

Hungry for a New Hit

Duran Duran's original lineup back together

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MUSIC GROUP Duran Duran poses at the Sony Club in New York, Oct. 12, 2004. From left are John Taylor, Nick Rhodes, Roger Taylor, Simon LeBon and Andy Taylor.

They played the obligatory classics: "Hungry Like the Wolf" and "Girls on Film." But when Simon Le Bon ripped into the chorus of the new single "(Reach Up for the) Sunrise," the sun suddenly illuminated Times Square in New York as if to officially mark a new day for Duran Duran.

As the original five members performed for "Good Morning America" last week, it seemed the planets had finally aligned for a band that had been ignored through its ever-changing lineup and lackluster albums of the past ten years.

The British quintet once created a fan hysteria that was compared to the Beatles', and they are largely credited for ushering in the music video age with their innovative and exotic clips. Still, until recently, they couldn't buy the sort of publicity they're now enjoying.

"We are really pleased to be back in the history books where for a while it looked as though we were being written out of them," Le Bon told The Associated Press, commenting on the Lifetime Achievement award MTV finally bestowed upon the video pioneers last year and the sudden excitement over Duran Duran's 12th album, "Astronaut."

It's been three years since Le Bon, keyboardist Nick Rhodes, guitarist Andy Taylor, bassist John Taylor and drummer Roger Taylor (none of them related) announced their reunion. Since then,

they've played to sold-out crowds and made calculated public appearances to whet fans' appetite for the product. The anticipation also helped to secure a multi-album deal with Epic Records.

"We were dealing with the industry in its most jaded, deprived, downsized state," Andy Taylor recalled, "but when they saw the concert tickets flying out the... window the question was answered for them and they came to the table with what we wanted."

Enduring good looks didn't hurt the band's cause either, but the former poster boys, now in their 40s, had no intention of simply letting Sony repackage their greatest hits.

"We didn't get back together to play 'Hungry Like the Wolf,' " John Taylor said, revealing the small creases bordering his flirty eyes. "We got back together to see what kind of music we could create together, and oh my God, this is the sound that we've been striving for!"

Who better to achieve that sound than old Duran Duran producer Nile Rogers, alongside Don Gilmore and Dallas Austin - who's been a big fan since he was a kid.

"I don't think they try to come off too trendy or too young or be what they are not," Austin said. "I think if you like Duran Duran you'll really like this record."

Rhodes agrees: "If it hadn't of worked musically and we hadn't have felt that it was something that was as good as everything we had done before, there is no way it would have ever come out. There's just too much pride in what we created together."

The studio chemistry (which the band considers their best since 1983's "Seven and The Ragged Tiger") resulted in a potent, moody album that showcases a newfound comfort in voicing powerful opinions.

"The first batch of songs we did in the South of France were all very upbeat and happy-go-lucky," Roger Taylor said, "and the second batch was after 9/11."

"Point of No Return," perhaps their most political song to date, deals with America's response to terrorism. Le Bon said the message is that rather than bombing people, "you've got to try and make the world a fairer place."

No matter where this release takes them, the quintet is committed to not letting their youthful insecurities once again divide them. Still, the band may always have to ride the line between '80s nostalgia act and relevant 21st-century band.

"We are proud of the '80s, we know where we came from," Le Bon says with a transfixing, crystal-blue gaze. "But it ain't where we're going."