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Next time you get down on another dancefloor synthesizer stomp or curl your lip in scorn at yet another band of pretty English haircuts, remember, for better or worse, pioneers like John Foxx. His three albums with Ultravox, before he left in 1979, and his first solo album at the start of the 80s, have paved the way for the fully synthesized sound we now either love or hate.

So what of the man behind the detached vocals, the elegant electronics. Is he 'The Quiet Man' as an early song suggests, or maybe even now 'The Hidden Man', a song on his new solo work. John Foxx and band have just finished touring Japan and he's on the phone from Sydney talking about his third solo album *The Golden Section*.

"I wanted this one to be more like a live performance rather than carefully layering things like I've done in the past. I wanted it to be more in the tradition of English rock and roll music that I really like and not so reliant on synth or that obvious synthesizer sound...a more human kind of album. What I want to do now is make a more intimate kind of music and a more sensual one rather than heading for just pure rhythm or dancefloor music. It's nice when it works both ways but really if I had to make the choice it'd be a more personal kind of music."

What's the significance of the title?

"Oh that's my art school background coming into it. Really I just liked the nice combination of words. But the 'Golden Section' is a system of proportion that was applied to architecture and paintings in Renaissance times. It's a kind of fundamental aesthetic. It's based on human proportions because they had this idea that in order to make something look beautiful it had to have similar proportions and balancing points to that of a human being. I thought it was quite a nice idea because that's what I was trying to do anyway with the music so it fitted as well. I also found I was

JOHN FOXX IMPORTANCE OF BEING ENGLISH



using in the lyrics a lot of things like 'golden' and 'glister' and 'glitter' so the title fitted happily with the feeling of the album."

John Foxx has emerged as one of the most careful lyricists in recent times. He's particularly interested in juxtaposition of words within a simple phrase; for example early Ultravox song titles like 'Dangerous Rhythms' or 'Hiroshima Mon Amour' or the title of the third album *Systems of Romance*. I asked him about his creative process.

"It's very hard to describe. One thing I always feel is that songs build up by themselves. It's almost like I'm not writing them sometimes. I occasionally just get a feeling about something and then I find a phrase and if it's a good phrase then it tends to attract other words to it, in a strange way, and pretty soon you have a kind of song."

"My literary work helps as well. I've been doing the 'Quiet Man' book for about five years now. It supplies me with a lot of ideas. I think writing is a more private thing, it's even more intimate than music in some ways. It's something you do when you feel very tranquil and still, well I do anyway. It's like another life, a private life. I look upon writing as a kind of feeding process, it grows by itself and gives me a lot of ideas for the songs."

A cornerstone of his creative process is change. From the sparse electronics of the influential *Metamatic* Foxx moved last year to the gothic pastoralism of *The Garden*. This change led some

critics to dress him in a frilly shirt of the limp-wristed variety. Foxx is unphased. "I think it is sometimes necessary to change your base. And as a person you move on, you learn more and you want the music to reflect that. I want the music to be a living thing that grows up as I do. It's a bit like establishing a vocabulary and with each album I want to widen it a bit and make it a bit richer and a bit more enjoyable for everyone."

Enjoyable wouldn't be a word I'd use to describe the first solo album. The bleakly understated synthesizer and Foxx's dark voice certainly did though cast a spell. Will he return to music like *Metamatic*?

"I can't see it at the moment because that was just an investigation of an area of English music that hadn't been investigated before. It was meant to be a stripping back of everything that had accumulated in the past to make something that was very minimalistic. In a sense I was starting again. This was the start of that vocabulary idea and then I wanted to make it richer on *The Garden* and even more so on *The Golden Section*. I really like synth now to be used in a more lyrical way, in a more subtle way, to add colours to songs."

So what do you think of the fully synthesized artists and bands that have followed your lead?

"Oh I think they're fine. There's lots of areas to investigate like that really hard dance music that you can make with triggered things and sequencers and drum machines. It's all very valid. It's just that I chose after *Metamatic* not to go in that direction. I felt I'd done exactly what I wanted to do with it."

The dazzling new technology available in studios these days has often been accused of taking a lot of the human touch, the soul, out of modern music. How does John Foxx's high-tech approach help or hinder his attempts to create warmth in his music these days?

"The only reason I'm interested in that kind of technology is it just makes recording quicker and easier. It's the music itself that is important, how you record it doesn't matter that much. I mean the early Beatles' music was recorded in 13 hours on a 4-track, and it sounds great. The technology is just the medium you use to get the music from the player to the listener. It's just a vehicle."

Simple words from a pioneer in making the micro-chip musically valid. His attitude remains intensely personal. He shrugs off any responsibility for new directions in making modern music. His new work is by no means startling but this quiet Englishman is no doubt content to just let it exist as he goes off in search of new fulfilment. And if he hits upon anything as revolutionary as some of his work so far it'll doubtless be another case of follow a leader. Mark Everton

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WELLINGTON, Athletic Park, Wed Jan 11th 1984	6.30pm
NELSON, Trafalgar Park, Sat Jan 14th 1984	6.30pm
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