



New Order (L-R): Bernie, Gillian, Stephen, Hooky.

Shellshock and Brotherhood The Lore of New Order

It's 11 o'clock in the morning in Manchester. The rest of the city may not be sleeping, but Bernard Sumner certainly is. Like a log, it seems. Eventually he gets to the phone to yawn good morning at me, 12,000 miles away. "I'm a real slob," confesses the singer from the world's largest musical cult. "I don't usually get up till one o'clock." That rock star lifestyle, eh fans? Doncha just love it?

New Order's fourth album, *Brotherhood*, is just about to be released, a straightforward, (if a little *unstartling*) collection of songs. How does Barney/Bernard (Sumner/Albrecht/Dicken — take yer pick) see it?

"I think it's a damn good effort. I'm not that happy with the production [they produced it themselves]. It's like a cake with currants that shouldn't be there — too many currants! But I'm pleased with the songs ..."

That's the first in a bizarre series of analogies. The album was recorded in Dublin and Liverpool, mixed in London, whilst one side of the single 'State of the Nation' was recorded in Japan. Dublin seems a strange place to go to record, if you're not U2 of course ...

"Well firstly, it was just a matter of getting studios really, because the studio we normally mixed at, Britannia Row, had changed the whole studio around. They put in a new desk and made it high-tech, like the

Hacienda, and we didn't like it. And secondly, we'd just been on tour there and we quite liked Dublin. In fact, when you rang I was asleep, dreaming about being on tour in Ireland."

What about setting up a studio of your own?

"We did think about doing it. We built our rehearsal room like a studio, with a control room and studio area. We could do that, but when you've been in the same place all year rehearsing it's good to get away

when you're doing LPs. A different environment makes you feel fresh. A bit like being on holiday."

New Order have recorded in a number of different places, including working in the USA with noted producers John Robie and Arthur Baker. Is there anyone special you'd like to work with?

"Yeah, there is actually — Ernio Morricone, because the first record I ever bought was music from *A Fistful of Dollars* and I still play it. In fact I played it yesterday, so he must have a few feathers in his cap if we still play his records today."

The Joy of Video

Is there a video for the single 'State of the Nation'?

"No, we didn't do one for that. The Americans are putting out 'Bizarre Love Triangle' as a single, but it's a remix. In America they won't put out singles unless they're on LPs."

Is that why 'The Perfect Kiss' was included on *Low Life*?

"Yeah that's why, but we don't like doing it. We did it on the last album cos we always try something once, but we didn't like doing it, so this time we've not done it. There's two reasons — it doesn't sell well because people have already got it on another record, and the other reason is that I don't think it's very interesting. There's not much point unless it's a vastly different remix."

Do you think videos are unnecessary then?

"No, not at all. In fact we've done a video for 'Bizarre Love Triangle'. The Americans have done one. We just sent a few shots of us looking up and looking down and picking our noses to a guy called Robert Longhall who's a New York artist. He was into Joy Division very early on in his career and we work with people we like basically. If they're nice, we work with them, and so he's done a video on our behalf. We couldn't do it because anything that interferes with songwriting time, we won't do it. I think without songs, you've got buggler-all. But we always end up without songs! (Laughter) We always go into the studio without any!"

Brain Scans

On the subject of songwriting, what about your theory that it's best to write late at night, while the city sleeps ...

"It's just that at a certain level of your brain, I think that you pick up thoughts off other people ... yeah, that's true, absolutely true."

So in an artistic drought, you could always move to Iceland or Wales, away from brain interference?

"That's a very good point, yeah. But you need daylight to reflect on what you've done. You need daylight to see if your music's got through all the interference. I also like writing when I haven't been to bed for a day and I'm absolutely knackered. I think that's a pretty weird experience. Very productive, very powerful."

New Order's previous album *Low Life* stood hinting at a lot of possible directions for New Order's future, something that *Brotherhood* doesn't appear to have fulfilled. Is it as varied as it could have been?

"I think *Brotherhood* is like two directions. One side is rocky and one side is electronic. Usually we smatter that among the two sides, but on the last day of the recording session for *Brotherhood* after two and a half months, we had two hours to think of all the titles, the title of the LP and the tracklisting, and edit it all together. We'd been in the studio all night mixing, and we tried different orders but none of them seemed to work. Then we decided 'Hey! why not put all the synthesiser tracks on one side of the LP and all the guitar tracks on the other side?' and we did that. It sort of ties them together."

But that distinction, superficial as it may be, tends to make the sides sound "samey." Is there enough room in the format of the band to experiment outside the lines delineated by guitar tracks on one side and synths on the other?

Electro Beat

"I think we do experiment but we could be wackier, and I'd like to do some pretty weird stuff that I don't think the others would like."

What about a group like Yello, who maintain a dancefloor base, but have room for more sound-scape scenes and other variety? 'Elegie' on *Low Life* seemed to point towards that ...

"Well, I know what you're getting at, but we are very clever. What I like to do is to experiment by playing straight music. For me, that is experimentation. Like in Joy Division, we were searching in a strange direction and now New Order have been writing poppy-type music as experimental because after Joy Division, it was an area of music that I don't feel we've looked into at all. I thought Electronic dance music would be an interesting area to experiment in, which we did."

Successfully, do you think? "Sometimes yeah, sometimes not. Our music is just what we are as human beings. Sometimes we're right and sometimes we're wrong."

So what would you consider to be your favourite successes?

"There's two, depending on what mood I'm in. Sort of late at night, dreamy, I like 'Elegie'. When I get up in the morning and I feel wacky, I like the 'Perfect Kiss' dub version. If you can get into them, you've got a big bell in your head and that bell's gonna go 'ding' ... or 'dong' cos it's a big bell. Big bells don't go 'ding' do they? They go 'dong!'"

What about accusations that New Order are a "lad's band"?

"We tend to get a lot of football fans for some strange reason. Our audience has definitely gone less intellectual and more thuggish."

Is that a healthy thing?

"I don't mind so long as they don't start fights in the audience, which has happened a couple of times. They don't seem particularly violent ... just lads y'know, and they get pretty wild ..."

What about media generalisations — both of your music and audience over the years. Is that annoying?

"Over the past year and a half, that's sort of died out. But it annoys me when they say Joy Division was the old cliché, 'doom and gloom', because it's missing the point. I take it when they say that about Joy Division ..."

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Maximum extraction

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Palmerston North

Absolute Audio
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