

Ideally this interview should have taken place in 1975 when Roxy first toured here and were amongst the hottest bands in an otherwise stagnant rock scene. Since then they haven't advanced too conspicuously although Ferry's solo ventures, particularly *The Bride Stripped Bare*, have yielded some riches. But in the main rock'n'roll has overtaken the band and the one-time field-leading revolutionaries are now struggling for an artistic relevance and a place in a musical environment that they played an important part in creating.

Ferry's dilettante chic was a natural focal point in the band but since the departure of female companion Jerry Hall his characterisation has shifted to a vulnerable hurt-in-love footing. *The Bride Stripped Bare*, *Manifesto* and *Flesh and Blood* reveal a man, if not revelling in his sorrow, at least portraying a romantic partially glorifying his loss.

Past policies

Ferry sits slouched on the edge of his bed in a caravan behind the main Sweetwaters' stage. He draws quietly on a cigarette as he talkatively answers the questions involved, occasionally looking at me directly but more often fixing his eyes on some hidden object in the room. He has an air of vagueness but this was probably due to the jet lag he was complaining of.

The conversation naturally began with festivals, Sweetwaters being only the second that Roxy have every played; the first being at Lincoln back in 1972. Staying with that year I asked Ferry what became of his initial idealism for keeping singles separate from albums.

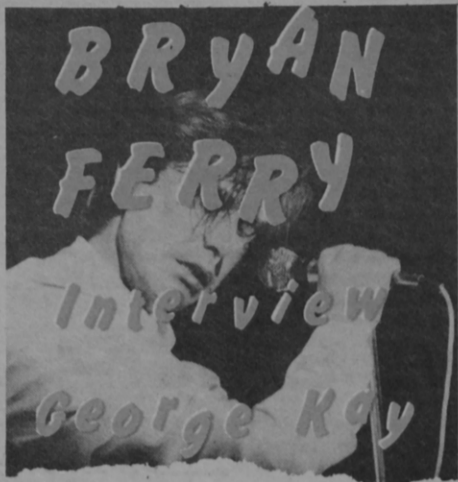
"It became realism. It seemed a nice idea at the time and then you discover people that like your music don't buy singles. We did two that way, 'Pyjamarama' and 'Virginia Plain' and then people said 'God this is ridiculous, I wish that track was on an album.' There's still some idealism left," he added smiling.

Roxy's rise was meteoric, there was no paying-of-dues for Ferry or hammering up and down the M1. This overnight success must have made profound changes on his way of life:

"I became totally immersed in my work. Before then I was doing it as a hobby and I was making money from teaching and doing odd jobs. I was now making money from something I loved doing and I felt very privileged as there's very few people in this day and age, except maybe for farmers, who see the results from their work, smiling faces at festivals. I also lost contact with a lot of people not because you become richer and drop people but because you're always on the move."

The original Roxy Music presented both a visual and a musical packaging that contained novel elements of glitter and rockabilly ritziness. Swept-back hair-dos and cinematic overtones, provocative and bizarre, who was responsible for creating such a package?

"Well I was. It was just that I wanted to make music and I couldn't find a suitable band so I had to find other musicians, although I didn't consider myself a musician until recently. I was writing songs and over the months the band



built up. I liked all the people involved and they were all pretty sympathetic and pretty weird, they weren't run-of-the-mill musicians. I couldn't have coped with straight musicians in the early days."

The band must have missed Eno's studio abilities after his departure before the recording of *Stranded*, the third album?

"No because he really didn't do much with us but he learned a lot from us and went on to prove himself afterwards. He's done a lot of very good work and a lot not so good as he tends to do too much, he dilutes himself. He left because there wasn't much scope for him as I was the ideas man and that was the role that he wanted but he's found that with Talking Heads. He doesn't play very much but he does have a brain and it's good for him to have a group of players who need a helping hand."

Album Views

The first five Roxy albums would have to be considered as containing some of the finest British rock'n'roll of the seventies, and of those five *Stranded* would be my pick as being the most consistent, the most perceptive. Ferry partly agreed:

"They all have different things that commend them to me and they all have lots of faults. I liked *For Your Pleasure* very much but *Stranded* was probably the most complete as a piece of work and the biggest influence on it was the *These Foolish Things* album I did prior to it as I became much more intent to craft the songs fully. If you look at the first and second albums you find that they are much more abstract pieces of music."

Siren, which wasn't well received critically seemed to be the band's attempt at coming to terms with the soul/disco fad that was on the way up.

"In one song, yes, 'Love Is The Drug' which was about a guy going to a club. 'Dance Away' later was about a similar sort of theme, about someone in an alienating disco situation. It's nice to have a theme for a song and sometimes you look for a peg to hang a song on like 'Sign of the Times' which was about the punk kids

and their whole attitude in '77."

Ferry revealed that he was unhappy about the release of their very scrappy live album, *Viva*, which is to be deleted, and also about the release of Roxy's *Greatest Hits* which he believed only serves as an introduction to the band.

Roxy Mk 2 started with *Manifesto*. How did he relate this to their previous five?

"It's a strange bridging album. Side One sounded like early Roxy stuff and the other side sounded more American, more songy. Things like 'Manifesto' were more off-the-wall. There was some great playing on the album and it was the first time we had guests throughout the whole album and we had five different drummers on it although they weren't all credited."

I'd heard *Flesh and Blood* described as a "good radio album". Fair comment?

"In a way, because not wishing to put the album down as there's plenty of others who'll do that for me, but most albums have one or two tracks and the rest are just padding and I think that *Flesh and Blood* is a balanced thing in that it doesn't have a super hit and all the tracks are attractive enough to be played on the radio."

Why include 'Eight Miles High'?

"We did 'In The Midnight Hour' for the Kenny Everett New Year show, y'know New Year's Eve midnight hour and so on. Everybody liked that and so there was another song I always liked from the sixties which was West Coast white as opposed to East Coast black and I nearly did it on the *Bride Stripped Bare*. I think it suited Phil's guitar playing — psychedelic."

Soul And Vulnerability

Ferry does have an air of vulnerability, of romantic resignation but this may just have been his role for interviews. Often he seemed to retreat into his own thoughts, and his answers frequently extended beyond the questions as if he was merely thinking aloud. He lacked aggression but I'm sure he doesn't. Ask Brian Eno.

Anyway the conversation turned to the *Bride Stripped Bare*, his most naked statement (sorry) and once described as a real soul album. Do you have misgivings about baring your soul?

"No I think it's my job to some extent. It's just like any other musician I've ever liked, Otis Redding, Charlie Parker and Billie Holiday, they're all people who exposed themselves and that was what they did best and they were happiest when they were working. And I'm the same. It's not that you want to depress people, I like doing fun things too, it's just that I'm more at home in a melancholy mood."

But surely there's a danger of dwelling too much on your personal problems?

"Yes there's a danger of any writer doing that but I think I step aside from that. Even during the same song sometimes you'll be very close to something and then step away from it in another verse. I can still make terrible mistakes in life and you think or hope you can learn all the time."

Does *Flesh and Blood* refer to being vulnerable?

"No just human."

Do you feel particularly vulnerable these days?

"An interesting question. In what way? I certainly feel physically vulnerable touring that's for sure but I'm sure that's not what your question implies."

Emotionally vulnerable?

"No more so than I ever did except that you become more cut off from people in this job although you try hard not to be. You try hard to live a normal life except something happens and you leap back into your shell again."

Earlier on you said that many of the new bands that were coming up were very influenced by the first two Roxy albums. Can you name some of these bands?

"Well, Siouxsie and the Banshees, all those sorts of people." Ultravox?

"Yeah and latterly Joy Division and quite a few of them."

How have you influenced them?

"Well you can just hear it. The chord structures were very simple and they're keyboards based songs as a lot of my songs were very keyboards inspired. Only a couple have come out of guitar which is probably unusual for most rock bands."

Ferry is right about Roxy's influence but it goes deeper than that. Like Bowie, the band broke rules and traditions, they evolved new concepts and showed no allegiance to their roots, if indeed they felt any. Soul was there but not in the accepted traditional American sense. The feelings involved were presented in a more contemporary framework and the Roxy legacy can be seen most obviously in bands like the Skids, Simple Minds and Magazine. But their real influence is impossible to measure or estimate. They were crucial.

Live Epilogue

Ferry is an awkward live performer. Dressed in his white suit and pink tie, his stage mannerisms and movements were gawky and stilted. His attempts at audience communication were equally hammy. His appeals of surely tongue-in-cheek, of "are you feeling all right?" and statements like "this is a really beautiful festival" were misguided and inane. That was the bad news, the good was excellent.

The band, Manzanera (lead guitar), Neil Hubbard (guitar), Gary Tibbs (bass), Dave Skinner (keyboards), MacKay (saxophone) and Michael Dow (drums) were steaming and skilful, especially Manzanera, and the choice of repertoire was faultless. Classics from the first five albums, 'Dream Home', 'Song For Europe', 'Bogus Man', 'Editions Of You', 'Do the Strand', 'Love Is The Drug', 'Both Ends Burning' and a belting 'Thrill Of It All', sounded better than ever. And the more recent output, 'Dance Away', padded out by an average drum solo, 'Over You', 'Eight Miles High' and 'Trash', (surprisingly no 'Oh Yeah') was transformed in the live situation.

But the highlight was an encore of Lennon's 'Jealous Guy' with Ferry's voice being ideally suited to the song's pain. That was magic.

They were a hard act to follow.

George Kay

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