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an englishman

Over a fish and chip supper in his Los Angeles home, **DAVE STEWART** talks to Philip Bradley about living in America, production, and the making of a new album from the most successful duo of the decade,

THE EURYTHMICS

Pix:Bodnar



EURHYMICS

Los Angeles: dream home of Hollywood, innumerable Rock stars and the just plain rich. A city designed for deep suntans, big cars, and bigger spenders. Believe the cliché - everything here really is bigger: the people eat big food, in big restaurants, off big plates; it's life lived like the movies.

Should you tire of participating in the non-stop parade of wealth and winners, you can always turn on the TV instead, and have The American Dream delivered to your door, 24 hours a day, toll free. One enormously popular show simply sells jewellery by credit card to its viewers, gold and silver (and in all probability, myrrh) in any shape and style you want, an endless outpouring From Us To You. The Three Wise Men had nothing on this place. This is consumer heaven, achievable now, and everyone here believes The Dream. Even those who, discredited, can only try to take a piece of someone else's...

As the record company Pontiac turned down Wilshire Boulevard, I watched two young guys kissing the gravel by the roadside, hands cuffed behind their backs. The police revolvers held to their heads were big. Naturally. In fact, from where they were lying, they must have looked enormous.

Our car drove on.

Dinner At Dave's Place

Dave Stewart takes a deep breath and sighs contentedly from beneath his now-customary shades. He's come a long way from the boy who played BEATLES and DYLAN covers on the local Sunderland Folk circuit. Indeed, as the light streams through the beautifully leaded windows of his beautifully-appointed Beverly Hills home, it seems hard to reconcile the two.

The plate of fish and chips helps. That, and the mug of steaming hot tea marking the varnish next to it on the immaculate designer table. As an emblem of the man, you couldn't wish for anything more apt. Stewart relishes the contradiction; remains acutely aware of the other side of life. Having grown up against the grim industrial prospects of his native Sunderland, where "nothing ever happened", it's a motto he has learned to live by. Not for him a Hard Times schtick played out in every interview. Instead, the changes he has gone through are there in the music. The new Eurythmics album, untitled at the time we spoke, embodies them; there are stark contrasts between the 21st Century synthesis which first defined The Eurythmics sound on their 1983 smash *Sweet* ▶

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◀ *Dreams*; and the 60's Soul-inspired vocals first given full rein on 1985's Lennox/Turner duet, *Sisters (Are Doing It For Themselves)*. Now, with the introduction of 50's Blues-tinged guitar (most notably on the track *We Two Are One*, and complementing his new greaser hairdo perfectly) there is yet another strand; it seems as if Dave is reaching even further back this time in his search for inspiration.

"Yeah, we don't mind admitting to people that we are jumbled, in the sense that we have many different sides. There is one side which is the very electronic stuff like *Sweet Dreams*, and the other is a kind of showman attitude where we just get up and play."

The 'get up and play' motive is definitely to the fore this time, with the whole album-writing process revolving around "... a nucleus of a band...it was recorded live. We used Olle Romo who played on *Be Yourself Tonight*, on drums, Pat Seymour (keyboards) and a guy called Chu Chu, who played bass on a lot of things. It's like a little band really."

He smiles, takes a sip of tea and continues.

"With *Savage* it was a completely electronic feel. We were going back to our early electronic experimental roots. So after we had spent two years with *Savage*, this album was like coming out. We like to move from one feel to another so we don't get stuck into a rut. The Eurythmics is still a duo, but this album features more live playing. It's very exciting when someone else walks into the room and everything changes. It's like an artist who decides to do a series of paintings that would all be three inches square: he's gonna think completely differently than if he was working on a canvas 20ft by 20ft. So, we wrote them in a different way. Being a showman is important too."

The French Connection

Having made the decision to record the album with a live feel, it was time to make tracks - over to Europe, to begin recording. The album was mainly recorded in France; specifically in the unlikely venue of a French Chateau. Dave takes up the story...

"It's never been a studio and has never had any connection with the music business...the people who owned it were approached by a group of strange people saying 'can we rent your house?'"

He smiles.

"To rent that house for three months was about a third of the price of booking a conventional studio and yet the library was full of £10 million worth of books including William Blake signed books, loads of D H Lawrence..."

Once a suitable venue had been found for the recording, Dave and Annie set about whipping the songs into shape. Once again, traditional methods were forsaken, in favour of a more surreal approach.

"On the last album we just set up the gear and played; no sound proofing or anything, just playing away in the Gentleman's smoking room. This album was done in a similar way. A bit like the SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE method where you just plug in and jump around in the control room. Charlie Wilson from the GAP BAND came in and did some keyboards...We put all the amps in different rooms like the bathroom and got some really long leads, listened through the monitors and jumped around in the control room."

The lyric side was similarly improvised - albeit over a longer period.

"When we started...when we were first writing...Annie had lots of words that she'd collected and they are not set words, they are random lines/thoughts...and, I usually don't try and write anything until I am just sitting down ready for the album. I don't actually write songs in that I just play them from beginning to end, like automatic writing/painting. I just play a song from beginning to end without actually knowing how they are going to turn out. Every ▶

DAVE'S TOP TEN ALBUM AIDS

In 1985 when we last asked Dave for his fave gear guide, walkmans and similar cheapos figured highly. The cheapies are still there - but these days Dave likes to add...Well, see for yourself:

1 I've got about ten SPX90'S which basically save a lot of time because they've got some really good presets. I've got some here in studio and some over in France ●

2 Drawmer gates because they are really effective. I use them in funny ways; I sometimes send all the reverb of the strings and acoustic guitars to the gate, and then trigger it from the snare drum. So, it opens up only when you hit the snare drum and you only get the reverb sound. It changes throughout the mix and you get this kind of musical snare going 'Ping pong' and the listener doesn't really know what is doing it, but it sounds really different from a normal record and you can't do that with a lot of other gates because they are not precise enough ●

3 I love to use compression, it's just a good effect ●

4 Gretsch guitars have such a warm sound and when you distort them, it's not like anything else, they are very good for rhythm sounds ●

5 I love Rickenbacker 12 strings because they have a completely ridiculous sound. It's like a wall of sound ●

6 Portastudios, because they're simple and for the sheer spontaneous way that you can put ideas down ●

7 The Compaq computer for composing. It's very portable and quick and really helps when we are making quick demos ●

8 I've still got an affection for the old Juno 6 because you don't have to fiddle around making new sounds. ●

9 We used the Synclavier on *Savage* a lot, basically because there is so much you can do with it ●

10 Orchestras are another favourite and in particular Cellos and Oboes. With synths, you can't get that 'de de de de de' flourishing sound like on the beginning of *Here Comes The Rain Again*. It's very difficult to do that playing a synth ●

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◀ song on this album is like that. I find it very unnatural to walk into a room and say 'what shall we write a song about?'

"So, over two years Annie will have written a selection of words that will relate to something very strong. Then we'd start singing over a section of the song until we found a good feel, and basically piece it together like that. Once we've married it together and changed the words slightly, it becomes a bit more polarised."

"When we were writing it we used acoustic and electric guitar and about four keyboards: the DX 7 rack and....in fact I quite like it when it's basic and you are using old patchcord synths and a Woolworths guitar that doesn't sound right. The demo wouldn't sound that much different from the album. It was just that it was played by a band. But sometimes we'd go back to the demo and completely change it. There's a song called *When The Day Goes By* ...when we came to play it I changed the whole feel including some of the chord changes. I thought it sounded a bit too normal, so I went back and made it a bit more sparse."

Guitar Crazy

No stranger to the guitar, Dave has quite a collection, probably about 20 in all. Confessing a fondness for all sorts, including Gretsch, Fender Strats, The Robin Octave (a guitar which plays an octave above the normal range, Dave has employed its distinctive tones on previous tours) Rickenbacker 6 & 12 strings, and a Guild 12 string, it becomes obvious that he just loves sound. It came as a surprise then, that for this album, he tended to stick to the sound of a Gretsch that he had bought from a mate just before Christmas.

"I bought it off this guy called Flu who came round to our house. He was pretty desperate to sell this guitar, so I took it and had it all re-set. It was kind of difficult to keep it in tune, but I persevered. I used it to effect on that track *We Two Are One*, which has this 6/8 rhythm like TEARS FOR FEARS' *Everybody Wants To Rule The World*.. I also love THE PLASTIC ONO BAND and John Lennon's guitar sound on *Cold Turkey*. I wanted to marry these feelings together, and that's basically how the original idea came about: the 6/8 rhythm, and a distorted Gretsch sound. The other thing was the contrast between the Blues guitar and a sequencer going *dun dun dun dun*. So it sounds like a Blues track, but with these odd sequencer sounds.

"With the solo, you know when George Benson used to sing along with his guitar, well, Annie learned to sing along with the solo. And, because the song is called *We Two Are One*, it was like a marriage of the guitar and voice. The sentiment of the song I really like, 'cos when two people are linked together whether they like it or not - like with Annie and me - she always knows I'll be there to help or vice versa. It's just saying it is not one persons' problem but two peoples' problem."

Production Matters

Stewart has helmed the last seven Eurythmics albums, as well as having produced the likes of FEARGAL SHARKEY, BOB DYLAN, TOM PETTY and THE RAMONES. However, with the latest album he made the decision to bring in American producer Jimmy Iovine for the role of co-producer. As with most things, he is direct about the reason.

"It was basically to stop Annie and I killing each other. An intermediate person, because I'd done seven albums in a row with The Eurythmics and it was getting difficult to look at it from an

outside point of view. Annie and I argue about everything, from music to ideals, etc.

"It was really strange working with Jimmy 'cos he'd suggest something and I'd be thinking completely the opposite, but I'd keep my mouth shut and wait and see. He was very respectful that I had done seven albums and he found a lot about how the Eurythmics worked that he didn't quite understand, 'cos we don't work like a normal group anyway. He found two lunatics that did everything from *There Must Be An Angel* to *Would I Lie To You?*..", He pauses, and continues in his unadulterated Wearside accent.

"I think space is one of the most important things in



Dave rocks out in the East Wing

production. Most other producers criticise me for it, but I think it is very hard to capture people's imagination when you're cramming their brains full of messages. I never like to fill up a track. Everybody that I work with knows my 'take no prisoners approach' which means if something is on a track then it should be featured and if it is not in, then it should be out. Trevor Horn would be horrified at some of my mixes, yet I really like some of his. It's taste."

We'll soon be treated to further examples of Dave's taste - he's already demo'd seven songs for a solo album, which, he promises, "...Is going to be very different from anything The Eurythmics have done." He's also running his own label, Anxious Records, and is putting the finishing touches to a TV programme for Channel 4 which involves him sharing the back seat of a '57 Chevy with assorted guest musicians whilst travelling across America. Tom Petty has already appeared in pre-publicity for the back seat gig; Living Colour are one of the other bands under consideration.

Living In America

The following evening, we're at a party with Dave Stewart. An LA sort of affair. Harry Dean Stanton sprawls on a chair, lazily strumming phrases from *Paris, Texas*.. A well-known Brit DJ emerges from the bathroom, sniffing, dabbing his nose, bright-eyed. Annie Lennox sits aloof, cross-legged in the corner, in plain white shirt and trousers; keeping a low party profile. And Dave Stewart is raving with a fans' enthusiasm over the impromptu performance of a Flamenco singer. "She's good, isn't she?" he bawls, digging me in the ribs, an island of Geordie enthusiasm in an ocean of Californian cool. America hasn't changed Dave Stewart, although he's doing his best to change America.

Philip Bradley