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Erasure's Andy Bell having a 'Wild' time on latest tour. Bell puts on some of the most eccentric performances of today's new artists.

Oh L'Andy! Erasure duo

By David Levin

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Rutgers U.

"Hello, Swing Studio."

"Yes, hello, Andy Bell, please."

"Just a moment, I think he's running around here somewhere."

The voice distinctly said running — not hanging, not sitting. Heck, I wouldn't have been surprised if the voice said flying.

This was going to be Andy Bell, the sometimes effeminate, always energetic and openly gay lead singer of the latest new wave crossover success story: Erasure.

The band's popularity has never been greater as the duo of Bell and Vince Clarke just finished their world tour, promoting their latest album, "Wild."

I remember seeing Erasure put on a very minimal, but ever-enticing, club show several years ago when their tour brought them to the East. Sure, that concert was sold out, too. Eventually. But things are different today.

Very different . . .

Andy Bell: We had the stage set (for the "Wild" tour) specially designed to kind of fill the place. The set is multi-tiered, and it's supposed to be the surface of a new planet. We've got lots of foliage and big plants. It's kind of a sci-fi show.

U: What story is the stage set trying to tell?

AB: Well, the idea of a new planet was because we messed up our own and this is a new place. . . .

U: For Christmas 1988, you did two shows in Birmingham where you used a live drummer for the first time. What was that like?

AB: I think it was very hard for him (Jonti, the drummer) because there were computerized drums as well. It was quite good having someone like him because I have the same problems being a singer.

When you're singing to sequencers, everything is quite rigid and there's not a lot of room for improvisation. Because it's not really a live band, you can't slow it down, you're not really a conductor.

U: Are you still familiarizing yourself with the American music market?

AB: I don't really understand the American market. In America, it takes at least 12 weeks for a single to chart. Whereas in the U.K., a week after release an Erasure track is, like, top 20, and it's kind of in and out within two months.

U: Well, it didn't used to be that way. Erasure's original singles didn't break the top 60.

AB: (laughs) Yeah, the first three singles.

U: And then "Sometimes," your fourth single, went to number one. It sounded like the same music from the previous singles. I mean, if "Sometimes" can hit, why didn't "Who Needs Love" hit and why didn't "Oh L'amour" hit?

AB: When we recorded the first album . . . I remember thinking, "God, this stuff is too commercial compared to the Yazoo material." It wasn't picked up on the radio and it was even more sugary and more pop than Abba. When "Sometimes" came along, I think it was just a little bit less . . . well, it was still commercial, but it wasn't so sugary.

U: The work you did with Stephen Hauge on "The Innocents" must be considered the turning point in your American career. Some consider working with a major dance producer a sellout.

AB: I don't know, I wouldn't consider it a sellout. I mean, I really enjoy his work; I think he's got a really good track record. He doesn't just work with blatantly commercial disco pop bands.

U: What was your reaction when you found out the audition you were going for was Vince Clarke's new band?

AB: I was very excited because I was a real Alison Moyet (from Yazoo, Clarke's former band) fan. My