

Love Songs for Lenin

Easterhouse

Easterhouse are the new darlings of the British rock press. Their new album *Waiting For The Redbird* has been critically acclaimed and the bands' singer-songwriter Andy Perry has even been hailed as a Bruce Springsteen for the 90s.

On the phone, Rough Trade's current pride and joy sounded pretty unassuming, friendly, and more than happy to talk about his music and politics at one o'clock in the morning, Manchester time.

Easterhouse seems to be not so much a band, but an organisation with Andy Perry at the head, the remaining members being staff employed to fulfill their designated roles. I asked Perry if he agreed with that description.

"I like to avoid that solo thing a little bit because it's a bit too much about personalities and stuff, but for me, yes, I have more control over this band and dictate the standards. Having said that, I think there's a certain amount of interrelation. Easterhouse is more important than me as an individual."

The music on *Waiting For The Redbird* is fairly diverse: the ballad qualities of a song such as 'This Country' contrasts with, say, the single 'Come Out Fighting'.

"I'd like to think there's an Easterhouse sound," Perry muses. "This LP we've just done is a lot different to what I've done a couple of years ago, but to me, the thread behind the music is what it's trying to achieve in terms of a message, and the kind of philosophy that goes into making music. If there is a dynamic behind Easterhouse, it's not so much a musical style, but more a whole

philosophy behind why you make music, and what you want to talk about."

The first album, *Contenders* is only available in this country on expensive import (if at all), so very few New Zealanders know what to expect from an Easterhouse album. How would you describe your music to a newcomer? (It's the question all musicians hope to avoid: self-classification. Andy Perry lets out a small embarrassed laugh.)

"Um... I suppose I would say it was consciously modern. A lot weirder in musical style than you'd expect from a band that was talking about political and social issues. We try very much not to be too insular, or too much on an alternative side of music. Just because it's talking about serious things doesn't mean I have to sound rough or alternative in that kind of way."

The album's called *Waiting For The Redbird*—what's the Redbird?

"It's a slang word for a Russian nuclear missile. When I wrote that song it was very much a concern in that time at that place. But now people have stopped worrying about the bomb and have started worrying about the environment, so it's become something of a minor issue. So the song 'Redbird' is a political snapshot of one time and place. It was very contemporary, like a newspaper: the next day it was out of date."

Would you be likely to deal with the environmental issue on the next album? It seems to fit in with what Easterhouse are doing politically.

"I'd like to tackle it, but I think we have a slightly different perspective on it than maybe those people who've taken it up now. For a lot of people who look at Green issues now, they're sort of looking at 'We as



the consumer can refuse to buy bleach products, or things that come from the Amazon rain forest.' It's all about being a consumer. It's a very middle class way of approaching it. Easterhouse would say: 'Well, you're worried about the environment, which is a very relevant thing to, say, a timber-worker who's worried about just getting enough food to live and getting a house for his family and putting clothes on their backs.' We have a different perspective. The reason that the environment is being destroyed by multinational corporations and logging companies is because of their quest for profit. What we'd say is, remove the profit factor and you'd prevent a lot of the destruction that's going on."

That and a lot of the statements on the album are fairly hard left. Where did the politics originate?

"Personally, my politics come from

my parents. My father was a very strong trade unionist who got made redundant during the recession in the late 70s in England. Both my parents are Irish—one protestant, one Catholic, so there's that dimension as well."

Does your music reflect a stance on the Irish struggle?

"I'm in favour of the struggle for self-rule with as much determination as any normal Irish person would be. In a way the struggle is more important for England, because a lot of the politics that are created in Ireland affect British politics as well. There's the three Irish people shot down in Gibraltar—the most stunning thing was that there was no real investigation of it and no real explosion or outrage. It seems that you can shoot people down in the street in cold blood and get away with it. And it seems to me that the

same shady government that could have these people shot down would also do the same to trade unionists or whatever if the time came, if that was what that government required. So you don't look at Irish politics in isolation, but as part of the whole British spectrum. You can't solve the problem of Ireland without solving the problem of British politics."

So, does Andy see himself as a musician who is politically concerned, or as a revolutionary who writes songs? He gives another embarrassed laugh.

"A musician and a revolutionary at the same time. I write songs because I've got something to write about, and that stems from the politics. So it's about fifty-fifty."

You've been quoted as saying you pride yourself on the influence in your music of the defiance of punk, yet when punk was around you would have been, say, 12 or 13. So what would be your more recent or relevant influences?

"Ah... Good question. [There's that laugh again.] In the heyday of punk in England, I would have been, say, 15, maybe 14, which is a sort of coming out time for most teenagers when

they get involved in music, so it was very significant. From that I've maintained the idea of socially conscious music—music with a message. Funnily enough, nobody at the time wrote those daft love songs. I also listened to a lot of Bob Marley and Linton Kwesi Johnson. After the dynamic quality [of punk] wore off, there wasn't a lot that attracted my attention anymore. Since Joy Division and New Order, music never had that strong a pull."

The daft love song seems to be coming back in a big way. Do you think Easterhouse will ever write one?

"I could write love songs, maybe dedicated to Lenin, or the revolution itself. Anybody could write love songs, but if you're talking about that hollow, commercial tripe, it would be a sad day if I got reduced to doing that."

Well, thanks for your time.

"Oh, look, no problem. Thanks for listening. It's been great to get a lot of that stuff off my chest. I think I can sleep now. Maybe I'll see you—a tour or something in New Zealand."

Yeah?
ANDREW DUBBER

The Hard Word

"They couldn't understand my accent and they thought we were communists."

—Midnight Oil vocalist and president of the Australian Conservation Foundation, PETER GARRETT, on visiting America.

"I really knew the enigma had taken hold when the immigration officer went apeshit and asked for my autograph."

—*Hellraiser* author and director CLIVE BARKER on visiting America.

"We write about going to the store and getting beer and potato chips, something that means something to me."

—Beastie Boy ADAM HOROWITZ on living in America, thus explaining the above two quotes.

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