

Pop Life

THE BOY CAN'T HELP IT: ERASURE CLEANS THE SLATE

by Adam Block

When Andy Bell of Erasure leaned into the microphone, lyrics in hand, and first tore into "Who Needs Love Like That," Vince Clarke, the song's 25-year-old composer and Erasure's founder, permitted himself a rare smile. He had laid down tracks for the song, only to spend frustrating weeks auditioning 42 singers looking for someone "who had that individual character: a bit of real soul. Andy strayed in, and I knew within two minutes that I wanted him," Clarke admits.

Bell, sitting across from Clarke in their San Francisco hotel room, smiles at the compliment; 21, with blond curls falling over sen-

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PHOTOS BY JEFF KATZ

Welcome to the Pop Music Supplement! We originally hoped for a cover with Phranc, Boy George and Little Richard (who adores the Boy). But George was under wraps—no print media in America allowed. And Richard was still recovering from a serious auto accident. That left newcomer Phranc (above right).

I tracked Phranc from clubs to concert halls, finally cornering her for an interview between shows with the Dead Kennedys and Mojo Nixon. My kind of lesbian.

I knew that Bronski Beat and The Communards both had albums coming out, but neither was due soon in the States.

Luckily John Gill, the erudite pop music editor for London's *Time Out*, is an old friend of both bands; he agreed to give us a report on the climate for gays in pop in England, and to bring us up to date on the two groups.

We needed something timely, and godsend Jim Fouratt, impresario scenemaker *extraordinaire*, serendipitously rang from Manhattan to exchange unprintable gossip and conspiracy theories. I begged him to write us a piece on the Big Apple's burgeoning gay rock scene, which is emerging from the ashes of AIDS panic with a roster of rising talents. He did.

Things were shaping up. Then a call came in from Warner

Brothers. Erasure would be playing San Francisco and Los Angeles. And yes, they'd do an interview! And the swift-looking gay lead singer would do the cover with Phranc! Eureka!

I tracked down photographer Jeff Katz. He is Prince's favorite; Katz made him look stunning on the cover of the *Cherry Moon* LP. I knew he could work wonders with these two.

The interview with techno-pop legend Vince Clarke and his new singer Andy Bell (above left) was almost as much fun as their show. Afterwards Bell and his American lover, Paul, joined me at The Stud. I reminded him that he had a flight to L.A. in five hours for the cover shoot.

FLAT-TOP FANTASIES, POST-PUNK POLITICS FROM FOLKSINGER PHRANC

by Adam Block

"Nice haircut," Phranc offered as she strolled toward the local teen, slouched at the entrance to the Austin disco. His killer flat-top matched hers, though his was dyed ash-white. The boy glanced up towards the source of the compliment, past her combat boots, Levi's, black leather jacket over a black T-shirt, and drawled, "Fuck off, faggot."

Phranc didn't flinch or pause. Gender-confusion and knee-jerk bigotry no longer phase her. After all, she was a punk before that kid sprouted his first pubic hair. She has looked pretty much the same

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The next night I got a call from Phranc: "Andy was real sweet. But, you know—that photographer kept pushing us closer together. The shots were great, but we look like fucking *boyfriends*. The dykes are gonna kill me," she laughed.

This isn't the Pop Music Supplement we planned, but it's the one we lucked ourselves into. Thanks to some daring recording artists and our far-flung correspondents. We leave it to our trusty readers to buy the profiled artists' discs; mob their concerts, jam request lines with demands for their tunes, and clot their mailboxes with fan letters.

—Pop Music Editor Adam Block, San Francisco