

"Oh I'm very aware of current fashion alright. I read everything, yes. I'm very much an information Hoover. But then I go. 'So that's what they like is it? That's interesting'. But I'm very independent. I know what I like."

Annie Lennox talking, but her comments are only indirectly about clothing or makeup, despite the fact that she's just spent ten minutes giving detailed instructions to her wardrobe keeper ('Check up on the silver shoes'). It's barely an hour after the Eurythmics' stunning performance at Sweetwaters and another assistant is busily packing things for the drive from Pukekawa back to Auckland. The entire entourage has the chance of only a few hours sleep before their 9 am flight to Europe in the morning. Lennox, however, seems oblivious to the bustle as, sartorial considerations put aside, she discusses something far more important — her music.

"If I were to sit down and make a list of music that really moved me it's got nothing to do with cults or movements. I've always been sort of open. But I have got very strong tastes. I know what I like. And it can include, oh, Siouxsie and the Banshees and then Glen Campbell. And why not? In the past, back to the Tourists, we were put down you know, for having eclectic tastes. Now I think people are starting to own up. Everybody wants to identify themselves with somebody or something but sometimes they're afraid others will laugh. It's all about other people's opinions. You've just got to be yourself and not worry too much about what others might think. As soon as you can do that with confidence most people will accept you and then you're one step ahead. Even the press can come around."

Both Lennox and her partner Dave Stewart are well experienced in handling the press by now. After the years of critical flak in England over the Tourists not being 'credible', there came a quiet turnaround with Eurythmics' first album *In The Garden* (unreleased in New Zealand). Then their big hits of last year brought major features, often covers, in virtually all the big British and American music papers. So it was understandable that Dave Stewart should greet *Rip It Up* with quiet confidence when the paper's reporter was ushered into a small crowded caravan backstage at Sweetwaters. Stewart had smiled, shaken hands and gestured towards a corner seat. Looking very much the tousle-haired Regency elf he had happily begun chatting as soon as he saw the tape-recorder. The reporter hadn't even phrased his first question.

"The way we see the world at the moment is that it's in the biggest clash of cultures there's ever been. In places like Bangkok we're walking down the street and there'll be a girl doing traditional dancing and right beside her there'll be a cop with a gun, all underneath an advert to fly Thai Airline. I filmed that exact scene on a street corner."

"This idea of two things clashing is behind nearly every song of Eurythmics, from love affairs to socio-political situations. *Love Is A Stranger*, for example: one line takes you in one direction and then the next takes you the other way. We create a tension all the time because that's what exciting music's all about. If there's no tension it's predictable, like a lot of pop music. You hear a chord and you know what the next one will be. You can also do it with the words. You hear 'Hey baby let's get down' or something and you go 'Oh yeah — blah, blah'. But we like to make one statement and then when you think you know what you're expecting ... Whap! Because that's what's happening to us when we're walking down the street. So that's the way the records are."

There is certainly a measure of the unexpected in the lyrics to 'Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This)'.
Stewart nods: "Right, and what we're saying in the middle part there is that, in the midst of all these diverse things that are happening, all you can do is (and he begins singing softly) 'Hold your head up — Moving on. Keep your head up — moving on'. When you're living in the society we're living in you've got to keep your head up and not crumble before things, thinking of the bomb or the massive starvation or whatever. Otherwise you'd probably commit suicide or something. You've got to hold your head up and use your energies to push through."

But if Eurythmics intend such a definite social-consciousness raising in their songs, do they really expect their audiences to pick it up?
"Well a lot of people see Annie as a very attractive lady and the videos are nice, but they're not reading enough into it because we do give them a glossy front. But I believe the best way is by infiltration, not winning the war from the trenches but by slipping in the back door. I think we get in the back door sometimes. Like with 'Sweet Dreams', everyone singing along to it and then thinking 'Hang on a minute; what's going on here?' Then you get people thinking. I try and do it in the arranging a bit too. It'll suddenly go left."

Yet there's a sense too, particularly on the new album, that although these opposites and tensions are still present, there's also a

coherence, a synthesis. For example, it's there in the way some expectedly divergent instrumental sounds work so well together.

Stewart nods again and holds his hands out. "Yeah, and of course that's what's happening all around us as well isn't it — different things integrating. Like in the part of London where we live there's Greek Cypriots, Asians, Italians, tons of nationalities all with their shops and different foods and languages and in among it is some old guy from, say, Wigan wandering around. Once he would've been shocked but now people accept the strangest things. It happens to me all the time."

"So what we're doing in the lyrics is a bit like Andy Warhol with his paintings of soup cans. Everybody sees these things every day, but when they're in a form of art it makes you look at them again. So our words are very simple but there is something underlying them."

Presumably that also applies to the videos for the songs?

"Oh, yeah. A lot of people think that, say, the 'Sweet Dreams' video is just a funny video — cows wandering around and so on — but it's meant as a totally surrealist comment on man's quest. You know, (singing) 'Everybody's looking for something'. Annie's pointing at a screen on which rockets are going off to the moon, yet the cow is wandering around doing the same

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things he was doing 50,000 years ago. No matter what we do, nature was always there and always right anyway. It's a Zen thing really. We're just here. If you see the video again, Annie and I are sitting cross-legged on a table in boardroom. We're meditating, trying to reach a higher plane. Annie's got a mark on her forehead and the picture goes in through there, her third eye, down a stream of consciousness and where we arrive is just in an ordinary field as musicians with cellos and all these cows come wandering around."

"I always write the video filmscripts. But we can't go explaining them on every kids TV show or something. We just hope some people will think about what's going on. They're not all lightweight people who just think 'Nice song; what's next?'"

But a lot of people certainly do seem to be wondering about Annie's public image.

"Well everybody talks to us about image but there isn't one image like Duran Duran or something. In the videos Annie plays all these different characters: blonde wig, then short hair, then she's a man. The image is one of constant change because all you can rely on is that everything's going to change. So the way we look, the music, the band, they all change."

Stewart begins to sing again, quoting from his lyric, 'Everything changes'.

Nonetheless, despite the emphasis on change, Eurythmics do seem to be establishing something like their own sound, their own approach.

"Sure. Take, for example, 'No Fear, No Hate, No Pain'. There it's as if classic Dionne Warwick is getting mixed with Ultravox and ... so many influences you have to give up. What we've deliberately done is try to create an atmosphere where no one knows what to expect and we can go anywhere. You know, on the next album I might try any combination of instruments and Annie might sing like, say, Francois Hardy, or get the Staple Singers backing her or ..." He smiles and shrugs.

Suddenly someone important looking interrupts requesting Stewart's presence elsewhere. With a gentle apology Stewart rises to leave but the reporter is not left alone as Annie Lennox, having dealt with her wardrobe assistant, slides on to the seat directly opposite. She peels a banana and calls for red wine. Up close her spiky orange hair and fine facial features are no less striking, though considerably less harsh than most photographs suggest. Enlivened by bright blue eyes and a husky Scottish voice Eurythmics' female partner is capable of transfixing any reporter.

Had she enjoyed the Sweetwaters performance?

"It was great, a gas, very easy. It was a holiday tonight. Some gigs are painful for me, physically painful, if I'm conscious of being under scrutiny. But tonight we were really up to do the gig and then there was the hour's delay with the rain. We were standing here in the caravan with our hands out the door praying

the rain would go away. The dangers are very serious with electrical contacts in the rain. It is possible for someone to get killed. The delay wasn't because we were scared of getting our hair wet."

One of the things about the show that surprised a lot of people was how very soulful and punchy it was. Had that soul element always been there?

"It's come out, out of the closet," she chuckles. "I didn't really know it was there for a long time. It was under cover. When I was a kid about fifteen — I wasn't a hippie because I was too young — I used to go to the Beach Ballroom in Aberdeen where they played Tamla Motown. But I never knew what that was. I was just exposed to those songs: 'Tracks Of My Tears', 'Dock Of The Bay', 'My Cherie Amour' ... all that repertoire was played there. And then I went to study classical music which I really regret. It was a waste of time for me."

"And then I had my first revelation about music. It was a toke on a joint ..." She laughs, "really getting stoned and listening to Stevie Wonder's *Talking Book* on a set of headphones. After listening to it, the whole album, I knew what music meant. I knew what it was I'd been searching for my whole life. I knew what had attracted me back at the Beach Ballroom. I hadn't seen the wood for the trees. And although I don't take drugs anymore — I'm a very healthy person really — I'm very grateful for that experience because it opened my mind to the enormous potential music has. The way it gets you on very different and basic levels — sexual, danceable, etc — and ultimately it gets you at your very core. And if you realise that ... well! It's the most important thing I ever learned in my entire life, that there is that core to me, to every single person. I don't have to be anybody else but me. If I walk on stage and I get in touch with that, tune everything else out ... Bang! I'm on. But if I'm not in tune, if I'm trying to impress, to be different or something, people know and they go 'Oh you're so phoney'. You don't stand a chance."

She smiles, her eyes sparkling at the reporter. "So it's great for me what we do. It's fantastic. It's so inspiring. I'm intimidated sometimes before we go on stage, absolutely scared shitless. I'll pace up and down. But then I'll go, 'Fuck it. I know what my function is and I know what Eurythmics' function is'."

"Not all groups know that. I think the groups you've got here at Sweetwaters this year know it though. 1984 should be a great year for music, being kicked off this way. A fantastic package. Very potent. I'm proud to be part of it."

Was she also proud that there were other Scots (Simple Minds) appearing as well?

Dave Stewart, Annie Lennox, Sweetwaters.



PHOTO BY KERRY BROWN