

return of the living dead

> by Jennifer Behrens



Bauhaus, the dark godfathers of Goth, make a once-in-a-lifetime Buffalo appearance

A California desert is hardly the ideal venue for Goth music. But in April of 2005, hordes of black-clad fans sweat through their eyeliner at the Coachella Arts and Music Festival, awaiting the first live appearance in nearly a decade by seminal post-punk legends Bauhaus. Their patience was rewarded immediately, as the band kick-started their headlining set with a blistering rendition of “Bela Lugosi’s Dead,” during which singer Peter Murphy hung upside-down in a leather bat costume for the entire nine-minute epic. The remainder of the set was no less dramatic, tearing through the back catalogue that had gone on to influence acts from Jane’s Addiction to Christian Death to Interpol. At show’s close, Murphy informed the audience with typical bravado, “You can say now that you were here.”

The Internet blazed with rumors that Coachella had hosted the last Bauhaus show ever, a logical assumption given Murphy’s cryptic comment as well as the group’s fractious history. In truth, the one-off gig had snowballed into something else entirely. “We thought Coachella would be a one- or two-time resurrection,” guitarist Daniel Ash told the *Miami New Times* last fall, “but that went so well [that] we were offered gigs out of the blue, and right there, at the festival, on the spur of the moment, we agreed to do it and just sort of hit the road.”

Beginning in—when else?—October, the band’s original lineup took the stage again, touring North America and Europe. Despite mixed reviews (*Variety* dismissed the Coachella performance as “a nostalgia act for their loyal, decked-out legion”), the subsequent shows proved so successful that they’re making another go-round this summer as the support act for industrial stalwart Nine Inch Nails. The itinerary includes a detour to Buffalo (sans Trent Reznor and co.) for a rare club appearance at the Town Ballroom next Wednesday—the only date

of the tour that will not be staged in an arena.

It is the kind of intimate venue where you might have caught the group in its brief heyday. Formed in Northampton, England in 1978, the band (named after the coldly functional German school of architecture, which was banned by the Nazis in 1933) lasted less than five years and produced just four albums. But the Bauhaus legend endured, in spite of scathing press which began with the release of “Bela” and never quite abated: “The bats have left the bell-tower,” Murphy intones on their career-defining debut single, seemingly without a trace of irony. “The victims have been bled.” After the punk movement had leveled the UK’s musical landscape, it was no surprise that critics would react so virulently to campy, self-indulgent vampire theatrics.

But a small, devoted audience responded to the band’s macabre style, and propelled its 1980 debut LP, *In the Flat Field*, to the top of the indie charts. 1981’s follow-up *Mask* found the band expanding its dark sonic repertoire, with hints of metal and electronica on tracks like “Hair of the Dog” and “Hollow Hills.” Singles “Kick in the Eye” and “The Passion of Lovers” even achieved some chart success. The band continued recording and releasing modest hits, such as the *Searching for Satori* EP and a searing cover of David Bowie’s “Ziggy Stardust.” Their audience expanded following a US tour and an appearance in the 1982 vampire film *The Hunger*, which starred Bowie and Susan Sarandon. Subsequent third album *The Sky’s Gone Out* earned their best debut yet, at number four on the

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UK charts. But the band was beginning to crack under the constant pressure to produce new music, cobbling the album together from BBC live recordings (a cover of Brian Eno's "Third Uncle") and unearthing songs which had been written before their debut LP was released ("In the Night"). The end result was uneven, but the band soldiered on.

When the time came to produce their fourth album, 1983's *Burning from the Inside*, Murphy was diagnosed with viral pneumonia. The remaining members continued recording without their singer, with Ash and bassist David J shouldering more vocal responsibilities. Murphy recovered in time to collaborate on four songs, including the single "She's in Parties," but his prolonged absence had exacerbated the band's internal tensions. Bauhaus officially dissolved in July of 1983, citing Murphy's continued health problems as well as creative differences with their label. Ironically, *Burning from the Inside*, released just one week after the split, would become the most critically acclaimed effort of their brief career.

All four members remained active in music following the breakup: Murphy recorded several solo albums of elegant pop before converting to Islam and moving to Istanbul with his wife, a Turkish national. The remaining members formed a new project, Love and Rockets, which found commercial success with the 1989 hit "So Alive" but split a decade later. Murphy, Ash and David J continue to record and tour as solo artists, while drummer Kevin Haskins has worked behind the scenes as a producer as well as a composer of music for video games. Despite vows from each member that the group would never reunite, Bauhaus embarked on a 50-date world tour in 1998. Rumors swirled that the group would write and record some new songs after the sold-out shows concluded, but the foursome quickly disbanded once more. A live double album, *Gotham*, was the only result of the "Resurrection Tour."

So will another successful reunion trek ultimately bring an album of new Bauhaus material, almost a quarter-century after their last studio release? "Don't ask," Ash demurred last November. "We've got some real, um, volatility issues...let's just say I've given up predicting what's ahead." Considering the band's wild trajectory in the last year and a half, fans may also wish to adopt Ash's philosophy. av

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