

# New Order Interview: STEPHEN MORRIS

When the phone rang in Stephen Morris's flat in Manchester he wasn't reading Nietzsche or brushing up on Conrad or even listening to the bleak landscapes of Bartok:

"Hang on a minute, *The Sullivans* have just finished, I'll turn the telly down."

Silence, then a dog yaps. *The Sullivans*, the Australian soap opera?

"Yeah, that's right, we get 'em all over 'ere. It's summat to do while you're packin'."

## Communion

Morris, drummer and co-keyboard/sequencer operator for New Order, sounds like a friendly, talkative John Cooper Clarke, and more than willing enough to spend nearly an hour on the phone the day before he's scheduled to start a hectic five week world tour.

"Not the healthiest way, but the only economically viable way to see the world."

The New Order tour includes one date in Auckland, merely a token appearance considering the band's popularity here. Why are they so big in New Zealand?

"I don't know, but we keep receiving all these gold discs from New Zealand. Maybe we're big with sheep or something. I know we've a big following, that's why we're coming back. I've spent a lot of time in New Zealand. I lost me passport the last time, so I ended up spending an extra two days in Auckland."

The word is that the band are Manchester United supporters.

"No, not me, that's everybody else. Rob Gretton (manager) put me off football for life, he's a City supporter. I can't see what people see in it. The roadies, who are into United, are always arguing with Rob, so football creates more problems than it's worth. I try to keep out of it in case I say something as a joke and cause a political controversy."

Why doesn't the band do more press?

"There seems to be this thing that we don't do interviews, but we do, whenever we can, unless the people wanting the interview come on too strong like 'you must do this or your career will be in tatters.' So then we'll say 'sod off, mate.' We don't particularly like doing them, because with people asking the same questions you can be a little less than enthusiastic, although we try to be accomodating."

In the background the dog goes mad. "Yes, we've got a dog. It's just run outside to at-



Bernard Albrecht, 'Murder' video. Photo (& cover) by Terry Moore.

tack somebody. It's alright, it's only a Yorkshire terrier. Oh dear, family."

## Old Testament

Enough small talk, here's some history. In the middle of 1977, "a young quartet formed as Warsaw, a spiteful punk group with obvious pretensions ... By mid-78 their motivation, direction, inspiration had sharpened considerably." (*NME Book of Modern Music*)

In other words, Warsaw had become Joy Division. Some transformation ...

"At the time we were a bit outside what was going on in Manchester, we weren't part of the Buzzcocks scene and all that and so we had trouble getting gigs. It was our decision as we didn't want to be part of it, but people thought we were a bit snotty. We practised a lot."

"We decided at the time to get a gig in London, but there was a new group around called Warsaw Pakt and we were told that we'd never get a gig in London with a name like Warsaw. So, rather naively and not taking into account that the person who told us that was actually Warsaw Pakt's manager, we changed our name."

Songs like 'Transmission', 'Atmosphere' and the *Unknown Pleasures* album represent the cream of the Joy Division period: Peter Hook (bass), Barney Albrecht (guitar), Ian Curtis (vocals) and Morris created the songs, Martin Hammet produced the sound:

"After we'd changed our name to Joy Division, we played a few gigs. Tony Wilson saw us and he was starting up Factory at the time and he wanted us to be on it. Martin was one of the four partners who started Factory, so we met him through that."

"He taught us about the things you could do in the studio. He was just like a mad doctor as he tried out loads of things in the studio and he would show you all these little boxes you'd never seen before. It was educational in a way and he could put his own imprint on what you were doing. You would envisage a song sounding a certain way, but he would put another perspective on it. Sometimes you'd like it, sometimes you wouldn't. Interesting, because we'd never realised before what you could do with a few knobs."

Was his production what the band wanted?

"It must've been at the time, we can't do anything about it now. He was good and we liked what he did and his style of production had an impact at the time, it became in vogue and he was in demand."

From 'Blue Monday' on, the band have produced themselves (except for the one-off with Arthur Baker, 'Confusion', but more of that later):

"Blue Monday' and *Power, Corruption and Lies* were done at the same time: We'd learned all the technological stuff through working with Martin, but four people producing themselves could either mean arguments or compromise. Fortunately we get on quite well and we compromised."

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"You start off with an idea of how the songs ought to sound. We've lost Martin's viewpoint but now we've total control so that the songs sound exactly the way you wanted them to sound when you wrote them."

Ian Curtis's sad suicide is well enough documented without dwelling on it here. In Joy Division, he was the lyricist, the voice; what was his influence back then on the band?

"Us three would be jamming away making a load of noise and Ian would say 'that's a good riff, we'll work on that one' and he'd have some lyrics and we'd put them on top and we'd have a song pretty quickly. That was the first thing that we missed. We'd all get involved in playing and we wouldn't listen to what we're playing, but he would listen and tell us whether it was any good or not."

"Once that's removed, it leaves a bit of a gap but we soon got over it. We just had to change the way we wrote songs and take that into account. Ian was just a regular bloke really, just like anybody else. But it was easier to write songs back then than it was initially with New Order, it was like starting over in that respect. Ian was like the quality control department. Obviously he was a lot more than that but that was his role in the songs at the time."

## From Depression to Religion

Joy Division became avatars, their name and music carried instant clout in its depressive weightiness; pain is art, art was Joy Division, an equation that elevated the band into the ranks of the untouchable. New Order have inherited that burden of responsibility, do they feel it?

"I can't really believe it. We don't feel responsible, you're responsible to yourself to carry on doing what you've been doing and hope it's as good and people like it. The people can't dictate to you what you should do, all they can do is judge what you've done."

People relate to the depression in your music, do you see that in Joy Division and New Order?

"(Laughs) I don't actually. A while ago we were always being accused of being doomy. I've never considered our music as depressing. We've done some sad songs, but not depressing, I hope. I think that depression is something to be avoided at all costs. You've got to be sad sometimes, otherwise you'd never be happy."

The pleasure-pain principle?

"Exactly, maybe that's what we're trying to do. We don't want to do the same thing over and over again — if the people don't like the next thing then too bad. You can't expect anybody to like everything you do."

Why has Joy Division/New Order had such an influence on music and attitudes?

"I don't know. I try not to think about it. It's

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