Durandduran

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Few keyboardist in the high gloss world of superstar rock have undergone as sweeping a stylistic transformation in as short a time as Nick Rhodes. On his early records with Duran Duran, he played a relatively conservative role, seldom straying beyond basic accompaniment. He talked about the first stage of his exploration beyond these borders in our May '84 cover story. Since then, however, the changes have been more dramatic, culminating in his work with Arcadia on the album So Red The Rose.

The music of Arcadia bears a strong resemblance to the hit-making Duran Duran sound-no surprise, since Rhodes and his fellow Arcadians, singer Simon Le Bon and drummer Roger Taylor, are past and present Duranites as well. But pop connoisseurs will already have discovered that with Arcadia Rhodes in particular stretches his creative wings a bit further. The album is looser than Duran Duran's tightly packaged LPs, and more exploratory than the work of Power Station, a previous spin-off featuring Duran alumni John Taylor 6n bass and Andy Taylor on guitar.

Who is behind this variation on an established sound? On So Red the Rose Roger Taylor's drumming is as self-assured as usual, and Le Bon's vocals are instantly recognizable. By process of elimination, that leaves us Nick Rhodes as the culprit. The 23-year-old keyboardist uses Arcadia as a forum for some cautiously experimental work, based around the Fairlight CMI that has become his favourite instrument. His ear for sound, in response to lyrics as well as song structure, was already developing quickly with Duran Duran; in the offshoot trio, the pace picks up even more. The combination of the Fairlight with Rhodes' forays into the expanding frontiers of pop music comprises the essence of Arcadia, and promises further explorations to come.

Unlike many teen idols, Rhodes seems to have a sense of artistic responsibility, not necessarily limited to music. He has, for example, created a multi-media exhibition, and published Interference [Michael Joseph Ltd., 44 Bedford Sq., London WC1 England], a collection of his Polaroid photos of televised images from around the world. Rhodes' preface to this volume reflects the same kind of trans-disciplinary vision espoused by one of his greatest influences, Brian Eno. In our previous interview Rhodes expounded on Eno's impact on his music, and soberly assessed the capabilities of his various instruments. It was clear then that Rhodes looked on music as a serious yet stimulating part of his life. He seemed more jazzed at being able to spend money on a Fairlight than on, say, a weekend at Biarritz. (Of course, having enough bread for both is even more of a kick.)

When we spoke again last December, that attitude was still apparent. A Duran Duran concert scheduled that month in southern California had just been cancelled. Though regretful, Rhodes shrugged it off. This just gave the group more time to put together a really effective show for their prospective tour in the summer of '86, he philosophized, better to do it right than to do it too quickly.

The big news, though, was Arcadia. Or, more accurately, the significance of Arcadia in Rhodes' ongoing musical growth. The album had just been released, "Election Day" was on the airwaves, and from distant London the voice of Nick Rhodes mused over the meaning of it all.

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Judging from "So Red The Rose", you've gotten even more into sampling than you were when we last spoke.

Yeah, very much. I've tried to give the whole album a very different feel from the stuff we've done before, and with the advent of digital technology it's getting better everyday. That seemed to be the most logical way to move. There's an awful lot of undiscovered ground with digital synthesis, so I've been developing in that direction, trying out a lot of sampled sounds and using digital writing techniques. Also, as opposed to going for a very standard format of verse-chorus-middle-chorus-fade, we've tended to develop into a longer, less formatted overall approach to songs, and this also lends itself to a more experimental approach to digital and analogue sounds. Once you decide that something doesn't have to recur X number of times within a song, there are a lot more things you can do.

"Election Day," for example, is essentially a one-chord song.

That's correct.

But you put it through a non-repetitive sequence of samples and sounds. As you put this arrangement together, did you find that you were thinking in a compositional sense that was different than the one you might have had a couple of years ago?

Totally, yes. The major reason why Simon and I wanted to do this album was to experiment, to move further into the territory that maybe would have been a little too esoteric for Duran Duran, which follows a very specific pop group format. Obviously, with a pop group, you have certain constrictions and barriers, which are good for that sort of music. But with Arcadia we just said, "Okay, so now we don't have to use the same instruments throughout each song. We don't have to use the same old arrangement patterns. We can do whatever we want." And we began writing songs in a very simple manner, with a keyboard, a pencil, and paper, working out the melodies and the chord patterns. As soon as we had all that, it was a case of approaching the recording in a different manner too, and saying, "Okay, so instead of having all those chords there all the time, why don't we take that one out occasionally, or move that one and change the melody over this bridge?" We developed it a stage further than we would usually do, which proved to be very interesting. With "Election Day," for instance, the vocal melody is the same throughout, but I decided to change some of the chords behind the vocal on the verse. It was a very different approach to writing than that which we used with Duran Duran, because it basically broke down to me doing the music and Simon writing the lyrics.

Simon's voice sounds a bit different on this record too.

Yes, it does. When we started writing it occurred to me that some of the stuff we'd done with Duran Duran was written in keys that didn't necessarily suit Simon's voice as well as they could have, with a lot of very high notes that really aren't terribly flattering to his vocal range. So I decided to write things that were in a more suitable key than a lot of the Duran stuff.

Why did Duran Duran write so many songs at the top of Simon's range?

Well, there's a certain energy that comes from pushing things to the maximum, which suits Duran Duran in many cases. And a lot of our stuff was just written in our favourite keys. That's just the way it worked out. Whereas with Arcadia, I made some attempt to change this and see where the songs naturally went. I was working within open space.

How does the sound of Arcadia differ, in your opinion, from the sound of Duran Duran?

It's considerably more atmospheric. There aren't many dance songs on the Arcadia album, for example. The experimentation is much more evident on the slow songs, like "Missing" and "Lady Ice." Somebody said to me that the brass sounds on one of the tracks, "The Flame," reminded them of the keyboard sounds on "A View To A Kill." For me, that's probably the one part of the Arcadia album that sounds the most like things we had done before. "The Flame" was also ore of the first things we actually recorded as Arcadia. I guess it was like the end of a natural pathway for me, leading me into something else. For me the biggest difference is the writing aspect. With Duran Duran it's very much the five of us writing, and with Arcadia it's down to me to write the music and to Simon to write the words. Of course we both helped each other to an extent, but the results were very different. When you write something more individually, you tend to have a different approach to actually recording the melodies as well, because you think, "Wait a minute. Should I be playing this on a keyboard, or should it be the guitar? Should it be a brass sound or a string line? Should it be a rhythmic pattern?" I bore tempo in mind a lot more too, because I started a lot of things with rhythm units, with Roger coming in and dealing with the rhythm later. We pretty much stuck to the pace I'd come up with on all the songs, because I'd worked every-thing out around certain tempo ideas. When the songs were speeded up or slowed down too much, they didn't work the same at all.

In writing Arcadia material, how integral to the composition itself are your ideas with regard to the keyboard arrangement?

On some songs they're very integral, but most of the songs that both Duran and Arcadia have done are written so that they would sound good with just a piano and a vocal, or an acoustic guitar and vocal. All of us, especially myself, have always tended to go in for more elaborate arrangements. I think complex interlinking synthesizers and guitars are more interesting to listen to and more experimental than simpler orchestrations on many occasions. But in reality, I think our songs are good even without all the extra curricular synthesizer arrangements.

You didn't do most of your writing for Arcadia on the Fairlight?

Not most of it. I did quite a lot of writing on the Fairlight, but the initial stages were often done with a piano or on something like a very simple Korg analogue synthesizer or the Roland Jupiter-8. As these songs developed, we brought in the Fairlight and used it considerably more. There was more Fairlight on the album than any other keyboard.

It's still your main sampling instrument?

Yes, very much so. There's something about it I kind of like, particularly now with the new Series III, which I haven't actually gotten to use yet but I have seen and been through. The sampling on it is every bit as good as on any other sampling instrument. Admittedly the quality of the samples I've used on the album isn't as perfect as some of the other samples that were available at the time, but it really comes down to what kind of sound you want. If I had wanted perfect orchestral sounds, then I would have been just as likely to have gotten a real orchestra in. [Pause.] Well, maybe not. I'm not saying that I'd never use an orchestra sample, but I prefer going for more unusual things. The Fairlight itself also does something to the sound. I'm really happy with the capabilities it gives you for changing a sound once you've sampled it.

Have you got your Fairlight hooked into MIDI?

Yes, I do. I hooked it up to the Jupiter-8, a couple other Korgs, and my Sequential Prophet-5. MIDI, obviously, is very widely used, but I think one of the greatest uses of it is to mix digital and analogue together, which can produce some very strange things. It's also really great to mix together sounds for sequences. I've always wanted to do things with sequences that sounded slightly more metallic than usual, but which also had a smooth content. I always had a lot of difficulty perfecting the sounds I wanted, but MIDI has made it very easy for me to blend two totally different sounds and come up with what I need.

Has working with MIDI been an entirely positive experience for you?

It's been pretty positive, because I haven't tried to do anything too complicated with it. I still believe in simplicity above all else. Once you start getting into linking six keyboards, and trying to do different sounds on each one of them, then sequencing one and having another channel come in a little later, stuff like that, it can get too complicated. I really use MIDI for straightforward things. I think it's especially great for the low-range synthesizers, because it makes things much more feasible for people who can't afford to buy very expensive equipment all the time. You can do a lot more now with cheaper rhythm units and synthesizers because of MIDI and that's really great, because the more synthesizer technology comes down in price, the more young hands will be able to use it when they're starting and actually get decent sounds. I had my Jupiter-8 and Prophet-5 MIDIed during the course of the album, and that was quite an experience. I'd had them both for a very long time, and I was getting a bit tired with them: "There's only so much I can do with these things." And now MIDI has shown me that there's a whole new world with them.

Has MIDI affected how you program them?

Definitely. You learn that a sound can only be so big within a track. You link six synthesizers together with six totally different sounds, and you often end up with just a row [i.e., a racket]. You don't hear any of the sounds you wanted to hear. When I program for MIDI, I find that I have to know very specifically what I want to achieve overall, and how to break those elements down in different keyboards. I might need to use only one side of the Jupiter-8, or just play one sound and double it with one other sound. There are a few sounds on the album where I wanted some very unusual digital and analogue mix, using maybe a couple of analogue sounds. Using MIDI, I brought them up one at a time and figured out exactly what sort of frequencies I needed on them, and how much of one and the other I wanted, so that you can't tell in the end whether the sound is digital or analogue or sampled or real. I like that ambiguity.

You've had no problems at all with MIDI?

Well, we did have one problem when we first linked one of the smaller Korgs to the Fairlight, and the channel kept changing. It wouldn't stay on whatever channel we tried to lock it into. It would jump all over the place, from one channel to the next. That was a little irritating, but we solved it quickly. I think that happened because the Korg was operating from batteries, and it wasn't really up to the full power level.

Did you use the Fairlight as your MIDI control keyboard on the record?

Yes, I did. We only got the Fairlight MIDIed halfway through recording the Arcadia album, but the day we had it done I started using it as the MIDI controller. It was great; particularly using the writing page with MIDI as well, because I could MIDI all eight of the Fairlight tracks I had at the time to an analogue synthesizer, and that gave me endless possibilities because you can write in all these patterns and MID something to any one of those channels.

It sounds like the Fairlight gives you just about all you need.

It does. I've even sampled a couple of sounds from my analogue synthesizers into the Fairlight, so that saves me time as well. I use those sounds a lot, and now I can just draw them up from the Fairlight.

On your last American tour you were using a Crumar Performer string synthesizer, a Jupiter 4, a Prophet-5, and a Fairlight onstage. Will you be taking fewer keyboards out with you on the next tour?

I don't think I'd want to go onstage with fewer keyboards. With live work-touch wood-you never know what's going to happen. Something can always go wrong, and if the worst did happen, and one or two of the synthesizers went out, I'd like there to always be something else I can play on. Nothing can really double for the Fairlight in its entirety, but the Prophet-5 and Jupiter-8 can double for each other. It's nice to at least have additional string sounds on hand. The Crumar has always been good luck for me. That's why I continue to use it. It's on the Arcadia album as well; I managed to sneak it in on the end of "Keep Me In The Dark." It was on almost every Duran single too. It's got such a great cheap, tacky sound. I really like it, and I'm determined to take it on the next tour. My roadie is disgusted [laughs].

Will you he adding anything new to your setup?

Possibly. Depending upon what I use when we record the next Duran Duran album, I think there will probably be some new rack MIDI stuff, because that would make concert work a lot more versatile. I've been using a lot of MIDIed Korgs lately. And we just got this new device where you can switch MIDI channels in and out just by pressing a button, don't even know what it's called yet, but it's the most fantastic gadget. It's what MIDI has always needed for live work.

You haven't played much Yamaha gear.

I don't like Yamaha stuff so much. I must say, I played the DX7 when it was just about to come out. A demonstration was put on for us to see what it was all about, since everybody seemed to be quite excited about it. I think it is probably a great instrument for session musicians, because it has a number of very clear and very good digital sounds. But still, to me, it sounded a little boring. I like things you can explore a little more. That's why I always liked the Jupiter-8; even though it's analogue, it has so many possibilities. It's the same thing with the Fairlight's digital capabilities. I'm still finding out new things about it. I think I know the Fairlight pretty well, but it never ceases to amaze me. I'll go, "Wait a minute. I wonder if you can do this with it? And sure enough, you can. Whereas I don't think the DX7 has any of those possibilities. It's quite a limiting synthesizer. You either like the sound of it or you don't, and I didn't particularly.

What was the most recent surprise you stumbled across with the Fairlight?

Well, it was actually on the writing page. I was playing with it while working on "Keep Me In The Dark." I'd gotten about eight tracks of it working at once. There was one channel I wanted to reverse, while keeping all the others forward. I'd never really thought about doing that before, but I found that you could run one of the eight tracks backwards. It was very simple. I've been working with the Fairlight since the Seven And The Ragged Tiger album, and as I get to know all its little idiosyncrasies, it just keeps getting more attractive to me than the [E-mu] Emulator II or the [New England Digital] Synclavier or whatever. It's difficult to explain why. For instance, I still like the Fairlight voice sounds much better than those I've heard from either the Emulator or the

Synclavier. Also, I like the writing page on the Fairlight. I've gotten used to it over the past few years, and now that it's been expanded from eight tracks to sixteen, that's even more handy. I used that a lot on the Arcadia album. It was linked through SMPTE code on every track. I also like the way you can filter things on the Fairlight. It's a very simple and quick system. The actual feel of the keyboard itself is great too. You can control the attack and decay on the side, which is pretty much all you need to do. My only real criticism of the Fairlight is that I wish it had an overall volume control.

You don't have the pedal option?

I could get a pedal, but I don't particularly like pedals that much.

At one time you did own an Emulator.

I've still got it; it's an Emulator II never really use it, though.

Have you worked much with the Synclavier?

Yes, I have. I used it on "Wild Boys" [from Arena], when we were working with Nile [Rodgers, producer], because he favours the Synclavier. It was like Digital Keyboard Wars, the Fairlight versus the Synclavier. I like the Synclavier, but they're very different instruments. I don't know. Maybe I like the Fairlight because it's not quite as . . . precise as the Synclavier. There's something about it that's more toy like. I like instruments that have a sound of their own, and I like what the Fairlight does to digital samples; it always leaves something of itself on them.

How big is your Fairlight disk library?

Big! I've got hundreds of disks now that are all full of sounds, plus all the Fairlight library. I sample things all the time. I find myself constantly putting things onto pieces of tape, then sampling them sooner or later. It's good to build up a big library because you can waste so much studio time if you're having to sample each time you discover you haven't got a sound that would vaguely fit what you're looking for. If you've got quite a few things to choose from, then nine times out ten you can find the right one or develop it from a sound you already have.

Let's discuss some of the sampling on So Red The Rose. "Election Day," for instance, starts off with some unintelligible snippets of recorded dialog.

That came from a short-wave German radio program. We put that on when we were doing the mix. There were so many mixes of that song, I can't tell you-more than any other song on the album. In fact, more than any other song we've ever done. We finally decided it would really be nice to have a couple of different intros that sounded like something was going on. [Engineer] Francois Kevorkian had this great short-wave German radio tape, so we scrambled it with certain effects and cued it in wherever we wanted it.

Are the horns on "Election Day" real or sampled?

The saxophone is real; that's Andy MacKay. The Fairlight horns were sampled from a compact disc, but I'm not telling you which one, because I'd get into trouble.

The drum track is put through some interesting treatments too. Different beats are gated differently, some are reversed, and so on. How do you decide which bears to dress up, and which to leave clean?

There's a lot of rhythmic stuff on there: finger clicks from [percussionist] David Van Tieghem-the most unusual finger clicks I've ever heard-a cowbell, some percussive things, the rhythm machine,

some extra Simmons drums, the extra fills that Roger [Taylor] put on, plus the digital effects on the snare. It was almost like doing a big orchestral arrangement just on the rhythm track. The song had reached a point where we decided it sounded good, but we still went through it to add bits to the rhythm where we felt something was still needed, where something could be reversed, or a different sort of sample could be put in on the snare drum. That was done by Alex, Francois, and me, with no specific reasoning at all.

The album mix of "Election Day" is different from the single mix, isn't it?

Totally different. And the B side of the single ["She's Moody And Grey, She's Mean And She's Restless"] is actually part of the "cryptic" 12" version of "Election Day."

"Cryptic?"

There are two 12-inches. One is called the "consensus" mix, which is vocal. The other is the instrumental "cryptic" version, from which "Mean And Restless" was taken and re-edited The version on the album is different again. It's a cross between the instrumental and vocal versions. We felt this song should appear in many different forms because it lends itself to so many different mixes. We couldn't really pick just one and say, "This is it," Instead, we thought, "Why not approach it from several different angles?"

In contrast to the meticulous overdubbing on "Election Day," another song on the Arcadia LP, "Missing," has a very improvisational quality.

That track was taken totally live in the studio. It was the first Arcadia track that all the musicians played on together. Simon and I had this idea about "Missing." We decided not to try doing overdubs with it. Instead, we would just do it live and see what happened. The first time, of course, it was a total mess. But from then on it got better. That's about the fourth live take on the album, and there are only a couple of overdubs on it, which are basically sound effects I added later. Nobody replaced their part on the song. So, yes, there was improvisation on every version of that song. I've got about three other versions on cassette, and they're all different.

How did Herbie Hancock wind up playing on "The Promise"?

He was just in Paris at the time we were recording, and he popped down to the studio a few times. He's a great guy. He was there one night, and we asked him if he'd like to play something. He said sure, and he just played the soft jazzy thing on the Fairlight with that flutey sound in the middle.

He adapted well to your style. It didn't leap out as a Herbie Hancock part in the middle of an Arcadia song.

He just said, "Use whatever you fancy using, if you find anything in there." He played some really nice faster stuff too, but when we came to the final mix we decided the slowest things he played were more fining with the mood of the song, so that's what we kept. He is quite an incredible musician. I was watching him play, and my eyes were popping out of my head.

"Rose Arcana," the short instrumental track that leads into "The Promise," seems to reflect your conceptual, as opposed to technical, approach. It seems to blur the line between commercial pop and more avant-garde electronic rock.

I hope that line does blur. That's one of the purposes of this album for me. It's nice for me to be able to stretch my imagination a little further, and it's good for people who are listening to be able to stretch their imaginations too. I find that when I'm listening to things that other people have done, I'm looking for something that goes in a different direction, something more original. I'm not

just looking for a great pop song, although maybe that's what I was doing a few years back. I mean, I do really like good pop songs, and I think there are a few on the Arcadia album. But my favorite tracks are "Lady Ice," which I definitely believe is the best thing we've ever done, and "Missing," which is more experimental than some of the other tracks. "Rose Arcana" is one of two instrumentals we did that will hopefully be released later on an EP. I wrote them quite classically on piano. I was just fiddling around, and I came up with melodies I liked. But then I thought it would be nice to make them sound very modern, while keeping their melodic qualities, and to use more abstract sounds and arrangements. So I started with something that was quite classical and took it apart limb by limb, rebuilding it in my studio as a totally different piece. In its own way the original piece would have been very good if played on a piano or by an orchestra, but we ended up with something far more advanced. I was listening to Stravinsky and Erik Satie at the time, and thinking about how they approached music back in the '20s, breaking it down and finding new ways of looking at it I intend to pursue that path in the future.

"Rose Arcana" was also the only track on the album in which you use a drum machine instead of Roger's live drums.

I did the initial pattern on an old Linn-Drum I've been using the Linn 9000 too, but it's not on this album. I worked out a bass sequence with the Linn pattern too, so I didn't want to change the drum part. Roger liked it too, but he wanted to put some fills and percussion stuff in, so we put his snare and bass drums into the AMS DMX 15-80 S [digital delay] and RMX 16 [digital reverb], sampled the ones we liked, and gated them into the Linn pattern.

Why put the drum machine on that one cut in particular?

From day one, this one seemed very electronic to me. That drum machine pulse was the heartbeat; everything changes around it. It's a real shame that "Rose Arcana" is so short. It's like only a minute of a five-minute piece, which will come out sooner or later in its entirety. The problem was we had so many long tracks that we had to work with. We had about 80 minutes of music to go on the album. Generally, the most you can put on while retaining maximum quality is something like 18 or 19 minutes on each side. We've got about 22 minutes on each side, though. That was the shortest we could possibly whittle it down to. "Rose Arcana" had to lose about four minutes, but we felt it was important to have some of it on there to create some sort of atmosphere at the beginning of the side. On compact disc it's really nice because it runs from the end of the first side, which is "Missing."

What impact have compact discs had on your work?

Digital technology in general has affected the whole approach to this album. I wanted the best possible sounds, and I wanted to keep them as pure as possible. We started off recording digital synthesizers on to digital 32-track tape, which was then mastered onto the Sony digital mastering machine and from there transferred direct to digital disc. That should give us the ultimate quality available at the moment. And that's important. It often distresses me when I hear a record or a cassette where certain lower and higher frequencies have been lost. We went to so much trouble in the studio to make sure that the sound was beautifully layered. You can even hear it on a dreadful system.

Another thing that stands out on So Red The Rose is your occasional use of acoustic instruments, including a piano.

The piano does come in on little bits throughout the album. I found myself playing it on a few things, such as "Missing," I wrote some of "The Promise" on the piano. It wasn't a big thing where we felt we had to use acoustic instruments on the album; it's just that Simon and I decided to let things happen very naturally, and things like the violin and acoustic guitars and Simon's ocarina found their places. It's nice to have the occasional acoustic thing amidst all the technology and synthesis.

There's a lot of acoustic guitar on "El Diablo." Your keyboards stay in the background on that one, except for the backwards-sounding passage at the end.

That's all Fairlight. That track is interesting because when we wrote it, it sounded very... outdoors, like you were on top of a mountain in South America. I had the rhythm unit on, with this ridiculous reverb that made it sound like it was half a mile down the road, and this little Pulse synthesizer whimpering and sounding pathetic. There was something very endearing about that. Simon strummed along on an acoustic guitar, trying to figure out what chords I was playing. That's how that arrangement occurred. I was playing a very pipy thing on the synthesizer, with some strings and things, and it started to sound quite gypsy-like. We wanted it to sound ethnic but, at the same time, modern.

How did you do the tinkly glockenspiel notes in "Lady Ice"?

That's all Fairlight. I did the entire intro at a totally different time from when we did the rest of the song. It's all 16 tracks of Fairlight nothing else.

Do you play an actual Solo in that piece?

No, that was Andy MacKay. The first half he played on an oboe, and the second half on a Lyricon. He actually did two complete solos, one on each instrument. I really liked the sound of the Lyricon, but Alex liked the oboe, so we battled it out and decided in the end that it sounded best using half of each solo and putting them together.

The cool, detached texture created for "Lady Ice" seems like the antithesis of the buzzier, hotter sounds of "The Flame."

That's right. "The Flame," to me, is quite a raw, brassy song. "Lady Ice" is much more serene and atmospheric, and I wanted it to sound a little Eastern at the same time; hence, the bells and the more layered synthesizer. I really wanted to give the album a single overall feeling as a whole, but a feeling that was constantly in motion. I wanted to use brass sounds, for example, but different ones on different songs. I didn't want to just take one sound and put my label on it.

Yet that big Fairlight brass sound on "The Flame" that you spoke of earlier has become kind of a trademark of yours.

Yeah, maybe because of "A View To A Kill." I first started experimenting with that sort of high, brassy, abrasive sound on "Union Of The Snake" [Seven And The Ragged Tiger], and yeah, I do think it has a great emotive value.

Beyond that, you also sometimes use jazzy voicings that give that sound an even more distinctive quality.

There's an interesting story about that. There are actually two different sorts of brass sounds on "The Flame," because when I first sampled what I wanted, it had a natural fourth in the sound. Of course it sounded good in some chords and keys, and on others it didn't, and it worked better in

some parts of the song than in others. But that fourth within the sampled chord gave me ideas on what I could do with some of the notes I put around it when I did use that sample.

Where did you get that one?

It came from an old orchestral jazz record. I don't even know what it was; I just went through it to find which sounds I liked best. It's good fun to sample off of records sometimes, and the interesting thing is when you find something that isn't a pure note. You can get the most bizarre effects by putting it on top of your music. I've sampled things in the past with notes that I don't even recognize in chords, things I might never have used except at one point in one song. I never would have thought of putting a fourth at the end of "The Flame" without that sample. It changed my approach to that particular song.

Is there much keyboard bass on the album?

Not too much. I intended to steer clear of it because there are a lot of guys who play bass guitar much better than I play synthesized bass. They'd hit different notes than I would. But there are a few bits here and there. "Election Day" is maybe 98 percent keyboard bass; it mainly stays on one note. And there are a couple of little bits where I fill in or double in songs that are mainly Mark Egan.

Why did you choose to have Alex Sadkin produce So Red The Rose, as opposed to Nile Rodgers or some of the other producers you've worked with in the past?

There's a very straightforward reason for that. I like Nile very much. I think his production work with Duran Duran was great, and I hope to work with him again in the future. But we chose Alex for this particular project because he has the delicacy we really needed. This is a very subtle album, with a lot of detail involved, and because Alex is very careful, and because he has such good taste in recognizing the right part and the right sound, he was the right man for the job. It takes a lot of patience and time to make a record like this, and Alex is definitely the world's most patient man.

Was it very different working with him in an Arcadia session than when working in Duran Duran?

A little. It was perhaps a little less tense in the studio with Arcadia. With Duran Duran we tend to work off our own musical tensions. We pull and push against each other in the studio to make things work. The Arcadia thing was more relaxed than anything we'd done with Alex before.

Judging by its album, Power Station, the other Duran Duran spin-off, seems even more polarized from the Arcadia approach.

Arcadia is definitely the antithesis of Power Station. It's the total opposite. You'd never believe we were all in the same group, but that's really what makes Duran Duran work: the fact that there are such extremities. I guess opposites attract. The Duran Duran situation will certainly benefit from the fact that we have been able to do projects which are radically dissimilar. When we get back together everyone will have learned something, and we'll be able to use our ideas within Duran Duran to form something completely different again.