, including classic rock, electronic dance music, and the audio from movies on DVD – these tracks sound *painful*. The compression means that the tracks are very fatiguing to listen to. Every second of the album from the opening camera-clicking sound to the end of the last track is pretty much at the exact same volume, and that volume is “painfully loud.” It also sounds terrible through the beat-up old speakers in my car.

It isn’t just the excessive compression. As that Amazon review mentions, the high frequencies have been boosted, for some reason. In isolation, this means that sounds like the cymbals and high hats and some of the synthesizer and guitar sounds are boosted, and so you can hear that high-frequency detail better. But together, when the high frequencies from the drum hits and cymbal crashes and synthesizer pads blend together in the mix, they produce a constant abrasive “sizzle” which is very fatiguing. It also sounds like the mid-bass ranges have been cut a bit. Engineers do this to reduce “mud,” but in this case the other versions did not sound muddy. And now the electric bass guitar doesn’t sound like a real electric bass guitar should.

I’m at a loss to explain why the label did this. It’s possible that the master tapes of the mixed album tracks have been played too many times, and lost some of the high frequencies over the years. That happens. But the solution is to *gently* restore them. Not every remastered CD *has* to sound bad. A few years ago, the whole back catalog of the Beatles was re-released on CD, and it sounds fantastic. A team of very skilled audio engineers worked on those releases, and they approached the project like the restoration of a painting.

As an experiment, I tried using the equalizer in iTunes on this track. It’s not the world’s best digital equalizer. It adds a fair amount of audible phase distortion. But I wanted to see if I could make it sound better. I can’t fix the smashed dynamic range, but at least I can try to fix the nasty equalization. It turns out that if I put a fairly dramatic curve on the high frequencies, cutting the frequencies at 16kHz by almost 3dB, and a little less at 8kHz and 4kHz, it sounds much less fatiguing. And if I boost the frequencies at 250Hz and 500Hz similarly, the bass sounds much more natural. It’s hardly perfect – you can’t take CD-quality track and just *fix* the equalization without doing collateral damage to the sound quality, but I have some plug-ins that run off-line (in other words, not while the track is playing) that can do a better job; they can “declip” the track a bit, and apply higher-quality equalization algorithms.

Mastering is supposed to be a process of making very delicate and deliberate tweaks to the finished mixed tracks – for a mastering engineer to push a wide range of frequencies up by almost 3dB is, basically, for that engineer to make a statement that the original track needed *drastic* correction.

That person was wrong.

I’ve never studied this stuff formally, and I’ve never been paid to mix or master audio tracks. I’m entirely an amateur, and nearly entirely self-taught, and I

don't claim to be very good at it at all. But this person, whoever it was, that remastered the album tracks? That was a motherfucking *amateur*. This job was *botched*.

I've tried to track down a couple of earlier CD pressings for comparison. When they arrive, I can compare. But I don't actually regret tracking down this advance copy of the special three-disc edition, now out of print, and that's because of the other stuff on the album. Only the original album tracks were wrecked with shoddy mastering. And the other stuff is interesting!

The Other Stuff

This edition comes with four B-side tracks on the first CD, a whole second CD of rarities and unreleased tracks, and a DVD containing music videos and television appearances from back in the day.

The B-sides include an instrumental called "Khanada," which has some intriguing musical ideas but isn't very well developed, and a cover of David Bowie's "Fame." Duran Duran's "Fame" isn't bad, exactly – it sounds pretty cool – but the things that sound cool in it are exactly the same things that sound cool in the original. They copied Bowie's singing style very precisely. In my view a cover that attempts to clone the original song may be technically good, but if it doesn't highlight an artist's unique spin on the original, it doesn't really need to exist.

On the second CD, there is some quite interesting stuff. Duran Duran apparently recorded a number of tracks at Air Studios, and these versions are noticeably different – they are somewhat less polished, and lacking a lot of the Duran Duran signature sound – which must have come from the producer that they worked with later. But the "wall of guitars" sound in the alternate version of "Girls on Film" is nifty, and I like the fact that this track sounds so raw. The next track is a song entitled "Tel Aviv," which one might think is an earlier version of the instrumental track "Tel Aviv" on the album itself, but in fact it isn't – it's a completely different song, with lyrics, and not all that good a song. It features a long guitar solo that sounds so much like the solo on "As My Guitar Gently Weeps" that I think releasing it would have risked a lawsuit. Then the saxophones kick in, and it's six minutes long, and goes seriously bombastic, but yet somehow fails to have a decent ending. So they reused the title, but not the song, and for good reasons. In "Tel Aviv" in particular, Duran Duran still sounded a bit like a bar band, looking backwards at their influences rather than forwards towards more original sounds. And in the version of "Anyone Out There" that appears next, the instruments sound good but Le Bon's vocal performance is listless and weak, and even off-key in parts.

Next up, there are three tracks called "Manchester Square Demos." The tracks, versions of "Planet Earth," "Friends of Mine," and the B-side "Late Bar," sound more like the album tracks, but they are a bit less polished. These have an appealing rawness to them, but are definitely still a work in progress, especially where the vocals are concerned – not just the lead vocal line, the harmony vocals

as well. It's better than many bands could do live, and so it would fit right in if this was a live track, but it isn't, and it isn't quite the quality you'd expect in an album track.

After the early studio versions and demos, we get four live versions, recorded for the BBC, and four "Night" versions – two more mixes each of "Girls On Film" and "Planet Earth" that were intended for dance clubs. These are better than I expected – quite listenable, especially in comparison with dance remixes from their later albums. The band worked on these remixes, rather than just leaving it up to a remix artist who had only the original tracks to work with, so there are more solos, extended riffs that sound pretty decent.

The DVD contains some neat stuff. There are several "performances" on British TV shows that are obviously and entirely lip-synched. There's also one outdoor show that looks like it was filmed on the green at a college, and it's also lip-synched, which is laughable. This was in fact not an uncommon practice; a lot of these bands weren't quite capable of producing a live performance that sounded much like the album tracks, and so this was deemed the less embarrassing option. But the DVD also proves that these tracks used to sound *better* than the remastered tracks on the first disc – they have much more dynamic range, and sound much more natural, and are less fatiguing to the ear.

Things get more interesting with some of the BBC sessions. The band did a performance of "Night Boat" which was *partially* live. There's actually a reel-to-reel tape deck on stage, and after a brief synthesizer introduction, Nick Rhodes starts the tape, which adds layers of synthesizers and other instruments, presumably taken from the original album multi-track recordings, that the band can't reproduce live. From that point on, some of it is live – the lead vocal, the bass, and at least some of the guitar and synthesizer and percussion. This presents a particular challenge: the band has to follow the tape, because the tape can't listen to the drummer and pace itself accordingly. But they do quite a good job.

Among the music videos are the original, uncensored version of "Girls On Film," presented next to the censored version. Back in the day, "Girls On Film" caused a lot of publicity/manufactured scandal because it's pretty naughty. It still seems naughty in 2019, while at the same time presenting a startling array of sexist stereotypes... which are also often funny, if for all the wrong reasons.

There's also the original promotional video for "Night Boat." It's weird as hell. They made a very, very low-budget short zombie-horror film, probably an homage to some of the cheesy Italian zombie movies that were *au courant* at the time. The video itself is laughably bad, but it has one moment that I remember from back in the day, when I first saw the video, because it made a big impression on me. The long musical introduction in the track has dialogue overdubbed, as music videos sometimes did. The band members are awaiting the arrival of someone. Le Bon is asked "who is she?" Although it's hard to hear, because the dialogue isn't properly compressed and mixed with the music, Le Bon responds

with words from Mercutio's speech in *Romeo and Juliet*:

*She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes
In shape no bigger than an agate stone
On the forefinger of an alderman,
Drawn with a team of little atomi
Over men's noses as they lie asleep.*

It makes no damned sense, but fourteen-year-old me thought it was cool as hell, and since that nerdy and decidedly unfashionable kid is still part of me, I still feel bound to respect his opinion.

Until next week!

About This Newsletter

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