

Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark returns!

The synth-pop outfit's original lineup releases a beautiful new album.

By **Bruce Tantum**

The film: *Pretty in Pink*. The scene: the prom, where Duckie—seeing that the only way Andie will ever be happy is by being with Blaine—tells her to go to him; Andie and Blaine share a kiss in the parking lot, swathed in fog, while a luscious, plaintive synth-pop tune swirls in the background. The song: 1985's "If You Leave" from England's Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark, familiarly known as OMD. It's an iconic moment, one etched on the neurons of both those old enough to have lived through the '80s and those young enough to view the decade with a romantic distance. The quartet had other songs on the U.S. charts ("Enola Gay," "Souvenir," "So in Love," etc.) and supplied a major chunk of the soundtrack at clubs like Danceteria and the Pyramid—but OMD, huge in the U.K., would never have a bigger hit in America.

"At the height of Britpop, nothing was more out-of-date than an '80s synth-pop guy."

In a perfect world, that would change tomorrow: The combo is about to release a new album, *History of Modern*, the first studio long-player featuring the original lineup of core members Andy McCluskey and Paul Humphreys, along with sidemen Malcolm Holmes and Martin Cooper, since 1986's *The Pacific Age*. Despite the relatively hard-charging opener, "New Babies: New Toys"—not to mention "Save Me," a track featuring Aretha Franklin—the record sounds remarkably like the OMD of old, overflowing with perfectly polished pop gems, its melodies dripping with dreamy teenage joy and heartbreak despite the bandmates' middle-aged status. (In a nice nod to days gone by, the album's art design is by longtime collaborator Peter Saville, the man behind many a classic Factory Records album cover.) *TONY* caught up with McCluskey—gregarious,



THE OMD COUPLE McCluskey, left, and Humphreys are reunited—and it feels so good.

funny and still brimming with enthusiasm at age 51—during the run-up to *History of Modern*'s release.

"If You Leave" is very much embedded into the American consciousness. How does it feel to be associated with something so indelible?

It's generally positive, but to be honest, it's a bit of a mixed blessing. It's by far the biggest hit we had over there, and it was wonderful to meet John Hughes and the cast, and go through the red carpet Hollywood thing with the red carpet. But it's also a bit of an albatross around our neck; I suspect most Americans think of us as some sort of one-hit wonder.

Are you tired of the song? Do you even think about it any more?

Yes to both questions, really! We keep getting requests for it to be used in TV and films. Whenever people need something that says "mid-'80s America," that's the one they want.

So, if nothing else, it's a steady source of income.

I'm certainly not complaining. But

strangely, even though it was our only big, big hit in America, it didn't even hit the top 50 in the U.K.

After so many years of not having a new studio album, why decide to put yourself through it again for *History of Modern*?

That's a *very* good question; I keep asking myself the same thing! The original lineup, of course, kind of fell apart at the end of the '80s; I made a few albums on my own, some of which were quite well received. But toward the end of the '90s, I felt like I was banging my head against the wall—at the height of Britpop, nothing was perceived as more out-of-date than an '80s synth-pop guy. So I gracefully choose to hang up the microphone and started doing some things on the other side of the business. [Among his many projects, McCluskey created the successful British girl group Atomic Kitten in the late '90s.]

What got you back together?

As fads came and went, people started

asking us if we would do some gigs, and as the electro thing started to grow, we even had people asking us to produce them. In 2005, we took the plunge and did a TV show together after not really seeing each other all at once for years. It went great. Around

2007, we started playing all over Europe and the U.K., and that's been great too. So the logical—and frankly, stupid—next step was to dare to make a new record.

Why stupid?

People of our age *shouldn't* make records! Nine times out of ten, they've got nothing else to say, no energy to say it with, no good tunes and no good ideas. So we are being terribly conceited by thinking that we *do* still have some good ideas. And for some reason, it seems like people lately have been thinking of us as very credible and very cool. People half our age are name-checking us! It's a funny world, isn't it?

History of Modern (Bright Antenna) is out Tuesday 28.

HEAR IT NOW!

Listen to new tunes from OMD at timeoutnewyork.com/clubs.