

The Decades of DURAN DURAN



Duran Duran, 1995. Clockwise from top: John Taylor, Nick Rhodes, Simon Le Bon and Warren Cuccurullo.



Duran Duran circa 1983, from their self-titled album. From left, Andy Taylor, Simon Le Bon, Nick Rhodes, John Taylor and Roger Taylor.

From "Hungry Like The Wolf" to "The Reflex," Duran Duran was the quintessential '80s band. After struggling through a transitional period of change, in 1993 the band returned to the ordinary world and regained the national spotlight. Now, with a cover album hitting the stores, Duran Duran is paying tribute to its influences. Keyboard player Nick Rhodes talks about the progression of the band from the '80s to the '90s, as well as success, rap and ... makeup.

By Rob Clark
THE BATTALION

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h, the '80s. Images of Ronald Reagan, Live Aid, new Coke, knee-high socks, parachute pants, MTV and "Miami Vice" immediately come to mind. In terms of music though, perhaps one band portrays the mood of that decade. Duran Duran was the '80s. From the hugely popular videos to those awful hairdos and makeup, the band set the stage for the MTV generation.

"The Reflex," "Hungry Like the Wolf" and "Save A Prayer" were radio staples, teenybop rags like Tiger Beat and 16 finally found their cover boys, and there seemed to be no end in sight.

But as time progressed, the number of Duran Durans seemed to decline. Sales slumped, and the band all but disappeared by the turn of the decade.

It wasn't until 1993 when the singles "Ordinary World" and "Come Undone" finally thrust Duran Duran back into the nation's consciousness.

Now, Duran Duran is back with a cover album entitled *Thank You*, and the band is once again in the headlines.

Nick Rhodes, Duran Duran's keyboard player, discussed the Duran decades and how the band has come to grips with the successes and failures of the '80s and the transition to the '90s.

The early days

Rhodes, along with bass guitarist John Taylor, started Duran Duran in 1979. The band's popularity grew quickly in the early '80s, with the *Rio* album and the influence of MTV.

Rhodes said the speed of success was confusing for the band.

"Nothing came as more of a shock for us when we were thrust from these clubs into arenas with a lot of teenagers," he said. "We couldn't really understand how they were relating to what we were doing, and it was kind of like chaos and confusion."

But this unease was no Pearl Jam- or Nirvana-type shunning of the spotlight. The band quickly found a way to deal with the immense crowds of fainting girls begging for any of the band members to take their hands in marriage.

"We turned it into our favor in that we had an audience and we were thrilled to have an audience," Rhodes said. "You want to get through to people. You want to inspire people, make them

smile. You want to make them think about something. You might just want to make them dance. "And, at that time, we realized that whatever we were doing was getting through to a lot of people and causing a lot of euphoria. We just rolled with it and counted on making the records that we knew how to."

The transition begins

But with two spinoffs of the group, Arcadia (with Duran singer Simon Le Bon, drummer Roger Taylor and Rhodes) and the Power Station (with John Taylor and guitarist Andy Taylor), the identity of the band began to blur.

"People didn't know what was going on," Rhodes said. "There was a lot of confusion. 'Have they split up?' 'What's Power Station?' 'What's Arcadia?'"

After adding the departure of Roger Taylor and Andy Taylor (no relation) into this state of confusion, the band was in limbo, and faced with a difficult decision.

"Do we carry on as a three-piece, replace the band or do we disband?" Rhodes said. "And the latter choice was 'No, we're not going to disband.' As far as we were concerned, there's a lot that we've got to do. We haven't even started."

With Le Bon, Rhodes and John Taylor, the band went on, but struggled with albums *Notorious*, *Big Thing* and *Liberty*.

Then, Warren Cuccurullo was eventually added as a full-time band member, replacing Andy Taylor as lead guitarist.

"It took us from 1986 to 1990 to actually recover from losing those members and to integrate Warren into the band properly, which is a lot of the reason we lost a lot of ground with radio and commercially," Rhodes said.

"It was very hard for us having reached such a peak in the middle of the '80s to realize that by '88, '89, we were on a downward dip and we couldn't go any further upwards at that stage. By the

time it got to 1990, just about everybody in the media, and outside of it for that matter, wanted to close the door of the vaults of the 1980s and shut us inside it."

The big comeback

But a comeback was in the works with the unofficially-titled *The Wedding Album* in 1993. Spurred by the strength of singles "Ordinary World" and "Come Undone," the band members found themselves back in familiar territory.

"What 'Ordinary World' did for us was it made people that supported us in the '80s, and maybe people who hadn't, realize that we had been through the same kinds of things as them and we weren't stuck in 1984 or 1985," Rhodes said. "That we were feeling very differently about things and that coincided with a lot of people's views at that time."

Thank You

The strength of this comeback has brought about *Thank You*, a cover album inspired by cover albums by Bryan Ferry (*These Foolish Things*) and David Bowie (*Pin-Ups*).

With covers as diverse as Bob Dylan's "Lay Lady Lay," The Doors' "Success," Public Enemy's "911 Is A Joke," and Elvis Costello's "Watching The Detectives," *Thank You* is a definite new step for Duran Duran.

"We really wanted to show people some of our inspiration and influences over the years," Rhodes said. "As you can see by the tracks chosen on the album, they really are diverse. To have Public Enemy and Bob Dylan on the same album is pretty extreme. And we felt we could make them work because we wanted to make those songs our own."

While many of the songs on *Thank You* are from the '60s, Rhodes said they are relevant to the '90s.

"Songs like 'Ball of Confusion' — I was amazed when I looked at the lyric to it and saw the line 'Gun control and the sound of soul,'" Rhodes said. "They're all great songs in their own way and powerful pieces of music that we felt we were able to do something different with."

Duran Duran + rap?

Perhaps *Thank You's* most intriguing cover choices are the rap selections. The idea of a Duran Duran—Public Enemy connection is sure to turn a few heads.

"('911 Is A Joke') is an extraordinary piece of music," Rhodes said. "Obviously the lyric is very frightening in its

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honesty and hideous in its reality. It was an interesting choice for us.

"Obviously we're not from the same culture as Public Enemy ... We felt it was something very easy for us to actually change completely because we weren't going to do an out-and-out rap version of it. We wanted to put some delta-blues guitar on it and prove that one can take something from that culture and make it work as more of a piece of rock music."

Rhodes said he has received feedback from PE rapper Flavor Flav.

"He was thrilled we had done the song," Rhodes said. "He said, 'Thank you for bringing my song to people's attention again.'"

Duran Duran also recorded "White Lines," *Thank You's* first single, with rap legends Melle Mel, Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five. Rhodes said rap has made huge strides in its attempts for recognition as a music form.

"My feeling about rap is that it's now a legitimate part of music in the way that rock'n'roll is, in the way that pop is and funk is."

While Rhodes said he focuses on the current state of Duran Duran, he does look back on the past 15 years and, at times, laughs at what the band used to be.

"Are you kidding?" he asked. "With the scary haircuts we had? Of course."

And all that makeup ...

And, of course, no interview with Nick Rhodes would be complete without a discussion of makeup. Rhodes is notorious for caking on the stuff, and even took a few shots in jest from Le Bon in a recent Rolling Stone interview.

"I think the thing is people take makeup a little too seriously," Rhodes said. "You look at your television set every night and there's loads of people on there — David Letterman, Jay Leno, whoever the guests are — and they have makeup on."

"It's just that I put that little bit more on than anybody else."

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