

It isn't a wholly original observation that life, and music, and art, and fashion - and almost everything else, for that matter - move in a series of pendulum swings. For every movement *this way* there is a movement *that way*, immediately after. Nothing stays the same for long; there is a continual ebb and flow, boom and bust, to and fro, flux and reflux.

To understand Duran Duran one must understand the scenes and the pendulum swings in the Britain from which they emerged.

By the mid-Seventies rock music had become - as far as the kids on the streets were concerned - stagnant. It had become the province of the bland, and of the so-called supergroups: artists who had been around for years, bands like The Who, Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin and The Rolling Stones. All of them fabulously rich, their concerts and tours infrequent, expensive, and hard to get to. They had lost touch with the kids who were buying the records. They were bored and blasé; so were the kids.

It was time for the pendulum to swing.

Punk rock.

A term first coined in America to cover the numerous

1

THE SWING OF THE PENDULUM



bands that sprang up between 1965-68 (essentially high-school garage bands), it re-emerged in 1976-77 to describe the shift in music and fashion to - what? Ripped leather bondage suits covered with ubiquitous zips and chains, crazy-coloured shocks of spiky hair; with pale faces and strange names, the punks had arrived.

The media had a field day. They lost no opportunity to goad, decry, and give massive exposure to these strange young creatures, who avowedly believed in nothing, and the band that seemed to sum up what punk was all about: The Sex Pistols. They were the complete opposite of the old order; obnoxious not compliant; proud of their lack of talent. They played raucous and discordant rock 'n' roll loudly and badly, when they played at all (which wasn't often). They spawned a host of imitators.

Suddenly, everyone was starting a band, playing in a band, gigging at pubs, clubs, parties; releasing independent singles, starting record labels, trying to make it, trying to shock, to outrage, to succeed, and most of all to play.

With names like Raped, Destroyed, The Damned, Belsen Babies, the important thing was not - as the music papers, the rest of the media, and perhaps even the kids believed - the anarchy, the revolt, the desecration, the studded leather dog-collars, safety-pinned noses and badly-bleached hair. Most of the bands sank without trace. Even the majority of those that did have hit singles were 'one-hit wonders', like The Adverts, or X-Ray Spex. On the whole, the artists who did come out of the new wave whole and fairly intact, bands like The Police, The Clash, The Jam or Blondie, singers like Elvis Costello, would have made it anyway, simply because they had the talent. And in a couple of years the wave had crested and broken. Sid Vicious' death in New York was a fitting epilogue for the movement that had started in Chelsea's Kings Road boutiques.

That is not to say that punk had no effects, or that it had nothing going for it (although it could be argued that a good part of its charm was that it *didn't* have anything going for it). Punk had energy and vitality. There was a feeling that anything - absolutely anything - could happen. It returned The Dream to Rock 'n' Roll.

The Dream? That *anybody* could be a star, just by looking scruffy and picking up a microphone or guitar. Or just by looking wild enough to be shown on television, or in the papers. You didn't really even need talent. Whoever you were, whoever you are, *you* could be famous.

But while thousands of teenagers were revelling in the joys of dressing down and looking as tattily degenerate as possible, another movement started, rising from the ashes of punk to become next month's thing. A movement whose only linking factor was the desire to look pretty, to dress up, to pose, to be admired. Here were the boys (and sometimes the girls) whose only ambitions were to appear as lovely and striking as possible, living mannequins who idolised Bowie and Bryan Ferry, rather than Johnny Rotten or Iggy Pop.

In some ways both of these movements can be seen as symptoms, or products, of Great Britain's economic malaise. Different reactions to the same thing: punks with no hopes, no dreams and no future, are really the same bunch of kids (or their younger brothers and sisters) who figure that since there isn't anything attractive about the outside world, and no future but a dole queue, then they might as well look good and have fun. On the 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow will be just as drab as today' principle.

Besides, everybody loves dressing up.



Earth President: Have you heard of a young scientist named Duran Duran?

Barbarella: Yes.

President: Recently, while on a trip to the North Star, he vanished into the uncharted regions of Tau Ceti.

Barbarella: Why is that a secret?

President: Because Duran Duran is the inventor of the Positronic Ray. It's a weapon.

(From the film Barbarella).

Duran Duran took their name from the missing scientist in *Barbarella*, and movies, film and TV have played a big part in their story. Perhaps not surprising, when you consider that its two founder-members, John Taylor and Nick Rhodes, grew up as Hollywood kids.

Not Hollywood, Los Angeles...Hollywood, Birmingham. Birmingham is the second biggest city in England situated in a once busy industrial region which, for the last decade, has been plagued by high unemployment and closing factories. Unlike the far richer south of England, Birmingham is considered relatively drab, poor and boring. It is, if a generalisation can be made about a city covering over eighty square miles, a primarily working class region. In England it is famous only for the flat Birmingham ('Brummie') accent, its complex of motorways (the famed 'Spaghetti Junction'), and its rather ghastly blue and cream coloured double decker buses.

Birmingham has a high youth population (mostly unemployed) and is something of a cultural melting pot; it has in it an incredible diversity of types of music, people, and experiences; something for almost every taste. Amongst its population of one million were three names which would become known around the world, Nicholas Bates, Nigel Taylor and Roger Taylor.

Birmingham is not a glamorous place. Nor for that matter is Pinner in Middlesex, just outside London. It's just another dormitory town, the inhabitants of which commute daily to work in London. Simon Le Bon was born here, and some of his family still live here.

Whitley Bay is in the county of Northumbria, on the North-East coast of England. It has been described as 'a Northumbrian Brighton' (a South Coast seaside resort); golden sands, and huddles of bed-and-breakfast boarding houses. It was from Whitley Bay that Andy Taylor came, via the Tyneside conurbation of Newcastle.

Three places. Five boys.

Duran Duran are a phenomenon of the 1980s. Each generation has had its heroes, its idols, the stars who captured the hearts of fans (especially girls) the world over; from Rudolph Valentino to Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley to The Rolling Stones. In the field of popular music some of these went, like The Beatles, beyond the mobs of screaming fans to lasting fame and critical acclaim. Others, like The Osmonds, The Monkees and The Bay City Rollers had their brief moments of fame and fortune, their names scratched on a thousand teenage desks, only to be scratched out and replaced with that of the next transient heart-throb by the desk's subsequent occupant.

And Duran Duran?

In less than five years, since they were formed, they have sold over ten million records. They have had



Left: The old unromantics. Right: Barbarella, on the trail of Duran Duran



Top: Simon Le Bon and brother Jonathan
Right: The Next Big Thing... The New
Romantics

Number One records in most record-buying countries (in Portugal they have outsold the Beatles). They have played the major world venues, from Madison Square Garden to Wembley Stadium. Their faces adorn thousands of bedroom walls. One can buy, if one wishes, Duran Duran calculator-clock-radios, Duran Duran towels and pillowcases, Duran Duran pens, bags, lunch-boxes, clothes, dolls - even Duran Duran telephones (decorated with the band's logo and a photograph).

But what are they? Five pretty boys, with a fun-loving, clean-cut image, currently teenage idols and soon-to-be has-beens? Or something more - first rate musicians with staying power? Does anything lie beneath the glamour, the mystique and the magic?

The statistics are pretty impressive. Over a million people have seen them live. Many hundred times that number have seen them perform on television or video. Their records sell and sell - *Seven And The Ragged Tiger*, their third LP, and the first to be released after they cracked the American market, went platinum (over a million copies sold) in its first couple of weeks on sale in the US alone. The readers of *Melody Maker* voted *Seven And The Ragged Tiger* the best album of 1983 and Duran Duran best band and best live act. (Then again, in the same poll the readers voted the same album the worst album of the year).

The band themselves strenuously deny being a teenybopper band - that is to say, a band whose sole appeal is to a teenybopper audience. As John Taylor explained, on Channel Four's *Ear Say* program: 'You maintain it (success) by saying you're not a teenybopper band, and I don't think we ever have been. I don't think we make teenybop albums, and I don't think we put on a teenybop live show. There's a certain element of a teenybop audience, and people who buy records, but I don't think Duran Duran are a teenybop band.'

Certainly they don't sing about teenybop subjects, and, unlike many of the pretty-boy bands of earlier years, they can play their instruments - and play well. They write their own songs. They know where they are going. They've changed in order to survive and succeed. The new romantic bandwagon - all frilly shirts, fancy haircuts, mascara, lip-gloss and shoulder-sashes - gave them their initial start.

When the bandwagon had taken them where they wanted to go they jumped off, and continued under their own steam.

Some of the elements that have made up their success are obvious, others are much harder to see. But as John Taylor once said, summing up in a much-quoted comparison:

'We've always been like a box of Quality Street; everyone is someone's favourite.'

(Quality Street, for the benefit of the uninitiated, are an English boxed chocolate-and-toffee assortment, in a variety of brightly-coloured silver-foil wrappings.)

A band with five flavours:

Simon Le Bon. Good-looking vocalist, lyricist and frequent frontman. Blond hair, blue eyes, an energetic and enthusiastic singer and dancer, able to create audience hysteria with a wave of his hand. Offstage he is reputedly distant and withdrawn. Nicknamed 'Charley' within the group (although they used to call him 'Lardo', and he's still very sensitive about his weight and appearance).

John Taylor. Outspoken, volatile co-founder of the band. Engaging, attractive, witty and amusing, he's the glamorous one, fascinated by the tinsel and glitter of the

high life. James Bond fan, avid video watcher, and excellent bass player.

Nick Rhodes. Artistic and androgynous synthesiser and keyboards person. The youngest member of the band, who enjoys being and working in a studio, and taking photographs.

Andy Taylor. The rough-hewn hardened gigger, a musician from the age of five. Fierce rock 'n' roller, and the first member of the band to be married. His early nickname within the band was 'Sniffer', for reasons we can only guess at.

Roger Taylor. Dark drummer. Quiet, unostentatious, the most down-to-earth member of the band. Even the Sun newspaper, in its tawdry 'exposé' of the band described him as the only normal, feet-on-the-ground member of the group. 'He's never dabbled with drugs and he's never bothered with any of the groupies,' it said, under its headline 'Spoilt Little Rich Kids!'

And in the background there are the two other members of the band, their managers, Birmingham businessmen Paul and Michael Berrow. The Berrows were instrumental in shaping and creating the band, in grooming them for success and in looking after them.

The band's road to the top has so far been trouble free. They present an image, collectively and individually that their legions of fans can love, admire, envy or dream of. And they are well on the way to becoming the first true supergroup of the 1980s.

