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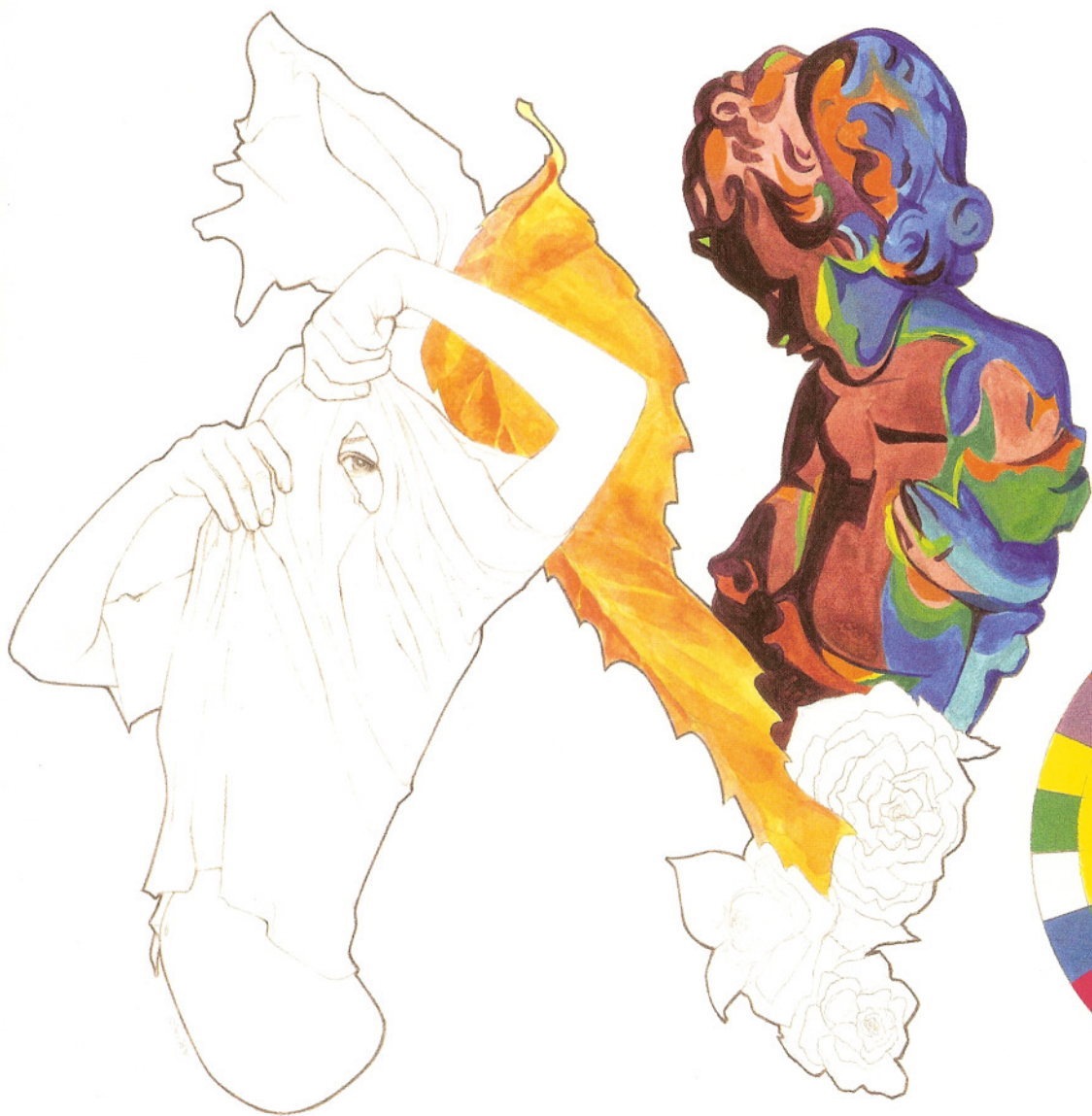
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NEW ORDER

In Search of the Mystical White Stag

by: Mark von Pfeiffer illustration: Akiko Stehrenberger

"It is not necessary for the public to know whether I am joking or whether I am serious. Just as it is not necessary for me, myself to know."

—Salvador Dali

[To reach its fully rampant splendor, the following introduction must be read by Leonard Nimoy/Mr. Spock in the style of the 1980s television show *In Search Of*.]

The Earth. The Solar System. The Milky Way, the Universe, the Multiverse...Infinity. As the atom shifts, matter ferments and decays, we spin and tumble through time—so jostled by the never-ending stimuli of *existing* that life's myriad happenings often appear as mere coincidences. For many, it is nigh impossible to pull back from the canvas of their own linear arc to see the larger patterns. But perhaps, once in a lifetime, even the most tight-assed empiricist will be slapped across the brain by the mackerel of the extraordinary—a fleeting glimpse behind the curtain of the sublime. For the majority of our lives we are, as Faulkner would say, "bags of meat" waiting for the end of our days, but in these moments we are truly *human*. Come with me as I detail one such experience.

At any rate, it was the 11th of March—my "birthday," the day on which centuries ago I leapt wholly formed from Zeus' loin—in the dead of the afternoon that I was awoken from my customary nap by a call from the head witch doctor at *Filter*. He gave me to know that New Order, the long-spanning British badasses who had bridged punk to electronic in the late '70s and bulldogged through the '80s with dance anthems like "True Faith" and "Bizarre Love Triangle," were again productive, and would soon be dropping a

new LP: *Waiting for the Siren's Call*. The fact that I had been conducting an interview with their frontman Bernard Sumner in my dream only seconds earlier struck me as significant.

I am a lucid dreamer and therefore can recall their every detail with stunning precision and immediately decided to ask of him the same questions in the physical world as I had in the somnolistic. When we met in the Presidential Suite at the Four Seasons Hotel in New York, I was given the same answers as in the dream. Verbatim. As the dialogue is synchronous and its backdrop is inevitably the more intriguing, I will present the dream in its entirety and leave it to you, the reader, to decide its significance.

Curtain Raises.

It's 5:00 am. Silence rings through the great northern woods. Ahead and to my left is Adolfo my loyal midget manservant. He is a "little person" but thinks that particular term is for the weak. To my right and crouched behind a tree is Bernard Sumner—lead singer and occasional guitarist for New Order. It has taken weeks of cajoling, bribery and finally blackmail to convince his press agent to convince him that a hunting trip in search of "The Great White Stag of the Adirondacks" would be in his best interest. His brown hair cropped close is now hidden below an orange skullcap. He cuts a dapper figure, dressed from head to toe in the most fashionable Orvis-brand camouflage Park Avenue can offer. His heart rate is elevated due to the tense situation of the hunt and the sharp expectancy one feels in the weeks before an album launches.

Waiting for the Siren's Call will be their ninth studio album over a 28-year period. That includes LPs issued under the names Warsaw and Joy Division, but does not count the various remixes, John Peel Sessions, EPs,

greatest hits and live releases which number legion. Sumner, band mates Stephen Morris, Gillian and Peter Hook—who parlays perhaps the most distinctive bass guitar in all of musicdom—are at least partly responsible for the acceptance electronic music enjoys in the mainstream today.

I creep, hunched over to Bernard who regards me dubiously, still, no doubt, feeling punchy from the venison jerky that was our breakfast.

I'm going to have Adolfo launch some clay pigeons for us. We can take target practice while we wait for the mystical White Stag rumored to reside in these woods.

Bernard Sumner: Whatever you say.

Many would be against firing into the air; they would assert that it spooks the game. I say they are drawn. Drawn to my raw machismo.

Okay.

What is your considered opinion on the movie *24-Hour Party People* which paints the British scene when you and other heavy-hitters, such as the Buzzcocks and Siouxsie and the Banshees, were mounting your first attacks?

Most of it was true, except for the extreme light-heartedness of it all—a little gospel according to Tony Wilson [owner of Factory Records].

It does cover the life and death of Joy Division—including the suicide by hanging of your original frontman Ian Curtis.

That turned our world upside down. It's such a violent thing, suicide. It's simple murder. He hung himself on Friday and we were to commit to our first Northern

American tour on Saturday, I had gone down to the coast with some friends for the weekend, Ian was supposed to have gone with us—instead he stayed on.

Did you consider breaking up?

We were having such a good time making music that the three of us knew there was no question that we would carry on, but bringing in another singer just didn't seem right. We all took turns singing out, I wound up with the honors. It was like pulling the short straw out of the long.

Do you think there were drugs involved? Perhaps the H word?

I couldn't say. I know he had an argument with his wife that went badly.

Speaking of drugs, heroin in particular, to what extent do you think it pervades the modern music world? Has New Order ever had any problems? The public hears about an overdose, or someone getting cut from a band because of it, but it's always been my opinion that those are the people that just get caught and it's a much larger number doing it.

I think it's the minority. Everyone knows it turns you into an asshole. We've never had any problems, why do it?

You played London's infamous Electric Circus in the heyday of punk. What was that like?

We played there May of 1977. The place was a dive in a rough neighborhood—in the government-funded "Tower Blocks." Kids in TB would rain bottles down on us. But it was punk. It had charm.

The band's first manifestation was Warsaw. Where did that come from?

We were "discovered" by the Buzzcocks' manager Richard Boone and had to think quick on a proper name. At the time, Iggy and the Stooges were our heroes. And Kraftwerk. Everything cool at that moment had a German or Eastern European feel to it.

PULL! Also having to do (BLAM...BOOM) with Germany and infinitely more intriguing is the second name you ran under: Joy Division. Isn't that the name the Nazis gave their program that concerned itself with the perpetuation of Aryan characteristics in its populace? A Breeding Ministry if you will.

I was under the impression that Joy Division was the name the Army gave its brothels. We were young, and

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I want to make this clear—we were in no way endorsing World War II Germany. We were young and it was a punk thing. If it was possible to go back, we might reconsider that. Then came New Order, it was like a new beginning.

You've held together for nearly 30 years. Very few bands in the world of rock and roll can do that, even less in the realm of electronic. Kraftwerk, Jesus and Mary Chain, U2—Depeche Mode is close.

Lou Reed, the Stones. I prefer to say over 25 years. Don't want to hurry anything. I can remember U2 coming into the studio when we were recording way back. Older artists tend to lose their way. It's happened to a lot of my heroes—won't mention any names.

I took this opportunity to showcase my antique, Al Capone-era zip gun for Bernard. There's something about the intestine clattering roar and automatic weapons mixing with booze and testosterone, regardless of the weapon's quality or antiquity that tightens the groin, loosens the buttocks and makes it nigh impossible to resist squeezing pointless rounds into the closest inanimate object. Bernard, unarmed, was simply agape. After I had demolished an ant hill, a tree stump and a discarded tire, I jellied like an asshole in the accusatory silence which, after a three-beat pause, was shorn by a high-pitched squeal of shock and pain that could only be coming from my pint-sized steward, Adolfo. He reeled out of the forest, wearing his customary crimson tuxedo and top hat with a dead squirrel in one hand, a great clump of tree bark in the other. Adolfo obviously felt some sort of solidarity with the rodent as they had the same wound, seemingly caused by an automatic weapon. Luckily that while my man survived, having only the lobe of his left ear shorn off, the rodent was dead. "Indubitably rabid," I grunted.

The dead squirrel brought my mind back to the temporality of all things. At one time New Order was innovative. Very. But the world has caught up, and the frequency of radical invention within the electronic genre has ground to a slow dry hump. Fortunately, their bag o' tricks—including Hook's distinctive bass, Sumner's dry, detached vocals and their knack to surround themselves with the "right" people—allow them to carry on with verve. Their production man on *Siren's* is Stephen Street who has worked with Blur, the Stone Roses and U2. He's Deadeye Dick for blending the electric and the electronic.

You used a very high-profile producer on this

LP. As a whole, with the emergence of higher technology, producers and mixers are leaving deeper stamps on the end product. Do you feel infringed upon?

No, everybody is equal. It's about the common effort. In the end, the song itself is king.

New Order has always celebrated dichotomous states of depression and jubilation. This question was hotly debated on a fan site, and answering it would make those people who spend literally hours talking about you every day go even more fruitcakes. It will throw them into a wild frenzy, like an elephant forced into the same room with a feeding Oprah. Out of your entire canon, which track would you say is the darkest?

"Murder." It's a B-side from 1983, we took a bunch of acid and locked ourselves in the studio. The lightest? "Every Little Counts."

I imagine that's you laughing at the end of that track, following the lyric: "I think you are a pig, you should be in the zoo."

The bottle of Pernod I'd drank running headlong into that, a very bad lyric, made me laugh. It was a real moment, so we kept it in. What we usually do is record the track, or work on the music in the studio, then I go off to the smaller studio at home and write lyrics for them. At any given time there will be around three songs we're putting together. It ends up a lot of late nights and a lot of wine.

Wine helps your creative process then?

Oh, yes. A minimum of one bottle per song.

Any odd stories about songs on this new album?

"I Told You So" came about when we were using a short wave radio in the Caribbean. We recorded a transmission and short wave noise, edited it and used it as the background.

That song's got a little Velvet Underground to it. What about the lead track, "Who's Joe?" Who is Joe?

He's a hobo with some peculiar habits.

About this time on the tape I note that Adolfo has been gone for quite some time. The Stag hunt has been his ideal and it's his quarry. It's part of a coming-of-age ceremony in his family. Upon turning 25 each male must track and kill a legendary animal armed only with the magical stone knife called

the Ykesha of Terrax. For his father it was Big Foot, his grandfather dove for Nessie in Scotland and his great grandfather tracked the Yeti in northern Canada. Destiny hangs thick in the air.

How does getting older affect being in a band? Especially one with such a wide fan base. There's a level of commitment required.

Well you have to set certain rules, but even then it's taxing. I've got four kids and this album took seven months from start to finish. I don't want to be an absentee father, but I only saw them on weekends. I love being with my kids, seeing the world through their pure eyes. We finished *Siren's* between Christmas and the New Year, had a brief pause and then started promotion. Paris, Hamburg, Sweden, London and now New York. As you get older the schedule and lifestyle taxes your body more.

Yes, the "lifestyle." You should look into a liver transplant. Both my kidneys and my liver are bionic.

I'm already on the waiting list. But now if I'm not working, I don't drink. It's hard because when you're touring there's so much going on. Performing on stage is like being in the top car of a carousel. It's such an emotional high that once it's over, everything seems drab; you turn to drink for excitement. These days I like to get up in the morning and feel good. We played an awards show recently, drank only moderately and were somehow unconscious until 12:30 pm the next day. Hangovers can last three days now.

At this point Adolfo returns. In his tiny hands he holds what looks like a cross between a bowling ball and a bloody potato. It is in fact the still-beating heart of the Mystical White Stag. According to tradition he must gorge himself on it, offer specific parts to his comrades and bury the magical pit said to reside in its interior. Also, per Adolfo's modern sensibilities, we must use every piece of the beast in a constructive manner. Adolfo has promised Bernard he will use the hide to tailor him a waistcoat. But for now, I must turn the conversation towards our "lunch."

Bernard, do you like pizza?

I like pizza, but only American Hot (sic). Pepperoni, fried egg on top with jalapeño. Now I want one!

Adolfo looks up from where he is preparing the heart with an apologetic countenance...
RINNNNNNGGGG! RING! **F**