

It's hard to imagine anything more dissimilar than R&B and syntho-pop, yet Yazoo, in two singles and one album, have managed to bridge the gap. It's a marriage of convenience as ex Depeche Mode's Vince Clarke needed the earthiness of blues fan Alison Moyet to add character to the twee popiness of much of his material and she needs Clarke's fashion and musical ideas to help her career in black music.

Moyet's on the phone from her place in Basildon, a London satellite designed to be a post-war spill-over for the greater metropolis. She has a slight Cockney accent, fast, efficient but not without an element of real charm or vulnerability.

Her background is blues and soul, not all that common among young ladies these days:

"It started about 1978 when I went to see R&B bands like Dr. Feelgood and Lew Lewis. And then I went back to their roots and I found people like Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson and Howlin' Wolf and then I formed my own group, The Screaming Abdabs; I stayed with them for three years. We were very obscure, we were lucky if we got one gig a month and we weren't even paid for them."

What's your opinion of the syntho-pop fashion?

"It doesn't effect me as I don't listen to it and I see the synthesiser as just another instrument. I never liked Depeche Mode when they first started when Vince was with them, they were too 'whee' but their last single 'Leave In Silence' was a brilliant piece of work. But I don't listen to the pop scene I just listen to my record collection."

That's a bit introverted isn't it?

"Yeah, sure, but I have become more open minded. At one time I decided I didn't want anything unless it was blues or soul but now I'm doing different things and enjoying it. I was certainly very narrow minded before."

Do you resent the fact that soul and R&B artists aren't given more attention or are made more prominent?

"They've had a fair deal but not in the singles' market which is such a throwaway thing anyway. So far Yazoo are doing really well but next year maybe everybody will have forgotten about us, it's so disposable. Pop music and our sort of music is like a Christmas present in that it's excitable at the time whereas soul and R&B lasts for years because so much of the stuff is classic. I'd prefer success in the long term rather than just a lot of success in a year."

Do you feel you're a convincing enough singer to be able to compete and be compared with the feel that black artists have?

"That's a difficult question. I'm one of these people who don't like hearing blues and R&B sung by white artists, yet here I am doing it myself. It's such a difficult thing to say, I'll just have to pass on that question."

Apparently you got in touch with Vince through a music ad?

"Yeah, I put an ad in for a blues band and he answered it. Five other groups answered it as well but they all backed out because I didn't have a demo tape so they weren't prepared to audition me."

A tough business, but what's it like fronting a bank of key-



## an interview with Yazoo's Alison Moyet

boards rather than a traditional band format?

"There's handicaps as you can't feed off the band's emotions and you can't slow things down as there's a set rhythm."

Yazoo music is breaking new ground, imperfectly sure and confident, they're taking risks rather than playing safe. Was there a realisation that Yazoo's blend of soul and electronic pop was an innovation?

"It wasn't so much an innovation. When Vince writes a song he'll tell me the basic melody line and I change it to suit me. It makes no difference to me as to what's going on behind me, whether it's a synthesiser or whatever I just follow the chord pattern. And when I write a song I'll pass it over to Vince and he'll interpret it his own way. So a part of both of us is going to come out in all of the songs as we both work on them."

Staying with songs and Alison Moyet's credits on the album include 'Midnight', 'Goodbye Seventies', 'Winter Kills' and 'Bring Your Love Down', all of them reflecting her R&B background. When were those songs written?

"The most recent was 'Winter Kills', that was done within a month of completing the album and the first one I did was 'Goodbye Seventies' which was about turning my back on the punk movement because I was very much into that. The group of people I used to hang around with were very anti-fashion and we were punks like in the Ramones idea not like the punks now. But it became just another fashion and I became disillusioned with it and that's when I turned to the R&B clubs which were great because people didn't give a damn what other people were doing. They were there to have a good time and they didn't care if they looked a mess or if the sweat had made their makeup run. It was a really healthy feeling."

Your jump from the anonymity of sweaty blues bands to the world of pop and glitter is real Cinderella stuff:

"Yeah, the jump has been very quick but I have been sweating it out in bands for five years trying to get a regular gig and that was my idea of success, just a couple of gigs a month. But the amount of success we've had has been astounding, but if I didn't think I was gonna make it somewhere I would never have carried on."

Do you feel as if you've compromised your past beliefs in your present activities with Yazoo?

"Not really. When we did the first single, 'Only You', it was just going to be a one-off as Vince didn't want to do any more and I was only doing it as a stepping-stone so that when other bands rang up I could say I had a demo. It worked out well but I still wanted to do soul music so after Christmas I'm forming my own band to tour and record with so that I can have the best of both worlds."

Vince is obviously not soul orientated:

"Right, he's influenced by Simon and Garfunkel and pop tunes. Vince and I are very different and we both lead different lives so we don't have that much contact other than when we're working. We've arranged it so that I can do this band thing and

he can do his jingles and work with other people like he wants to. That's why he left Depeche Mode, he had all of these pressures that he couldn't control but now he has more freedom."

What about 'I Before E Except After C' on the album? It seems to be a puzzling but interesting word-play on advertising clichés?

"I don't know. We had a bit of a quarrel about that one as I didn't want it on the album as it broke the spontaneity of it and I don't think it's good in its own right. I can understand experimental tracks but that one had no impact at all. I said to him that if he wanted to put it on he should've put it as the last track so that people don't have to lift the needle and put it down again. But he felt strongly about it, and it is a two person band and it was his band to start with so I didn't think I had the right to tell him what to do."

One of the album's most mature songs is your 'Winter Kills', a slow blues format with plenty of feeling. What's that about?

"That's basically a love song. I don't know whether you've come across people who're quick to tell you this is everything and that's great and I was saying to them that that's rubbish, it's not like that at all."

The rise of Yazoo has been meteoric, the instant success story syndrome that has its dangers of backlash:

"Yeah, that's something you don't like to think about but you do. We've told everybody that we're quite prepared for the backlash but whether we are is another thing. Ours is about due now as we've had three hit singles and I think the time is about right. We're lucky not to have had it before, actually."

You're not paranoid?

"Yeah sure, everybody is paranoid to some extent but through facts and logic I can't remember one band that's gone through success and not had a backlash."

The Beatles, surely?

"Yeah perhaps."

Is your attitude typical of new bands?

"Yeah, there's a lot of distrust about the press but you've gotta be prepared for the fact that the people who are praising us at the moment may start killing us off in a second. It's not important, it's irrelevant. It's an occupational hazard and it's not as if the papers in England help to sell records and it's just personal opinion and everybody's allowed that."

Do you attach any importance to your current popularity?

"Yeah, it's important but with records you may be big for four months and after you've made a record it's not part of you anymore, it's just a marketing product, it's nothing. My ambition is just to be able to work and sing for the rest of my life."

Is it possible that you're underestimating Yazoo?

"I don't think I am, I just think that we are as disposable as any other band that's come out of this period. Maybe I am being paranoid and I'm preparing myself for something that seems inevitable to me. It would be good if it can be successful for as long as it can but I don't want to be surprised if it's not."

That's a very defeatist attitude:

"No it's not, if we can carry on the way we are then we will be releasing material not because we think it's good but because it's commercially viable."

Yeah, but this is only your first album and you shouldn't be in that trapped frame-of-mind already, surely?

"What frame of mind? It just seems to me that we've been spending too much time on irrelevant things that don't concern the music and we've so little time to actually make the product. We're given a couple of days to write a song and get in the studio and do it and this will be detrimental to us in the long run because you're only as good as your last single or album."

The album suggests that Yazoo has the potential to last a long time:

"We recorded the album straight after the first single and we were given quite a bit of time to work on it, but since 'Don't Go' we haven't been given time to record to our level of satisfaction. We want to make sure that we're given time for the second album to make sure it's as good as the last one."

So can you see the band lasting as far as '83?

"Oh yeah we'll last through '83 but in a different way. Up until now we've been very much a singles' band pushing out product and in the future we will only put out music that primarily suits us."

The Yazoo backlash doesn't begin here.

George Kay

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