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## That "Go Away" bite: An interview with Peter Murphy



PHOTO BY THOMAS TADEUS BAK

When post-punk pioneers Bauhaus disbanded again in 2008 immediately following the release of the satisfying *Go Away White*, their first album of new material in 25 years, few were surprised. Yet leader Peter Murphy harnessed the restless energy leftover from the electric Bauhaus recording sessions to re-emerge with *Ninth*, a focused kick-in-the-face that is his strongest solo work in years. Recorded in just seven days, *Ninth* is a stylistic return to the guitar-based alt-rock swagger reminiscent of his previous album *Deep* (1990). You can hear for yourself on Monday, October 24 at Postbahnhof.

### How is the tour going so far?

Well, let me tell you exactly what's happened on this tour. My bass player who's been with me for seven years left the stage on the third show [*Laughs*]. He actually left the band. Details aside as to why, I've been playing my last two shows without a bass player.

It's chaos. And it's marvellous – kicking and sparking, you know, crackling. I've got no lighting guy. I've had to pare down to travelling in a minibus around the whole of Europe with so many miles driven. And it's fine.

I've got a bass player coming in to replace Jeff, from New York. He's learning the songs with the audio at home and literally parachuting in today to play with the band for the first time tomorrow. But I always say, the audience would be happy if I were to sing a cappella for an hour-and-a-half. Not that I would do that, though.

### **Do you feel in complete control onstage?**

I've got to be in control of letting control go. I know that sounds really smart, but let me put it this way -- the first moment I walked onstage, I'd never sung a song on a microphone. I'd never written lyrics until I first got together with a guitarist in 1978, and I wrote half the first album with him, the Bauhaus album.

Two weeks later, I was on a stage for the first time in front of the art school Christmas ball, as it turned out, and there were some 600 people there. And the moment I walked onstage, I knew what was happening. I knew what I had to do. It was almost, like, instinctive.

I was not a careerist. I went through it with just pure *wanderlust* of kind of having to draw it out every night in a way that was spontaneous, because we as a band couldn't really play, so we would be spontaneous. That was my school. So, I think I walk onstage now and know exactly what's *not* going to happen.

### **How was the process of recording *Ninth*?**

I teamed up with David Baron, who ended up being the co-producer of *Ninth*, up in the Catskills. Rather than over-agonize, I wanted to record the material immediately. We found a disused church studio that had a very basic, old recording system. I created a residential environment where we would have group dinners together.

It was a far cry from the habit nowadays of people sending files to somebody digitally and having them add their musical contribution. It was not old school, but it was real school. With [Bauhaus' 2008 reunion album] *Go Away White*, it was left sort of undone, really. We wrote, recorded and mixed what is on the album in 18 days.

And we would have refined it and written more songs, but we had to go away and tour with Nine Inch Nails at that time. The plan was to come back and to finish it. But then we split up and released it as it was. And after writing furiously in the same room and capturing the performances, I was reminded that that's how I do things best. And with that kind of unfinished unresolvedness, I just had all this energy.

### **On *Ninth*, where does the title for the single "I Spit Roses" come from?**

Well, I literally spat roses at the rest of the band.

### **At Bauhaus?**

At Bauhaus, yeah. But it was an act of great beauty. It was the antithesis of spitting.

### **Did they take it that way?**

Well, no. There was like an internal issue, an argument one night. I left early to go back to the hotel. The morning after, I knew I would find the other three at the studio laying conference about this, and as was the habit, somehow turning it around onto me. It's this us-and-him syndrome, but I think that singers often get that from other musicians.

That aside, as I was having my coffee, I would sit next to a rosebush. I was talking with a friend that morning about the situation. She said, "Stuff a rose into your mouth, and the moment they start arguing, spit roses at them." And I went "Oh my God, classic!" *[Laughs]*.

So I did it, and that act confirmed their whole belief system that I was the crazy one. I'm their saviour: if it weren't for me, they'd be working in some cigarette shop still in Northampton. I said, "Look, it's roses for God's sake, now let's get to work." And it kind of worked because it was an irony in itself, and it was like, "I will react to you, but you know how I'll react to you? I'll spit at you, but it will be roses."

### **Is this really it for Bauhaus?**

It's all done.

### **But we've heard this before.**

Yeah. *[Guitarist]* Danny Ash and I could work together. I totally enjoyed the four of us recording and being on tour. I would love to play with them again in a way, but in another way not at all. Because once we were touring, it was kind of like... I don't know, but there is a lot of personal tension there.

I've always thought that Danny Ash and I could make a great album together. He was ensconced within Love and Rockets for many years. He was kind of hijacked by David *[J]* and Kevin *[Haskins]* for many years in that band. And Danny and I never really got to continue what was really the heart of Bauhaus.

We really are like brothers, he and I. We go back to school days. It was Danny and I who really formed that first album's sound. Then of course, the other two members are crucial in that, later. It's all about whether Danny can get back into the headspace, have that trust and that desire to do it.

### **You've started singing certain Bauhaus songs again that you refused to sing for years, such as "Stigmata Martyr".**

Now I do "Stigmata," and I play the guitar on it, too. Sometimes some of the Bauhaus songs in context would give the impression that there was a sort of dark occultic intent, when actually there wasn't. There was such a frenzied audience that was so focused on us. At times, there was such a negative energy being whipped up that I felt playing songs like "Stigmata Martyr" or "Rosegarden Funeral of Sores" would only feed this misconception.

### **Were you trying to reign in your dark image?**

Over the years, just after Bauhaus, I tried to dissolve the notion of being *[adopts an evil voice]* The Dark Underlords of *Something*. Those who came after us, like Fields of the Nephilim and

The Mission, with black hair and really bad makeup: that was not us at all. The Fathers of Goth, The Dark Lords of Goth...you know, all this stuff. And I thought, "Fuck that."

We'd laugh about that. There was a lot of humor in our band. Our shows were amazing, but we'd go back after the show, have a cup of cocoa and go to bed. We didn't have like lots of young boys and girls and loads of heroin at all. It was marvellous, really.

**So you weren't dangerous behind the scenes?**

Oh, very dangerous, but not outwardly.

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CARA COTNER