

I've heard a thousand words

Return of the young Devils 12th July 2002

by Caitlin Moran

What would Duran Duran have sounded like if its original singer Stephen Duffy hadn't left? He and Nick Rhodes can now give the world a clue. Our critic listens agog

Stephen Duffy and Nick Rhodes are such perfect lunching company for the Harvey Nichols restaurant in London that the store should consider renting them out by the hour. Louche, wry, knowingly pretentious and dressed to the nines, it's like being with Statler and Waldorf from The Muppets as scripted by Scott Fitzgerald. While Stephen and I wait for Nick, a waiter runs past baring gaudy cocktails. "Mr Rhodes has entered the building, then," Stephen notes wryly.

When Rhodes does turn up, it's with the air of someone who's just left his yacht parked rakishly on the meter outside. "Oh, goodness, the gypsy look really isn't working for some, is it?" he sighs, looking at the other diners.

He chooses the only vegetarian, dairy-free item on the menu ("I do occasionally have cheese, but the idea of cream is beyond the pale, isn't it?") and fails to notice that Duffy has ordered a wine called "Seberduranto" in

tribute to their roots as members of Eighties band Duran Duran. He also manages a sentence that spans Brian Eno, Andy Warhol and Christian Dior within a minute of sitting down.

However, as I've grown up in The Era of Duran Duran, Rhodes isn't what I was expecting. I was primed for a glacial alien who quoted bits from unpublished Hemingway letters and, every ten minutes or so, emitted a moody bank of dry ice from his pores with a gentle hiss.

This Nick Rhodes, however, is, well, David "cheap as chips" Dickinson from Bargain Hunt. As legendary, travelled and linen-suited as Rhodes is, there's a skein of indelible Birmingham that runs through him. It makes the idea of the adolescent Rhodes and Duffy in Edgbaston in 1979, trying to kick-start the New Romantic revolution in satin jodhpurs, all the more endearing.

For those who weren't aware, it was Rhodes and Duffy, rather than Rhodes and the band's frontman Simon Le Bon, who first tried to turn all of Britain into girly fops with Duran Duran. Duffy was the original lead singer/songwriter before a flouncy argument about literature saw Duffy leave to have one quick solo hit with Kiss Me. He then spent the next 21 years being Britain's most under-rated pastoral pop-folk artist with the Lilac Time.

But now, like a pop Sliding Doors, we get to see what would have happened if Duffy had stayed with Duran Duran.

Calling themselves the Devils for their album *Dark Circles*, Duffy and Rhodes lead us into a parallel world where the eight songs that Duffy wrote in 1979 ended up being the first Duran Duran album rather than, as was the case, languishing on a C-60 cassette in his homework desk for 20 years.

Surprisingly, however, *Dark Circles* doesn't sound like *Brideshead Revisited* with synthesisers at all. Instead, the Devils appear to be the godfathers of the genre du jour, electroclash.

"We invented it not once, but twice," Rhodes says chidingly, over his risotto. "After all, Stephen and I invented electroclash initially in 1979, and these other bands like Fischerspooner still hadn't got around to inventing it themselves in 2000, which is when we started work on the bloody album again."

Dark Circles is oddly moving. It sounds like Kraftwerk driving around Spaghetti Junction in the rain, trying to get laid. The synths sound like the swooshes and trundles of a fog-bound airport, and there are tracks called *Hawks Don't Share* and *The Tinsel Ritual*. Anyone who loved Duran Duran or A-ha is duty bound to both buy and love it.

The microcosm in its macrocosm is *Big Store*, which I believe to be the silliest, most solemn, most knowing song I have ever heard. I cannot conceive of how two 19-year-olds were clever enough to be that stupid. Its chorus runs: "Ooh, such a big store/Ooh, it's the biggest store in town." It's about Rackhams in Birmingham. I hope they use it in a tacky advert.

"But at that age, department stores are the most glamorous buildings you get to go in," Rhodes contextualises. "The trans-continental allure of a logo - I mean, Christian Dior next to Chanel is still something I can get excited about."

"Richard Hell said of the Voidoids that they were slum kids with big ambitions," Duffy says, to much "Rock historian!" teasing from Nick. "Well, we certainly weren't slum kids, but after 12 months of punk rock's towerblock imagery, it was nice to look at the mannequins in Rackhams and think of another life."

"It was the manicurists I was after," says Rhodes with a nuance-perfect "cheap as chips" leer.

"The Sobranie cigarettes display," Duffy sighs. "That was the allure," Rhodes agrees. "Black and gold. Or pink. You saved your pocket-money for weeks. But when you matched your pink cigarette to your pink gin, you knew you had arrived."

Duran Duran's first gig was supporting a puppet show at Birmingham Arts Centre. Rhodes wore a cut-up fur coat from the 1940s. Duffy wore satin jodhpurs and tights, and his mum roadied for them. "I even shaved my legs," he notes.

And were you, as most pop stars are, doing this to get laid? There is the only pause in our entire conversation. Rhodes looks gobsmacked. "No," he finally says. "I mean, you can't be a rock star unless you're getting laid." No, you usually don't get laid unless you're a rock star. "Well, that I wouldn't know about," Rhodes says uncomprehendingly.

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THE DEVILS - DARK CIRCLES

www.thedevils.tv

Did the totty get better once you were in a band? "Well, there's a quote in Andy's diaries that says: 'Nick came to the studio with Simon, they've both got new girlfriends, and they're taller this time.' That made me laugh."

I'm slightly puzzled as to why he's quoting his mate Andy's diary at me, until I realise he's actually talking about Andy Warhol. "I never really thought about Duran Duran during the Eighties," Duffy admits. "But reading Warhol's diaries for the first time, I realised - Nick met Andy Warhol. At 19 we were sitting in Rackhams talking about him, and six months later you went off and bloody met him!"

So what would it have been like if Duffy had stayed in the band? How would the world have been different? What, for instance, would it have been like if the Devils had played Live Aid instead of Duran Duran?

"I think we'd have been in bloody tune," Rhodes says, in a sudden and unexpectedly Birmingham accent. "Oh God," Duffy says in horror. "You've let the accent slip. They'll throw us out of Harvey Nicks now."

Stephen 'Tin Tin' Duffy was Duran Duran's first singer, but jumped ship in 1979 after just four gigs.

A chance meeting in 1999 between Duran Duran perennial Nick Rhodes has resulted in 'Dark Circles', a new work inspired by some long-forgotten demo recordings.

It's closer to the band's early influences (Bowie, Kraftwerk, Talking Heads) than the Simon Le Bon years. It's also timely (given the current '80's revival) and rather good too.

Duffy's melodies ooze period pop charm, leaving 'Come Alive' and 'World Exclusive' sounding like hits. With female backing vocals and Duffy's pin-sharp narratives (the dreamy 'Barbarellas' is both ode to '80's Birmingham nightclub and the joys of youth),

the album also manages to be soulful and moving.

Marti Aston

-- 4 stars out of 5"

S t e p h e n

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December Peals



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N i C K
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Rhodes & Duffy: Lil Devils by John Earls

Before Duran Duran conquered the 1980's with Simon Le Bon, they were an arty trio of Nick Rhodes, John Taylor and... Stephen Duffy. Best known as singer with lush popstars The Lilac Time, Duffy left Duran Duran after four gigs in 1978.

But now, the REAL original line-up of Duran Duran are back. Rhodes and Duffy tell PS why a 16-year silence ended with them making an album based on the very first Duran Duran gig...

After meeting at a New York nightclub in 1982, Nick Rhodes and original Duran singer Stephen Duffy went 16 years before chancing across each other.

"I'm surprised we didn't run into one another," admits Nick, "The industry is so small, the law of averages said it was bound to happen one day."

Stephen adds: "We met again at a London fashion show. Nick's first words to me were 'Oh Stephen, why did you ever leave the band?'"

When Stephen Duffy met old schoolpal Nick Rhodes in 1998, he revealed he had a tape of their first ever gig as Duran Duran in Birmingham in 1978.

"Stephen is one of life's librarians," Nick smiles. "He'd even kept the slides for the gig backdrop, of a geography field trip he and John Taylor were on."

Although he'd never played the tape since it was recorded, Stephen adds: "I feel these kind of things come in handy. As it proves, I was right."

Once Stephen Duffy and Nick Rhodes played the tape of Duran Duran's first gig from 1978, they quickly agreed to make a whole album 'sounding as a Duran album would do if it was still 1978.'

"Half the songs on our album are ones from that gig," recalls Stephen.

Nick adds they would have got the gig's third member John Taylor in, but: "He wasn't around. Plus John was guitarist at the gig. And there's a good reason John became Duran's bassist instead..."

Nick Rhodes and Stephen Duffy's new album of songs based on Duran Duran's first gig was made in just twelve days.

"There was no record company breathing down our necks," beams Nick. "It was easy, though I work people pretty hard. 'Just ten more minutes' is six hours."

The album is released under the name The Devils. "I wanted us to be The Sea The Sea," says Stephen. "But the album sounds Goth. As Nick says there's nothing more goth than the devil."

Nick Rhodes and Stephen Duffy have made an album based around Duran Duran's first gig. Does Stephen miss the fame he could have had if he hadn't walked out on the band in 1978?

"I think people mean 'do I miss the money?' not the fame," Stephen retorts. "I make enough money to be a musician for a living. I'm grateful I don't have to work on the bins or at a car factory like most of my family and school friends had to."

Nick Rhodes and Stephen Duffy plan to make more albums together as The Devils and have set up their own record label called Tape Modern.

"It's not a boutique, we want to sign other bands," says Nick. "I want to hear the next Nirvana or Sex Pistols."

And live plans? "We'll wait until a second album," Stephen explains. "If we go on tour with just one album, we'd have to pad it out with Nick playing rio on a kazoo for twenty minutes."

Devils' Dark Circles album out July 15th.

Cologne, Live Music Halle 17th February 2003 Music Planet 2nite (reviewed by Graham)

We arrived just before 19.00 to find a healthy crowd gathered around the tiny entrance. Everyone seemed in good spirits despite the rapidly plummeting temperatures and I was heartened by the sight of a few folks in Duran T-shirts singing loudly a few words from "World exclusive" in amongst the slightly more prevalent Gary Numan T-shirts and badges clad Germans.

Shortly we were aloud in, although I was surprised to be searched! before being allowed to proceed by the security who explained that as the gig was being recorded for the German Tv programme "Arte" they were looking for potential bootleggers, which was a little annoying. Once inside we made our way to the small stage, which was unusual as you could stand all around it, both back and front and left and right.

Before very long the TV presenter came into the crowd and the numerous cameramen started to film his introduction of "Nick Rhodes, who you would have known from his work with Duran Duran and Stephen Duffy who you SHOULD know from his solo work and his excellent work as The Lilac Time", Wow, big cheers all round... I was starting to get excited! Then, emerging through the dry ice and bright lights and lasers Stephen and Nick appeared accompanied by two attractive backing singers/dancers who I later discovered were named Sally and Evie.



Nick settled down in front of his keyboards, I tried to get a better view past the cameramen and Stephen announced "Listen to the voice of buddha" before the opening bars of **"Memory palaces"** sounded out. Pretty impressive, I became aware of the screen behind the stage showing all manner of psychedelic images which perfectly captured the mood of the evening.

As "Memory palaces" drew to a close, Stephen announced that they had wrote the next one when they were twelve, and it was called... "Arthur" according to someone just behind me...

"Yes, its called Arthur" agreed Stephen and then the most haunting synth sounds of **"Aztec moon"** set the hairs on the back of my neck on fire!

