

Modern English

by Boz

One of my favorite albums of last year was "Mesh and Lace" by Modern English on 4AD Records. A rich album, full of rough edges that was generally ignored here in the states. Their latest album "After the Snow" is a bit of a departure- most of the rough edges are gone and alot of the power of "Mesh and Lace" appears absent. However, "After the Snow" should not be entirely dismissed, there are subtleties that aren't immediately apparent. If given the chance I'm sure it will grow on you as it has on me- There's really some excellent material on it (I still must admit though, that it still doesn't match the intensity of "Mesh and Lace"). The following interview was conducted at the house that Modern English rent and share in London, just a few blocks away from the offices of their label, 4AD. Present were Robbie, vocalist; Gary, guitar; Michael (Mick), bass; and Stephen, keyboards. The only member not present was Richard, their drummer. I found all of them to be quite helpful and friendly. We discussed alot of things in general, for example the British and Miami riots, Thatcher, Reagan, etc... Since all 4 of the members were quite vocal throughout the interview, rather than single out who's saying what individually, I've taken the liberty of lumping their individual comments together: SR- Suburban Relapse, ME- Modern English, - designates a new comment from a different band member.



SR: Do you see and have contact with the other bands on your label, 4AD?

ME: Not really. Moreso in the beginning when we were supporting Bauhaus or playing with the Birthday Party, In Camera, or even Mass. It was more contact in the beginning, but now each band has its own little direction or ideas.

SR: Sometimes, or maybe moreso in the past, the press used to refer to a 4AD sound. Would you agree with that?

ME: -I would say there was. It's all broken away from it now.

-I think it's like this-any record company where a bloke or a person like Ivo likes a particular type of music, he's not putting out records, or wasn't putting out records to make money, he was putting out records because he liked them. There was an overall sound but each group was completely different. There was a kind of connection in that they were being pretty inventive but now the bands have grown up, are a bit wiser.

-Plus the fact when Ivo signed all the bands like us, the Birthday Party, Bauhaus, etc. All of us were quite young musically, now everyone has developed their own style.

-It's funny watching all the bands get older, not older through age but grown up as through the

music. It's funny.

-And we start to use producers.

SR: The new LP is quite a departure from the first. What brought this about, was it a conscious shift?

ME: It wasn't a conscious shift. It was more of a development really, getting better musically, vocally, and everything.

SR: Was it a commercial attempt?

ME: No, Modern English isn't just about like the first album, second album, or even the third album. We've been writing commercial songs since we started. It's just how it goes on vinyl. I mean the first album, if a producer had gotten a hold of it they would have come out a little more accessible.

SR: The first album was dark...

ME: Well, that's the good thing about Modern English whereas a lot of bands are relaxed and happy about what they already got, like Killing Joke, who put out 4 or 5 albums the same. We've progressed...All the songs have got a riff going, which all songs have got. It's just actually how you get them down on vinyl. We put them down with edges on the first album, with the distorted guitar, growling vocals, heavy drumming....

SR: What about the 12" remix?

ME: We're really pleased with that song. We've never actually done anything very danceable before. It's much better than the album version... the drums are more powerful.

SR: You've toured abroad in Europe and America-how do the audiences compare to your audiences at home?

ME: I think the audiences abroad are more on to an English band because they've been conditioned to think that an English band is the best anyway.

SR: Do you think that's good?

ME: I think it's sad but it's good for a band. I think you break through that barrier anyway and give them what's good anyway.

SR: Who puts up the money for your tours?

ME: Ivo (of 4AD) puts all the money up for everything.

SR: What would you consider success to be for Modern English?

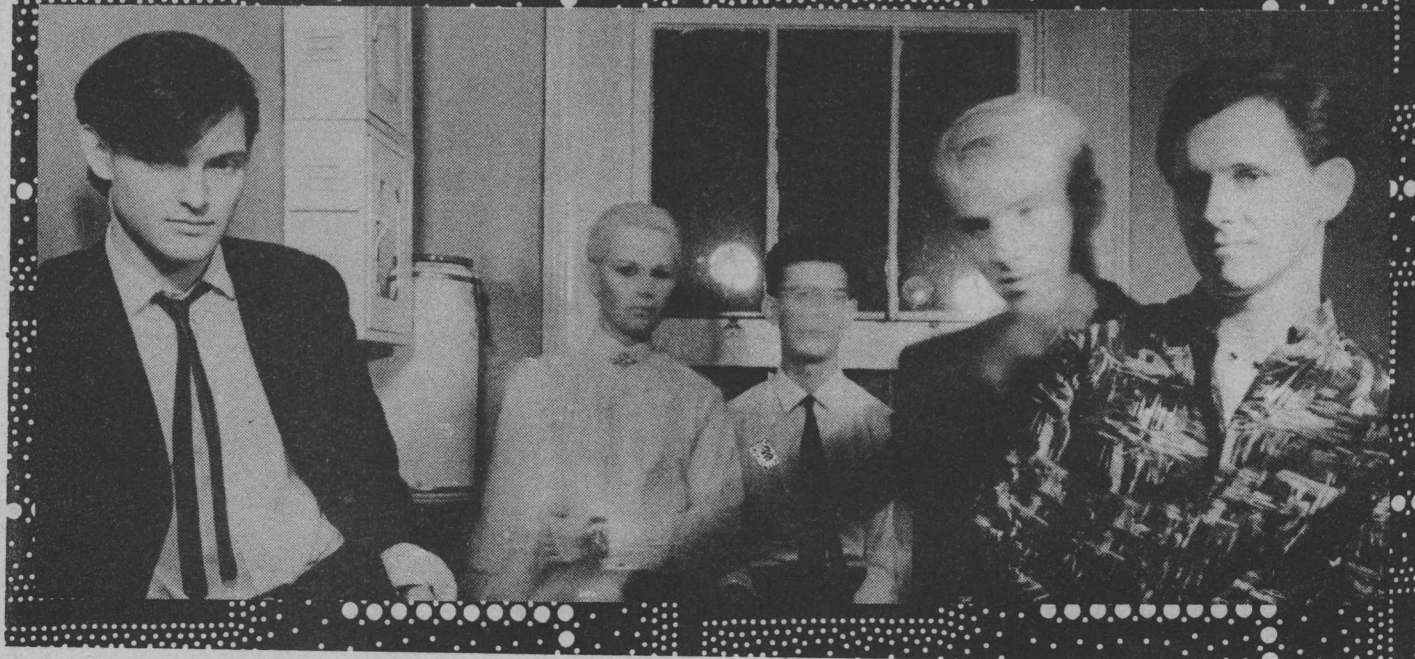
ME: -I think success would be like doing 6 albums when you still enjoy it.

-I think alot of success is things like getting money, and getting famous, but even that can fuck alot of people as well. You see it everyday. If you can keep things in perspective and be yourself and still make money....

-People think success is a single in the charts but once they get that single in the charts they got to get another single in the charts and then another one....

SR: When you play the new album live, how does the interpretation of it differ?

ME: It's a lot harder live. It's more exciting. We like to create a bit of excitement. We've





Gotten a lot better... I mean this is definitely our best period for playing live.

SR: What about airplay?

ME: Airplay's a real bastard 'cause that's so important now. Go back to the sixties people like the Doors or anyone like that who got played 'cause they're a fucking good group. It's finished. It's finished now.

SR: What do you think of the British musical press?

ME: -You have to be in the business to know what they're like. When I used to read them I used to think that this was the gospel.

-Things like late, they just pick out cliquey little bands that they like.

SR: What are your attitudes to the music business in general?

ME: It's like any other job really, it's about commodities, products.... It's funny, you have to laugh at it or otherwise it just fucks you right up. You can talk to anyone. Cabaret Voltaire will know what it's like as well... It's like you get a bit that comes along like Haircut 100 and everyone just looks at them and everyone goes RIGHT (laughs) and sticks them up on a pedestal and they're given everything that can possibly be given them for about 6 months and then they can take from there or whatever.

SR: Would you consider the British scene overly-trendy?

ME: We don't really involve ourselves in that a lot for one, we don't have the money. We don't



go out much...clubbing or anything like that...

SR: What about fashion?

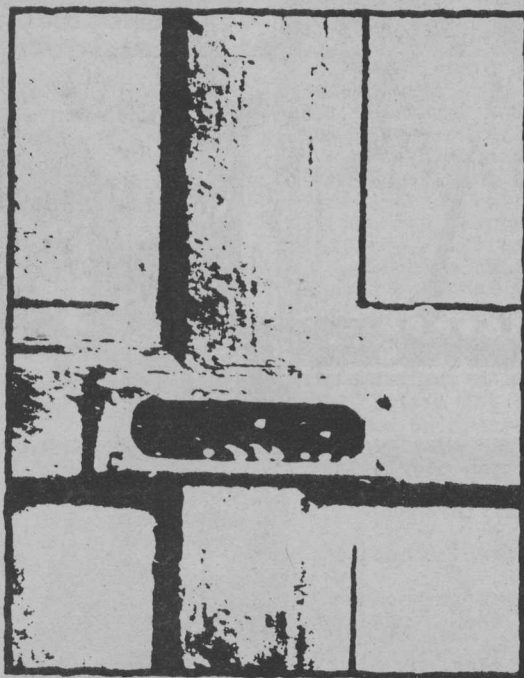
ME: I think fashion's really healthy if you use it in your own way. Like Gary, that's his own stuff. There's lots of fashions you can follow but... we can't afford to... Although we look good on stage we don't really get involved in what's in what's happening here and stuff.

At this point the discussion generally became more sidetracked as things wandered on to different unrelated topics, so I'm going to call it quits for now.

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