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Duran Duran on Working with Lindsay Lohan, Keeping 'Brand Duran' Fresh

U.K. pop heartthrobs talk Taylor Swift, Andy Warhol and latest gem, 'Paper Gods'

By [Rob Sheffield](#) August 6, 2015



Duran Duran team with guests ranging from Nile Rodgers to Lindsay Lohan on their latest, 'Paper Gods.' Stephanie Pistel

It's safe to say nobody ever expected [Duran Duran](#) to endure this long — not even Duran Duran. But the original New Romantics are back with a vengeance. Their excellent new LP, *Paper Gods*, lives up to their classic sex-synths-and-mascara legacy. All four remain as criminally charismatic ever: singer Simon Le Bon, keyboard guru Nick Rhodes, drummer Roger Taylor and the ladies' choice, bass stud John Taylor. And as they prove at an August 2nd warm-up show in Port Chester, New York, they're in fierce shape onstage. "Last night we were witness to some truly appalling behavior," Simon tells the crowd of frenzied ladies. "We hope to see it again." And they do — even when they debut the futuristic new electro-funk jam "Pressure Off" between two of their juiciest hits, "Notorious" and "Planet Earth," the crowd doesn't even pause for breath. Simon dedicates "Girl Panic" to Nick: "He's very fond of a pretty girl, isn't he?"

If *Paper Gods* were a debut from some upstart band, the buzz would be insane — yet this is the latest from a group that's been reinventing itself for more than 30 years. The album features longtime comrades [Mark Ronson](#) and [Nile Rodgers](#), as well as a stellar new cast: [Janelle Monae](#), Mr. Hudson, Mew's Jonas Bjerre, long-lost ex-[Red Hot Chili Peppers](#) guitarist John Frusciante. And that foxy voice in "Dancephobia"? She turns out to be [Lindsay Lohan](#).

As John Taylor says in his essential 2012 memoir, *In The Pleasure Groove*, DD always wanted to combine Chic and the Sex Pistols, and they still have that spirit. As he says now, "There's a bonus track called 'Planet Roaring' that [Sex Pistol] Steve Jones plays on. So we're quite pleased we got Steve Jones and Nile Rodgers on the same record — that's huge for us." Finally — Duran Duran's own theory of everything. The band met up in a posh NYC suite to discuss music, girls, art, car design, escaping the Eighties, Andy Warhol and Taylor Swift's new-wave cred.

Congratulations—not many bands make a fourteenth album.

Le Bon: That's true. What do you call those horses, not the favorites — the ones with the really long odds? In the Eighties, you could have gotten really long odds on us making it through. If you were betting on bands that might make a 14th album? We would not have been in the top ten.

Roger Taylor: Everything changes. The London paper just did a story reporting how we now drink herbal tea instead of having sex with supermodels and snorting lines of cocaine. But it *was* eleven o'clock in the morning.

Le Bon: Well, that wouldn't have stopped me back then.

There's such a wild mix of musical styles on *Paper Gods*.

Rhodes: The schizophrenia is getting worse. A lot of artists get into a comfort zone. They know what works. For us, that's the *least* comfortable zone, the comfort zone. We like to torture ourselves a little bit.

John Taylor: You have to be prepared to get in the muck with each other. As you get older, if you're not careful, you can stiffen up and it becomes a kind of party line. You speak to each other, but it's coded. When you're trying to write music that has depth and intimacy to it, you've really got to be prepared for some arguments. Because we've got a lot of baggage, and that baggage can really get in the way. So we've always got to keep things clear.

Rhodes: You have to keep the rough sex out of the way of the Louis Vuittons.

"You have to keep the rough sex out of the way of the Louis Vuittons." —Nick Rhodes

Why didn't you just make the same album you made last time? Everybody would have been fine with that.

Le Bon: But *we* wouldn't have been. It's important to us to keep the flame of inspiration and experiment burning. It takes a lot to get us to *want* to go out to play a world tour, so a record like this is what makes it fun. It's a false goal to try to repeat past success. It's never worked for us. Whenever we've tried it before, we've ended up falling flat on our faces.

How did you hook up with John Frusciante?

John Taylor: He emailed me and said, "I hear you're making a record — I've always wanted to play on a Duran Duran record." He hadn't really been playing guitar — he'd gotten into electronic music in a big way — but he was starting to pick up his guitar again. He told me that when he was a kid, before he started to play, he heard "Save a Prayer" on the radio and thought, "If I play music, I'd like to sound like this." A beautiful thing to say. So we were part of his process in getting back into the guitar.

Putting Janelle Monae and John Frusciante on the same record — that still seems so taboo to people.

Le Bon: It *is* quite risqué, isn't it? But it seems so normal to us. We knew Ben Hudson from his vocals on the Jay-Z record — he added so much sizzle. I've been very jealous about my ownership of the microphone, but all these collaborators raised the standard: Janelle, Mark [Ronson], Nile [Rodgers], Kiezsa, Jonas [Bjerre]. And finally, Lindsay.

That was...a surprise.

Le Bon: Ain't that fantastic? She was great for the part, wasn't she? It's going to make a great University Challenge question in the future: "What links Lindsay Lohan and John Frusciante and Nile Rodgers?"

Punk, art rock, disco — you've always been into smashing boundaries.

Roger Taylor: Music was so tribal when we grew up. You were a mod or a rocker. We were the mockers, somewhere between all these tribes.

Le Bon: And also this idea: "You're not rock, you're not dance, you're not pop — what the fuck *are* you?" And for two decades that was the biggest criticism of the band. But the lines are becoming — I don't want to say "blurred" — but all these definitions are becoming more vague, with the way kids listen to music. My daughter will listen to George Harrison followed by Tame Impala followed by One Direction — well, not One Direction, actually — but Little Dragon or something. There's no genre she's faithful to and no era she's faithful to. When she looks at pictures of Led Zeppelin, she looks at pictures of them in their twenties. That's how she sees them. I think that's fantastic.

You've also flouted the boundaries between girl music and boy music.

Roger Taylor: We're very much embraced by girls of all ages.

Le Bon: When we were really at the height of our teen popularity, I think the smart guys went to Duran Duran concerts because that's where the girls were. They might not have liked us when they walked in there, but by the end of the concert, they had a little bit of affection for Duran Duran.

**"The smart guys went to Duran Duran concerts
because that's where the girls were." —Simon Le
Bon**

Your live shows are still full of dancing girls. Is it strange when you play the new songs and nobody sits down?

Le Bon: Some bands are really happy with being a band that people have to sit down and get stoned to, until they're flat on their backs. But you know, I like to get people up and dancing. There's a lot to be said for being a party band. It's a hell of a lot of fun.

Roger Taylor: There's a very small number of bands that escape their decade. We're one of the very fortunate ones that have done it. It's because we're musical nerds, really — that's the driving force in this band. We didn't finish in 1979 and think, "That was the year!" We had to move with the times.

You keep inspiring young pop artists. [Taylor Swift](#) wrote a song called "New Romantics."

Nick Rhodes: Well, she's intelligent, isn't she? I haven't heard that song yet, but she's got something for sure. She doesn't just put a decent tune together — she tries a new sound.

John Taylor: I don't know a lot her about her story, but I think the big thing is leaving Nashville, right? Both spiritually and physically. There was no going back. Once you've gone to Max Martin, you don't go back to Nashville. But she had a vision for herself that could exist outside of categories. And I guess we were probably like that with our own sound. We left Nashville. Even before we left Birmingham. I don't like the genre thing. Everything you buy on iTunes has got the word "genre" attached to it. We never would have used the word "genre" in 1980.

Nick Rhodes: Schizophrenia was our genre.

You've never made the same album twice—how do you resist the temptation?

Le Bon: Trying to rewrite old stuff appears to be really tragic. We did try once — Roger, were you around when we did "[A Matter of Feeling](#)"? No? Okay, so that was an attempt to rewrite "Save a Prayer." And it was absolutely a disaster. Such a shadow of what it could have been, because I was obsessed with rewriting "Save a Prayer," and it failed dismally. I will never try that again. If there's one thing about me, I do learn from my mistakes.

I don't even remember that song.

Le Bon: Was it on *Notorious* or *Big Thing*? *Notorious*, I think.

Roger Taylor: See, that's what happens when you've got 14 albums. "That child over there — what's your name?"

Rhodes: At this point in our career, there's no reason to make an album of substandard Duran Duran–sounding songs. John and I have one thing in our whole oeuvre we feel we really got wrong, and that's the [1990] *Liberty* album.

But I love that album.

Rhodes: It has some great songs — "Serious," "My Antarctica." But that's the only one we've ever said, "One day it'd be fun to go back and open up."

John Taylor: The director's cut! *Paper Gods* was the first time Nick and I were using the word "brand" a lot. We'd listen to something and say, "It's Brand Duran." We've got this thing that we've built over 30 years, but we're coming out with a new model. I remember once in Tokyo, after a gig, we saw the new Rolls Royce Silver Shadow, the first one designed by the German team. I remember going, "Oh my God, this is amazing," while Nick and Simon said, "That's the ugliest thing I've ever seen!" So we have this design conundrum — we have this legacy, this signature sound. So what do we keep, what do we modernize?

Rhodes: There's lots of brands that we love. Like Chanel — what a great brand. When we talk about our brand, it's something that's precious to us, something we must protect.

We look more to modern-artists now than musicians — Ed Ruscha or Jeff Koons or Richard Prince. A lot of artists can easily keep changing their styles and come up with new shows, which are like albums.

John Taylor: Pop art's always been about branding, hasn't it? Andy Warhol putting his stamp on it.

Rhodes: Brandy Warhol. Andy invented the 21st century, didn't he? Andy invented reality TV — all those films with Edie Sedgwick just putting her makeup on. I wish he'd been alive to see what happened with the Internet and reality TV. He would never have left his house.

Has it ever occurred to you to make records the easy way?

John Taylor: You have to take sharp turns. It was forced on us, really. After the first three albums, Andy and Roger left, so we had to reinvent the sound of the band. And from that point on, there was no going back. That's when we left Nashville.

Rhodes: To make *Paper Gods*, we were all insistent and tenacious enough to go through that process, even after 35 years of Duran Duran. We still sat there in that studio for hours and hours and hours, some days coming out with nothing, other days coming out with a little crumb, until we got it. So you do have to really *want* to do it.

Every generation gets into Duran Duran. What do you think it is that makes this band still so influential?

Rhodes: I think the approach we took has certainly become more popular with a lot of artists now. But we took it from everything we'd heard and seen and put it together. We liked Chic and Sister Sledge, and we liked David Bowie. We liked the Sex Pistols and Kraftwerk. Along the line we got into James Brown and electronic music and house music. It all goes into the mix, and that's the way music's always developed.

The world keeps catching up to where Duran Duran started.

Le Bon: We're still here. And we'll wait forever if we have to.

<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/duran-duran-on-working-with-lindsay-lohan-keeping-brand-duran-fresh-20150806>