

# THE AGE OF BUGGLES

Buggles in keeping with their new found status as pop stars arrived 45 minutes late for our interview, but to be fair to the lads it was Friday and the traffic was particularly bad. "Sorry we're late," explain Buggles, beaming apologetically, "We've been having lunch in Covent Garden."

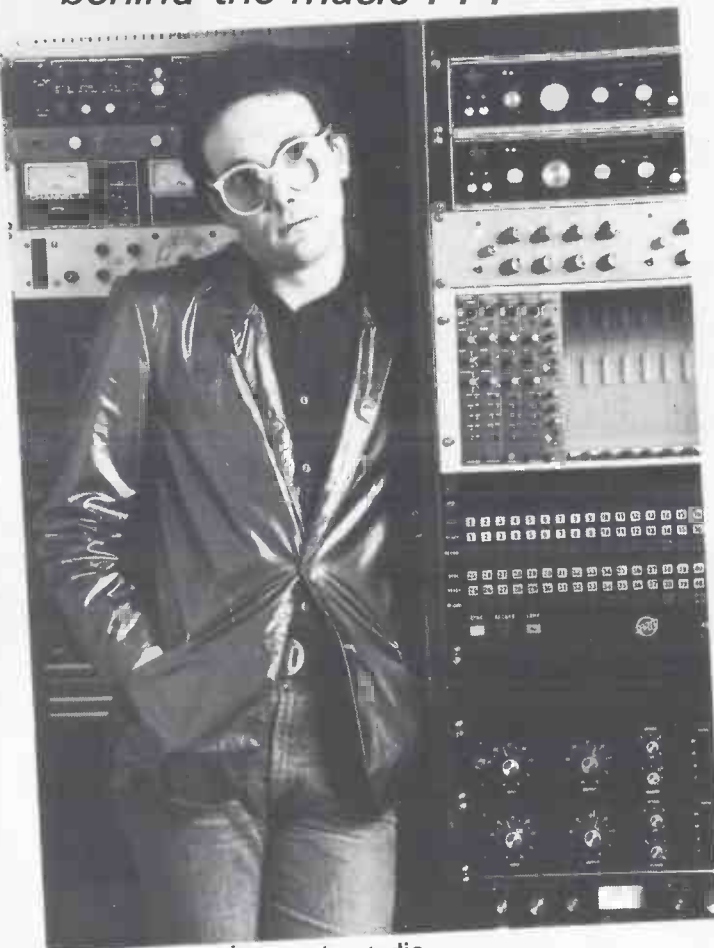
Having arrived and settled into some comfortable chairs I asked keyboards player Geoff Downes how he came to meet up with Trevor Horn and how Buggles came about. "I was doing anything just to make out, living in a squalid flat when I saw this ad. 'Top Chart Act needs keyboard player'. Well I thought I'd try it, even if I didn't like the music you know, at least I'd be able to stay alive for a couple more years. Trevor happened to be putting the band together. I'd managed to borrow a Moog and went along with a whole load of keyboards, which I think impressed him, and managed to bluff my way into the band."

"What impressed me about Geoff," points out Trevor, "was that he didn't say anything. He came in, set it up and just did what was asked for in the audition. You know, some people come in and try to be friendly with you, some unfriendly, the whole bit. I was looking for a keyboard player who was going to play five or six keyboards and Geoff looked like he could probably get it together."

That meeting took place four years ago in London. And with typical northern diplomacy Geoff remarks "I neither liked Trevor nor disliked him. He was just the guy who was putting the band together." However, that chance meeting of two northerners struggling to make a living out of music in the big city eventually gave birth to Buggles. Through playing together, doing demos and re-writes of other people's material a friendship and professional understanding developed.

Trevor explains: "After a couple of years of mucking about with other people's stuff we realised that they were getting the deals on the strength of the

*Who and what are Buggles? Where did they come from and where are they going? Andrew Pike talks to the men behind the music . . .*



Trevor 'Buggles' Horn in the studio.

work we'd put in. Also the confines of working with other people was beginning to come to a head. The turning point came about 14 months ago. We'd already written Video Killed the Radio Star and a few other songs. So we said let's get some money together, do the demos in our way with us as the artists, arrangers and producers and see what happens."

The reaction to 'Radio Star' was quite favourable, but a number of record companies were worried about the identity of the song's creators. Were

they songwriters? Were they a group or what? At this stage Geoff and Trevor were not sure themselves about the next step, but realised the potential was there for something big. Then Island's Chris Blackwell heard the tapes in America and had no hesitation about signing Buggles.

"Island offered us a deal as producers, writers and artists so we took the deal."

"Yeah, they offered us the works", Geoff recalls: "When some guy comes up to you with a cheque for £10,000 and you've been trying to find 10p for the

gas meter only a couple of months before it's all pretty amazing. Well, we took the deal because it was a good one."

That was in June '79. Six months and roughly £60,000 later the album was completed and after a minor legal hassle with a Moog programmer who would have liked an album credit, Buggles' first album was released last month.

I asked Trevor about the mechanics of making the album.

"Making the album was probably the most difficult thing I've ever had to do in my life. It was a very intense discipline. A lot of the album was done on 46 track; we used Psalm studio for the 46 track and for mixing. The way we started was with piano, bass and drums and in a lot of cases a rhythm box. The idea was to get a very contained drum sound. We used a lot of A.D.T. on the drums. Rather than use an ambient drum sound we put the ambience on ourselves with the effects. We used three drummers on the album, a guy called Richard Burgess; Paul Robinson who is probably one of the best drummers in the country; and a great pop drummer Johnny Richardson who plays with the Rubettes".

"Having been around the session scene for a long time we knew a lot of musicians and what they were best at, so we picked them for that. We used six different guitarists, they all played little bits. We used a guy called Dave Birch to play the heavy bits 'cus he's got a good natural heavy sound — he played the guitar line in 'Plastic Age'. Dave Christopher and Joe Partridge did bits and pieces and I did some acoustic guitar. We didn't really like guitars. The album is purposely guitar light because we wanted to do something different."

Were you conscious of doing something very different or weird?

"Well, we were fed up with the way things were going and we felt we wanted to try different things to see if they'd be

musical. I think there had been a decline in musicality almost, but because of what we are because of our training we couldn't be weird like say the B 52's are, kind tunelessly wierd, we couldn't think like that. We think in terms of tunes and accessible music. But we'd always try and do something different. A couple of engineers had told us we were crazy, but it wasn't because we thought there was a gap in the market so let's do something crazy. It was more that we were frustrated. Things like putting the voice through a Vox AC 30 which is what we did on Radio Star or using two mikes on the drum kit and cross A.D.T.'ing them or even using a synthesiser to play an arrangement. These were all things that people thought were crazy and weird. But we had to try them and for us they worked."

Having thrown off the constraints of working with other people and been given an open brief by Island I was interested to find out what The Buggles attitude was to producing their own material. Trevor explains further. "We pushed the style of recording to its logical extremes really. Everything was very well thought out and carefully constructed. We didn't want anything messy cluttering up the album. As far as production was concerned we saw the songs as pictures. "Video" was a picture like a little screen play which we tried to illustrate with the music. We wanted the



Keyboard player Geoff Downes and a peering Horn.

album to have that precise clinical feel — it's all part of the concept of the plastic age. But rather than totally rely on machines say like John Foxx we took different musicians and made them play like machines".

So what, I wondered, would be the next step for Geoff Downes — the one time choir boy who always wanted to be a pop star and for Trevor Horn whose years of studio training

were now finally bearing fruit?

"We've spent a hell of a lot of time in the studio, now we'd like to get out on the road and play live."

And how will the material so precisely constructed in the studio be presented for a stage show? Geoff was confident.

"We won't use tape and things on stage to reproduce the album parrot-fashion. The stage is a totally different environ-

ment. We're gonna re-arrange the songs for live audiences. We'll have a five piece band — two keyboards, guitar, bass and drums. It's an exciting prospect."

So with the distinct impression that the innovators of plastic music for the plastic age are a little more substantial than their Top of the Pops persona would suggest and with best wishes I left The Buggles to contemplate their live performance. The tour kicks off in June. Venue: Olympic Stadium, Munich.

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