

When You Start to Break it All Down

Erasure still bringing beats and boldness after 25 years

BY RYAN J. PRADO

Without ever breaking enormously within the United States, U.K.-based synth-pop legends Erasure have still managed to become ubiquitous with club music fans. Following the late '80s-early '90s successes of Top 20 singles "A Little Respect" and "Chains of Love"—from their platinum 1988 long player *The Innocents*—and "Always," vocalist Andy Bell and songwriter/keyboardist Vince Clarke have remained an integral cog in the club circuit, releasing 14 albums since 1985.

The group has teamed up with U.K. producer Frankmusik for its newest album, *Tomorrow's World*, set for release October 4. A five-track single EP featuring remixes of the track "When I Start to (Break it All Down)" by Kris Menace, Little Loud and more drops September 27, but until then the band has hit the ground running during their current American tour. Erasure headlines a sold-out show at the Crystal Ballroom Wednesday, October 5, just a day after the release of *Tomorrow's World*, and Bell, who is openly gay, spent a few minutes answering our questions in anticipation of their performance.

Just Out: *Tomorrow's World* is due out next month. Do you feel it's at all a revisitation to the band's musical roots?

Andy Bell: It's hard to say, really. It's somewhat of a progression. At the same time it's kind of one of those things where you keep making albums, and every album's different but you feel like you improve a bit with each one. With this one it seems like we've jumped forward about 10 years or so. A lot of people are saying it's the best one we've done for a long time. I really love *Nightbird* [2005], and also *Erasure* [1995]. It just depends on your tastes, really. It definitely feels like there's some kind of excitement to the new songs in the air.

JO: What new ground do you feel Erasure

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-ANDY BELL

is treading sonically, lyrically or otherwise now that you hadn't tried to before?

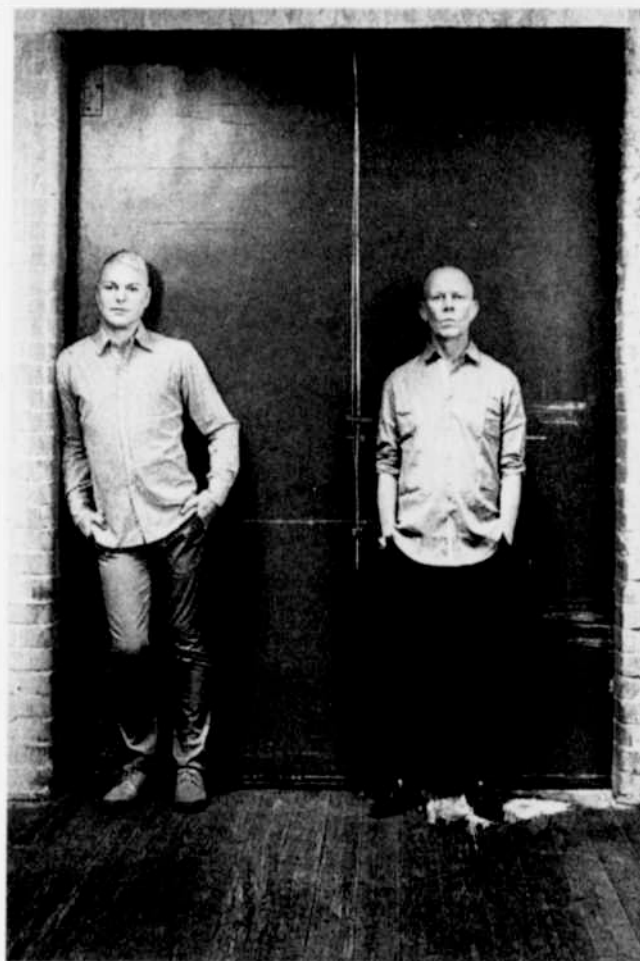
AB: I think because we're working with Frankmusik, definitely sonically it's a lot more in your face, harder. It's got a much clubbier edge to it than when we've done stuff on our own. Also, the songs have gone down really well live. I think people are quite surprised; they seem to be a bit shocked by them. They have a kind of techno-punk edge.

JO: Were there any modern contemporaries or inspirations that you and Vince looked to for the album?

AB: I wouldn't say anything in particular. I really love Robyn's music, and I really like Röyksopp as well, and bands like MGMT. Also, Frankmusik, his stuff on his own. I wouldn't say that we copy anything, but probably the most influential, which is going to sound funny, is Robyn. She likes tunes.

JO: Erasure is now more than 25 years into its existence. To what do you attribute the continued perseverance between yourself and Vince?

AB: I think it's one of those partnerships that's very rare. It's something that's a struggle sometimes for us, as a band—to get airplay and all those kinds of things. Especially when you've been going for so long, the odds are kind of stacked against you. Even being iden-



tified as being a gay band, people don't realize that it still is like that. Also, we're not Top 40, and we don't have huge record labels behind us, so it's quite tricky. But I think that compounds you, and brings Vince and myself closer together. You know it's just your unit, and you two people that are doing it. I think it makes you realize that you've got quite a precious thing going on.

JO: Erasure has always enjoyed bigger successes in Europe, South America and the U.K. I read an old article in which you said the reason behind the lag in popularity in the U.S. may have to do with you being openly gay. Do you still feel that's the case?

AB: Definitely. Lots of the radio here is very commercial, and it's getting the same in the U.K. as well. You really do have to have big guns behind you. I wouldn't say they have

payola or anything like that anymore, but everything is tied in with each other. It depends on who's sponsoring the tour, who's sponsoring the radio station, all these things. I think it's very hard, because we're not really considered indie either, even though we're on an indie label [Mute Records]. We're not considered an indie [act] because of the style of our music, I suppose. So the only one way for us to get exposure is through clubs, but that's not really going to sell a whole lot of records. You get your dance remixes played and stuff, but you don't really get mass exposure.

JO: In what ways do you feel being open about your sexuality has helped inspire or empower the LGBT population throughout the world?

AB: I think it's really amazing. You do feel like a bit of an ambassador when you're going around and doing these gigs. If we're playing in Asheville, N.C. or Texas, we have huge followings, and there's a great mixture of people in the audience now—quite a lot of young people. Young people don't really give a damn or care about who you sleep with. But you feel like you've brought people along for the ride. People admire you for your honesty and openness, really, and not for selling out for big business.

JO: Is that something that's progressed as the band's been on the road?

AB: Definitely, I think that's something you can definitely feel, especially on this tour. You can almost see the acceptance growing and growing until [the intolerance] hopefully disappears. **JO**

Tickets to see Erasure's show at the Crystal Ballroom October 5 are sold out. For more information on the group's tour, visit erasureinfo.com.

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