

Bauhaus: David Jay (guitar), Peter Murphy (vocals), Kevin Haskin (drums), Daniel Ash (guitar).



# BEHIND

B A U H A U S

# THE MASK

Naming yourself after a 1920s German artistic movement is a sure way of inviting an Art School Rock tag, but British doommerchants Bauhaus now find themselves in the intriguing position of cultivating a teenybopper following alongside the original devotees of the chamber of horrors sound displayed on their first two albums, *In A Flat Field* and *Mask* and songs like 'Bela Lugosi's Dead'.

The band's new pop-star status in Britain can be jointly attributed to their recent decision to cover such commercially accessible tunes as Telegram Sam, the T-Rex classic and 'Ziggy Stardust', and the pin-up visual appeal of the four lads, especially riveting frontman Pete Murphy. After a sweatily successful Canadian club date recently, Murphy defended Bauhaus' use of readily recognisable relics from the glam-rock era.

"The songs we do are really related to certain elements within Bauhaus, so they come across very strongly. It is not a compromise, but it is sort of inviting people to come and listen to our stuff."

The latest collection of their own stuff, *The Sky's Gone Out*, was a Top Five album in Britain last year. The album marks a progression in the Bauhaus sound with increased emphasis on instrumental atmospherics, but the often brutally bleak lyrics remain. Lines like "a symbol of fish hooked by the baby flesh of maggots" are not the staple fare of most bands with a teen appeal, but Pete Murphy does not feel that his young audience is at risk.

"Yes, there is a responsibility with the lyrics. I've thought about it a lot and have been very worried at times, but the lyrics are wrapped in a very abstract, surrealist presentation. If a kid is not really ready to understand it all, he'll pick up on images that he wants from it, which will be helpful."

The Bauhaus vision may seem strongly affected by film and literature, but Pete Murphy adamantly claimed that "there has been no visual influence on us, it has evolved naturally. You do come to seem comparisons with Gothic surrealism and films like *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*. Our imagery on the sleeve of 'Bela Lugosi's Dead' is the same as in that film, yet none of us had seen it!" Bauhaus themselves soon make their cinematic debut with a cameo appearance in *The*

*Hunger*, starring David Bowie and Catherine Deneuve. Murphy's description of the projected opening scene certainly whets the appetite.

"The film opens with Bowie and Deneuve going out to a New York nightclub in search of victims in the audience. She plays a character fated to immortality and she wants victims for an experiment for a way to make her lover (Bowie) immortal. Anyway, the director wanted a band to appear in the club. It is a very sensitive issue, because it has to be very dramatic. The opening scene shows Deneuve playing Debussy on the piano, then it cuts more and more to the music he had in mind and that had to be very jarring and atmospheric, the opposite in effect. The director apparently went through lots of bands, then saw us on TV doing 'Bela Lugosi's Dead', and asked us over straight away. We re-recorded the song with his musical director; it was a real thrill."

A fascination with film and video is nothing new for the band.

"We've shot a whole lot of film of ourselves from the beginning and we hope to release that as a package. We have an idea for an actual story into which we'll integrate the show. We were going to show it as a B-movie, but a millionaire backer we had pulled out. We were too much of a street band for him."

Murphy describes the musical influences on his group as "very diverse, but with some common ground. People like Eno, the Velvet Underground/John Cale/Lou Reed *Berlin* thing, the Bowie *Ziggy Stardust* era, even the Beatles. Of bands around now, we really respect the Birthday Party. We feel they've taken that element in us to its extreme. There's no-one else really, but David feels affinity with Throbbing Gristle. They're very political in their approach, while we're basically self-centred and isolated in our own subjectivity."

This self-centredness could be a natural reaction to life in Northampton, the group's home town.

"It is an influence only in that nothing happens there, so we only have ourselves to feed off. Northampton is a void and we recognise that in our negativity. We still rehearse in the North, but I live in London now. I'm soaking it up, but as far as the music scene goes there, it is getting a bit decadent and posey. That in-crowd thing again."

The British success now enjoyed by Bauhaus has yet to spread to North America, but Pete Murphy claims that "we're not really committed to it. We always want to broaden our audiences, but if it means doing extensive tours, we won't do it."

When I mentioned a Kiwi following for the band, he chuckled.

"Yes, I heard that 'Telegram Sam' made Number 11 on the New Zealand charts. Nineteen people bought it! Yeah, that's really great." (2500 copies have been sold in NZ — Ed.)

Bauhaus had a trip to Japan scheduled for February and Murphy was looking forward to that.

"It should be great. I'm sure the Japanese will go crazy about the image and all that screaming is great. It's so light-hearted."

Pete Murphy is eager to dispel the popular perception of the group as serious philosophers of the netherworld.

"You can't go around in a daze of thought and introversion all the time. It's only music, it is only a-part of our lives. None of us is actually obsessed with Bauhaus; we live a totally free life away from it."

Still, his eyes did light up when, on request, yours truly suggested a movie he might enjoy that afternoon, the cannibalistic *Eating Raoul*! Kerry Doole

Joni Mitchell



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