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NZ ON AIR

So why exactly would you want to hear what Siouxsie Sioux has to say for herself, some eight years since she last made a record that was much better than embarrassing? I'll tell you why:

SIOUXSIE

Because when you ask this year's selection of ill-groomed god-kings for anything vaguely resembling an opinion they'll most likely look blank and suggest helpfully that they "can't be easily categorised, really" but Siouxsie has hates, loves and, still more remarkably, demonstrates a reasonable command of the English language in expressing them. Moreover she realises that there's nothing even slightly revolutionary about using the massive resources of the multi-national of your choice to deliver reassuring left-liberal-humanist commonplaces (coming soon, Sinead O'Connor, the mini-series); her spleen is directed straight at the music industry itself. So given that she has this reputation as one of the least foolish people in her ridiculous profession, did she enjoy "crossing over" ("reaching out" as they say at *Stump* magazine) into an even more absurd part of sad ol' Showbusiness? In plain (i.e. enfeebled) English, what was it like working on Tim Burton's *Batman Returns*?

"I'm really happy about being involved in the film and with the song and everything. We'd been touring America and me and Budgie had just moved to France and we'd decided we were going to have a good long rest and then the call came through about this *Batman* single and that was the only thing that would have pulled us out of our semi-rest, 'cause I've always been a fan of the *Batman* comics, the regalia, everything. And especially with this one having *Catwoman* in it — it was ironic, really, 'cause in America they'd been asking me what I thought of Michelle Pfeiffer being *Catwoman* and I'd been saying, like, God it's a blonde, how awful. And so we flew out to L.A., met Tim Burton and Danny Elfman and apparently they hadn't had such a fine time working with Prince and they'd decided not to use any more pop stars but at the last minute they contacted us. Apparently Tim Burton was a fan but it was a shock 'cause we're hardly a mega-million selling band. I really liked Burton's other films and with him based in Hollywood amongst all the other ugly cliché things that do happen there I really do think he's out on a limb making the kind of films he wants to. I think this second *Batman* film is much better than the first, although perhaps not as commercial. The only downside was the way Warner

Brothers handled the whole thing; they were expecting Tim Burton to pick one of the many big names from their roster and they certainly didn't put their hearts into releasing the single for us."

The question of Hollywood "style" or ugliness seems to be something that's interested you

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for a while. Would you agree that the Hollywood aesthetic has saturated America so deeply that any "post-punk" resistance there involves throwing away the whole idea of style (cf. the snappy t-shirt and jeans ensemble sported by every American band of note except the Cramps in the last ten years), whereas in England there's a perception that it's possible to appropriate, even "radicalize" style or image?

"Well I think the Hollywood thing is pretty much everywhere in the Western world by now, but there's resistance to it everywhere, New York, even those poor fuckers in Seattle, there's as many people unhappy with what's being forced down their throats in America as anywhere else."

Do you think the voyeuristic/ parasitic relation between star and fan, the whole obsession game played out by everyone from Zappa to Bowie to Morrissey is dependant on scale, on the size of the star, or is it just as intense among smaller, "alternative" audiences?

"I think there's a lot of strong people out there who have made a difference, whether they're underground or overground, so I suspect that the whole idea of what's popular, the common idea of audience scale, is controlled by the industry; there's a kind of false reality out there that certain people are popular whether they actually are or not."

Like the way you never meet anyone who actually admits to buying Bryan Adams records...

"I've never met one, I honestly never have, unless they're lying for fear of being tortured to death. But I suppose it's fodder for the masses, music for battery farms."

I remember you saying a few years ago that if you were getting involved in music for the first time now you'd be trying

to change the business structures as much as the music itself. Even with the recent mass success of ultra low budget, independently produced dance records and (some would say cretin-friendly travesties of) indie guitar rock, has the industry changed in any of the ways you'd hoped?

"I hope so, yeah, it must have made a difference. The reason I said that in the first place was that as long as the industry is in control they're only going to allow a certain kind of reality or they'll create a reality that'll furnish their pockets. They don't want anything to upset their preconceptions of society, sexuality, whatever. So they are more the enemy than the people making the music. But I do think that if you get a real change in music it affects every area of the arts; in England in '76 it affected painting, film, even fashion; it put a stop to "Fashion" per se, people were dressing how they wanted to dress. And I think a refusal to consume, to accumulate more and more little accessories, as we all do, will always be a powerful weapon against some advert man's idea of reality."

So do you see the deliberately small scale, low budget operations of, say, 7-inch single labels as that kind of strategy of refusal to seek maximum gain?

"Well yes, but I'd still like to think that in an ideal world the good stuff would sell by the bucketload. It's good to be able to reach an audience of a particular, limited size but I do

find it frustrating"

Do you see what you do as political inasmuch as you're trying to stay widely visible while fending off as many media stereotypes as you can? Are you trying to set an example?

"I suppose so, but it's only really in hindsight, we don't sit down with a plan to change this and this and this. But yeah, we'd love to change the situation, to change DJs, video stations, MTV. But I like pop because it lacks a certain respectability, it's a situation where surprising things can be seen to happen without the radio men, the A&R men knowing about it. Like for an instant Laurie Anderson being at number one, everyday families putting the song on their phone messages, it was so exciting when it got through on that level. But I think it's probably getting harder, not easier to do that. There are now cleaned-up versions being sold of things that might have been subversive once: at least Jimi Hendrix was getting fucked-up through trying something where he didn't know what was going to happen; he probably died of his own naivety, not because he was fulfilling someone else's idea of what a fucked-up rock star should be, like Guns and fucking Roses. It's like immunizing people with tiny doses of deviance or a very contained, heterosexual view of deviance; it's for people who dress up and pretend to take drugs on the weekend then go home and behave like good laboratory rats for the rest of the week. And all these supposedly decadent rock stars have pristine family values anyway, they all have beige shag pile carpets upstairs. But there you have it, that's schlock 'n' roll."

There you have it indeed. Just like a good pop song: the bleeding obvious, beautifully put.

MATTHEW HYLAND

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