Robert Palmer
Interview
The Power & the Story

Some guys have all the luck indeed. It is difficult to imagine anyone in the music business with a more enviable position than Robert Palmer. A smooth English soul singer with matinee idol looks, his long career has been successful enough to allow him to live in comfort in the Bahamas for the past decade and yet has never never soared to a stage where he is subjected to the worst elements of fame. Respected by his peers, praised by the critics, he's a fortunate man.

A glare of publicity as bright as the Caribbean sun is now being directed at the affable Yorkshireman — and the end result could well be elevation to higher rungs of the pop ladder.

The reason for the media blitz is the Power Station, a project that links Palmer with two current pop superstars, Andy and John Taylor of Duran Duran, and so stands to bring him to the attention of a whole new audience of wide-eyed teeny-boppers.

We tracked down Robert in New York on the eve of the Power Station's TV debut, an appearance on *Saturday Night Live*. He gently laughs at the suggestion of butterflies.

"Hey, I've been singing since I was 16 (20 years ago). Live TV would be nerve-wracking if you didn't have your act together, but I'm doing the show with the people I made the record with and everyone is working together so well. The whole thing has been incredibly enjoyable."

"I'd known John Taylor for some time (Palmer has opened shows for Duran Duran) and we'd talked about working together. The next I heard was when he and Andy phoned me at home and said "we've got a few tracks down, come and help." So they sent me a cassette of songs they wanted me to work on and I wrote the lyrics on the plane to the studio in New York."

That studio was the Power Station, now the Big Apple's most prestigious recording room, and its name was borrowed for the venture. Rounding out the lineup of Andy Taylor (lead guitar), John Taylor (bass) and Palmer (vocals) was drummer Tony Thompson, who thumped the skins for Chic and the Bowie *Serious Moonlight* tour. Producing the proceedings was Bernard Edwards, here taking a break from his partner in Chic, Nile Rodgers. The Rodgers/Edwards team produced all the Chic albums (an acknowledged influence on Duran Duran), Debbie Harry and Sister Sledge, so Edwards clearly has a way with a knob.

The Power Station: (L-R) Robert Palmer, Andy Taylor, John Taylor, Tony Thompson.

Robert Palmer is quietly ecstatic about the Power Station:"The chemistry was right from the word go and the whole thing soon escalated."

The sessions led to a self-titled album that sees the two Durannites mining a musical seam with a far higher R&B content than that found in the Duran motherlode. It's certainly difficult to visualise Simon Le Bon singing covers of the Isleys' classic 'Harvest For the World' or T Rex's 'Get It On', but Palmer's extensive background in Anglo pop and American soul is put to good use.

But before those zealous fans of the Anglo pop princes reach for the razor blades, let's stress that we're not yet witnessing the demise of Duran Duran. For the two Taylors the Power Station was a stimulating hobby akin to the use Chris and Tina of Talking Heads make of the Tom Tom Club. Palmer is also quick to emphasise that "when the record comes out in mid-March, everyone goes their own way and that is the end of it.

"One of the most exciting things about the Power Station was that it was basically a quartet, rather than me fronting my own band. Plus, I've been producing myself over the last five years, so to come in as a singer and be able to return to listen to it a few weeks later was a great feeling!"

An enjoyable diversion it may have been, but the Power Station stands to benefit all its principals considerably — and we're not just talking money here. As mentioned earlier, Palmer exposes himself to a new teen audience, while their part in the project may give the Taylors a credibility still largely denied Duran Duran.

The collaboration has already had Duran-bashing critics squirming:

"Some of the interviews with John and Andy have been extremely awkward for the journalists, as they've always called Duran Duran bad names and I've been something of their darling and here we are sitting together. It's a bit of a giggle," says Palmer.

"Yes, I believe they've been unfairly maligned and overlooked musically, but that's perhaps their own fault. They've certainly had their share of success, but what really impressess me is that they care a lot. They sit down and do these things in a big way. No one thinks these things up for them, they *are* creative. The music itself is a matter of taste. I mean, I don't care for the Blues Brothers and they even made a movie!"

It is not out of line to suggest that the Taylors, perhaps subconsciously, may have been repaying a debt to Robert Palmer by inviting him to be their singer. The dance-orientated, so-called"blue-eyed soul" of Palmer's work throughout the 70s certainly would have come to the attention of Duran Duran as they lounged around the Rum Runner and Barbarella's discos in Birmingham.

As well, Palmer's rather tongue-in-chic image as the cool Casanova constantly chased around exotic locales by long-legged beauties was in place while the Duran boys were still parading the school playground in shorts. Listen to him in this *Playgirl* interview of 10 years ago ...

"My father was a spy ... I pursue music like I relate to a woman. I feel the rhythm first, then the melody, and finally the lyric."

Suppress any thoughts you have that Robert Palmer is an aging hipster desperately trying to revive a flagging career. He has always kept up with new trends in pop music in a convincing way, working with such diverse musicians as Little Feat and the Meters on solo albums like *Sneaking Sally Through the Alley* through to Gary Numan on *Clues* and the System and Rupert Hine on *Pride*.

His production credits are similarly varied, ranging from German synth-rocker Peter Baumannn to reggae artist Desmond Dekker and American pop-rocker Moon Martin. But Palmer is no musical bandwagon-jumper.

"I've never been the one to search those people out. It has always been an accident in the same way that the Power Station was an accident. With all those people you mentioned, we just bumped into each other and ended up in the studio. I can't really says why those things happen, I just thank my lucky stars."

Robert chuckles heartily when it is mentioned that he has never been called "a boring old fart" in 20 years in the biz.

"Well, I've still got a long way to go yet, but I know what you mean. It is because I never do the same thing twice, so I don't bore myself or others."

There'll be a new Robert Palmer solo album out very soon and he insists "it will again be very different," without being very specific as to its sound. It won't be trendy white funk because"that is too fashionable now."

Not that he is totally negative about young bands getting hits with the kind of black/white crossover material he was doing 10 years ago:

"Whether or not it is superficial, there is certainly more collaboration between black and white musicians and producers and that has to be good."

His music may have often possessed the fragrant aroma of the Caribbean, but Palmer abruptly dismisses the image of him lying on a Bahamian beach absorbing the local sounds along with the solar rays.

"That is a lot of hokum. Down there it is just bands playing Top 20 covers for tourists. I'm not particularly fond of Carribean music, but I'm a collector of rhythms from all over."

He apparently has proxy antennae ferretting out new sounds around the globe: "I have corresponents in cities who'll send me things they've heard, radio tapes, etc. In fact, down there I hear more music in a more open way than when I live in cities."

The Power Station record turned out so well that Palmer enlisted Bernard Edwards to produce his new effort. His last solo LP, *Pride*, "didn't do as well as I'd hoped, because it was extra special to me. When it came out, a lot of people felt it was too avant-garde. I thought they were crazy, but looking back, maybe they were right."

After having had success with the songs of others (from 'Pressure Drop' through to 'You Are In My System'), Robert Palmer is now finding his own songs in vogue. Seems that Tina Turner recorded a version of 'Johnny and Mary' (his best-ever composition in this critic's view) a couple of years back, but"she was having contractural problems and it never got released. I have a copy though and it's marvellous! I believe it has to be the singers themselves that pick songs. If it is a guy from the record company, it will sound contrived."

While in constant demand as a songwriter and producer, Palmer intends to concentrate on his singing.

"I'd like to sing more. That may sound silly, for I still sing in the shower, but I'd like to spend more time singing *out* of the shower. I'm definitely interested in making plenty more records."

One item that is not on Robert Palmer's future agenda is acting. At a time when any Joe Pop Star with a video under his belt thinks he is De Niro or Redford, this debonair Robert shrinks in horror at the prospect.

"Sure. I've had offers, but I'm not tempted. God no, I think the concept of acting is very ugly. It is a separate skill, totally foreign to me and it holds no interest.

"Acting is vicarious. I want first-hand emotion and I've got that!"

Kerry Doole

SOUNDS UNLIMITED 75 QUEEN ST ENTERS THE PRICE WAR!!

THE NEW ZEALAND ALTERNATIVE RECORD STORE ANNOUNCE DISCOUNTS THAT WILL SHOCK & SURPRISE!!

SUPER SPECIALS (FRONTAL ATTACK)

DEPECHE MODE Some Great Reward	$6.99
Construction Time Again	$6.99
Broken Frame	$6.99
Speak & Spell (LP only)	$6.99
THE SOUND Shock of Daylight	$4.99
NICK CAVE From Her to Eternity	$6.99
MAGAZINE Second Hand Daylight	$6.99
After the Fact (both LP only)	$6.99
TONES ON TAIL Pop (LP only)	$4.99
XTC Waxworks (LP only)	$7.99
HICKS FROM THE STICKS (LP only)	$6.99
SIOUXSIE & THE BANSHEES Nocturne — Double album	$6.99
MOLOKO PLUS Echo/Associates/Sound/Wah (LP only)	$3.99
JOHN LENNON Milk & Honey	$3.99
DAVID KNOPFLER Release	$3.99
ROXY MUSIC Atlantic Years	$4.99
BOB SEGER The Distance	$2.99
KING CRIMSON Beat (LP only)	$4.99
SIMPLE MINDS Catwalk (12")	$2.99
LLOYD COLE Forest Fire (12")	$3.99
LYDON/BAMBAATAA Timezone (12")	$5.50
POWERSTATION Some Like it Hot (12") (Duran Duran/N. Rogers/R. Palmer)	$5.99
MARCHING GIRLS (12")	.99c
OMD Dazzle Ships	$4.99
FAD GADGET (LP only)	$7.99
PiL Paris Au Printemps (LP only)	$5.99
MURRAY HEAD Shades	$5.99
HUMAN LEAGUE Hysteria	$4.99
PARTY TAPES (Double Tape only)	$4.99
JAM Snap (Double Tape only)	$6.99
EQUATORS Hot	$3.99
BOWIE Golden Years (LP only)	$5.99
JAMES BOND Soundtracks	$1.99
RICHARD CLAYDERMAN One Night in Paris (Double LP only)	$7.99
THE GREAT CLASSICS Double Album	$6.99
KLAUS WUNDERLICH Rendezvous (Double LP)	$4.99
ECF Radio W.A.N.K. (12")	.99c
EVERYTHING BUT THE GIRL Eden	$9.99

PLUS MANY MORE FROM $1.99
TOO NUMEROUS TO MENTION!
ONLY AVAILABLE AT
SOUNDS UNLIMITED
75 QUEEN ST AUCKLAND PH: 799-793
Opposite Queens Arcade

NEW RELEASES (REAR FLANK ASSAULT)

ULTRAVOX Collection (includes limited edition 6 track EP)	$10.50
TEARS FOR FEARS Songs From the Big Chair	$9.99
THE SMITHS Meat is Murder	
Hatfull of Hollow	$8.99
PHIL COLLINS No Jacket Required	$10.50

THE BACK-UP BATTERY

COCTEAU TWINS Treasure	$9.99
BOB DYLAN Masterpieces (Triple album)	$16.99
Infidels	$8.99
DALIS CAR The Waking Hour	$9.99
PINK FLOYD The Wall (Double album)	$12.99
BIG COUNTRY Steel Town	$8.99
THE CLASH London Calling	$8.99
THE WATERBOYS A Pagan Place	$9.99
BILLY HOLLIDAY Legendary (Tape only)	$8.99
ORANGE JUICE Orange Juice	$9.99
DON HENLEY Building The Perfect Beast	$8.99
JULIO IGLESIAS 1100 Bel Air Place	$8.99
JEAN MICHEL JARRE Zoolook	$9.99
MICHAEL JACKSON Thriller	$8.99
Off The Wall	$8.99
TALKING HEADS Stop Making Sense	$10.50
BILLY JOEL Innocent Man	$8.99
THE FALL The Wonderful & Frightening World of ...	$9.99
STRANGLERS Aural Sculpture	$8.99
Feline	$8.99
DD SMASH The Optimist	$10.50
STREISAND Memories	$8.99
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN Born In the USA	$9.99
CAROLE KING Tapestries	8.99
TINA TURNER Private Dancer	$10.50
MIDNIGHT OIL Red Sails	$8.99
10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1,	$8.99
LLOYD COLE Rattlesnakes	$9.99
PSYCHEDELIC FURS Psychedelic Furs	$8.99
Talk Talk	$8.99
Mirror Moves	$8.99
VAN MORRISON A Sense of Wonder	$9.99
SADE Diamond Life	$8.99
TOM ROBINSON Hope & Glory	$8.99
SIMON & GARFUNKEL Collection	$8.99
Concert in Central Park	$12.99
THE CULT Dreamtime	$9.99
ALISON MOYET Alf	$8.99
PINK FLOYD Wish You Were Here	$9.99
SPANDAU BALLET Parade limited yellow vinyl copy	$10.50

QUEEN SPECIALS

The Works	$9.99
Live	$9.99
Greatest Hits	$9.99

NOTE: ALL TITLES ARE AVAILABLE ON LP & TAPE UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED.

FLYING NUN

The Full Range including Chills, Verlaines, Tall Dwarfs, etc.

IMPORTS

Sex Pistols, Disorder, Husker Du — Debut LP Magazine Face Magazine, etc. etc. etc. arriving weekly!!

NOW STOCKING COMPACT DISCS

Mike Oldfield, Police, Simple Minds, etc.
More titles arriving weekly.

BLANK TAPES

TEAC C90	$4.99 each or $11.99 for 3
TEAC C60	$3.99 each or $9.99 for 3
TDK MA60 (Metal)	$9.99 each
TDK SA60 (Chrome)	$8.99 each

IMPORT T-SHIRTS ALL $9.99

Billy Idol, Joy Division, Japan, Bowie, Duran Duran, Ozzy Osbourne, Black Sabbath & many more.

CALENDARS ALL $9.99

Iron Maiden, Police, Duran Duran

DON'T WAIT!! ORDER NOW!!

MAIL ORDERS: Sounds Unlimited, PO Box 3089, 75 Queen St, Auckland.
SPECIAL OFFER: Postage and packing only $1.25 in total on any amount (minimum order **$20**) Cheques or money orders.
I wish to pay by: BANKCARD ☐ VISA ☐ DINERS ☐ AMEX ☐
CARD NO: ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
NAME
ADDRESS
SIGNATURE EXPIRY