

CLASSIC POP PRESENTS

# PET SHOP BOYS

SPECIAL EDITION

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POP  
ICONS

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS • CLASSIC ALBUMS •  
DESIGN • TOP 40 TRACKS AND MUCH MORE...

COLLECTOR'S  
COVER #1 OF 2



**ANTHEM**  
CLASSIC POP  
PRESENTS  
PET SHOP BOYS  
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# PET SHOP BOYS WELCOME

PET SHOP BOYS ARE MASTERS OF NAMING THINGS. THEIR GUILEFUL, MINIMALIST ONE-WORD ALBUM TITLES HAVE A CRAFTY WAY OF GIVING US THE SUGGESTIVE LITTLE POKE THAT INSISTS WE LISTEN TO THE THING IMMEDIATELY AND TRY TO WORK IT ALL OUT. THEIR SONG TITLES PLAY THE SAME TRICK, ALBEIT OFTEN WITH MORE WORDS, JUST ASKING TO BE UNLOCKED. THOSE SEDUCTIVE SLEEVES DEMAND DEEPER SCRUTINY TOO, OFFERING A FLIRTATIOUS PEEK INTO SOMETHING FAR BIGGER THAT LIES BEYOND. AND THEN THERE'S EVERYTHING ELSE – BY WHICH WE ALSO MEAN THE MUSIC – AND IT SEEMS THAT PSB-WORLD IS JUST ONE GIANT NUT THAT'S EAGER TO BE CRACKED...

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Perhaps therein lies the enduringly magnetic draw of pop's finest sophisticates. For Tennant and Lowe, it's all about the whole. The outer shell is as important as the kernel. Everything must resonate with that singular musical vision, from the packaging that presents it to the people with whom they interpret their disparate ideas. It's all intrinsic to the artifice, to the ever-intriguing whole. And there's always an endless queue of us fascinated enough to grasp the nearest nutcracker.

It seems to come easy, and maybe it does, but as PSB confidante Anne Dudley explained to us, there's plenty of hard work too. Chris and Neil are the architects of their destiny, and unlike the swathes of bands that land with their bums in the butter, they clearly have a plan. Expertly self-branded from the start and with a manifesto that set out all the things they didn't want to be, the Pets' world takeover began. They manufactured themselves like no other act has ever done, or is ever likely to

do. They had help, of course, and inside this issue we dip into the Boys' kaleidoscopic – ever-nonconformist – aesthetic and its many co-creators, and meet Trevor Horn, JJ Jeczalik, Stephen Lipson and Julian Mendelsohn, who discuss their work with the duo... and importantly, the freedom handed over to them.

In all, we attempt to get to the heart of how an act from the pre-internet age can boast that, almost 40 years after their formation, they still maintain the pertinency so often attributed to them. Sought-after producers and remixers, they remain a hip name to drop. Their secret? They occupy both sides of the coin, both ordinary and extraordinary. Some hear Pet Shop Boys and dissect every word; some simply dance. Ultimately, they speak to anyone who's really listening. We may not have their flair for nomenclature, but given one word to describe them? Complete. Enjoy the issue!

Rik Flynn Editor

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**Mark Lindores** grew up during the golden age of pop mags devouring *Smash Hits* and

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Eric Watson



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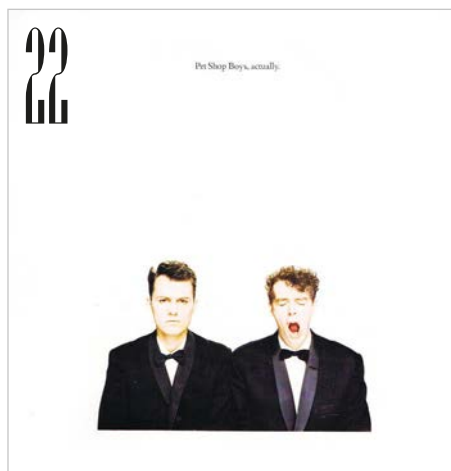
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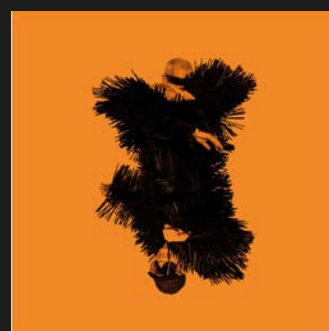
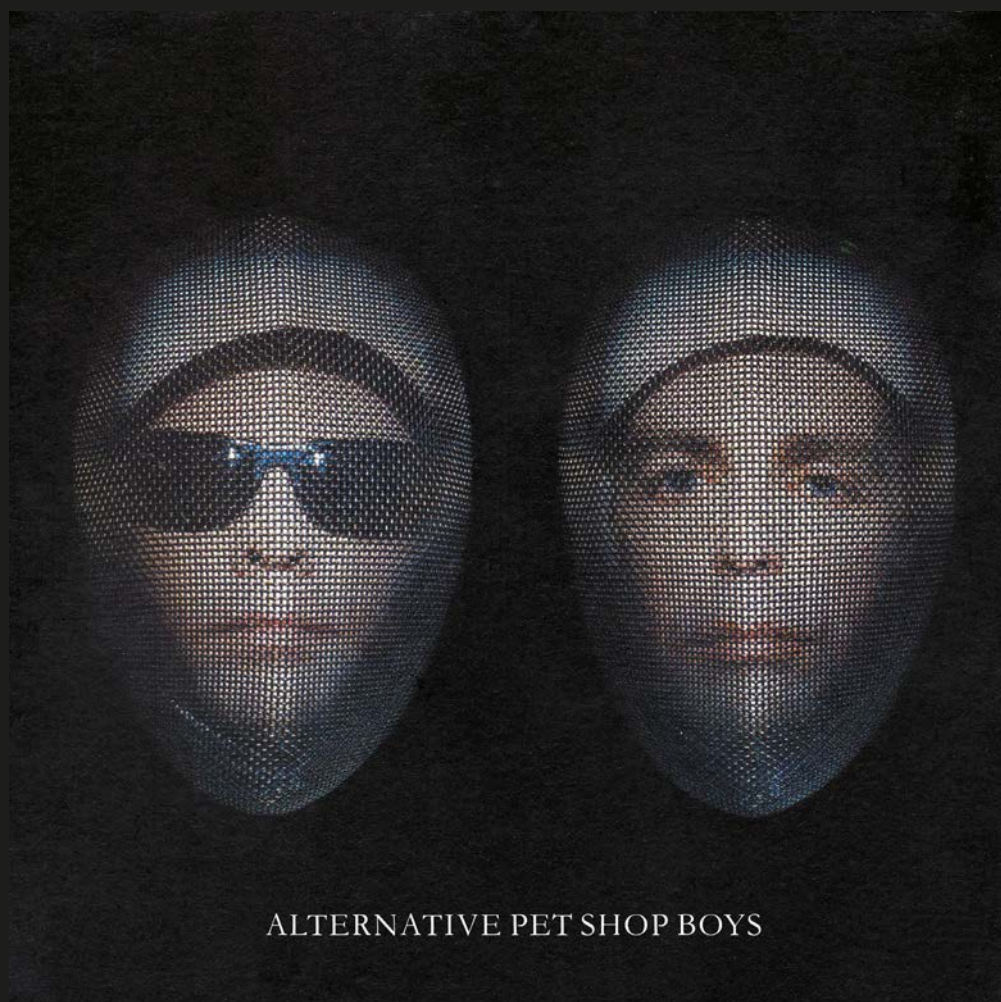
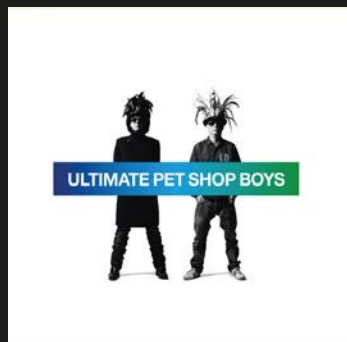
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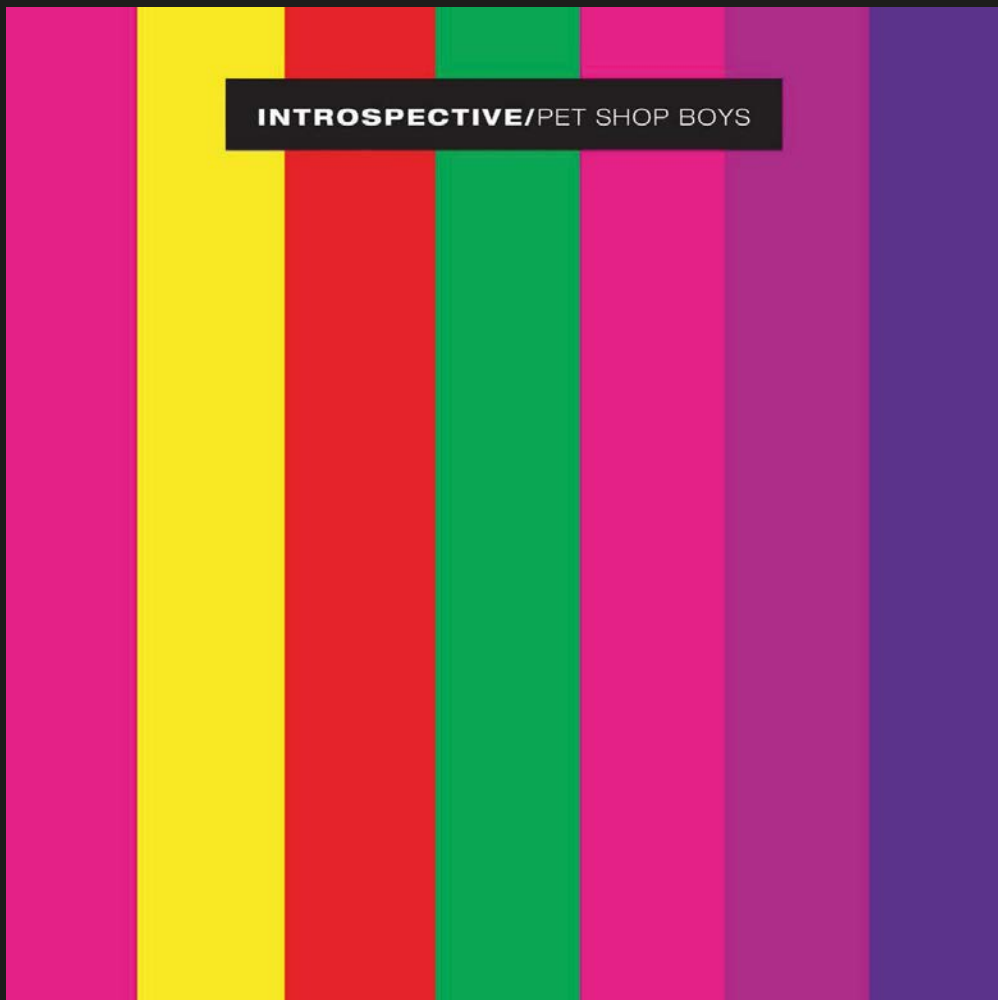
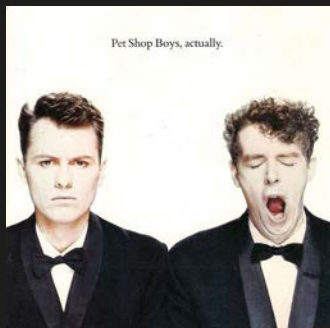
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With the help of talented and creatively sympathetic associates, designers and photographers – Tom Watkins, Mark Farrow, Gary Stilwell, Eric Watson, Daniel Weil, Wolfgang Tillmans, Es Devlin and others – the shape-shifting Pet Shop Boys have always striven to bolster their music with imagery and artwork of lasting depth and quality. See our special PopArt feature on pg 66



Chris Lowe and Neil Tennant in an EMI promo image used for the *Always On My Mind* campaign in 1987







1980s

# WEST END BOYS

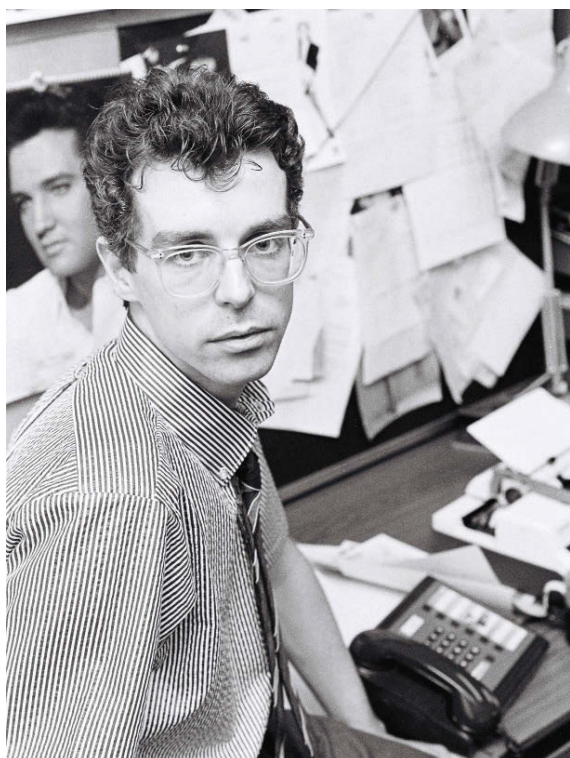
IN CREATING THEIR VERY OWN MUSICAL MANIFESTO, PET SHOP BOYS ESCHEWED THE TRADITIONAL ROLES EXPECTED OF A BAND, CHOOSING INSTEAD TO EMBRACE THE VARIED WORLDS OF MUSIC, THEATRE, ART AND DANCE, DULY EMERGING AS POP'S MOST SUCCESSFUL DUO OF ALL TIME

MARK LINDORES

// It really was completely by chance," Chris Lowe recalls of his collision with Neil Tennant in an electronics store on Chelsea's Kings Road, a meeting that launched British pop's most unique – and successful – duo. "As George Michael said, turn a different corner and we wouldn't have met. I don't know if people believe in fate but it's difficult not to when you meet a complete stranger and you fit perfectly with them musically."

Tennant and Lowe were both Northern boys who had relocated themselves to London in order to pursue their prospective careers – neither of which had anything to do with music. Blackpool-born Lowe had migrated south to study architecture at university, while Tennant had arrived in the capital from Newcastle in 1972, working as a production editor at Marvel comics before moving into journalism and writing for the beloved pop bible *Smash Hits*. ➤





Neil Tennant at *Smash Hits*: YouTube will reveal him voicing a radio ad for the magazine's sticker issue. "Sticky gum!"

Though their careers weren't technically music-orientated, both men harboured a serious interest in music, and wrote and recorded recreationally. Lowe had been raised in a family of performers and had been adept on trombone as a child, while Tennant had spent time in local bands in the early Seventies and had written songs privately ever since. He had just bought his first synthesiser when the first meeting between the pair occurred on August 19, 1981.

### FIND A FRIENDLY FACE

Having uncharacteristically struck up a conversation with each other in the electronics shop, Tennant and Lowe quickly established they had a lot of mutual interests, mainly a voracious appetite for underground dance music – particularly the work of New York dance producer Bobby Orlando (aka Bobby O), best known for tracks such as *Passion* by The Flirts and *Shoot Your Shot* by Divine. They exchanged telephone numbers, and three days later they met up and began writing songs together.

"The whole thing started off as a hobby, but part of me was observing it, thinking that we were doing something that was good," Tennant recalls. "It took a while to come up with something that was worth having, but one weekend Chris went back to Blackpool and he came back with a cassette of a piece of music he'd written on the piano and I wrote the lyrics for the song *Jealousy* over it – and that was our first song."

From that point, the boys developed a strong partnership (though never a romantic relationship, as has been rumoured in the past), with a prolific output of songs, writing and recording throughout 1982, either in Neil's flat or in Camden 8, a basement studio in Camden Town belonging to songwriter/producer Ray Roberts. Early demos such as *Bubadubadubadum*, *In The Club Or In The Queue* and *Oh, Dear* originated from this period, as did the foundations of what would become some of their biggest hits, including *It's A Sin*, *Rent*, *What Have I Done To Deserve This?* and *Opportunities (Let's*

# THE KEY RECORDINGS

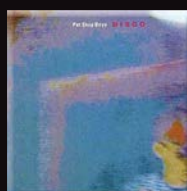
FROM THE START, PET SHOP BOYS' WORK SHIMMED FROM CHART TO DANCEFLOOR



### PLEASE

1985

The debut album is a concise collection of immaculately crafted, perfectly produced synthpop. On face value most of the songs are tech-enhanced studio creations produced for the dancefloor, driven by cold, melodic keyboard riffs and pulsing drum machines; however, the wry wit of the lyrics is pervasive throughout, and the hook-laden melodies are a perfect accompaniment for the lush electronics. While it's impossible to argue against the marvellousness of an album so stuffed with instant classics, the singles are only half of the story; such is the quality and promise of the rest of the record that there is little to differentiate them from the album's other tracks. A milestone – not only for Pet Shop Boys, but for pop music in general.



### DISCO

1986

It was only a matter of time before PSB returned to the clubs for inspiration. On 1986's *Disco* they enlisted Shep Pettibone and Arthur Baker to remix their four singles to date as well as two lesser-known tracks, creating an album which amps up the beats and bleeps, creating an instantly dancefloor-ready set. Both Baker and Pettibone came up with respectful reinterpretations that expanded on the originals while retaining the hooks and charm that made them classics in the first place. While neither *In The Night* and *Paninaro* were singles at the time (the latter was remixed again and released as a single in 1995), thanks to *Disco*, both were rightly given the attention they deserved.



### INTROSPECTIVE

1988

*Introspective* is a brave and unique work in the PSB canon. Having taken much care in choosing the right people to create their remixes and 12" mixes for them in the past (see *Disco*), this was an experimental work which reversed the standard process and created extended mixes first and then edited them down as singles. With a strong emphasis on dance culture, the album ranged stylistically from Latin rhythms to pulsating house, all complementing lyrics of real depth. On occasion the core elements of some songs became slightly clouded, but *Introspective* is a brilliant work – though the long mixes, Neil believes, factored into the underperformance of the next album, *Behaviour*.



### RESULTS (LIZA MINNELLI)

1989

Although celebrated as Liza Minnelli's first studio album in 12 years, *Results* is ultimately a Pets project with Liza as a guest vocalist. Taking the melodrama of Steven Sondheim's *Losing My Mind* and giving it a pulsating hi-NRG backbeat, the first single was a huge hit – and much of the rest was fabulous, too. Neil and Chris revelled in writing for a strong female voice, just as they had done with Dusty Springfield, and penned seven of the album's tracks. The cover of the boys' own *Rent* stands out as the highlight; with Minnelli perfectly conveying the emotional vulnerability of the song's narrator, and superb orchestration courtesy of Anne Dudley, it's a triumph for all involved.



Lowe and Tennant on London's South Bank in a moody still taken from the *West End Girls* video, directed by Andy Morahan and Eric Watson

*Make Lots Of Money*). "Most of the songs on the first two albums were written around that time," Lowe confirms. "We used to go to the Camden studio every weekend to write and record songs, and most of them appeared on either *Please* or *Actually* – that's why there's a consistency of sound and song type to those two albums."

Sensing the potential and quality of their material, the pair began to seriously pursue music as a career, first taking West End as a band name. "Chris and I used to love the West End of London near Leicester Square because you'd get a lot of skinheads and you'd get posh girls," Neil says. "We used to go out nightclubbing a lot, and we'd go to The Dive Bar in Gerrard Street, which is mentioned in *West End Girls*.

It was in a basement, and it was damp down there, and there was no one in it apart from a couple of queeny guys talking to the barman – but it used to fascinate us. The barman used to play Shirley Bassey or Barbara Streisand or Barry Manilow. We used to really like going there."

Having remained strong fans of Bobby O's productions, Neil orchestrated a meeting with the producer whilst in New York on assignment for

"IT STARTED OFF AS A HOBBY, BUT PART OF ME WAS OBSERVING IT, THINKING WE WERE DOING SOMETHING THAT WAS GOOD. IT TOOK A WHILE TO COME UP WITH SOMETHING THAT WAS WORTH HAVING"



The original Bobcat Records *West End Girls* was followed by *One More Chance*, which would also be re-recorded later

*Smash Hits*, where he was due to review a Police concert and interview Sting. "The day after I interviewed The Police I went to Bobby O's office on Broadway," Neil recalls. "I was just talking to him about his records, because I knew everything about them, and then I told him about this group I was in with Chris, and he suggested we make a record. Three weeks later, we went back to New York, he put us up in his friend's flat just off Broadway, and we went into the studio, doing these 90-minute sessions. The first

song we did was *West End Girls*."

The track had started life back in 1982 when Neil decided to write a rap inspired by Grandmaster Flash's seminal *The Message*. The song dealt with the pressures of living in a modern city (inspired by TS Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*) and began with the now infamous opening line, "Sometimes you're better off dead/ There's a gun in your hand and it's pointing at your head", which Neil had thought up during a bout of insomnia, having just watched an old James Cagney gangster film. Writing it down before finally going to sleep, he completed the lyric the next day. Two days later, whilst working in Camden 8, the boys created an instrumental which, Neil surmised, fitted well with the rap, and the duo recorded the demo onto a cassette of tracks they planned to work on in New York with Bobby O.

Once in the Big Apple, the pair were instantly inspired by the city's vibrant nightlife during one of its most culturally diverse periods, with clubs such as the Paradise Garage, Area and Danceteria providing a veritable breeding ground for a generation of future superstars. They would hit the clubs by night, absorbing the latest sounds, and integrating them into their own work the following day in the studio.

#### THE BOYS BACK IN TOWN

By the time they arrived back in London a few weeks later they had recorded 13 tracks and signed to Bobby O's Bobcat Records. Though *West End Girls* was already earmarked to be their first single, they perceived it as far too gimmicky to have the words "West End" in both the moniker of the band and the song, so they changed the name of the group to Pet Shop Boys, named after three of their friends who worked in a pet shop in Ealing.

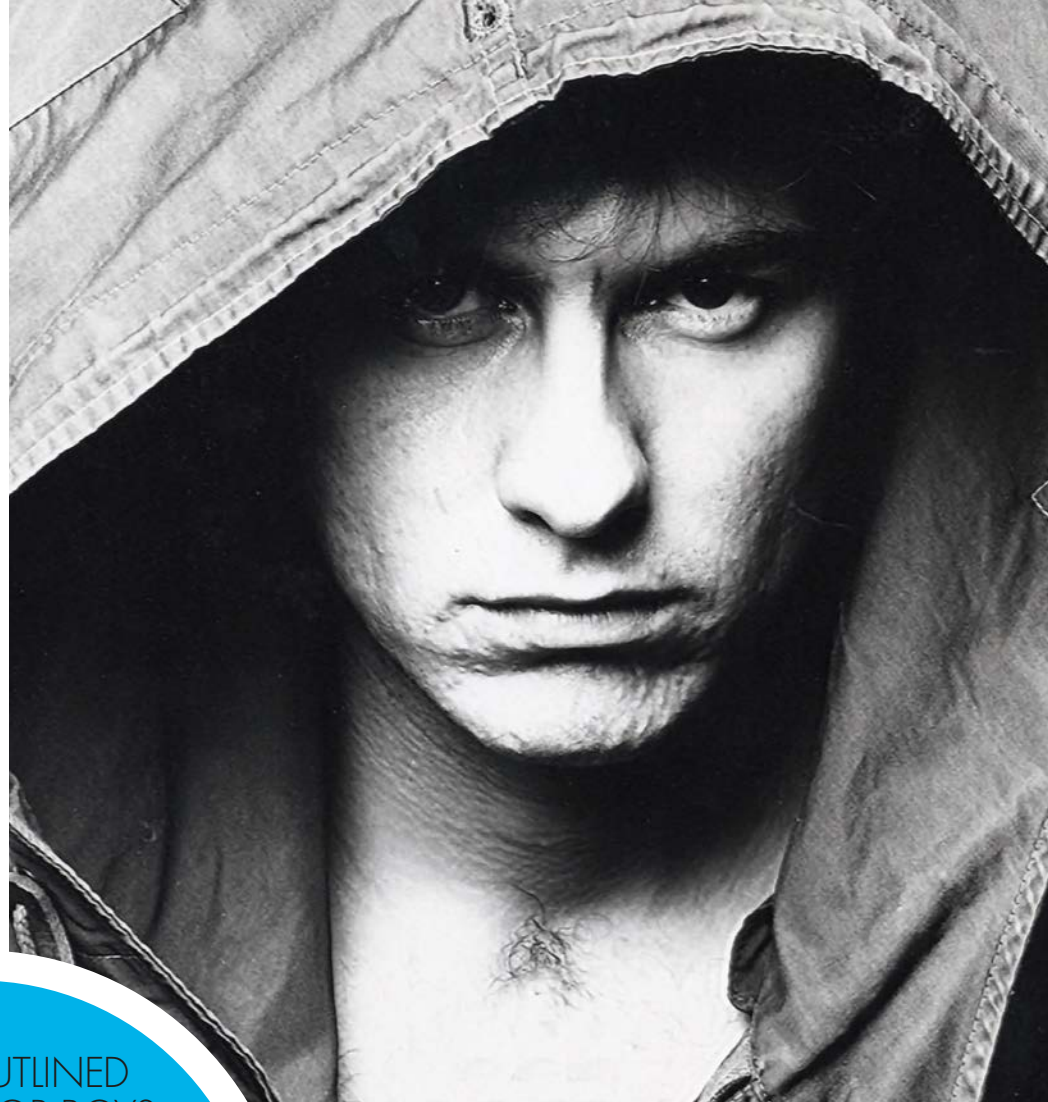




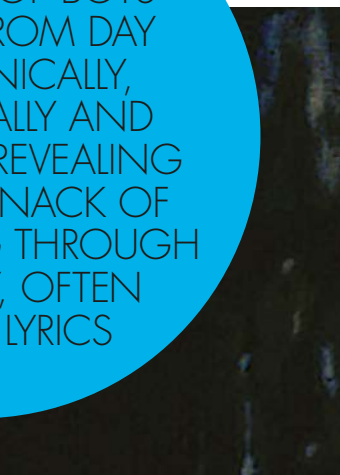
**Left: Neil, sans horn-rimmed glasses and hat, pictured during the shoot for *Opportunities***

*West End Girls* was released in April 1984 to a lukewarm initial response. The connection to Bobby O helped it become a club hit in L.A. and San Francisco as well as France and Belgium, while the boys were thrilled that the song was only available in the UK as an import 12" single. Follow-up single *One More Chance* followed a similar pattern when released the following June, prompting Tennant and Lowe to rethink their strategy – the first major change being to sever ties with Bobby O. After long negotiations, they eventually came to a legal agreement which allowed Bobby the rights to the songs they had recorded together and a percentage of royalties from the first three Pet Shop Boys albums. Emancipated from their early deal, Neil and Chris began to build their career in earnest, hiring Tom Watkins as manager and signing a deal with Parlophone in August 1985.





PLEASE OUTLINED THE PET SHOP BOYS AGENDA FROM DAY ONE, SONICALLY, AESTHETICALLY AND POLITICALLY, REVEALING THE PAIR'S KNACK OF STORYTELLING THROUGH THEIR WRY, OFTEN ACERBIC LYRICS



They also gave up their day jobs to focus solely on the group, decisions they no doubt second-guessed when their debut single on the Parlophone label, *Opportunities (Let's Make Lots Of Money)*, stalled at a disappointing No. 116 in the charts.

Unperturbed, Neil and Chris began work on their debut album. While Tom Watkins had suggested The System and Stock Aitken & Waterman as potential producers, the boys themselves favoured Stephen Hague because of his recent work with The World's Famous Supreme Team (*Hey DJ*) and Malcolm McLaren (*Madame Butterfly*). A compromise was reached that they would record a new version of *West End Girls* (Bobby O still owned the rights to the original version) with Hague, and if they liked it, Parlophone would green-light the decision for him to work on the album.

#### MAKE THEM OR BREAK THEM

The remixed version of *West End Girls* was released in October 1985 and, after entering the charts at a lowly No. 80, steadily climbed to the No. 1 spot over the next two months, forcing Neil and Chris to punctuate recording sessions of the album with assorted TV, radio and press appearances. With a first bona fide hit on their hands, the pressure was on to finish their album. Deciding to keep it to a concise 10 songs, they re-recorded early tracks *Opportunities* and *Suburbia* alongside new tracks. With the pair considering *Love Comes Quickly* to be a huge musical progression, it was released as a single on 24th February 1986, with their debut album *Please* following exactly one month later.

*Please* outlined Pet Shop Boys agenda from day one – sonically, aesthetically and politically. With ➤

**"It was like a day out" – Chris and Neil well wrapped up in another snap taken during the *West End Girls* shoot in 1985**







Chris Lowe with 'Boy' cap in a photo used for the cover of the 1986 single *Love Comes Quickly*

a knack of storytelling through wry, often acerbic lyrics set against the latest tech-enhanced sounds, they possessed an innate sense of contrast which would become one of their trademarks; even their image reflected this, Neil looking bookish and intellectual in a suit while Chris brooded behind his keyboard in the latest sportswear and baseball cap.

With a clean, sleek sleeve – a plain white cover with a passport-sized image of the boys in its centre – designed by future mainstay Mark Farrow, *Please* encapsulated Pet Shop Boys' slick futurism. With sound effects sprinkled throughout the record, they achieved their goal of creating a 'filmic' sound to their music and even sequenced the tracks so that they loosely told a story – a precursor to some of their theatrical endeavours of the future.

"We had the idea for the album that it was sort of linked together," says Tennant. "They run away in the first song, they arrive in the city [*West End Girls*], they want to make money [*Opportunities*], they fall in love [*Love Comes Quickly*], move to suburbia [*Suburbia*], go out clubbing [*Tonight Is Forever*], there's violence in the city [*Violence*] and casual sex [*I Want A Lover*], someone tries to pick up a boy [*Later Tonight*]... it does sort of work."

Reaching the Top 10 both in the UK and the US, the album sold consistently throughout 1986 as the hits racked up. By the end of the year, *Please* had produced four hit singles and, in keeping with their dancefloor roots, Pet Shop Boys capped the year with *Disco*, a compilation of some of the best remixes



of tracks from the album, as well as an Arthur Baker remix of *Opportunities*' B-side *In The Night* which became widely recognisable as the theme to BBC's *The Clothes Show*.

Though Pet Shop Boys had originally scheduled time to go on tour in the latter half of 1986, their ideas for a lavish, theatrical production were deemed too expensive. Rather than compromise, they axed

the tour altogether and used the time to hit the promo trail for *Please* and its singles abroad – particularly in America – and to work on their second album. "Not touring turned out to be a strength, because we spent quite a while writing songs," says Tennant. "The idea was to make the next album more musically ambitious. Bigger-sounding, the arrangements slightly more adventurous."

As well as the new material they'd written, the gestation period of early tracks such as *It's A Sin* and *What Have I Done To Deserve This?* meant that those songs had grown into something much bigger than the early demos promised, allowing the boys to continue a cinematic flair throughout their music. *It's A Sin* benefitted from the inclusion of everything from recordings of "the ambience" from



**POP UP** Chris and Neil used to tease their actual pet shop-working friends that they should do a cover of *How Much Is That Doggie In The Window*. We are still waiting for the PSB version





Left, the boys spiffed up for the photo shoot for the *Actually* cover: "We felt we had the secret of contemporary pop music. It was an exciting time"



Above, the duo on set in Slovenia for the 1988 *Heart* video with a very scary-looking Ian McKellen



"NOT TOURING TURNED OUT TO BE A STRENGTH, BECAUSE WE SPENT QUITE A WHILE WRITING SONGS. THE IDEA WAS TO MAKE THE NEXT ALBUM MORE AMBITIOUS, BIGGER-SOUNDING, MORE ADVENTUROUS"

Brompton Oratory (priests preaching, choirs singing, Latin chanting); *One More Chance* was remixed by Julian Mendelsohn; and, just as they were beginning to think Dusty Springfield wasn't going to duet with them on *What Have I Done To Deserve This?*, she accepted their offer to perform on the track.

### SOMETHING WE COULD SHARE

This new, expansive sound that Pet Shop Boys had envisioned required them to broaden their team of collaborators. As well as working again with Stephen Hague, they brought in producers such as Julian Mendelsohn, David Jacob, Andy Richards and Shep Pettibone (Tennant later admitted working with so many different producers was detrimental to the album, as it wasn't as cohesive a body of work as their others). As well as experimenting sonically, they also began writing from differing perspectives, introducing a characterisation that lent their material a versatility and depth unusual to pop acts.

*Rent* was written from the point of view of a prostitute (though widely perceived to be a rent boy because of the title, its ambivalence hid the fact that

it was about a 'kept woman'). *What Have I Done To Deserve This?* is about a couple who have separated and regret it, and *Heart* was originally written with Madonna in mind, though they never sent it to her, choosing instead to keep it for themselves.

Such was the personal nature of their lyrics that they occasionally found themselves subject to criticism – particularly in the case of *Actually*'s lead single, *It's A Sin*. Jimmy Somerville accused them of capitalising on gay culture, and a teacher from Tennant's old school castigated him in the press for painting a less-than-complimentary picture of his schooldays. Mild controversy aside, the boys' unstoppable run of success showed no signs of abating, with the song giving them their second No. 1 hit when it was released in June 1987.

Following on 7th September 1987, *Actually* was released to great critical acclaim and enormous

Above, Chris Lowe adopts a perky maritime look in another *Actually*-era shot





**Top, the Pets on the road with fluffy dice in a scene from *It Couldn't Happen Here*, accompanied by *Two Divided By Zero*. Above, waiting on the platform for *King's Cross***

commercial success. Between June 1987 and June 1988, the boys notched up a No. 2 album and no less than five hit singles – three of which topped the charts, including the non-album single *Always On My Mind*, which had been recorded for a TV special commemorating the tenth anniversary of Elvis Presley's death. The song was released as a single due to public demand and secured the prestigious Christmas No. 1 spot.

"We had entered our imperial phase," Neil says. "As soon as *Actually* came out we planned a tour and promptly cancelled it again and did lots of promotion instead. We were still having hits in America, and felt that we had the secret of contemporary pop music, that we knew what was required. We did our thing with Dusty, we made a film, *It Couldn't Happen Here*. It was an exciting time." Originally planned as an hour-long video album to appease fans in place of a tour, the boys used the time that had been set aside for live dates in late 1987 to shoot the film in Clacton and South London. *It Couldn't Happen Here* grew into a feature-length film, released to slightly puzzled reviews the following summer.





Pet Shop Boys,  
complete with  
assorted devices,  
in a suitably  
Dadaesque  
photograph by  
Michael Roberts

# BOYS ON FILM

1988'S SURREAL TRAVELOGUE IS  
AN ESSENTIAL PSB ARTEFACT



"It all started in 1987 when we were going to do a tour," remembers Neil. "PMI, our video company, were going to make a film of the tour. But then we decided not to tour, and so with *Actually* we planned to do a simultaneous video

release. We worked with the director Zbigniew Rybczynski [who did the second *Opportunities* video] and had scripts for each song, but we had to do it by July and they couldn't get the equipment we needed back off an Italian TV channel. The whole thing fizzled out, basically."

PMI (Picture Music International) was still keen on the idea of a visual album. Impressed by an edition of the South Bank Show on the subject of Roald Dahl, they arranged a meeting with the director, Jack Bond, to gauge his interest in working on the film. Bond immediately hit it off with Tennant and Lowe and began working on a treatment for the film while the boys were in America.

"We talked to Jack about our lives and I was surprised how much of our lives and our childhoods was in that film," Lowe says. "Obviously with the seaside setting, being chased, the Catholic aspect – there's a lot of Pet Shop Boys history in that film."

After listening to the boys' music on a continuous loop in order to derive inspiration directly from the songs, Bond placed the material in an order which loosely worked as a narrative and began creating scenes. Although it was originally planned to only include songs from *Actually*, the project was expanded to incorporate tracks from *Please* as well.

Bond eventually came up with a plot which loosely detailed a journey across England, interspersed with fantasy sequences that gave the film a detached, dreamlike quality and showed the boys metaphorically escaping from repression and authority figures. Originally planned as an hour-long series of videos woven together, the project transformed into a full 90-minute script. Shot in just three weeks in November 1987 in Clacton and South London, *It Couldn't Happen Here* co-starred Barbara Windsor, Gareth Hunt and Joss Ackland. With *Always On My Mind* (which is featured in the film) unexpectedly released as a single at the end of 1987, a video of clips from the film was put together. It was released the following July to somewhat mixed reviews and had a limited cinema run before being released on VHS. Frustratingly, it has not yet been issued on DVD.



"IN THE MUSIC  
BUSINESS THERE HAVE  
ALWAYS BEEN RULES  
YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO  
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ARE RECOGNISED AS  
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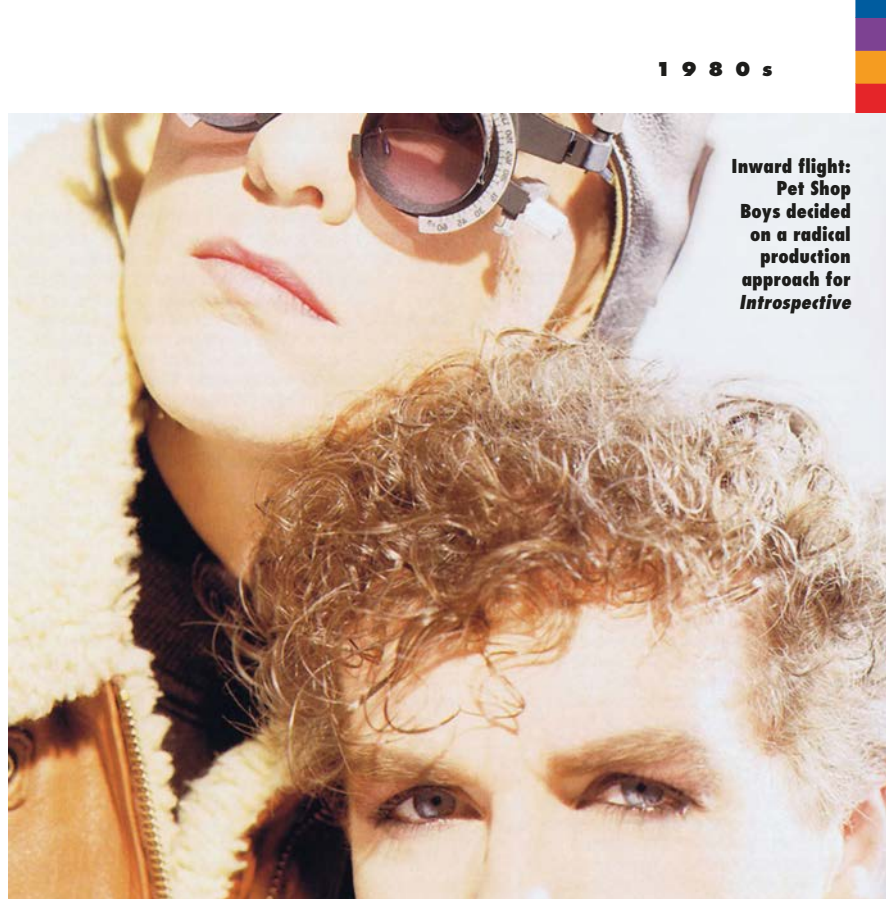






**Left, in leafy mood, taken by photographer Cindy Palmano**

**POP UP** In the US, the press had trouble with the fact that a non-touring group could be successful. True enough, few others had done it – one exception being Steely Dan



**Inward flight: Pet Shop Boys decided on a radical production approach for *Introspective***

1988 could not have started better for Pet Shop Boys. They began the year picking up the BPI Award for Best British Group and performed *What Have I Done To Deserve This?* with Dusty at the ceremony before picking up the Ivor Novello Award for International Hit of the Year for *It's A Sin*. As well as their own success, they also enjoyed their first hit as songwriters for other artists (something they'd pursue more as the decade progressed) when Eighth Wonder's *I'm Not Scared* became a Top 10 hit.

Simultaneously achieving chart success in their own right, as songwriters for other acts and making their own film – Pet Shop Boys had by now thrown conventionality out the window and were writing their own pop policies. "In the music business, there have always been rules you're supposed to follow and ways of doing things that are recognised as the right way," Neil mused. "We've never been interested in that, so we didn't want to operate like that."

Extending their unconventionality further into their music, they adopted a unique approach for their next album, *Introspective*. Rather than have the songs extended and remixed for 12" club mixes, they reversed the process and recorded the album as six extended club mixes which would be edited down to four-minute length for release as singles. With dance music taking off in a big way, they perfectly captured the zeitgeist, even covering club classic *It's Alright* by Sterling Void. Though only *Domino Dancing* and *Left To My Own Devices* were specifically written for the album, the production and decision to use live orchestration meant that recording it turned out to be a lengthy process.

### TIMELESS WAVELENGTHS

*Introspective* was released on 11th October 1988 and encapsulated their unique brand of 'intellectonica' – the unusual pairing of deep, thought-provoking lyrics with club-infused beats (best summed up in *Left To My Own Devices'* classic lyric, "Che Guevara and Debussy to a disco beat"),





On *Introspective* Pet Shop Boys allowed their infatuation with dance music to flow unabated. To date it has sold 4.5 million copies

INTROSPECTIVE ENCAPSULATED PET SHOP BOYS' UNIQUE BRAND OF 'INTELLECTRONICA', THE PAIRING OF DEEP, THOUGHT-PROVOKING LYRICS WITH CLUB-INFUSED BEATS. IT WAS A PERFECT FUSION OF POP AND DANCE

**POP\_UP** The MCMLXXXIX tour had esoteric support in the form of The Balanescu Quartet, who have also worked with Kate Bush, Spiritualized and Kraftwerk



hence the title *Introspective*. With *I Want A Dog* the only track on the album not to be a hit single (they had essentially covered themselves by including their own version of *I'm Not Scared*), *Introspective* was, it seemed, a perfect fusion of pop and dance.

Though the top spot of the album chart once again alluded them, *Introspective* was a major success, becoming their biggest album to date, and spawning huge hits in *Left To My Own Devices* and *Domino Dancing*, which peaked at No. 7 in the UK, leading Neil to surmise that the golden Pet Shop Boys period was finally over, coming after a solid run of Top 2 chart positions. Though we now know that wasn't the case, *Domino Dancing* was the last big win for the duo in the US, something many attribute to the song's homoerotic video.

With three hugely popular albums to their name, Parlophone realised that a tour was now an essential addition to Pet Shop Boys' oeuvre and granted them the budget needed to create the identity they wanted to in a live setting. Featuring screen projections from



filmmaker Derek Jarman (who also directed the show), myriad costume changes and a troupe of dancers, 1989's MCMLXXXIX Tour was the impetus for the theatrical extravaganzas that Pet Shop Boys would become renowned for.

The tour, along with writing and production credits on songs for Liza Minnelli, Dusty Springfield and Electronic, ensured that Pet Shop Boys ended their defining decade with their reputation as pop's greatest partnership firmly intact. Equally prolific and pioneering, they had already created a legacy which made it almost unimaginable that some of their best work was still ahead of them. ■





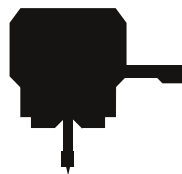
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CLASSIC

ALBUM

# ACTUALLY

FOR A MOMENT, THEY WERE LOOKING LIKE ONE-HIT WONDERS. THEN CAME PET SHOP BOYS' SECOND ALBUM, INFORMED BY THE STATE OF THE NATION, A SIXTIES SINGER LIVING IN A MOTEL, CATHOLICISM... AND ZZ TOP

OLIVER HURLEY

If *Please* was Pet Shop Boys' mission statement, *Actually* consolidated their sound and aesthetic: massive synth hooks that were at once uplifting and melancholic, creative arrangements, thoughtful lyrics that avoided cliché, all presented with a mild disinterest, as if this massive pop juggernaut wasn't really anything to do with them.

They chose to record the album in London studios Advision and Trevor Horn's Sarm West – which, according to Lowe, afforded them the opportunity to “faff a lot”. A number of producers were chosen, notably Stephen Hague, who had produced *Please*, and Julian Mendelsohn, who had produced the re-recorded single version of *Suburbia*.

Mendelsohn's biggest impact on *Actually* was his work on *It's A Sin*, the album's centrepiece. The song had existed for years – along with *Rent* and *West End Girls*, it was on a demo tape when the duo signed with Parlophone, and there had been plans to record it for *Please* with Stock, Aitken and Waterman.

“I sort of meant the lyrics as a joke,” said Tennant during his 2007 appearance on *Desert Island Discs*. “I guess it

came from my subconscious... at school, we always seemed to be taught that everything you wanted to do was a sin. It was an early example of us trying to bring a different subject matter into pop.”

The use of real sounds gave the song a filmic quality, with Mendelsohn even including a recording of the ‘ambience’ from inside Knightsbridge's Brompton Oratory. “That’s on the record somewhere,” the producer says. “You can hear it in the ‘Father forgive me’ section. At the time, I was listening to a lot of ZZ Top. So I sort of sent the song in that direction a bit – that kind of insistent heaviness.”

Released as a single in June 1987, *It's A Sin* spent three weeks at No. 1 and, along with *West End Girls* and their 1993 cover version of The Village People's *Go West*,

is one of the Pet Shop Boys' most recognisable moments.

Day trips to neo-classical Catholic churches aside, the recording of *Actually* was fairly structured. The day would start at about 10 or 11am, and Mendelsohn would be in the studio for anywhere from 10 to 14 hours at a time. “Neil and Chris would leave the studio at about seven or eight o'clock and then me and [keyboard programmer] Andy [Richards] would muck around until one or two o'clock in the morning,” he recalls. “They'd come back with fresh ears the next day and say, ‘Yep, that's really great,’ or, ‘That's crap, you've got to work on that.’”

Mendelsohn's abiding memory of recording the album was that he and Tennant “did a lot of the hands-on work” while Lowe

would lie on the couch at the back of the control room, chipping in with suggestions. Sometimes an extra keyboard line would be needed. “So he'd get up and fiddle about for a couple of minutes,” says Mendelsohn. “And he'd put the machine into record, he'd do the line and that was it, he'd go back to the couch. And it was always a winner.”

“You'd think, ‘How the hell does he do that?’ Most of the keyboard lines that you hear in a gap in the vocals or in the intros, he would have just knocked together.”

There was no great ceremony when it came to recording the vocals. “You used to just go in and say, ‘Oh, we'd better do the vocal on this,’” says Mendelsohn. “It was always good to get them done before dinner because, once we'd had dinner, it never seemed to work.”

“Neil had a great voice but there were always a few tuning problems, so you had to be quite hard on him. You did four or five takes and then you compiled the best from each take, and then you might have to do a few bits again and you'd pretty much got it.”

Pet Shop Boys needed a woman to duet on *What Have I Done To Deserve This?* and had approached Dusty

## TRACKLISTING

### SIDE A

One More Chance  
What Have I Done To  
Deserve This?  
Shopping  
Rent  
Hit Music

### SIDE B

It Couldn't Happen Here  
It's A Sin  
I Want To Wake Up  
Heart  
King's Cross



# THE PLAYERS

## RELEASED

7 September 1987

**LABEL** Parlophone

## PRODUCED BY

Stephen Hague, David Jacob, Andy Richards, Shep Pettibone, Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe

## ENGINEERS

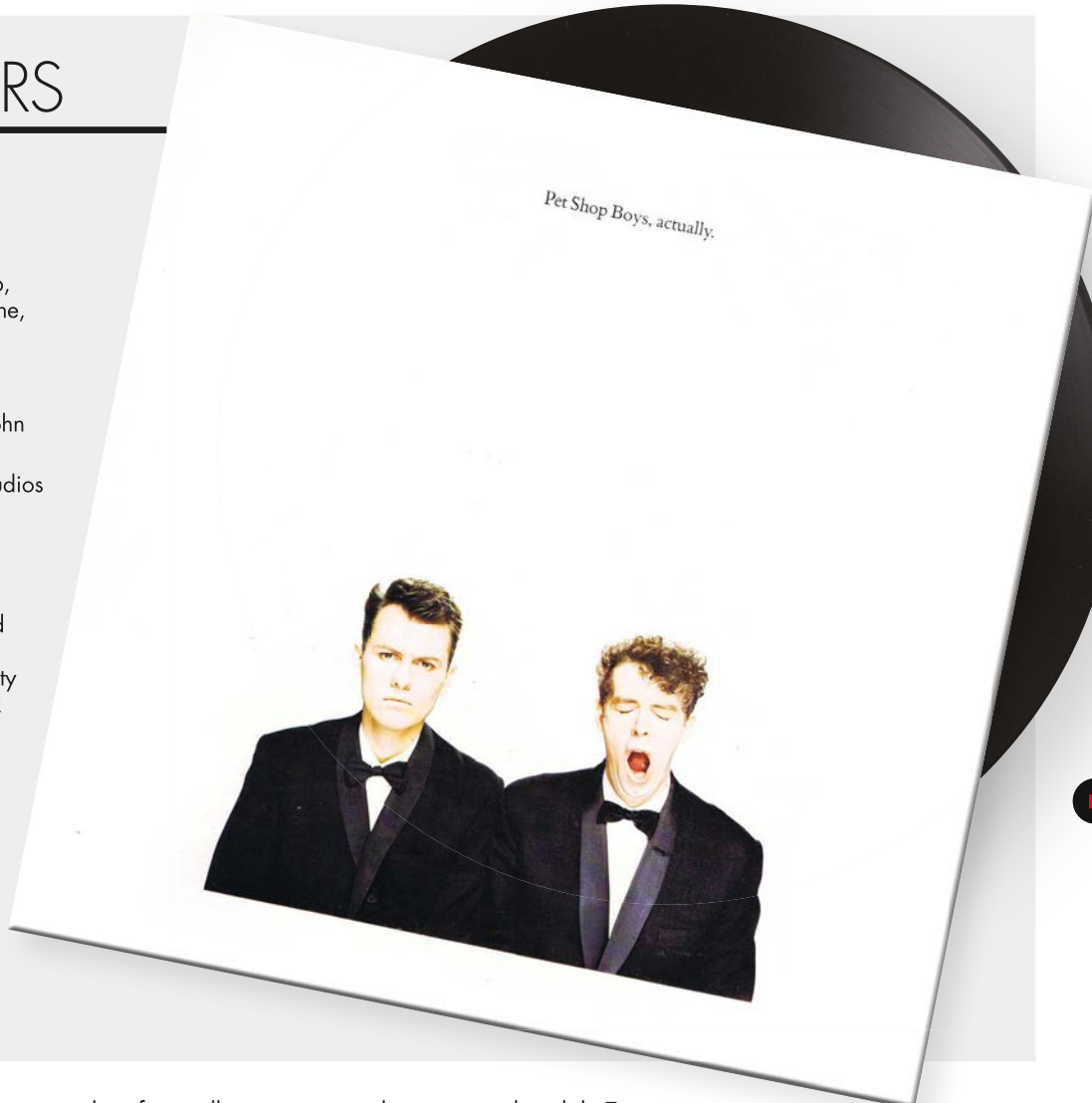
David Jacob, Dave Meegan, Tony Philips, Julian Mendelsohn

## RECORDED AT

Sarm West and Advision Studios

## PERSONNEL

Neil Tennant – vocals, keyboards; Chris Lowe – keyboards, vocals; Andy Richards – Fairlight CMI and keyboard programming on tracks 1, 4, 5, 7 and 9; Dusty Springfield – vocals on track 2; J. J. Jeczalik – Fairlight CMI programming on track 3; Gary Maughan – additional programming on track 3; Angelo Badalamenti – orchestra arrangement on track 6; Blue Weaver – Fairlight CMI programming on track 6; Adrian Cook – programming on track 8



Springfield prior to recording their first album, eventually enlisting her in time to include the song on *Actually*. "Dusty was, to us, a legend," Tennant said. "When we met her, she was living in a pay-by-day Hollywood motel. She was really at rock bottom. It was a sublime moment hearing her sing our music."

Dusty, as ever, had a meticulous plan for how she wanted her vocals to sound and would record take after take. After she had finished, says Mendelsohn, "Neil had to go through the whole thing and swap between each take. It was pretty painful." The reward came when the song reached No. 2 in the UK charts in August 1987, making it Springfield's highest charting single since 1966's *You Don't Have To Say You Love Me*.

It was followed a month later by *Actually* (the title was simply a word the group said a lot). The album also peaked at No. 2 and sold

more than four million copies. With songs such as *Shopping* (about the sale of nationalised industries), *It Couldn't Happen Here* (about AIDS) and *King's Cross* (a metaphor for poverty in Eighties Britain), the album was received by critics as a statement about Thatcherism – something, Tennant said,

"Dusty was, to us, a legend. When we met her, she was living in a pay-by-day Hollywood motel. She was really at rock bottom. It was just a sublime moment hearing her sing our music" **NEIL TENNANT**

"which didn't occur to us while we were making it."

The defining Pet Shop Boys album, *Actually* has a sleeve that also captures a defining image of the duo – to the chagrin of Lowe, who has said he hates how he looks on it. Both are dressed in black dinner jackets and bow ties; Lowe looks ahead

dispassionately, while Tennant yawns. The initial idea had been to use a painting of the pair by Scottish artist Alison Watt, but they didn't think the finished portrait was quite right for the album (Tennant ended up hanging the painting in his flat). The 'yawning' photo, taken by

Cindy Palmano on the set of the *What Have I Done To Deserve This?* video, was due to be used on the cover of an August 1987 edition of *Smash Hits* but was pinched for the album sleeve the day before the magazine went to press. "It was sort of uncompromising and funny at the same time," said Tennant.

Non-album track *Always On My Mind* was released as a single in November and became that year's Christmas No. 1. Final single *Heart*, was released in March 1988 and also reached No. 1.

The Pets have gone on to sell more than 50 million records and have had 44 Top 40 UK singles, making them the most successful British music duo of all time, but the period around *Actually* marked the zenith of what Tennant often refers to as the group's "imperial phase".

"We sort of did understand what the sound for contemporary pop in 1987 to 1988 was," the singer told Radio 2 in 2016, "because dance music's influence was very very strong, but we had this strange production thing that was like no one else."

"It just seemed to work at the time. There's a certain amount of luck as well, but I think we had good songs and we had the confidence to follow our own instincts." ■



1990s





# LOVING THE ALIENS

WHILE GRUNGE PEDDLED SWEATY, RETROGRADE ROCKISMS AND BRITPOP FLOURISHED ITS ERSATZ WORKING CLASS PATINA, PET SHOP BOYS TURNED TOWARDS TECHNOLOGY, FUTURISM AND FANTASY, PLUS THEATRE, OPERA AND FAR-FLUNG LANDS. BUT PURE ESCAPISM WAS NOT THE AIM: THE NINETIES WOULD REVEAL SOME OF PSB'S MOST DEEPLY PERSONAL WORK

MARK BEAUMONT

In the Nineties, things got real. Surly Manc lads with guitars straddled the charts like Kangol-clad colossi. Art school rock visionaries donned Fred Perry T-shirts, studied greyhound form and became ironic pastiches of working class mods, singing lyrical portraits of the frustrated and mundane. Yorkshire fops found glamour and mystique in supermarkets, bad sex and suburban voyeurism. West end girls flocked to (faux) East end boys. In pop music, too, the everyday flourished. Taking cues from the boy/girl-next-door successes of Stock, Aitken & Waterman's Hit Factory, the flamboyance of the New Romantics was shelved in favour of girl bands and boy of stock suburban disco types and boy bands full of Walthamstow bruisers or shirt-allergic underwear models. Even in the sci-fi realm of dance music, the bald, faceless 'superstar DJ' was king, recognisable only by their Timotei hair or penlight spectacles, shouting lager, lager, lager.

Outside the establishment: careering towards the millennium while deploying a dizzying array of imagery, Pet Shop Boys' Nineties would be a magical mystery tour



Tennant and Lowe  
clutch armfuls of roses  
in a *Behaviour* album  
shot inspired by a  
1951 photograph of a  
Chaplinesque Judy Garland  
taken by Richard Avedon

"IT WAS A TOTALLY  
DIFFERENT VERSION  
OF THE PET SHOP  
BOYS. WE HAD BEEN  
A SINGLES BAND, BUT  
WE BROUGHT OUT THIS  
BEAUTIFUL REFLECTIVE  
ALBUM, IN SOME WAYS  
INFLUENCED BY FRIENDS  
DYING OF AIDS"







Lowe and Tennant amid a cast of beautiful people assembled for the *Being Boring* video, released in November 1990 and stylishly shot in nostalgic black and white by Bruce Weber

One major pop act, though, bucked the trend towards pop culture reflecting real life. Sliding down a candy-cane Batpole in bright orange dunce caps, ascending a staircase to the stars surrounded by seven-foot CGI beach balls or riding the subway in cyberpunk shock wigs, came Pet Shop Boys, the last bastion of art pop spectacle.

### BOLTING THROUGH THE DOOR

Their shift from glum sophisticates pounding sordid West End streets to men in neon bowl hats and shocking pink tank tops dancing in a computerised 23rd century version of *Ready Steady Go!* was a gradual one, inspired by theatre and tragedy. With 1990's *Behaviour*, as Neil Tennant told this writer in 2017, "we presented a totally different version of the Pet Shop Boys. Pet Shop Boys became an albums band – in the Eighties we were totally a singles band. We brought out this beautiful, reflective album, in some ways influenced by friends dying of AIDS, and we thought that was the future of the Pet Shop Boys."

The future was one of broader scope, deeper textures and wider vision. Where *Introspection* was a shamelessly commercial collection of 12-inch dance singles, albeit with a soft heart, *Behaviour* was a rounded, emotional piece, a record the band would come to consider "often overlooked" but diehard fans would rank as a pivotal classic. Recorded in Harold Faltermeyer's Red Deer studio in Munich between May and June 1990, where it was given a more human tone by the use of analogue synths, *Behaviour* fed from the florid guitar pop of The Smiths (Johnny Marr guested on *This Must Be The Place I Waited Years To Leave* and *My October Symphony*), operatic orchestral music and the enigmatic electronics of Depeche Mode's *Violator*. "It was more reflective and more musical-sounding," Tennant would say, "and also it probably didn't have irritatingly crass ideas in it, like our songs often do."

Easing in on the wistful washes of *Being Boring*, *Behaviour* was instantly open-hearted. Sparked by a quote from F Scott Fitzgerald's wife Zelda and drawing comparisons between the scandalous, liberated hedonism of the Twenties flappers and the LGBT scene that emerged in the Seventies, the autobiographical track traced Tennant's life from his teenage years in the Newcastle closet to his London gay scene debut and beyond. The melancholy atmosphere took on tragic overtones as Tennant ultimately reflected on the friends and lovers he lost in London. "It's about a friend of mine who died of AIDS," he told BBC2's *O Zone* in 1993. "It's about our lives when we were teenagers and how we moved to London, and I suppose me becoming successful and him becoming ill."

Thanks to such artful vulnerability, *Being Boring* became accepted as Pet Shop Boys' greatest song, a kind of *Maudlin Vibrations*. When they eventually got around to touring in 1991, its omission from the setlist caused so many complaints from fans – including, surprisingly, Guns N' Roses' Axl Rose – that they began adding it as an encore.

On *Behaviour*, *Being Boring* acted as a tone-setter, giving way to the quasi-religious Depeche Mode solemnity of *This Must Be The Place I've Waited Years To Leave* and launching the album's scintillating series of emotional vignettes. Neil as a knee-trembling teenager in love in *Nervously* or the sleepless cuckold lying awake at 3am wondering "where've you been/Who've you seen?" in *Jealousy* and *To Face The Truth*. A relationship imploding amid "piles of toast and broken promises" on *The End Of The World*. Or a couple hiding their affairs from each other on the hi-NRG No. 4 hit *So Hard*, a track given a hard house remix by David Morales. It would occasionally make stylish lurches into INXS electro rock hits allegedly about Transvision Vamp frontwoman Wendy James (*How Can You Expect To Be Taken Seriously?*) and dream disco treatises on Russian economic failings (*My October Symphony*), but *Behaviour* was Pet Shop Boys' most personal and human achievement yet. And, as the grand synth-classical crescendo of *Jealousy* climaxed, it clearly demanded Performance.

Businessmen in bold primary colour suits rode surfboards through *What Have I Done To Deserve This?* Psychiatric nurses tortured their keyboard-playing patients during *It's A Sin*. Pig bankers and pumpkin-headed women filled the stage and black-suited angels danced around the seat where Chris sat, centre stage, reading *Playboy* in his underwear. Pet Shop Boys' theatrical imagination was let loose upon the world's arena stages like Salvador Dali had been given his own musical roadshow, and nothing would ever be boring again.

Racking up their fourth consecutive Top 3 UK album on the release of *Behaviour* in October 1990, the cashflow issues that had scuppered their 1986 attempt to tour were dissolving

Chris Lowe, 1990: *The Chicago Tribune* praised the album as "a record that'll seduce dance clubs for a few months, and haunt the stay-at-home crowd for long after"



POP UP "What was interesting about *Behaviour* was that we wanted [Harold Faltermeyer] to programme the synths like Giorgio Moroder – but these weren't Donna Summer kind of songs," said Neil





"THE GRUNGE THING WAS VERY MUCH NOT WHAT WE ARE. WE WERE TRYING TO MAKE A VERY EXTREME COMPUTERISED STATEMENT. WE'RE MOST LIKELY TO DO THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT'S GOING ON"

by 1991. Cue Performance, the theatrical arena tour of PSB's Diamond Dogged dreams. Conceived alongside David Fielding and David Alden from the English National Opera and accompanied by a compilation of all of their hits called *Discography* – although *How Can You Expect To Be Taken Seriously?* was replaced by its more popular double-A side mash-up of U2's *Where The Streets Have No Name* and Frankie Valli's *Can't Take My Eyes Off You* – Performance was a pop opera tour de force, as dazzling as it was bewildering.

"It was produced to look like an opera," Tennant told *NME*, "we didn't acknowledge the audience between the songs. It was occasionally puzzling for them. We all come on, all the dancers are dressed as schoolboys and the last two are me and Chris, Chris sits down and all Chris does in the first song is hold up an apple. It's a very beautiful moment."

Neil still shudders, however, when recalling the night in Milan when the show's climactic fanfares failed to trigger at the big finish. "Chris and I die onstage, as we're meant to do, and it ends, but you don't get the fanfares," Neil remembered. "There's supposed to be massive applause, there's silence. This is in an arena with 14,000 people. So Chris and I literally crawled off the stage. Then a slow handclap starts, and we behave as though it's rapturous applause demanding an encore."

Performance worked wonderfully as a hermetically sealed piece of stage art, but PSB had wider ambitions. They launched a label called Spaghetti Records, collaborated further with Marr and Sumner on their *Electronic* project, and realised there was a whole world out there to subvert. Grunge was moping across the Atlantic shrouded in plaid and daddy issues and Britain was gradually mustering its response. "In 1993 Suede come along and sort of started the Britpop thing without realising it probably," Neil told *NME*, "and we were trying to do something that was very much not real. The grunge thing was 'hey man', letting it all hang out, plaid shirts kind of thing, which was very much not what we are. We were trying to make a very extreme computerised statement. We're most likely to do the opposite of what's going on. That's the standard reaction."

So Pet Shop Boys' reaction to grunge's tortured angst was to attempt to simply stop being human.

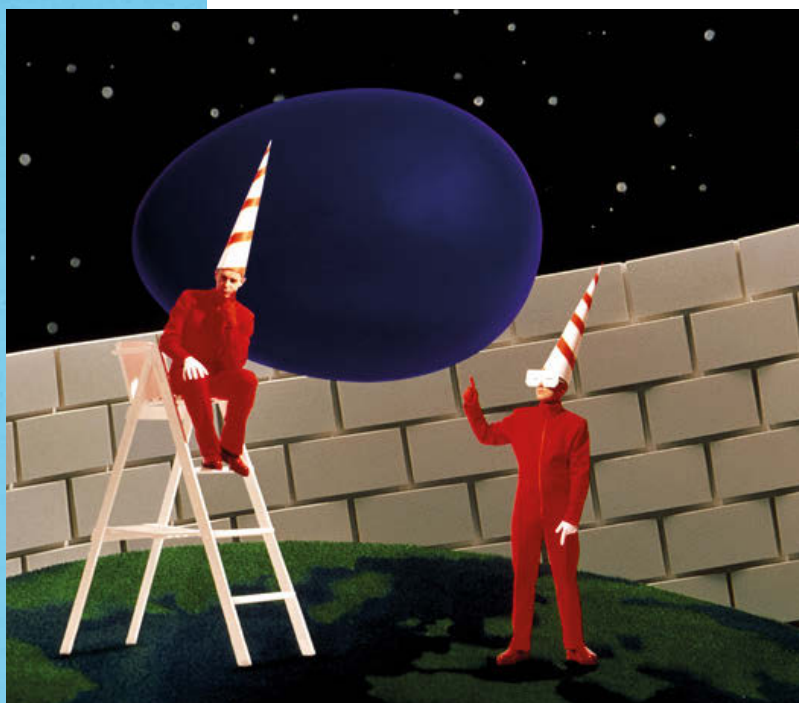
**Lowe and Tennant in the *Can You Forgive Her?* video directed by Howard Greenhalgh, who also shot promos for George Michael, Muse and Soundgarden**







The computer imagery of *Can You Forgive Her* came from the fertile mind of Chris Lowe, who took note of *Sonic The Hedgehog* and wondered "wouldn't it be great if we became this thing existing in a non-real world"



Harnessing the explosion in video game technology, they returned in 1993 uploaded into CGI worlds. "We thought it'd be quite good to look like we were part of a video game," Lowe said, and Tennant agreed. "We always wanted to be like a cartoon and we sort of achieved that with *Can You Forgive Her?*"

In May 1993, the video for *Can You Forgive Her?* – a song about secret teenage same-sex trysts drawing its title from Anthony Trollope's 1864 novel – marked the public debut of the Dunce Emperors From Planet Wonka. Clad in futuristic orange boiler suits and spiral cone hats, Chris and Neil floated around shifting computerised alien landscapes of gigantic eggs and spiked space worms, occasionally visiting Earth to add a splash of bright orange colour to our drab commuter existences.

Over the course of the campaign for 1993's fifth album *Very* we were sucked ever deeper into PSB's interplanetary *Barbarella* fantasies through Howard Greenhalgh's eye-candy videos. The heart-bursting elation-pop wonder *I Wouldn't Normally Do This* ➤



# THE KEY RECORDINGS

FROM ANALOGUE TRIUMPHS TO LATIN LOVE LETTERS: ESSENTIAL PETS OF THE NINETIES



## BEHAVIOUR

1990

Not as immediate as its pop-to-the-fore predecessors, Pet Shop Boys' benchmark fourth album – considered by many to be their most involving and rewarding – unravelled its subtler charms gradually. "Some of their dance fans may be a trifle

disappointed," wrote Q, "but the best ballads here are as wry and touching as vintage Broadway. Frank Sinatra should be calling shortly." Given its lustrous heart by producer Harold Faltermeyer's expertise in analogue equipment, *Behaviour* flipped PSB's ideology from the chart-honed to the conceptual, with its hints of autobiographical tragedies and its operatic finale. This was the sort of behaviour, frankly, that should be encouraged.



## DISCO 2

1994

Perhaps they were distracted by all of the spikey space amoebas flying around, but Pet Shop Boys took their eyes off the massive CGI beachball when it came to 1994's *Disco 2*. Initially they had hoped to put together an expanded version of the

*Relentless* bonus disc from 1993's *Very*, but Danny Rampling's megamix of that disc with the band's selection of remixes was a disappointment – so, throwing good money after bad, they got Rampling to mix together remixes from *Behaviour* and *Very* alongside various B-sides from the Nineties and ended up with the mashed-up mixtape of *Disco 2*, which baffled critics and fans alike. A rare mis-step in PSB's march to the future.

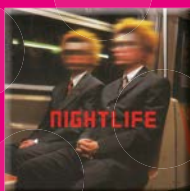


## BILINGUAL

1996

Sex On The Beach, Señor Tennant? Don't mind if he does. Launched with a series of parties at gay nightclubs across the world, *Bilingual* was Pet Shop Boys' *The Rhythm Of The Saints*, an exotic jaunt into the feather-crowned miasma of world music.

But while the likes of Paul Simon, Peter Gabriel and Sting took a cultural tourist's eye view to their musical travels, Tennant threw himself into the wider world with passion, sympathy and aplomb, scouring palm-swaddled streets for the best Latino pick-up joints and digging beneath the surface of despotic warzones. Not just speaking, but dancing in tongues.



## NIGHTLIFE

1999

Somewhere between a Rachmaninoff recital and Faithless rave sat seventh album *Nightlife*, a musical smorgasbord of disco, dance-pop, hardcore trance, country and classical. So madly broad-scoped was the record that it even featured Kylie

Minogue playing a girl with a gay dad in the closet on *In Denial*, yet nonetheless it was hammered by the press and ended up becoming Pet Shop Boys' least successful Nineties studio album, though it reached a (still creditable) No. 7. Still, PSB would press on with *Closer To Heaven*, the stage musical the album was written to soundtrack, with similarly mixed results.

"BOY GEORGE SAID EVERY SINGER HAS A NEMESIS, AND WITH GO WEST PET SHOP BOYS SUDDENLY BECAME THIS FOUR-TO-THE-FLOOR, SLIGHTLY CAMP THING. IT'S A DIFFICULT THING TO ESCAPE FROM"

*Kind Of Thing* found the duo in pink tank tops and beatnik wigs, dancing with rubber-clad go-go girls on revolving Sixties pop show stages as geometric shapes flew by. For the *Liberation* video Lowe and Tennant were entirely CGI'd, flying above sci-fi worlds with their heads transposed onto golden eagles – the promo was even converted into 3D and turned into a virtual reality ride that toured the country. "It seemed like the future at that point," Neil told me. "We tried to create our own world. You can invite Dusty Springfield or Liza Minelli or David Bowie into it but it's a universe of our own that doesn't necessarily apply to everything else that's going on outside, particularly with regard to the visuals."

Central to the uplifting, galactic pop feel of *Very*, itself a reaction to the downbeat tone of *Behaviour*, was *Go West*, a jubilant Village People cover which Tennant was reluctant to record until Lowe told him its chord progression was lifted from Pachelbel's Canon. With its futuristic update of Soviet propaganda imagery and terrace-friendly chorus, it would become PSB's biggest hit of the Nineties and a football crowd standard, but also a weight around their necks.

"Boy George said every singer has a nemesis, an albatross," Neil said. "So the Pet Shop Boys, who'd come up on *West End Girls*, aiming to be a rap record in an English accent, suddenly become this four-to-the-floor, slightly camp thing. It's such a strong thing it's difficult to escape from, assuming you want to escape from it. People can think that's what the Pet Shop Boys are, 'Oh yeah, they're Go West'."

By the time the *Very* era reached its surrealist peak with the release of *Yesterday When I Was Mad* and its "Chris was just a lamp" video, PSB were itching to upturn their new aesthetic. They drew a line under their early-Nineties albums with a second album of single remixes, *Disco 2* (1994) and a chronological B-sides compilation *Alternative* (1995) and, having once gone resolutely west, now ventured south.

## FACING THE FUTURE

"We react against [*Behaviour*] by doing the hyper-pop album of *Very*," Neil Tennant explained, "and then we react against that by touring South America and having the idea of taking samba drums and putting them against electronic rhythms and we make a whole album where that's the basic idea."





While Ricky Martin was still shilling himself around Mexican TV and four years before Kirsty MacColl's Cuban-inspired *Tropical Brainstorm* album, PSB took the road to Rio and returned with a samba in their step. Ending their contract with EMI and due to get a big US push from new label Atlantic, it seemed the perfect opportunity to broaden their sonic horizons and react against the culturally introspective Britpop explosion by going global. Drawing on the rhythms they'd come across on tour and recording in New York, London and Moscow, PSB proffered 1996's sophisti-disco classic *Bilingual*, tee'd up with the sleek electro soul of *Before* and *Se a Vida é (That's The Way Life Is)*, a mariachi carnival of a pop song and one of several tracks on the record sung partly in Spanish or Portuguese.

With tracks like *Discoteca*, *Electricity* and *Metamorphosis* recalling the louche, sardonic raptronica of *West End Girls* but given a world music

make-over, there was a certain romance to *Bilingual*. This was Neil cast as a globe-trotting Casanova, both worldly and worldly-wise, a Hawaiian-shirted cupid at one with his metamorphosis from tortured teen to hot-stepping pop star and keen to pull others along in his pan-cultural conga. "Why do you want to sit alone in gothic gloom?... Throw those skeletons out of your closet and come outside," he urged a lovelorn figure in *Se a Vida é (That's The Way Life Is)*, and *Before* promised "so many tears will fall before you find your love" but "one day when the phone starts ringing/ You'll answer to the word you're longing for".

Though the likes of *Single* and tropical lounge love song *It Always Comes As A Surprise* carried the first half of the album playfully along, buoyed by romantic successes and gadabout charm, parts of the record were imbued with the dark undercurrents of *Behaviour*. *Discoteca*, ostensibly a party song about being lost in a foreign land trying to find a disco —

**"Go West was Chris's idea, and I didn't like it," said Tennant. "It wasn't that anthemic... more a disco stomper. So we added that aspirational middle section, to make it more of a journey"**



Lowe and Tennant captured smeared and in transit for *Nightlife*. "Most of my work with Pet Shop Boys was about the juxtaposition of shiny pop things and decay," said photographer Eric Watson

**POP UP** *Nightlife* was written after a rare spell of PSB downtime. "We hung out in places like St Petersburg, so when we came back, we were feeling quite in the mood"



# THE CULTURAL REFERENCES

THE PETS' WIDE-FLUNG NET GATHERS IN POETS, PLAYWRIGHTS, CLASSICAL COMPOSERS, NOVELISTS AND FILM-MAKERS



## ZELDA FITZGERALD

1900 – 1948

The wife of F Scott Fitzgerald, Zelda Fitzgerald's *Eulogy On The Flapper* lent *Being Boring* its title and theme: "[The] Flapper awoke from her lethargy of sub-deb-ism, bobbed her hair, put on her choicest pair of earrings and a great deal of audacity and rouge and went into the battle. She flirted because it was fun to flirt and wore a one-piece bathing suit because she had a good figure, she covered her face with powder and paint because she didn't need it and she refused to be bored chiefly because she wasn't boring."

## SHAKESPEARE

1564 – 1616

On the extended version of *Jealousy* – the first song PSB ever wrote, but held back until *Behaviour*, Neil recites a speech by Iago from *Othello*. "Not poppy, nor mandragora/ Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world/ Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep/ Which thou owedst yesterday."





in which to dance your woes away, carried a tragic metaphor – this alien environment was a symbol of the unknown world faced by AIDS sufferers “going out and carrying on as normal”. And come the latter half, darker global forces reared: *To Step Aside* and the hi-NRG *A Red Letter Day* both explored Neil’s champagne socialist views, detailing the impotence of the Labour party in the face of Thatcher’s all-conquering neoliberalism, while *Up Against It* drifted away from the tiki bar to visit the war-torn cities struggling to rebuild. Tennant’s lusty tourist turned out to be our pop dandy in Havana.

World music, of course, was traditionally the sphere of the moneyed middle-aged rock star having rhythmic revelations in Bolivia; of Paul Simon and Peter Gabriel, of Sting forcing Terry Wogan to try to interview a Brazilian tribal elder. Combined with collaborations with David Bowie and Tina Turner, Neil curating an album of covers of Noel Coward songs called *Twentieth-Century Blues*, and a three-week residency at the Savoy Theatre in a show featuring projections by Sam Taylor-Wood in which the band walked in and out of an on-screen party – a concept piece so intricate that it lost £12,000 a night – *Bilingual* appeared to represent PSB dutifully accepting their spot in the establishment, like a self-imposed sonic MBE. PSB, however, saw themselves more as pop art saboteurs.

“At no point did we feel that we were part of the establishment,” Tennant said. “When David Bowie asked us to do a reworking of *Hallo Spaceboy*, that was a career highpoint. The song only had one verse and Chris in the studio suggested we cut up *A Space Oddity* to make a second verse. ‘Ground to Major bye-bye Tom/ Dead the circuit countdown’s wrong’. David Bowie phoned up to ask how it was going and we said, ‘We’ve cut up the lyrics of *Space Oddity*’. Silence. Then he said, ‘Sounds like I’d better

“HELLO SPACEBOY WAS A CAREER HIGHLIGHT. DAVID BOWIE PHONED AND WE SAID, ‘WE’VE CUT UP THE LYRICS TO *SPACE ODDITY*’. SILENCE. HE CAME IN AND ROARED WITH LAUGHTER AND SAID ‘OH, IT’S GREAT’”

come in’. So he came in and sat there and roared with laughter and said ‘Oh, it’s great, you’ll have to sing it!’ What we did was we completed the Major Tom trilogy. *Space Oddity*, *Ashes To Ashes* and suddenly *Hallo Spaceboy*. I said to Bowie, ‘It’s like Major Tom is in one of those Russian spaceships they can’t afford to bring down anymore’ and he said ‘Oh wow, is that where he is?’”

### SHOCK OF THE NEW

Ever restless, PSB’s espadrilles soon started to chafe. It was time, once more, to love the alien. They wrote soundtrack music for an eclipse.

They rebuilt the drawing room from 2001: *A Space Odyssey* onstage at Creamfields. They began dressing as cyberpunk samurai, or fright-wigged business robots. As the millennium approached, Pet Shop Boys spiralled off into an imagined Y2K all their own, both cosmic

Shola Ama with Craig Armstrong, Damon Albarn with Michael Nyman, The Divine Comedy, Marianne Faithfull, Bryan Ferry, Elton John, Paul McCartney, Pet Shop Boys, Vic Reeves, Space, Sting, Suede featuring Raissa, Texas, Robbie Williams  
Twentieth Century Blues  
The Songs of Noel Coward

### NOEL COWARD

1899 – 1973

Besides co-ordinating an all-star covers album of Coward songs, Neil also slipped a cover of his *If Love Were All* onto the B-side of *Yesterday, When I Was Mad*.

### PACHELBEL

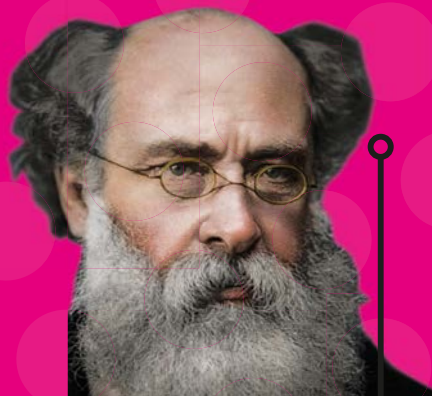
1653 – 1706

Pet Shop Boys enhanced the chord progression of *Go West* to bring out the theme from Pachelbel’s Canon. It’s what he would have wanted.

### STANLEY KUBRICK

1928 – 1999

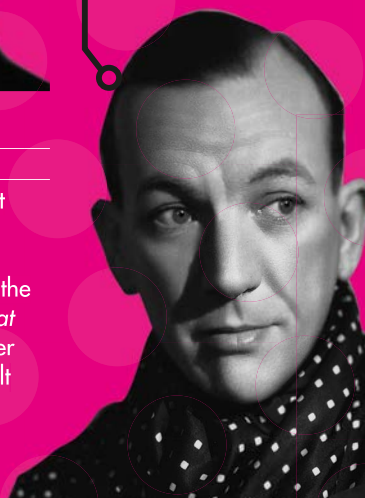
Kubrick movies *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *A Clockwork Orange* were amongst the major influences on the aesthetic of *Nightlife*; they even recreated the white apartment from the end of *2001* onstage.



### ANTHONY TROLLOPE

1815 – 1882

As PSB went futuristic, they kept one foot in the cultural past. The lead track from *Very* was named after Trollope’s novel of the same name, and its B-side *What Keeps Mankind Alive?* is a cover of a piece co-written with Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill.





THIS STARK,  
COLOURFUL BUT  
EMOTIONLESS NEW  
LOOK WAS AN ATTEMPT  
BY TENNANT TO  
BECOME EVEN LESS  
HUMAN THAN ON *VERY*,  
TO DISTANCE HIMSELF  
FROM *NIGHTLIFE*'S HYPER-  
PERSONAL LYRICS

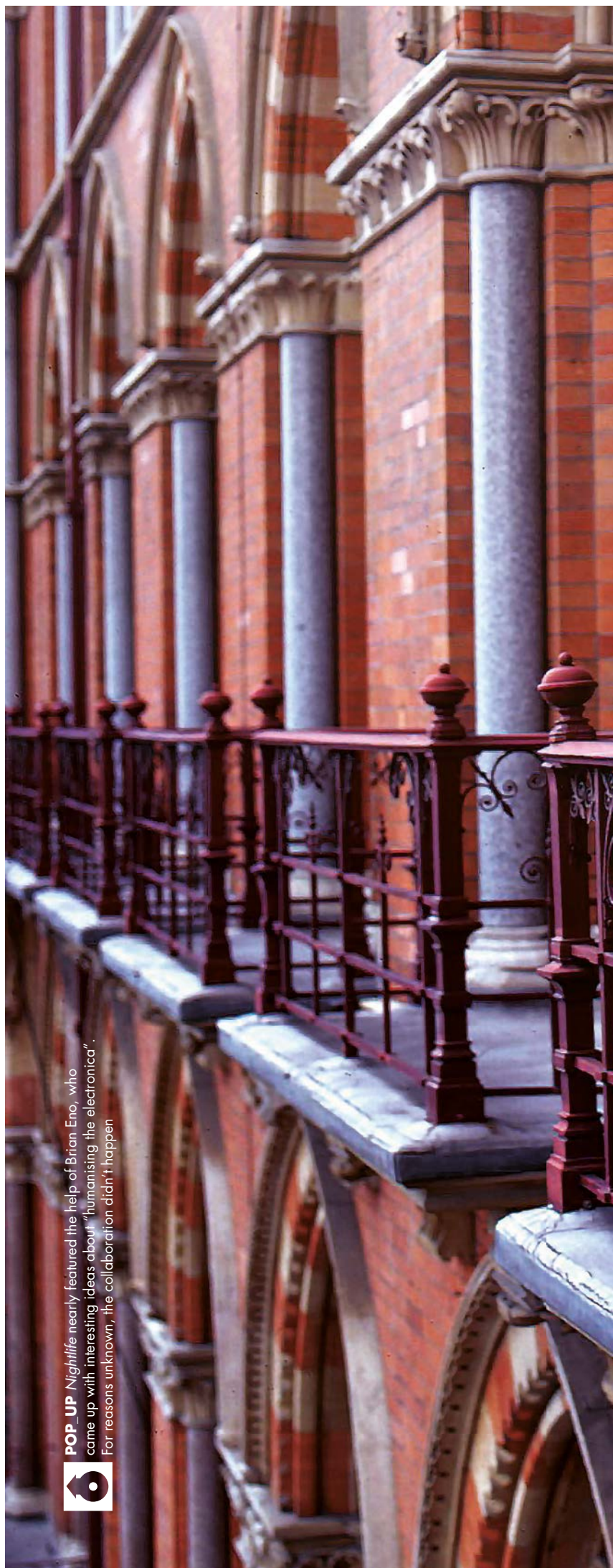
and kosmiche. Before brutalist backdrops – council estates, subway trains – they appeared, two *Blade Runner* replicants with spiked orange hair and Neo overcoats, restraining a pack of attack dogs. A blend of the Kabuki theatre aesthetic, samurai and punk dreamt up with the help of designer Ian McNeil, this stark, colourful but emotionless new look was an attempt by Tennant to become even less human than on *Very*, in order to distance himself from the hyper-personal lyrics on PSB's seventh album *Nightlife*.

*Nightlife* started life as a PSB stage musical, a collaboration with playwright Jonathan Harvey that would become *Closer To Heaven*. Midway through, realising they had an album's worth of new material recorded between London and New York, Neil and Chris decided to release the songs as *Nightlife* (one working title for the show) in October 1999 to showcase the tunes ahead of the musical's premiere.

Anyone expecting a solid narrative would leave empty-handed; the loose concept of *Nightlife* was the ever-changing paradox of love, with the odd spattering of romantic euphoria (*Radiophonic*) counterpointed with confessional tales of paranoia, insecurity, depression, heartbreak, drink and drugs. When Neil wasn't begging a lover to sleep with him rather than a prostitute on *For Your Own Good* or struggling with cheating or disinterested partners on *Closer To Heaven* and the singles *You Only Tell Me You Love Me When You're Drunk* and *I Don't Know What You Want But I Can't Give It Anymore*, he was wrestling his demons of self-hatred on *Happiness Is An Option*. The happy-go-lucky tourist of *Bilingual* was gone; in his place was a desolate Tennantron.

The album's embrace of hard trance, applied by DJ co-producers David Morales and Rollo from Faithless, helped accentuate the dehumanising feel of the record, and though *Nightlife* brought PSB some withering reviews ("the sound of the sun plummeting on the musical magic of the greatest melancholic-disco duo this country's ever known" wrote *NME*), they would never really come back down to Earth. If the Nineties was a period of transformation, of pop's greatest imagineers shedding their veneer of normalcy in reaction to a world gone mad, the entire 21st century thus far would be a surrealist wonderland for the Pet Shop Boys, an age of stark geometrics and vivid colour. Ground to Major bye-bye Neil. ■

**POP UP** *Nightlife* nearly featured the help of Brian Eno, who came up with interesting ideas about "humanising the electronica". For reasons unknown, the collaboration didn't happen





The late Eric  
Watson is behind  
the shutter once  
more to snap  
two future-punks  
at London's St  
Pancras Station







# ALBUM VERY

VIBRANT, COMPUTERESQUE AND CHOCKABLOCK WITH POTENTIAL SINGLES, 1993'S *VERY* WAS BUILT UPON PUREST HYPERPOP AND BUOYED BY A TECHNICOLOUR PROMO CAMPAIGN, WITH PET SHOP BOYS SHARING RESPONSIBILITY AS PRODUCERS

RIK FLYNN

"It is called *Very*," said Neil Tennant, "because it is very Pet Shop Boys: It's very up, it's very hi-energy, it's very romantic, it's very sad, it's very pop, it's very danceable, and some of it is very funny..." Pet Shop Boys' hits compilation, *Discography*, wasn't the end after all. After the duo traded the dancefloor for the melancholic, deeply personal reflections of *Behaviour*, a return to pop was, perhaps, inevitable. *Behaviour* left many fans profoundly moved – uniting spirits crushed by the AIDS epidemic – but it hadn't matched its predecessors in terms of success. "*Behaviour* was lagged off at the time for not being a dance album," Tennant relayed to Chris Heath. "We were feeling a little insecure, maybe. Anyway, we decided to do a mega dance-pop album."

Recording was a three-tier process. Basic tracks were laid down in Lowe's home studio in Hertfordshire, with Pete Gleadall helping on programming. Further sessions took place at Trevor Horn's Sarm West studios, before Stephen Hague got involved, with a final mix completed at RAK studios.

While Ace Of Base, UB40 and the omnipresent pop-grunge of The Spin Doctors' *Two Princes* fought it out for UK No. 1, PSB stretched out. With the help of designer David Fielding they created an entirely new realm, built of surreal costumes and fantastical imagery. One episode of *TOTP* found a pointy-hatted Neil in orange jumpsuit, miming opening single *Can You Forgive Her?*

atop a giant high chair, while Chris frolicked with dancers next to a giant egg. Add Daniel Weil's injection-moulded, bright orange Lego-like CD case, and PSB's distinctly 'Up' manifesto was realised. This album would be a turning point; in place of *Behaviour*'s discreet and seductive habitat, the Boys returned to Hague's instinctive nous for pop, adopted neon-brite computer games as

visual impetus, and hawked an engaging collection of micro-dramas over a renewed joy for the floor.

The Fairlight stabs and forceful programming of that blast-off opening single gave impetus to what was one of the duo's boldest melodies for some time. A potent tale of "youthful follies and changing teams", it added weight to suggestions that this was PSB's 'coming out' album. *I Wouldn't Normally Do This Kind Of Thing* was EDM pop perfection; soft synths and lush orchestration atop thumping kick and snare. A protagonist who feels like taking all his clothes off and dancing to the Rite Of Spring pressed the reset button for an open-palmed freedom. *Liberation* dropped all disguises entirely; as Tennant professes his uncontrollable love, we're escorted up into pearly clouds of symphonic electronica.

The story unfolds as *A Different Point Of View* suggests discord amongst our lovers, whilst the theme continues into *Dreaming Of The Queen*, this time reframed within a dream of doleful acceptance – that there are "no more lovers left alive". Its stark imagery of the AIDs crisis combined fear,

In place of *Behaviour*'s discreet and seductive habitat, the Boys returned to Hague's instinctive nous for pop, adopted neon-brite computer games as visual impetus, and hawked engaging micro-dramas over a renewed joy for the floor

## TRACKLISTING

### SIDE 1

Can You Forgive Her?  
I Wouldn't Normally Do This Kind Of Thing  
Liberation  
A Different Point Of View  
Dreaming Of The Queen  
Yesterday, When I Was Mad

### SIDE 2

The Theatre  
One And One Make Five  
To Speak Is A Sin  
Young Offender  
One In A Million  
Go West



# THE PLAYERS

## RELEASED

27 September 1993

## LABEL

Parlophone

## PRODUCED BY

Stephen Hague, Brothers In Rhythm

## ENGINEERS

Bob Kraushaar, Pete Gleadall

## RECORDED AT

Sarm West Studios, Angel Studios, Power Station

## PERSONNEL

Neil Tennant – composer, vocals;  
Chris Lowe – composer, vocals;  
Pete Gleadall – programming;  
J.J. Belle – guitar (tracks 3, 12);  
Frank Ricotti – percussion (track 5); Phil Todd, Snake Davis, John Barclay, John Thirkell, Mark Nightingale – brass (track 12); Anne Dudley – orchestra arrangement and conducting (tracks 3, 5 and 7; Richard Niles – brass, choir, added keyboard arrangement (track 12); Dainton Connell, Sylvia Mason-James, Carol Kenyon, Katie Kissoon, Tessa Niles – additional vocals; Joanna Wyatt, Thomas Rogers, Laurie Smith, Hody Smith, Nigel Francis, Francis Hatson, Lee Harris, Lucy Clark, Marie-Claire Peterson, Victoria Ferher – choir (track 7); Scott Altman, James Bassi, Hugh Berberich, Rodne Brown, Maurizio Corbino, Martin Doner, Dan Egan, James Gandre, Paul Houghtaling, Michael Hume, Robert Kuehn, Drew Martin, Joseph Nelson Neal, Mark Rehstrom, Steven Tachell, Frank Nemhauser – choir (track 12)

vulnerability, and comfort into one sobering sentiment. As its central character stands naked amongst royalty signing autographs to the sound of the onlookers' laughter, the compass is wildly spinning out of control.

Full Eurobeat mode follows with the autobiographical *Yesterday, When I Was Mad*, the cause of the homeless is given weight via *The Theatre's* driving beats, while *One And One Make Five* returns us to that hesitant central love story. The tempo drops for *To Speak Is A Sin*, the album's sombre anomaly, while the pixelated *Young Offender* approaches an age-gap affair. Jubilant backing in break-up song *One In A Million* – initially intended for Take That – frames our lover's cocksure rejection. The duo's iconic cover of Go

West wraps up what to many fans is the duo's crowning moment. *Very* is the one and only Pet Shop Boys' album to make UK No. 1. In an era when AIDs was upending lives left, right and centre, here was a hopeful, celebratory, masterstroke. ■

## VERY RARE

Once again leading the crowd in terms of innovative formats, the Pets decided that the wealth of floor-friendly (largely) instrumental material that they had banked during the *Very* sessions would be best served up as a bonus disc added to a special limited edition of the album. While largely forgotten and now somewhat hard to find, *Relentless* is a curio of the PSB catalogue, for sure, but its euphoric, house-bound vistas display an integral part of their songwriting palette. An initial run of the album entitled *Very*

*Relentless* featured this bountiful companion disc that compiled six (almost) voiceless treasures in one place – *My Head Is Spinning*, *Forever In Love*, *KDX 125*, *We Came From Outer Space*, *The Man Who Has Everything* and *One Thing Leads To Another*. At just over half an hour, *Relentless* contrasts the unapologetically bright pop of *Very* with equally unapologetic synthpop dance that ranges from house to trance and techno. We love it, but for many it's one reserved for the true Petheads.





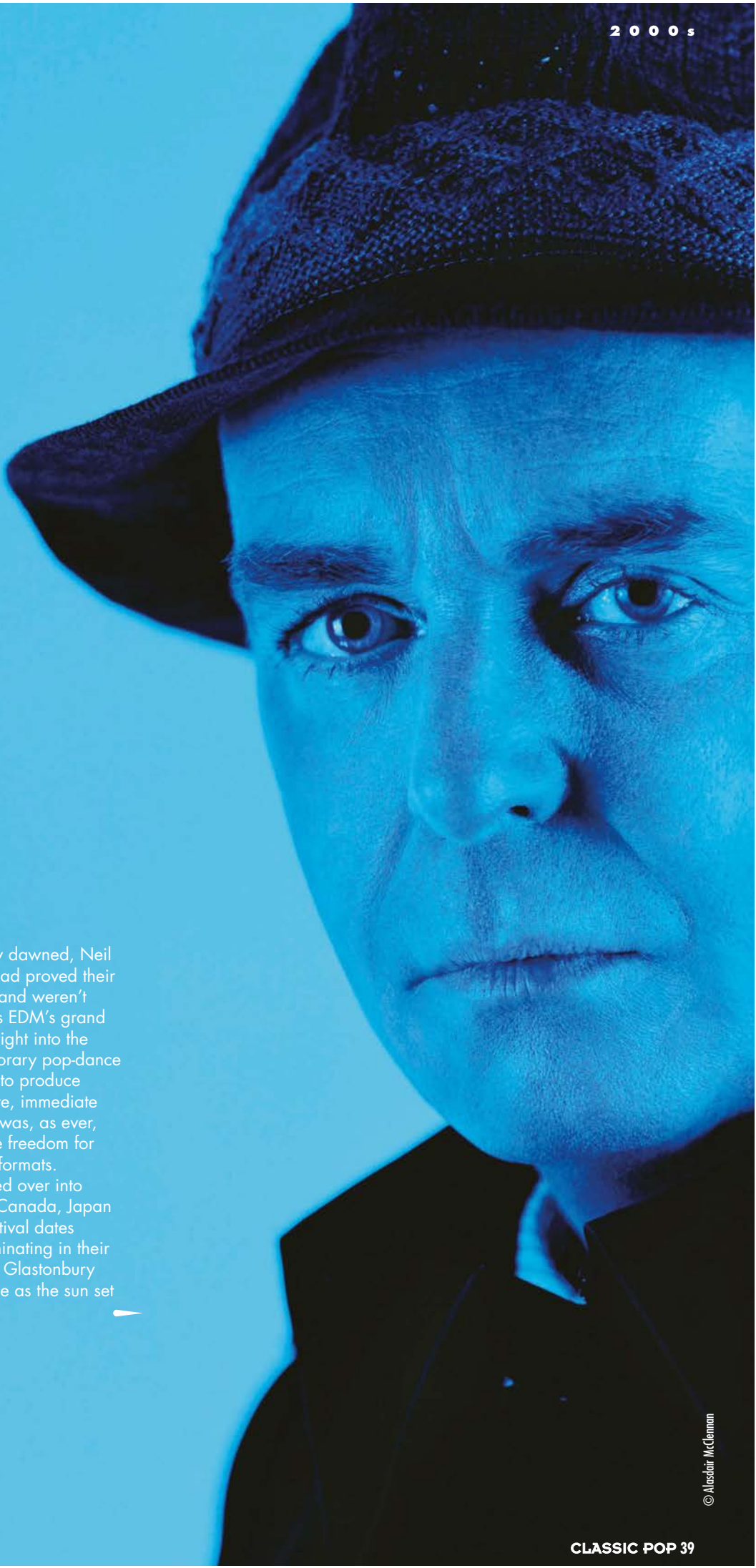


# WE ARE THE PET SHOP BOYS

THE FIRST DECADE OF THE NEW CENTURY WAS A TIME FOR PET SHOP BOYS TO DEMONSTRATE THE MANY, MANY THINGS THEY COULD BECOME: GLOBAL LIVE ATTRACTIONS, COMPOSERS, SOUNDTRACK SPECIALISTS, LABEL BOSSES, REMIXERS AND SONGWRITERS, PIXELATED POP STARS – AND, AS EVER, ARTFUL MANIPULATORS OF BOTH GENRE AND STYLE. WAS THERE ANYTHING THEY COULDN'T DO?

IAN RAVENDALE





By the time the new century dawned, Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe had proved their mastery of the live arena and weren't afraid to take chances. As EDM's grand ambassadors, they fitted right into the club, re-mix and contemporary pop-dance scenes, but still managed to produce records that were consistently inventive, immediate and deeply considered. Being a duo was, as ever, a vital ingredient in allowing them the freedom for experimentation with other theatrical formats.

As 1999's Nightlife world tour rolled over into 2000, Pet Shop Boys visited the US, Canada, Japan and Europe. A series of European festival dates followed throughout the summer, culminating in their long-awaited first-ever appearance at Glastonbury festival, lifting spirits on the main stage as the sun set on Saturday night. ▶



2 0 0 0 s

Speaking out, Pet Shop  
Boys addressed the  
wrongful 2005 shooting  
of Jean Charles de  
Menezes in the scathing  
*We're All Criminals Now*,  
a B-side on *Love Etc*







© Carlos Alvarez/Getty Images

Lauded Mexican photographer Carlos Alvarez is behind this portrait of Neil Tennant at Madrid's Club Aqualung in June, 2002, taken while on the Release tour

"WE KIND OF KNOW HOW RECORD COMPANIES WORK, BUT THE THEATRE'S SO DIFFERENT. THERE ARE CONSTANT QUESTIONS: WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO SAY? IT'S A REALLY GREAT COLLABORATIVE PROCESS"

Talking to *Next* magazine's Gregg Shapiro at the start of the jaunt, Tennant explained how this tour was different. "Last time, the show was very theatrical. This time it's futuristic," he offered. "It's being designed by one of the most famous modern architects in the world, Zaha Hadid. It's this brilliant structure which adapts to different sizes of stages and venue and changes during the course of the show. It has film elements involved in it and the lighting is very futuristic and comes out of the middle of the structure as well as from the outside of the stage."

Pet Shop Boys had moved on significantly from being recording artistes who didn't gig. Their first tour had been in 1989, four years after *West End Girls*, and then came... nothing. The pair didn't do another live expedition for eight years. As Neil explained to *Time Out*'s Laura Lee Davis, one of the key issues was simply financial; "If we were only going to tour and lose money, what was the bloody point? Apart from that, we wanted to make statements. And that wasn't easy to do live. But then the world opened up – suddenly you're playing in Beirut and Bogata. So it made it all more feasible. Plus, we love playing live."

Tennant also theorised why things had changed so radically. "Communism collapsed, globalisation and the internet happened," he pointed out. "People can see things and they think, 'I want that too'."

"The global market for music is huge now... also for dance music. People want to see something fresh, so they want to see it live. At same time we have a fan base around the world – that's an amazing thing, really. But we really changed as an act when we got into the live thing; that's only in the last 10 years. What really drives Pet Shop Boys is putting on a show and trying to do something that looks extraordinary... and sounds extraordinary."

## HEAVEN CAN'T WAIT

Tennant and Lowe won their third Ivor Novello Award in 2000, this time celebrating their Outstanding Contribution To Music. At the same time the duo were working on another first, *Closer To Heaven*, their first-ever musical, written with playwright and TV scriptwriter Jonathan Harvey, who had *Gimme Gimme Gimme* and *Coronation Street* amongst his many credits. Andrew Lloyd Webber's Really Useful Group came on board and guided rehearsals, workshopping the project, making changes and searching for investors.

While Pet Shop Boys were used to being able to constantly tinker and re-mix their music, they had little experience of doing it with anything else, as Chris Lowe related to *The Guardian*'s Sheryl Garrett in May 2001; "After being in pop music for so long this is just like releasing our first record," he said. "It's as exciting as making *West End Girls*. We kind of know how record companies work now, but the theatre's so different. The director, the choreographer, the actors all ask constant questions: 'What's the context? What are you trying to say in this song?' It's a really great collaborative process."

Jonathan Harvey was in no doubt as to who they were wanting to turn up for *Closer To Heaven*; "I hope we can appeal to a younger audience that maybe doesn't usually go to the theatre." With Frances Barber in the lead role as fading rock star Billie Trix, *Closer To Heaven* made a sharp left turn away from traditional musicals like *Evita* and *Les Misérables*, being set in a London nightclub



"WE REALLY CHANGED AS AN ACT WHEN WE GOT INTO THE LIVE THING. WHAT REALLY DRIVES PET SHOP BOYS IS PUTTING ON A SHOW AND DOING SOMETHING THAT LOOKS AND SOUNDS EXTRAORDINARY"

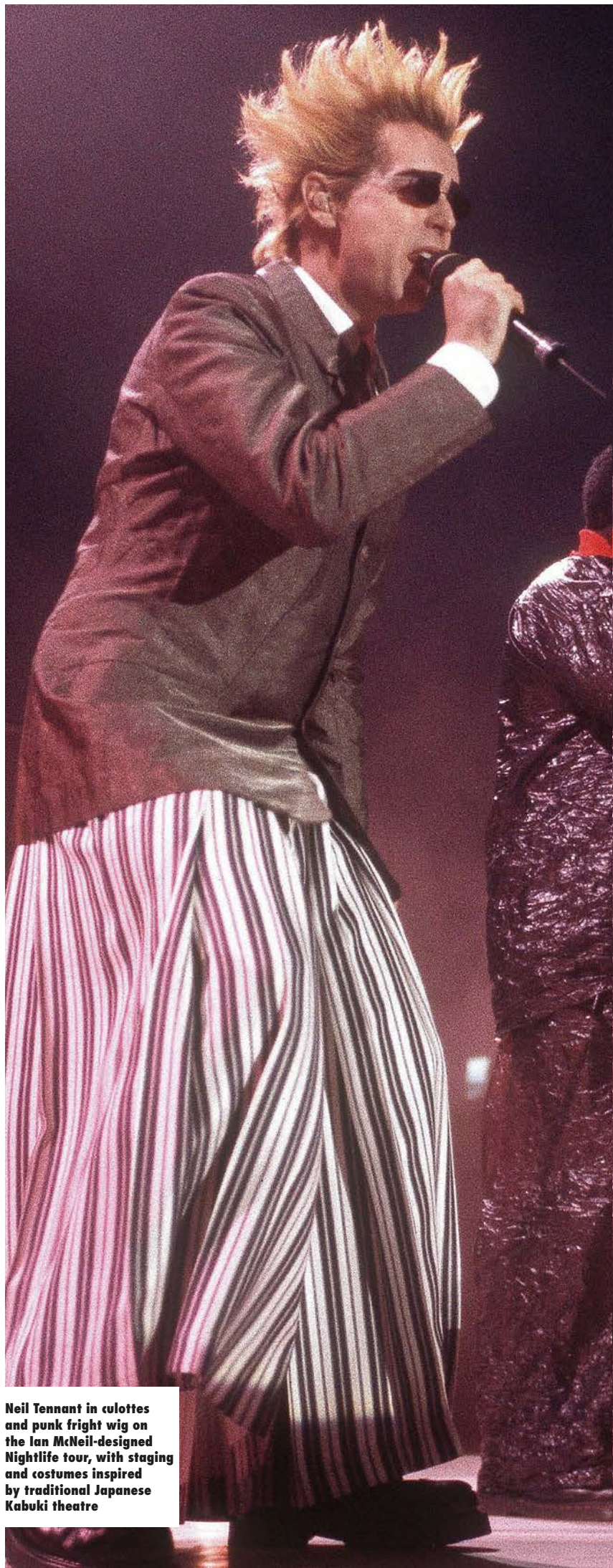
stocked with unconventional characters. It opened at the 340-seat London Arts Theatre on 15 May 2001. The run was initially extended but the show closed in October, rather earlier than expected.

Tennant said that they were in talks to take the musical to various locations in Europe, particularly Germany – always a Pet Shop Boys stronghold – and also to mount the show in New York, but these plans came to nothing. A new production of *Closer To Heaven* was staged at the Visy Theatre at The Powerhouse, Brisbane, Australia, from 8 to 18 June 2005, although neither the Pet Shop Boys or Really Useful were involved.

After *Closer To Heaven*, Neil and Chris returned to the studio to work on the self-produced *Release*, their eighth album. It was a major departure from their home turf, often adopting guitar and piano sounds, and while different genres including hip hop were explored, ultimately the pair chose a more conventional, organic sound. Often deliberately sparse and with the songs intentionally upfront, it conveyed an elegant melancholia.

A short college tour was undertaken to promote *Release*. This time round, reflecting the album's stripped-back approach, there were no dancers, backing singers, costumes or lavish sets; Chris and Neil were instead joined by guitarists Bic Hayes and Mark Refoy, percussionist Dawne Adams, and regular PSB programmer Pete Gleadall. This low-key warm-up was followed by the *Release* tour proper, which played Germany, the USA, Canada, Spain, Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden. UK dates were followed by shows in Switzerland, Japan's Fuji Rock Festival, Singapore and Hong Kong. The curtain fell on the tour with Pet Shop Boys' first-ever performance in Thailand at the Bangkok Impact Arena to an audience of 9000.

In 2003 Pet Shop Boys closed their Spaghetti Records label and launched not one, but two labels in its place – Olde English Vinyl and Lucky Kunst. The first Olde English Vinyl release was 2003's *Hooked On Radiation* by Atomizer, a London-based technopop duo; *Jack And Jill Party* by Pete Burns followed in 2004. Showing a distinct fondness for the perverse, Neil and Chris issued remixed versions of Yoko Ono's *Walking On Thin Ice* in 2003 and German noise band Rammstein's *Mein Tell*,



Neil Tennant in culottes and punk fright wig on the Ian McNeil-designed *Nightlife* tour, with staging and costumes inspired by traditional Japanese Kabuki theatre





**POP\_UP** PSB's 2010 single *Together* includes a version of The Dave Clark Five's *Glad All Over*. The original is a fave anthem of fans supporting Chris's team, Blackpool FC



# THE KEY RECORDINGS

THE PETS OSCILLATE WILDLY BETWEEN TRAD SONGCRAFT AND STATE OF THE ART REMIXES



## RELEASE

2002

Feeling perhaps that their synthy approach was a little over-used, Chris and Neil opted for a more natural guitar and piano-dominated sound for *Release*. Most tracks were programmed and used sampled instruments, though Johnny Marr supplied

non-virtual guitar on seven of the album's 10 tracks. *I Get Along* is PSB's Beatles pastiche, with a Lennon drawl, a Ringoesque-drum break and a keyboard sequence that nods at George Martin. All songs were produced by Lowe and Tennant with the exception of *London*, which was produced by Chris Zippel and recorded in Berlin. The tracks were then passed onto Michael Brauer, who had previously mixed Coldplay's first two albums.



## FUNDAMENTAL

2006

Pet Shop Boys' 2006 album sees the duo venturing into more controversial lyrical territory than any of their other releases, with even the title being open to several interpretations. *I'm With Stupid* challenges the 'special relationship' between the

UK and the US; *Integral* touches upon the Identity Act of 2006; *Psychological* and *Luna Park* reference the 'war on terror', and *Indefinite Leave To Remain* deals with immigration. The line "All the worlds that I saw/ I went so far away and still wanted you more" is Tennant celebrating Britain's open-border enlightenment. The Pets' first collaboration with Trevor Horn since *It's Alright*, *Fundamental* has the producer's trademark busy arrangements.



## CONCRETE

2006

With its title a play on the word 'concert', Pet Shop Boys' 2006 live album was recorded at the Mermaid Theatre in London as an exclusive BBC Radio 2 broadcast before an invited audience of 600. The album included a raft of songs

from *Fundamental* and songs PSB had originally recorded with orchestras, plus *West End Girls* and *It's A Sin*, which they hadn't, all performed with the BBC Concert Orchestra conducted by Pete Gleadall with Trevor Horn as musical director. Material included *Rent* from the Liza Minnelli album, *After All* from the Battleship Potemkin film soundtrack, *Nothing Has Been Proved* from the *Scandal* film, and *Friendly Fire* from *Closer To Heaven*.



## DISCO 3 & 4

2003

Released in 2003, *Disco 3* consists of five remixes of songs, B-sides from *Release*, three new tracks, a new recording of *Positive Role Model* from *Closer To Heaven* and a cover of *Try It (I'm In Love With A Married Man)*; *A Powerful Friend* was subsequently used as the B-side for the 2010 release of *Love Life*. *Disco 4* is predominantly a compilation of PSB remixes of songs by The Killers, Madonna, Yoko Ono and Atomizer along with a previously unreleased mix of *Integral* and the maxi-mix of *I'm With Stupid*.







Performing the score to the stunning movie classic *Battleship Potemkin* in a drizzly Trafalgar Square, 2004



## SHE'S MADONNA!

EVEN THE MATERIAL GIRL IS NOT IMMUNE TO THE INFLUENCE OF TENNANT AND LOWE

Neil first met Madonna in his pre-fame days when, in his capacity as a music journalist, he interviewed her for *Smash Hits* before she became a global megastar. Several years later the duo had wanted to offer Madonna their song *Heart* but were nervous about it being rejected and kept the number for themselves instead... which proved to be a rather good move, as it became their fourth No. 1 single.

The tie-up between the two acts eventually happened in early 2006 when Neil and Chris remixed Madonna's single *Sorry* (taken from her *Confessions On A Dance Floor* album) adding new backing vocals from Tennant. The single reached No. 1 in the UK and a very pleased Madonna subsequently used the Pet Shop Boys' remix (complete with Neil's taped vocals) during her 2006 Confessions Tour.

The song *Jump* from *Confessions On A Dance Floor* has an arrangement inspired by the Pets' *West End Girls*. The *Confessions...* album was produced by Stuart Price, who went on to MD Pet Shop Boys' 2009 Pandemonium tour and produce 2013's *Electric* album and 2016's *Super*, the outfit's most recent release. When Madonna heard what Price was doing in the studio with the arrangement for *Jump* she is alleged to have shrieked: "Pet Shop Boys! I f\*\*\*ing love them!"

Madonna later asked Pet Shop Boys to provide a song for *Hard Candy*, the follow-up album to *Confessions*, but changed her mind when it was decided the record would go in a more R&B direction instead.

A LIMITED EDITION REMIX OF THE FUNDAMENTAL ALBUM, *FUNDAMENTALISM*, WAS ISSUED WITH A VERSION OF *IN PRIVATE* WITH ELTON JOHN REPLACING DUSTY SPRINGFIELD, PLUS A NEW TRACK CALLED *FUGITIVE*

controversial for its references to cannibalism, a year later. The Lucky Kunst label has released only one record, albeit a great one: Kiki Kokova's (aka Sam Taylor-Wood) pounding version of Donna Summer's *Love To Love You Baby*.

### LIVE AND DANGEROUS

With 2003 marked by Parlophone's issue of the double compilation *PopArt: Pet Shop Boys – The Hits*, complete with companion DVD, and much of 2004 devoted to preparing for the live soundtracking of the classic movie *Battleship Potemkin* (see pg 105), Pet Shop Boys were building towards a period of firmly putting their mouths where their hearts were.

They were the chosen headline act for the Live 8 show held in Moscow on 2 July 2005, part of the worldwide series of eight concerts staged across the globe aimed at relieving poverty in Africa. U2, Madonna and REM topped the bill in London, and Pet Shop Boys did likewise in Red Square alongside top local bands including Bravo, B-2 and Spleen. Neil and Chris were recruited for the Russian event almost by accident after organiser Richard Curtis – the director and writer of hit British comedy films *Four Weddings And A Funeral* and *Love, Actually* – had bumped into them at a party in London.

Much was expected from the ninth Pet Shop Boys studio album, and it delivered tenfold. The lyrically mature *Fundamental* offered up political disillusionment on a grand scale, helmed once more by Trevor Horn. Tennant's fellow North Easterner had, of course, been a vital part of the team that brought 1988's *Introspective* to life, producing both the timeless single *Left To My Own Devices* and the Pets' sublime cover of house classic *It's Alright*. *Fundamental* was equally well-received, with NME calling it "their best album for over a decade". A remix of the *Fundamental* album, *Fundamentalism*, was issued in a limited edition and included a version of *In Private* with Elton John taking Dusty Springfield's part and sharing vocals with Neil, plus a new track produced by Richard X called *Fugitive*.

After Trafalgar Square, Germany and Spain, the *Battleship Potemkin* event was staged once again in Neil's home city at the disused Swan Hunter shipyard in Wallsend on 1 May 2006 with the 51-strong Northern Sinfonia replacing the Dresdner



The duo in 2002, pictured unexpectedly among their touring paraphernalia, in a shot by Pennie Smith of The Clash's *London Calling* album sleeve fame



**POP UP** Girls Aloud's June 2009 single *The Loving Kind* was written by Chris and Neil with producers Xenomania during the sessions for the Yes album. It hit No. 10





Sinfonika. The concert met with less enthusiasm than the Trafalgar Square shows, and hundreds of fans – who probably were under the impression the free concert would be more of a Pet Shop Boys gig, albeit in an unusual setting – left soon after the film began.

Interviewed in the *Whitley Bay News Guardian*, local government officer Jayne Stewart was one of those who quit early; “I think it just wasn’t what people had expected and a lot of people were disappointed with it,” she mourned. “We hadn’t quite known what to expect. The music was fantastic and it was an amazing setting, but I have to admit that we did get bored listening to a Russian film and trying to read the subtitles.” Fan Anne Taylor from Wallsend saw the event differently; “It was what it was – not a pop concert, but a movie screening with very dynamic, stirring music from the Northern Sinfonia and the Pet Shop Boys. I really enjoyed it, and most people seemed to. I was surprised that some people had left before the end, as I thought it was classic Pet Shop Boys music with a fabulous new twist.”

### ALL AROUND THE WORLD

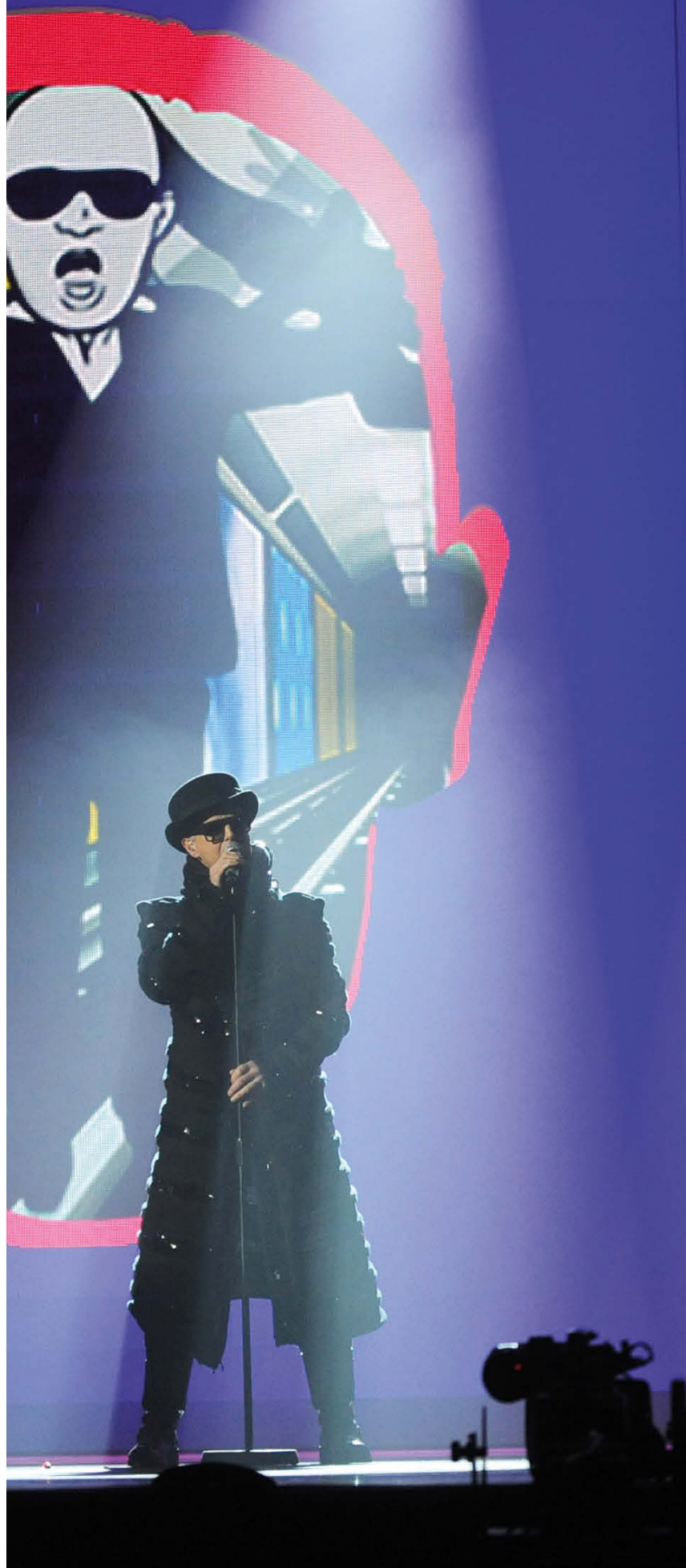
Fundamental’s *I’m With Stupid* single may have featured comedians Matt Lucas and David Walliams larking about in the video, but its enigmatic lyrics refer to the much-maligned relationship between PM Tony Blair and US President George Bush. But who played the part of ‘stupid’? As always with Pet Shop Boys, it wasn’t as straightforward as it seemed. Tennant discussed the lyrics’ ambiguity in interview: was it Blair and not Bush that occupied the role?

Following the synthpop melodies of *I’m With Stupid* came the driving, ethereal robotica of *Minimal*, supported by a slick promo filmed in Paris with director Dan Cameron. The Fundamental world tour – designed and directed by Es Devlin and choreographed by Hakeem Onibudo – soon followed, stretching out across Europe from June 2006 and taking in festivals and some unconventional outdoor venues including the Tower Of London and Thetford Forest. In October 2006 the next leg took the duo to Canada and the Americas.

After a break during which period Neil enjoyed his role as executive producer on *Release The Stars*, Rufus Wainwright’s latest album, Pet Shop Boys recommenced their world tour in March 2007 in Rio de Janeiro and then ploughed into a busy itinerary

“LOVE ETC SHOULD HAVE BEEN BIGGER! BUT WHEN YOU’RE OUR AGE IT DOESN’T MATTER HOW GOOD IT IS, THEY’RE NOT GOING TO PLAY IT. THEY DON’T WANT TO INTRODUCE ANYONE NEW TO PET SHOP BOYS”

Pet Shop Boys do a run-through for the BRIT Awards show in 2009, where they delivered a slickly-arranged greatest hits taster set with the help of famous pop chums





"TO MAKE UPLIFTING DANCE OR POP IS ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS TO DO. TO WRITE SOMETHING LIKE A GREAT MOTOWN RECORD WHICH CHANGES YOUR MOOD FOR THE BETTER IS QUITE AN ACHIEVEMENT"

that would put most rock bands to shame with shows in Argentina, Chile, New Zealand, Norway, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Germany, Switzerland, France, The Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Belgium and Singapore. They also co-headlined Australia's V Festival alongside The Pixies and Beck, playing Sydney's Centennial Park on 31 March 2007 and the Gold Coast's Avica Resort the following day.

Never ones to shy away from exploration, PSB also made an appearance (which didn't involve going anywhere) on 30 June at Secondfest, a musical event held online as part of the virtual world Second Life.

### ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

Back in the real world Neil and Chris began working with Brian Higgins and his Xenomania team and completed the *Yes* album in late 2008. Using the producers behind Girls Aloud, one of the decade's most successful pop acts, was an inspired move on behalf of Lowe and Tennant and the record duly hit No. 4 in the UK – their highest album chart position in more than 10 years.

Talking with *Interview Magazine's* Colleen Nika in June 2010, Neil challenged the widely-held belief that Higgins was difficult to work with. "I find that Brian has a very flexible way of writing songs," he pointed out. "But I think for a lot of bands his methods are tricky indeed. Brian is highly disciplined, and I think most acts find it very challenging to deal with."

*Love Etc* was a very commercial track dripping in hooks, and by rights the single should have been more successful. Unsurprisingly, Neil fully agreed; "It should have been bigger! But when you're our age and you've been around a long time, it doesn't matter how good the record is, they're not going to play it! Radio 1 said to us, "It's an amazing record – but we're not going to play it." It didn't fit their youth demographic; they don't want to introduce anyone new to the Pet Shop Boys. But in Germany, *Love Etc* was on the charts for months."

By the time of *Yes* Pet Shop Boys had become recognised as one of the great British bands, to the extent that even the *Financial Times* wanted to speak to them. Interestingly, it was Chris Lowe rather than Neil Tennant that Ludovic Hunter-Tilney interviewed in March 2009 in order to enquire why *Yes* was much more upbeat than some of their previous albums. ➤

**POP UP** The title of Shirley Bassey's *The Performance* is taken from a song on the album written by Tennant and Lowe. "The record is my autobiography," gushed Bassey





THE PANDEMONIUM TOUR BEGAN IN JUNE 2009 AND FEATURED SONGS THAT HADN'T EVER BEEN PERFORMED LIVE, INCLUDING TWO DIVIDED BY ZERO, WHY DON'T WE LIVE TOGETHER? AND DO I HAVE TO?

"It's a lot easier to make miserable music," Lowe explained. "To make uplifting pop or dance is one of the hardest things to do. To be in your bedroom and put some minor chords together and whinge... I think that's the easy option. To write something like a great Motown record, which has built-in euphoria and changes your mood for the better – that's really quite an achievement."

Pet Shop Boys received another award for their Outstanding Contribution To UK Music, this time at the BRITS, held at Earl's Court Arena in February 2009. The duo delivered a medley of hits, aided by The Killers' vocalist Brandon Flowers and Lady Gaga. The publicity returned the *PopArt* album to the charts.

Now a seasoned touring and performing act, Lowe and Tennant started the summer section of their Pandemonium Tour on 10 June 2009 at Russia's St Petersburg Ice Palace, then moved onto Moscow's Luzhniki Arena, carrying on through Luxembourg, Germany and Switzerland before reaching the Manchester Apollo and London's O2 Arena. They then returned to Europe, followed by an eight-date US tour. Alongside songs from Yes and a selection of classics, Neil and Chris aired songs on the Pandemonium jaunt that had yet to be performed live, including *Two Divided By Zero*, *Why Don't We Live Together?* and *Do I Have To?*

With an eye on their large and fervent South American audience, the *Pet Shop Boys Party* compilation was unleashed in November 2009 to coincide with the Brazilian leg of their tour. The album housed songs that were heavily featured on Brazil's hugely popular TV Globo soap operas: *Being Boring* (the programme *Meu Bem Meu Mal*, or in English 'My Good My Evil'), *Domino Dancing* (*O Salvador Da Pátria*, 'Saviour Of The Homeland'), *West End Girls* (*Selva de Pedra*, 'Jungle Stone') and *King Of Rome* (*Viver A Vida*, or 'Seize The Day').

The *Christmas* EP closed the decade in appropriate style. Lead track *It Doesn't Often Snow At Christmas* was a re-working of their 1997 fan club single, and appeared alongside a rework of *All Over The World* from Yes, plus a unique take on Madness' 1979 hit *My Girl*. Coldplay's *Viva La Vida* was also covered as part of a medley with the Pets' own *Domino Dancing*. With recording and another triumphant Glastonbury show set for 2010, Tennant and Lowe were soon to reinvent themselves yet again. ■



Directed by David Barnard, the Pandemonium Tour featured visuals inspired by the German artist Gerhard Richter, known for blurring the lines between painting and photography



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# ALBUM YES

TENNANT AND LOWE HAD NEVER HIDDEN BEING FERVENT FANS OF COMMERCIAL POP MUSIC. THEIR TEAM-UP WITH BRIAN HIGGINS AND XENOMANIA, THE UK'S MOST SUCCESSFUL POP PRODUCERS OF THE 2000's, WAS PERHAPS INEVITABLE...

IAN RAVENDALE

**P**et Shop Boys' biggest-selling album of the 21st century – so far – almost didn't happen. Producer Brian Higgins had recently come away from a difficult week working with Franz Ferdinand and had a sneaky suspicion that Chris Lowe and Neil Tennant could prove to be as tricky, if not more so, than the Scottish art-rockers. Higgins was all set to politely decline the duo's approach but felt he had to do it face to face, rather than remotely via their respective managers.

A meeting was set up in Higgins' Xenomania studios in Kent to discuss the viability of a potential production tie-up. Much to their surprise, the producer told Lowe and Tennant why he thought he'd be bad for them and explained he had no interest in anything he didn't like. The pair had been expecting Higgins to snatch their hands off, and his approach made them want to work with him even more. They argued that Higgins would push their standards higher and even though he thought they could be difficult, Pet Shop Boys too had a

clear vision of what they wanted. The collaboration was on – although, in a move perhaps designed to level-out the playing field a bit, they decided to record *Yes* at London's Abbey Road, not Xenomania's own studios.

Speaking to Julian Marszalek of *The Quietus* in March 2009, Tennant described their reaction on meeting Brian Higgins; "We really liked him. He was a real character. He's totally

committed to pop music and making hit records – more so than anybody else that we met. The set-up at his studio was great... he has this house with all these different rooms with all these different people all making music. You'd have Girls Aloud and Alesha Dixon tripping through.

"Because we're a duo, we welcome people to come and play on our records. We arrived there with very, very completed demos and we're

quite happy for them to play with them and do what they want." As part of this 'open house' the Human League's Philip Oakey sang on *Love Etc* and Johnny Marr added his distinctive guitar playing to four tracks, two of which he also played harmonica on.

Xenomania was formed as a production team in the early 2000s after Higgins had met songwriter and producer Miranda Cooper. Since then the outfit has worked with artists including Cher (with Higgins writing *Believe*, her biggest-ever hit), both Minogues, The Saturdays, Sophie Ellis-Bextor, and the Sugababes with *Round Round*. The organisation's longest-standing arrangement was with Girls Aloud; all but one of their albums were written and produced by Higgins and his writers, and played by the Xenomania in-house musicians.

According to a July 2009 interview with Tennant in *The Scotman* before *Yes* was conceived, half the songs were originally intended for Kylie Minogue. "This album is so pop," Neil said. "Like every other songwriting team in London we were asked

"Brian was a real character. He's totally committed to pop music and making hit records. He had this studio set up with all these different people making music. You'd have Girls Aloud and Alesha Dixon tripping through" **NEIL TENNANT**

## TRACKLISTING

Love Etc  
All Over The World  
Beautiful People  
Did You See Me Coming?  
Vulnerable  
More Than A Dream

Building A Wall  
King Of Rome  
Pandemonium  
The Way It Used To Be  
Legacy



# THE PLAYERS

## RELEASED

18 March 2009

**LABEL** Parlophone

## PRODUCED BY

Brian Higgins, Xenomania

## ENGINEER

Andrew Dudman

## RECORDED AT

Abbey Road Studios

## PERSONNEL

Neil Tennant – lead vocals, keyboards, programming, remixing (1); Chris Lowe – keyboards, programming, remixing (1); Xenomania – production (all), remixing, backing vocals (1,9); Philip Oakey – guest vocals (1); Johnny Marr – guitar (3, 4, 7, 9), harmonica (3, 9); Nick Coler – keyboards, programming (3-5, 7, 9-11); Sacha Collisson – keyboards, programming (1, 6), guitar (6, 10); Fred Falke (1, 5), Pete Gleadall (3-5, 7-9, 11), Matt Gray (1-3, 6-8, 10, 11), Kieran Jones (3, 6-8, 10, 11), Owen Parker (1-3, 9, 10), Tim Powell (all), Jason Resch (3, 6-8, 10, 11), Toby Scott (10) – keyboards, programming; Mark Parnell – drums (9); Miranda Cooper (6), Alex Gardner (3, 6), Brian Higgins (6), Jessie Malakouti (3), Owen Parker (3) – vocals; Andy Brown – brass arrangement (2) and London Metropolitan Orchestra conduction (3, 11); Steve Hamilton, Mike Kearsey – brass (8, 9); Owen Pallett – orchestral arrangement (3, 11); Cathy Thompson – London Metropolitan Orchestra leader (3, 11); Jeremy Wheatley – mixing; Dick Beetham – mastering; Pet Shop Boys, art direction; Alasdair McLellan – photography; Angela Becker – management

to write songs for Kylie two years ago when we were mid-tour. We wrote four or five, and never heard anything.”

The subject matter of *Love Etc*, Yes's opening track and lead-off single, is maybe not

what the listener would expect: “The idea is that it's Kate Moss singing about Pete Doherty. There's total chaos going on – that's where I got the lyrical idea.” ■

# SONGWRITING THE XENOMANIA WAY

Once Higgins and Pet Shop Boys had agreed to work together, Tennant and Lowe jumped into the approach to songwriting favoured by Brian and his team. From the *Yes* album, *Love Etc*, *More Than A Dream* and *The Way It Used To Be* were written by a combination of Neil and Chris and Xenomania's Higgins, Cooper, Owen Parker and Tim Powell.

The opening melody and much of the backing track for *Love Etc* were actually generated by Brian Higgins and Miranda Cooper before Chris and Neil got involved. The duo took what Xenomania had come up with, and developed it. “I don't think

Neil ‘got it’ initially,” reported Higgins in the July 2009 edition of *Literally* magazine. “I think Chris got Neil into it. I didn't want to play it [to them], and then thought... this is a move they could and should make. It was very different for them. It was much more aggressive – which is not a word you would apply to the Pet Shop Boys, particularly.”

In March 2009 *Love Etc* made No. 14 in the UK singles chart, while *Yes* hit No. 4 in the album charts the following month. The single and the follow-up *Did You See Me Coming* both became No. 1's in the US dance chart.





Pop is littered with acts who split from a long-established record company home only to find a chill wind blowing through their sales figures. Pet Shop Boys had no intention of being among them







# SUPER STARS

THIS DECADE BEGAN WITH PET SHOP BOYS LOOKING AS IMPERIOUS AS IT'S POSSIBLE FOR POP'S ELDER STATESMEN™ TO BE. THEY'RE LOOKING JUST AS REGAL NOW.

BUT WHAT WENT ON IN BETWEEN WAS A PERIOD OF UNPRECEDENTED UPHEAVAL. JUST HOW DID THEY EMERGE UNSCATHED?

JOHN EARLS

**T**he defining moment of Pet Shop Boys' career in the 2010s came on March 14, 2013. It was announced that day that, after 28 years, Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe had left Parlophone. They'd dabbled with their own record companies before, releasing music by their synthpop protégé Cicero in the Nineties on Spaghetti Records, before a run of low-key singles in the early '00s on Olde English by the likes of Pete Burns and their film director friend Sam Taylor-Wood. But the establishment of Pet Shop



A studio shot from 2012, the year of PSB's final Parlophone product *Elysium* – the album produced by Andrew Dawson, who had cut his teeth with Kanye West, Destiny's Child, John Legend, The Notorious B.I.G and others



The duo's final Parlophone album *Elysium* less than a year earlier had implied that, just maybe, Pet Shop Boys were happy to grow old gracefully. The headrush throb of the *Electric* trailer, combined with its perfectly fitting futuristic visuals, was a stark warning: Pet Shop Boys will always cause mayhem and are never more dangerous than when cornered.

### BOYS TOGETHER

In addition to *Elysium*, the three years preceding *Electric* had seen four other major releases on Parlophone: the singles compilation *Ultimate*, the live album *Pandemonium*, the B-sides set *Format*, and the soundtrack of Pet Shop Boys' Sadler's Wells ballet *The Most Incredible Thing*. Such intense cataloguing during their final years on Parlophone looked as if the Pets were clearing the decks for a new era, and so it has proved. *Electric* and its successor *Super* have re-established Pet Shop Boys as a major force in electronic music. Coupled with their continually evolving cutting-edge live show, they're a group who are peerless: who else of their vintage in electronic or pop music is operating at the height of their powers in this decade? Yet that burst of retrospective activity in the early 2010s and the stately pace of *Elysium* indicates this decade

could have seen a very different Pet Shop Boys evolve.

Released to mark 25 years since *West End Girls* got to No. 1, the *Ultimate* compilation is barely remembered even by fans now, but it reinforced Tennant and Lowe's own belief in their music: an 18-song sampler of their biggest songs, plus new single *Together*.

Boys' new record label X2 signified not just how Tennant and Lowe's career had shifted, but how music in general had changed in the online age. Parlophone had released all 11 Pet Shop Boys albums, so for them to be without their longest-running act was like the ravens leaving the tower.

Gone were a band who had given their old label an unprecedented run of 42 consecutive Top 40 singles. With changes in chart rules making it harder for established albums bands to crack the singles chart, even the hit-loving Pet Shop Boys had to change tack. Hence X2.

Pet Shop Boys admitted that going it alone after so long was daunting. Tennant told *Idolator*: "I wondered when we left Parlophone whether we'd feel a bit left out in the cold."

Two factors helped: X2's parent label Kobalt is a worldwide franchise of small offices, so "It feels like being with a big, global record company," according to Tennant. Also, the day of the X2 announcement coincided with the first taste of a new Pet Shop Boys album – and the 40-second teaser of *Axis* from the album *Electric* was one of the most exciting bursts of new Pet Shop Boys music in years.



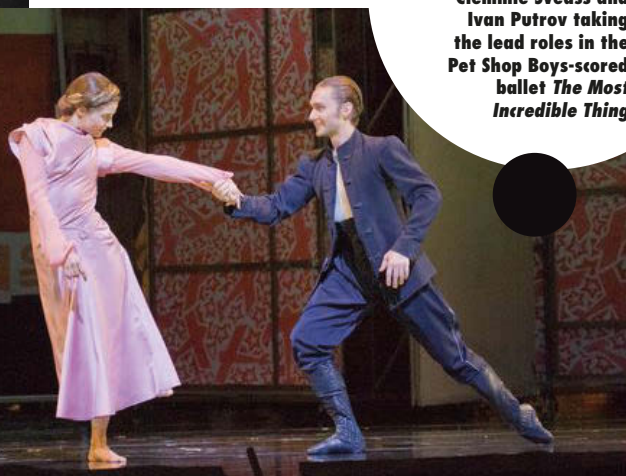
**POP UP** One of Pet Shop Boys' remaining ambitions is to write a sitcom. They've discussed the idea with Jonathan Harvey, co-writer of their *Closer To Heaven* musical





"YOU ALWAYS HEAR THIS PHRASE 'OH, THAT'S TYPICAL PET SHOP BOYS'. BUT ACROSS *ULTIMATE* THERE'S A WIDE VARIETY OF SONGS. I SUPPOSE PEOPLE THINK OF US AS DANCE-POP, BUT WITHIN THAT, STYLES CHANGE"

**Clemmie Sveass and Ivan Putrov taking the lead roles in the Pet Shop Boys-scored ballet *The Most Incredible Thing***



"We don't listen to our own music much," Tennant told me around its release. "I don't think about *It's A Sin* much." Lowe added that he doesn't even possess half of his own band's singles. But *Ultimate* was a reminder to the pair of their consistency. "You always hear this phrase 'Oh, that's typical Pet Shop Boys'," Tennant scoffed. "But actually, across *Ultimate*, there's a very wide variety of songs. I suppose people broadly think of us as dance-pop. But, within that, styles change. We recognise that our most famous era is the late Eighties. But if you put all our eras together, it sounds great. Listened to one after the other, our singles flow really well."

The pair were especially enamoured of *Ultimate*'s new song *Together*. It wasn't written specifically as the Token New Single familiar to many veteran acts' new hits compilations; instead, it was penned during a break from making *The Most Incredible Thing*. Lowe summarised *Together* as "a techno waltz... very headrush. It's one of the strongest singles we've done." So it must have been galling that it was *Together* which ended Pet Shop Boys' mammoth run of consecutive Top 40 singles when it stalled at No. 58 on its release in November 2010.

Its commercial failure came as Tennant re-emphasised his determination for PSB to continue being part of the singles chart, as he said: "We still love the idea of having hits. It's important to us, because it's part of the culture. There's the assumption that you get to a certain age and go stale, and I don't think you can say that about us."

But the pair also acknowledged that their career had evolved over the years: according to Tennant, the Eighties was about hit singles, the Nineties established them

# THE KEY RECORDINGS

FABLES, FLIPSIDES AND CAB FARES: FOUR PLUM PET SHOP BOYS PROJECTS FROM THE 2010S



## THE MOST INCREDIBLE THING

2011

The idea of turning Hans Christian Andersen's short, three-page story into a three-act ballet took four years to complete, and was begun after Sadler's Wells dancer Ivan Putrov contacted the pair asking them to write him some music. It was partially

inspired by the commercial failure of PSB's *Closer To Heaven* musical. "It gave me the hunger to continue doing something like this until we bloody made it work," Neil told *The Daily Telegraph*. Although the ballet was dismissed by some pompous critics, its shivering, faintly sinister music works as well with or without the ballet. It also has a great pop song, *Baby*, playing on the radio in one scene; it was eventually released as a B-side to *Leaving*.



## FORMAT

2012

PSB love making B-sides; "If you're prolific, like we are, you can always get a B-side out," says Neil. If there are fewer famous songs compared to their first flip-side compilation *Alternative*, that's just because fewer people are buying singles. Sadly, to

fit onto two CDs, *Format* had to omit their cover of *Je T'Aime... Moi Non Plus*. "I wanted *Format* to come out, because I didn't have all the songs," Lowe told me. "I'm not very good at archiving." The standout is the stunning girlgroup pastiche *I Didn't Get Where I Am Today*; Parlophone convinced the Pets to leave it off *Release* as it didn't sonically fit. Crackers. All of *Format*'s songs are now available on the reissues of their parent albums. Buy those instead.



## ELYSIUM

2012

One overlooked aspect of *Elysium* was its humour, most obviously present in *Ego Music* and the self-referential *Your Early Stuff*. The latter song contains many genuine comments Tennant and Lowe are exposed to, often by taxi drivers. "Where's the

other one, then?" is a favourite," Lowe reveals. "They've generally some hazy idea of what we're up to." Tennant semi-jokingly says cabbies are one of his main sources of information. According to Lowe: "If Neil ever starts a sentence with 'Apparently...', chances are it's something a taxi driver told him." *Ego Music* mocks pompous pop star quotes, with Tennant especially horrified that "I am my own demographic" was from a genuine interview.



## SUPER

2016

Pet Shop Boys had stopped trying to have hit singles by the time *Super* was recorded in LA at Stuart Price's studio. Although songs like *Twenty-Something* would have been big in a bygone age, *Super* is a more unpredictable affair than some of

PSB's earlier albums. "We don't have to concentrate so much on traditional pop structures," Lowe told *The Quietus*. "To be honest, I'm not even sure what pop music is any more." Although it's still an up-for-it set of bangers, there's also a nostalgic feel to *Super* – it cherry-picks the best of assorted dance genres to recall the best nights from the pair's more hedonistic youthful past. Not that it isn't perfect for living large at Berghain on a Sunday either, obviously.



Lowe and Tennant in reflective mood in Sao Paulo, Brazil, 2013. The city was the fifth stop on the Electric Tour, which began in Mexico and ended in Finland 29 months later



© Leo Aversa



"REQUIEM IN DENIM AND LEOPARDSKIN IS FLASHBACKS FROM THE FUNERAL OF A FRIEND OF OURS. IT'S ABOUT COMING TO CHELSEA IN THE EIGHTIES AND MEETING JOHNNY LYDON, ADAM ANT, DEREK JARMAN"

Tennant and Lowe pose with their prize backstage at the GQ Men Of The Year Award at Komische Oper on November 7, 2013 in Berlin, Germany

as albums artists, while the 2000s witnessed Pet Shop Boys become a touring act. And it was that mature progression that continued on into *Elysium*; it's consistent with *Behaviour* and *Release* as the most contemplative of Pet Shop Boys' albums. Yet its genesis was much different. The "headrush" of *Together* coincided with their triumphant medley at the previous year's Brit Awards and equally ecstatic Glastonbury appearance in 2010. That onward momentum was inspiring new music that, according to Tennant in that *Ultimate* interview, was shaping up to be "more dancey. After *Together*, we've been discussing doing more in that vein."

### ENDS OF THE EARTH

There were many reasons that *Elysium* ended up in a much different headspace than the celebration of *Together*. Tennant and Lowe viewed their previous albums *Fundamental* and *Yes* as being broadly speaking of a piece, from their uptempo pop world. Speaking around the release of *Elysium*, Tennant said: "We wanted something less poppy than the last two albums, much as we love them."

The centrepiece for *Elysium*, its beautiful elegy *Requiem In Denim And Leopardskin*, was actually written during the sessions for *Yes*, but the pair had held it back. "It wasn't poppy enough for *Yes*," said Lowe. "But we loved it. It seemed a different sort of song from us, so we thought 'Maybe we'll keep it for whatever we do next.'" Explaining its echoes of *Being Boring*, Tennant said: "Both songs have a filmic structure, with flashbacks. *Being Boring* is flashbacks of my life, but *Requiem In Denim And Leopardskin* is flashbacks from the funeral of a friend of ours – a make-up artist for Bryan Ferry and lots of divas. It's about when she came to Chelsea in the Eighties, meeting John Lydon, Adam Ant, Malcolm McLaren, Derek Jarman..."

Also inspiring *Elysium* was the decision in 2011 to support Take That on the stadium tour for their reunion as a five-piece. With Robbie Williams back, Take That were bigger than ever. *Please* was the first album Gary Barlow owned, while Williams was such a PSB acolyte that he'd covered *We're The Pet Shop Boys*, My Robot Friend's witty collection of Tennant/Lowe song titles set to music. Tennant and Lowe are known for the mastery of whether any offer to them fits Pet Shop Boys' ethos, boiling down to the essential question "Is this something Pet Shop Boys would do?" The offer to support another band initially threw them, but was soon accepted,





not least because the production for their Pandemonium tour – lavish though it looked – was easy enough to scale down from 95 minutes to 40. “It works just as well at Wembley Stadium or the Hard Rock Café in Las Vegas,” Lowe noted.

Three songs for *Elysium* were written on the Take That tour. “We’d get to the stadium at 6pm and be back home by 10, so we had the whole day to ourselves,” explained Tennant. “Chris had a portable studio with him. So, practically, it was no different to writing at home, but actually being away from home and its distractions made us quite productive.”

### PROMISED LAND

*Elysium* was recorded in Los Angeles, with the opportunity finally presenting itself for the LA album Trevor Horn had long suggested Pet Shop Boys should make. The shiny *Invisible* reminded them of something Kanye West might write, so they scoured the credits of 808s *And Heartbreak*. That album was engineered by Andrew Dawson, who had since enjoyed success as a producer for *We Are Young* hitmakers Fun. As Tennant explained: “We googled Andrew’s contact details and, unlike most people in the music industry, he came straight back to us. Within hours of our manager emailing him, he had agreed to produce the album.” Lowe added: “Andrew knew our music inside out. When we first met, he mentioned stuff I’d completely forgotten about.”

Dawson’s studio is based in the Crossroads Of The World, the first open-air mall opened in the US, also famed for housing Orson Welles’ office when he made *Citizen Kane*. Located in the centre of Hollywood on Sunset Boulevard made it the ideal recording environment. “Just driving to work down Sunset Boulevard made your day a trip,” Lowe enthused. “We recorded the album during awards season – the Oscars and Grammys – so we got a sense of LA at its most full-on. If Andrew was doing anything technical, we’d just drive around LA. Perfect.”

*Leaving*, the opening song on *Elysium*, was also written during the sessions for *Yes*. “It’s a classic ‘Let’s not really break up’ song,” Tennant noted. There are

“WITHIN HOURS OF EMAILING ANDREW, HE’D AGREED TO PRODUCE OUR ALBUM. PEOPLE WERE DISAPPOINTED IT WASN’T A DANCE ALBUM, BUT SOME FANS NOW SAY ‘I WISH THEY’D DO ONE LIKE THAT AGAIN’”

what Tennant calls “strange lyrics about death” in *Leaving*, which he said was a response to both his parents dying in the past five years. Yet, although *Elysium* is a reflective album, it’s ultimately hopeful too. Its initial title was *After Life*: “All senses of that phrase,” clarifies Tennant. “But to emphasise the multiple meanings, it would have to be a two-word title. And that would never do.”

Although it contains the storming *A Face Like That* and the hilarious pairing *Ego Music* and *Your Early Stuff*, *Elysium* was unfairly dismissed on release as being too downbeat in tone. Only reaching No. 9, it’s the lowest-charting Pet Shop Boys album. “People were disappointed it wasn’t a dance album,” Tennant admitted in the sleeve notes for its reissue last year. “Though nowadays there are fans who say ‘I wish they’d do an album like that again.’”

If *Elysium* remains divisive, its successor is universally hailed as a classic. Typically, although *Electric*

**POP UP** While they wait to sign any other acts to their X2 record label, Chris Lowe has said he wants to open a chain of X2 hotels and launch an underwear range



## B-SIDE THEMSELVES

Dictators in cahoots, linguistic liabilities and survivors of the gulag: all subjects of recent bonus gems



### HELL (B-SIDE OF LEAVING)

2012

On the Pandemonium Tour, twin dancers Polly and Sophie Duniam’s love of Balkan dance music inspired Lowe to write a Balkan track. This fitted Tennant’s lyrics about the banality of evil. *Hell* sounds like one of PSB’s full-on romps, and its lyrics about Caligula spitting

stale food at Hitler are hilarious, but the line “Evil is a bore with a big idea” is the song’s key serious message. On tour in Cuba, Tennant was soon aware that state television’s relentless parroting of Fidel Castro was boring the populace into submission. That sombre intent caused Tennant to cut a verse he felt too farcical, about Colonel Gaddafi farting in the face of Adolf Eichmann – even though the Iranian dictator really did deliberately break wind at Tony Blair during talks. Initially worked on for *Elysium*, it was soon obvious it was too oddball for that album.

[open.spotify.com/track/4Yk6rL4CCv836AAJol6r2A](https://open.spotify.com/track/4Yk6rL4CCv836AAJol6r2A)







Pet Shop Boys in 2013, obviously thrilled at *Electric's* press reception: "sublime", "a reaffirmation of belief in the power of pop music" and "just the kind of thing to dance away your troubles to"



**ENTSCULDIGUNG!**  
(B-SIDE OF LOVE IS A BOURGEOIS CONSTRUCT)

2013

Produced by Stuart Price, *Entschuldigung!* really does feel like an off-cut from its parent album, as musically it fits *Electric* perfectly. The slender lyrics may well be the reason it was left off, even though Lowe's harsh bassline is the equal of

much of the album. It doesn't sound like either Tennant or Lowe sternly intoning the sole lyric, "Ich nicht sprechen Deutsch", I said 'Ich nicht sprechen Deutsch'." The line is pidgin German for "I don't speak German", yet the accent is suspiciously good for someone supposedly so hopeless at languages (despite having an apartment in Berlin to write music, neither Pet is fluent in German). *Get It Online*, the other B-side of *Love Is A Bourgeois Construct*, also features lyrics in other languages, while *Construct* itself has the line "Speaking English as a foreign language".

[open.spotify.com/track/0Jooj4udBS2D0Qp4031UdY](https://open.spotify.com/track/0Jooj4udBS2D0Qp4031UdY)



**THE DEAD CAN DANCE**  
(B-SIDE OF SAY IT TO ME)

2016

Despite working for *Smash Hits* during their Eighties heyday, Neil Tennant hadn't heard of Australian art-rockers Dead Can Dance until playing a friend *The Dead Can Dance*. He told fanclub book *Annually* the song was actually inspired by American Soviet history

expert Stephen F Cohen's book *The Victims Return*, about political prisoners being released by President Krushchev when he came to power in 1958 and tried to 'de-Stalinise' the region. "It's from our enormous catalogue of songs inspired by Russian history," Tennant noted. *The Dead Can Dance* holds the distinction of being the most recent Pet Shop Boys B-side. Currently, they have amassed 82 B-sides otherwise unavailable in studio versions on any PSB album, excluding the *Further Listening* expanded reissues. At the current rate, they'll have hit 100 B-sides in three albums' time.

[open.spotify.com/track/0xl209vtegnZie2OMi49dQ](https://open.spotify.com/track/0xl209vtegnZie2OMi49dQ)



is completely different in tempo to most of *Elysium*, two of its songs – *Vocal* and *Axis* – were written during the recording of its predecessor. Ever self-aware, Tennant sensed the anticipation building around *Electric* once its teaser was unveiled. He told *The Huffington Post*: “No-one got excited when they heard Pet Shop Boys were releasing an album about living in LA and getting old. But they strangely got a bit more enlivened by the news that a disco album was on the way.”

### CALL OF THE FLOOR

At the start of the decade, Pet Shop Boys seemed to have slightly fallen out of love with clubbing. Although they liked the then-new dubstep scene, Lowe despaired at London’s gentrified nightlife, saying: “I’d like to go clubbing more often. But a lot of good clubs are disappearing, and I’m not aware of anything particularly new happening.” But then the Pets bought an apartment in Berlin to write in – and the energy of Berlin’s nightlife, notably its revered weekend-long club Berghain, is writ large in *Electric*.

Another jolt of energy comes from producer Stuart Price. As well as producing Madonna’s *Confessions On A Dance Floor*, Price had produced Scissor Sisters, The Killers, Kylie and PSB’s touring partners Take That shortly before *Electric*. He’d worked with the duo as musical director on the Pandemonium Tour, and had mentioned that hearing the first *Disco* remix album was what made him want to become a producer. Even on a practical level, it made sense for Price to produce *Electric*, as his wife Angela Becker is Pet Shop Boys’ manager.

Released just eight months after *Elysium*, *Electric* nearly didn’t become an official Pet Shop Boys album at all. Its all-out electronic pulse is similar in feel to *Very*’s spin-off dance album *Relentless*. As Tennant told *Popjustice*: “When we started *Electric*, it was more Chris’ project. It had the slight feel of a side-project. But when we sat down and said ‘What is this? Is this Pet Shop Boys’ 12th studio album?’ the answer was ‘Yes it is!’”

*Electric* was made while Pet Shop Boys were officially an unsigned band. Parlophone were considering renewing their contract, ultimately baulking at the size of the advance they’d have to pay. “Which I have some sympathy for,” Tennant admitted to *Popjustice*. “Our record sales maybe didn’t justify it although, you know... maybe market them better?” (Tennant had told me around *Elysium* of his fury at Parlophone refusing to sell the CD single of *Winner* anywhere apart from Pet Shop Boys’ own website.) Kobalt were eventually selected because of their success with their first release by Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds, which had given the band their highest-charting album ever. “Nick Cave is a good comparison to us: a cult artist around the world.”

On its release, Pet Shop Boys stated that *Electric* would be the first in a trilogy of albums with Stuart Price, which certainly seemed borne out by its sequel, *Super*, three years later. But before that, in July 2014, came *A Man From The Future*. A tribute to World War II codebreaker Alan

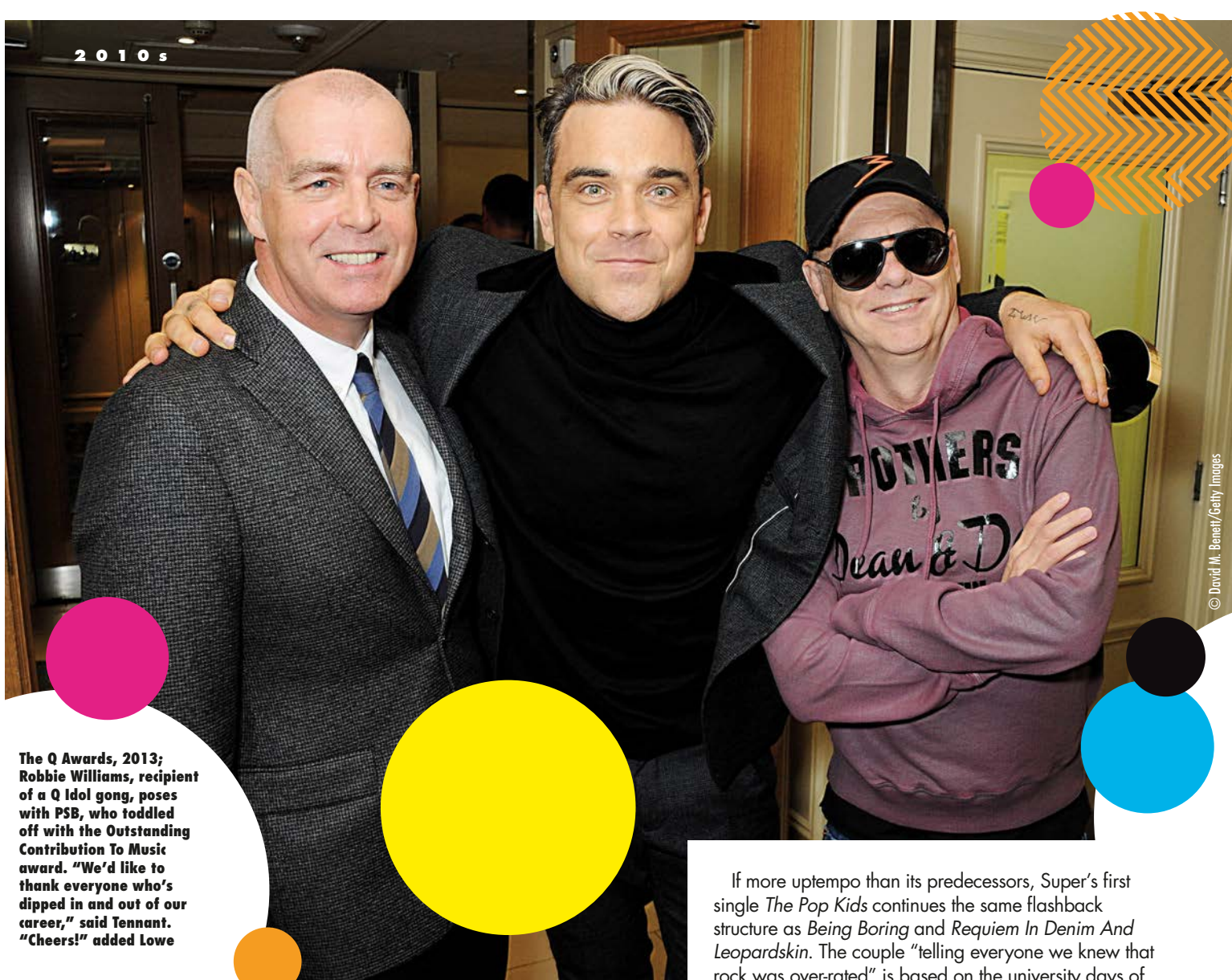




Lowe and Tennant, 2016: "I like music to be uplifting, but it doesn't have to be fast and banging," Lowe told *The Quietus*. "Sad music can be uplifting too. I love a good wallow. It's complicated"

"NO-ONE GOT EXCITED WHEN THEY HEARD PET SHOP BOYS WERE RELEASING AN ALBUM ABOUT LIVING IN LA AND GETTING OLD. BUT THEY GOT A BIT MORE ENLIVENED BY NEWS A DISCO ALBUM WAS ON THE WAY"





**The Q Awards, 2013;** Robbie Williams, recipient of a Q Idol gong, poses with PSB, who toddled off with the Outstanding Contribution To Music award. "We'd like to thank everyone who's dipped in and out of our career," said Tennant. "Cheers!" added Lowe

© David M. Benett/Getty Images

Turing, it's the most ambitious concert performed in the BBC's decade of their Electric Proms season at London's Royal Albert Hall. An eight-part musical biography, it was conceived in 2011 after Lowe watched a Channel 4 documentary on computer pioneer Turing, leading the duo to contact his biographer Andrew Hodges. He suggested the most suitable sections of his book *Alan Turing: The Enigma* as the words to accompany Pet Shop Boys' music.

"In the Eighties when I first learned about Alan Turing, I knew nobody with a computer," Tennant told *The Guardian*. "Also back then, homosexuality was only legal in private over the age of 21, and of course that's changed too. Essentially, we've all caught up with Alan Turing."

That *A Man From The Future* was only performed once and remains unreleased means it's become a footnote in Pet Shop Boys' career, but it was a thrilling and moving show which deserves better than its status as a curio.

### SUPER SONIC

The almost three-year gap between *Electric* and *Super* was the standard wait for a new Pet Shop Boys album, but projects such as *A Man From The Future* and their by now Dylanesque approach to constant touring meant the gap didn't seem so long – especially as *Super* fulfilled its brief to continue the atmosphere of its prequel.

If more uptempo than its predecessors, *Super*'s first single *The Pop Kids* continues the same flashback structure as *Being Boring* and *Requiem In Denim And Leopardskin*. The couple "telling everyone we knew that rock was over-rated" is based on the university days of a friend of Tennant's and his then-girlfriend. Its opening song *Happiness* is country-and-western by way of Scissor Sisters, a rare moment when the phrase "high camp" actually could be applied to Tennant and Lowe's music.

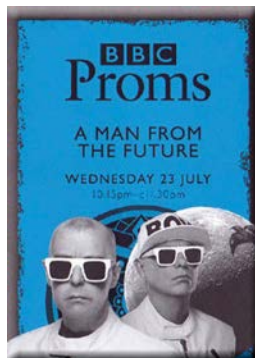
The tour was designed by their longtime collaborator Es Devlin, who has also worked with Beyoncé, Kanye West and U2. "Es has this fantastic energy, as they say in California," Tennant told *The Sun*. "She's even worked with Adele," Lowe added. "And she's got a child. How does she find the time?"

Even by Devlin's standards, the *Super* tour has been spectacular, complete with Chris Lowe's head encased in a glitterball. It began and ended with a residency at London's Royal Opera House, marked with perfect merchandise declaring "House Music". The surprise wasn't so much that Pet Shop Boys were the first pop band to play the venue as much as it took them so

long for this most well-rounded of groups to do so.

The wait before album 14 has been filled with reliably comprehensive reissues of all their Parlophone albums: the bonus material is so exhaustive and Chris Heath's sleeve notes so lovingly-detailed that it can be assumed relationships with their former home are cordial enough.

As for what the final part of the Stuart Price trilogy has in store, Lowe told *The Quietus* that they've been stockpiling ballads for volume three, revealing: "The third one is when the melancholia will kick in again." One thing is pretty much guaranteed. It'll be *super*. ■



**POP UP** While working on *Smash Hits*' US spin-off *Star Hits*, Neil Tennant profiled the duo Times Two. He swears that it didn't influence the name of Pet Shop Boys' record label X2



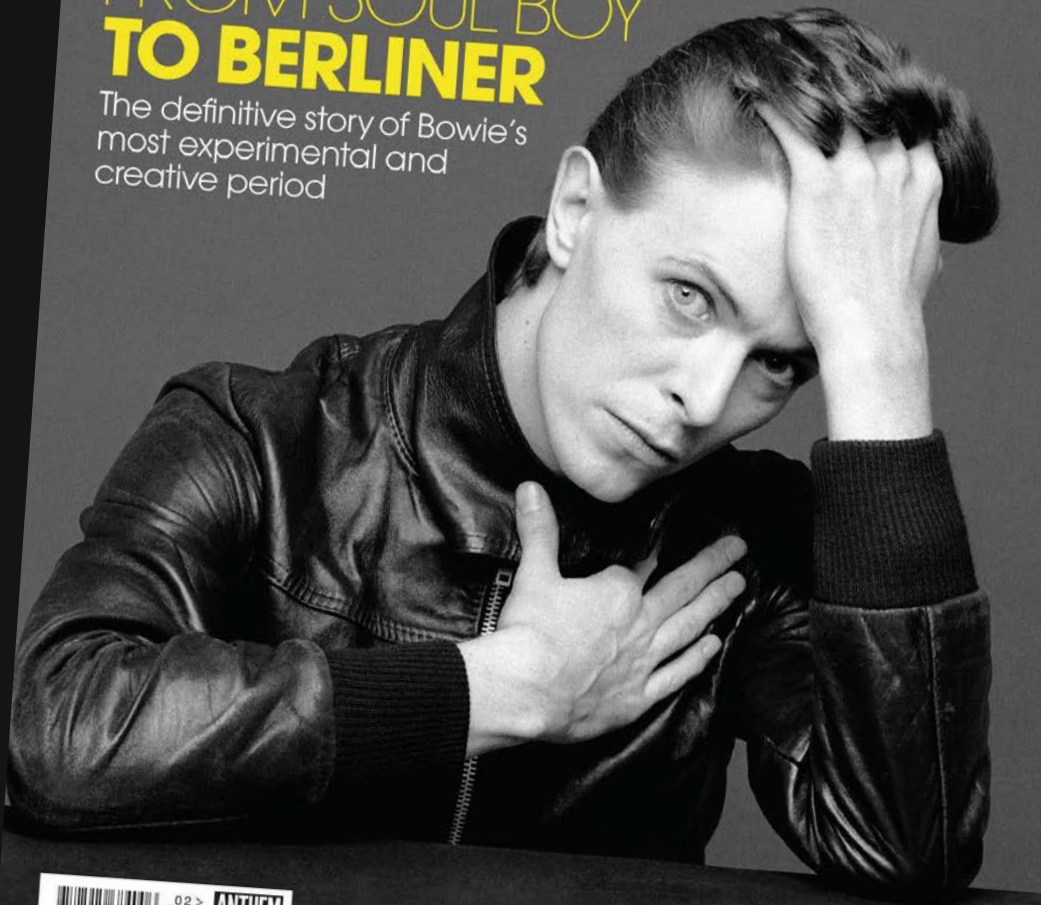


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# CLASSIC ALBUM ELECTRIC

WHAT STARTED OUT AS A POSSIBLE ELECTRONIC SIDE-PROJECT SOON BECAME THE MOST ADVENTUROUS ALBUM OF PET SHOP BOYS' CAREER. HOW DID A 17TH CENTURY OPERA AND CHRIS LOWE'S SISTER HELP SHAPE A MODERN CLASSIC?

JOHN EARLS

According to Neil Tennant, Pet Shop Boys have twice written the perfect pop song. Few fans would dispute *Being Boring* as one of them; the other, intriguingly, is *Vocal*, a piece Tennant cites as a song that could carry on indefinitely without ever, er, being boring. Not only is it sublime, it's also a key moment in the arc of Pet Shop Boys' career. Along with *Electric*'s opening song *Axis*, *Vocal* was written during the sessions for *Elysium*; indeed, it is the only song the Pets have ever previewed live before its release. Not only that, but it ended the shows on the *Pandemonium* tour instead of traditional set-closer *Go West*, which was a ballsy move.

So if *Elysium* was designed to contrast to its poppy predecessors *Fundamental* and *Yes*, *Electric* was a reaction to the melancholia of *Elysium*. In fact, *Electric* was made partially in response to a fan review. Neil Tennant has admitted to googling his band's name every few days to keep up on what information is in the public domain; after a YouTube comment on *Elysium* said people wanted "more banging and lasers", Tennant

told *Popjustice*: "We thought 'Alright, then! More banging and lasers – here it comes!'"

The idea of covering *The Last To Die* from Bruce Springsteen's 2007 album *Magic* might seem to follow the anti-rockist stance of their demolition of U2's *Where The Streets Have No Name*, but the pair actually love the song. It was the idea of Chris Lowe's sister Vicki, who played *The Last To Die* to him

thinking it'd make a good Pets Shop Boys cover. "We immediately started doing a version of it," Tennant told *Wow 247*. "We thought the guitar riff would make a great synth riff, but it actually ended up being a vocal riff."

A similarly unlikely move came with Example's appearance on *Thursday*. His part was initially going to be taken by a Nicki Minaj sample, but producer Stuart

Price was working with Example at the time and it seemed obvious to get the London rapper in to see what he could do.

*Love Is A Bourgeois Construct* takes its title from a line in David Lodge's 1988 novel *Nice Work*. It was their most audacious marriage of full-on dance and detailed storytelling since *Left To My Own Devices*, and Lowe summed up its approach to *Wow 247*: "It's got a giddy-up bassline, which we haven't had for a while". 17th century baroque composer Henry Purcell gets a co-writing credit because his opera *King Arthur* was sampled on Michael Nyman's 1982 minimalist classic *Chasing Sheep Is Best Left To Shepherds* – the real inspiration for *Love Is A Bourgeois Construct*.

That song was going to simply be called *Bourgeois*, which explains its position in the tracklisting of *Electric*: note how the rest of it is in alphabetical order. Bizarrely, that's also the order the songs were recorded in, at Stuart Price's insistence.

Price's first musical memory was of "taping my Sony Walkman to my BMX so I could listen to Pet Shop Boys at all times", and he got his

If *Elysium* was designed to contrast to its poppy predecessors *Fundamental* and *Yes*, *Electric* was a reaction to the melancholy of *Elysium*, made partially in response to a fan review on YouTube demanding "more banging and lasers"

## TRACKLISTING

### SIDE 1

Axis  
Bolshy

### SIDE 2

Love Is A Bourgeois  
Construct  
Fluorescent

### SIDE 3

Inside A Dream  
The Last To Die  
Shouting In The Evening

### SIDE 4

Thursday  
(featuring Example)  
Vocal



# THE PLAYERS

## RELEASED

12 July 2013

**LABEL** x2 Recordings Ltd/  
Kobalt Label Services

## PRODUCED BY

Stuart Price (mixer, additional programming)

## ENGINEERS

Stuart Price; Pete Gleadall

## RECORDED IN

London, Berlin and LA

## PERSONNEL

Neil Tennant – songwriter/  
vocals; Chris Lowe –  
songwriter/keyboards; Henry  
Purcell – songwriter; Bruce  
Springsteen – songwriter;  
Elliot Gleave – songwriter;  
Stuart Price – additional  
vocals; producer, engineer,  
additional programming,  
mixing; Andy Crookston  
– additional vocals;  
Luke Halls – additional  
vocals; Pete Gleadall –  
additional engineering  
and programming,  
additional vocals;  
Adam Blake – handclaps;  
Jessica Freedman – additional  
vocals; Katharine Anne Hoyer  
– additional vocals; Brian  
Gardner – mastering

first keyboard so he could learn how to replicate Chris Lowe's parts. Before he got to work with the duo, Price became a successful dance musician under the aliases Jacques Lu Cont and Les Rythmes Digitales. Überfans working with their heroes can often lead to complications, but in the case of Stuart Price, the duo felt it was a totally natural fit.

Price considers *Electric* to be a spiritual heir of *Disco*, telling *Spin*: "Disco blended song arrangements with dancefloor mixes; *Electric* allows songs to be full-length without considering the pop rules." It's been such a successful relationship that Pet Shop Boys' biggest gripe seems to be that Price insists on having daytime TV on too loud during recording. ■





# PET SHOP BOYS POP ART

FEW MUSICAL ARTISTS HAVE FUSED AUDIO AND VISUAL AS ARTFULLY AS PET SHOP BOYS, AND NEIL TENNANT AND CHRIS LOWE'S USE OF DESIGN TO PROJECT THE BAND AS A BRAND HAS BEEN IN EVIDENCE ALMOST FROM DAY ONE. IN THIS OVERVIEW SPANNING THREE AND HALF DECADES, WE'VE SELECTED KEY EXAMPLES OF DESIGN EXCELLENCE FROM THE DUO'S REMARKABLE OEUVRE

ANDREW DINELEY

**W**ith backgrounds respectively in magazine publishing and architecture, it's no surprise that a keen eye for visual detail would permeate everything for Tennant and Lowe. Combine this with their early association with Tom Watkins as manager, a man who himself had an impressive creative pedigree working with Terrence Conran before establishing XL design studio in 1982, and we can see how things inevitably came to be...

## SOME SPECULATION

Pet Shop Boys arrived during a period in pop that saw a massive expansion in formats. Never had so much been spread so widely. One single could be stretched out across numerous seven-inch and 12-inch discs, poster packs, limited edition boxes, cassette singles and picture discs. It was a ripe period for creativity. A cynic may look back and speculate that it was all about rampant marketing and consumer exploitation, but music fans duly lapped it up... and nobody forced this writer into buying anything.

In their 2006 book, an overview of Pet Shop Boys design entitled *Catalogue*, Neil Tennant confirmed

their formative intentions. "*West End Girls* became a hit so slowly that there were endless formats to jig the charts," he said. "Chris and I were influenced by Scritti Politti – the idea of looking like a brand, a perfume bottle or whatever."

After a couple of false starts, *West End Girls* became Pet Shop Boys' breakthrough single in 1985, heralding a sustained creative collaboration with Mark Farrow. His first PSB design was a re-working of the first single sleeve, which Chris Lowe himself had originally worked on.

In his autobiography, aptly titled *Let's Make Lots Of Money*, Tom Watkins provided an interesting perspective on this radical redesign by Farrow; "He loathed and detested the sleeve for *West End Girls*. He hated everything: the design; the lettering; the feel. Christ, I thought, this man takes record covers very seriously."

Watkins, Tennant and Lowe were admirers of Ettore Sottsass' Memphis Group in Milan, whose designs were recognisable by their bright colours and angular, pop-art-deco sensibility, and it comes as no surprise to see how Farrow had ticked the right boxes with his reductive re-interpretation for the *West End Girls* remix. According to Watkins, "It was frankly a



Though *West End Girls* came packaged in a wide array of scattergun-style sleeves, all lacked wit, adequate fashion sense and a sense of identity. That was about to change



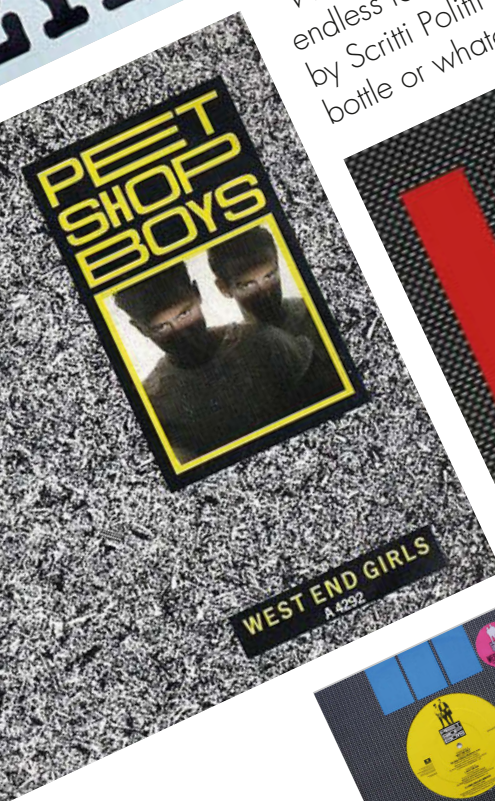




The so-Eighties designs for *West End Girls* didn't look amiss on the shelves but they produced a strong reaction in future PSB designer Mark Farrow, who despised them all



Farrow's Sottsass-informed designs for the *West End Girls* remix (left) replaced all band and song ID with bold, minimal colour blocks – a startling change that the duo immediately loved



"*West End Girls* became a hit so slowly that there were endless formats to jig the charts... Chris and I were influenced by Scritti Politti – the idea of looking like a brand, a perfume bottle or whatever" **NEIL TENNANT**





Please displayed a fresh, stripped-back austerity far removed away from the tawdry showmanship of so much New Romantic-era design. Farrow called it an example of "reverse marketing"

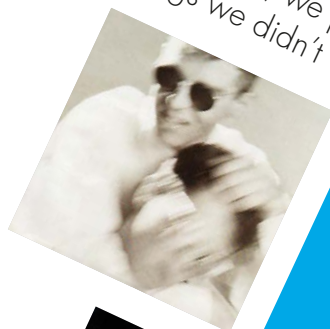


pet shop boys

please

"We were creating images that were intentionally un-pop – some imagery around the first album, for instance, was actually quite bleak. It's mostly black-and-white. We wanted, and still want, to look totally different to everyone else. At the very beginning, we put out this manifesto to accompany our demo tape that listed all the things we didn't want to be"

NEIL TENNANT



# ALL OVER THE WORLD

PET SHOP BOYS CONCERT-GOERS HAVE LONG BENEFITTED FROM ADDED VISUAL TREASURES

Sleeve design concepts can flourish within the broader context of a live tour. Ideas can be given space to expand – in staging, costume and all manner of merchandising potential. Since their first MCMLXXXIX tour in 1989, the tour programme [20] has been a good platform for each album's creative identity to be built upon in ingenious ways. With Farrow, they have continued to push creative boundaries – from imaginative formats to lavish printing processes. Pet Shop Boys tour books are now established as collectible works of art by fans. For their most recent Super world tour, the simple coloured Pet Shop Boys have toured in 58 countries and the flags of these were reimagined by Farrow using only concentric circles which were then featured prominently, and U/V spot varnished, in the large format programme. Signed, limited edition lithographs of these designs were also made available to purchase in each territory, meaning that fans could purchase something exclusive to their country. Few other artists would consider such astute tailoring of their tour merchandise.



Above, this Alison Watt painting – complete with an artist's self-portrait, hanging on the wall – was commissioned for the Super world tour. Actually and taken from an Eric Watson photograph



work of art. All excess imagery and uneven lettering was removed and he added bold blocks of red and blue, with a yellow circle at the centre like a record label. Neil Tennant had apparently cried with admiration and jealousy when he saw the sleeve to New Order's *Blue Monday*. He must have been a blubbing wreck when he saw his own sleeve... from that moment on, Mark Farrow was a vital part of the team."

### MINIMAL

Within a few months, *Please*, Pet Shop Boys' debut album, was released. Its simple one-word title would set a trend in 1985 for every other album they would release. The album sleeve followed a similar minimalist ideal, with Farrow further channelling the reductive graphic

style he'd grown up with as a designer for Factory Records, prior to XL. The front cover's tiny lone photograph offset an inside sleeve featuring a grid of images, devoid of typography. In total, the image count ended up just one shot short of 100. For an exercise in restrained minimalism, that is a lot of photography, and all were largely taken by long-time collaborator Eric Watson.

"We were creating images that were intentionally un-pop – some imagery around the first album, for instance, was quite bleak," said Tennant. "It's mostly black-and-white. We wanted, and still want, to look totally different to everyone else. At the very beginning, we put out this manifesto to accompany our demo tape that listed all the things we didn't want to be."

Mark Farrow's main objective was to create a sleeve that didn't look like a record cover. *Please* couldn't have been more different to its hyper-saturated chart competition and stood out for being the antithesis of sleeve design during the Eighties.

Tom Watkins, however, originally had far more

complex ideas. "I thought my concept was a great idea: a big fold-out lattice-work cover, opening out into a crucifix that contained all the mean and moody images they had created over the last couple of years. I excitedly folded the cardboard out in front of them, knowing they were going to just love it. An awkward silence ensued.

Neil and Chris mumbled a few words with an overwhelming air of indifference. Perturbed looks flashed across their faces. They didn't like it. I didn't show it but I was mortified."

Sometimes images that will go on to define an act can come about in unexpected ways. This was the case for the single sleeve of *Suburbia*. "I'd just bought this striped shirt and striped glasses and so I thought 'Wow! This is visually stunning!'" said Lowe. "Neil just wore a plain T-shirt and plain glasses so it was obvious that it was going to work as a photo – me all stripes and him all plain."

Elaborating on the use of Eric Watson's photographs for the single sleeve in the Pet Shop Boys book *Catalogue*, Mark Farrow concurred. "I've always thought that if the photograph is strong enough to do the work on its own then I don't really need to do anything. In my mind at that time Chris was the logo, if you like."

Though the front cover did bravely eschew any distracting words, typography was used on the back cover, laid out in a visual homage to movie credits, appropriate given that the single's name was taken from a film. As simple as it may appear, this sleeve design was the first to earn Farrow a silver D&AD award.

### DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW

In contrast to the white space and minimalist cover imagery of *Please*, it was decided that a different treatment was required for 1987's follow-up album, *Actually*. Neil Tennant came up with the idea of commissioning Alison Watt, the Glaswegian winner of the National Portrait Award, to create an oil painting of the duo for the cover. Tennant, Lowe, Farrow and Watson headed off to Scotland to see the artist and plan how it would look, but practicalities were part of why the sleeve ended up quite different. "Alison wanted them to sit for three weeks but their schedule made that impossible," explained Tom Watkins. "She worked from a photo instead, but it looked quaint, stuffy and just un-pop."

Eric Watson had supplied a series of photographs for Watt to use as reference material, which led to much to-ing and fro-ing between the painter and PSB camp, but the idea was eventually abandoned, partly because Chris Lowe was unhappy with how he looked. "My face was all wonky," he complained in the *Annually* book, published in 1988.

The final sleeve design went on to become a much-loved and parodied design classic, and remains a favourite of Neil's. "We liked it because it wasn't a cop-out 'please, please, buy me' photo. It was sort of uncompromising and funny at the same time. It fitted all the basic tenets – it looked really strong, it was noticeable in the shops, it was funny and of course people were obviously going to say 'Why are you yawning?'"





## YOU CHOOSE

The sleeve of *Heart*, the last single to be taken from the album, is also classic Pet Shop Boys. The single had two covers, so buyers had to choose between 'Neil' and 'Chris', or simply decide to buy both – which can't have done any harm getting the song to No. 1 in the UK. Images from this session were also used on the cover of their 1988 book *Annually*, combined to visually reference the sleeve of *Actually*. The sleeve featured the duo in outfits worn at the UK BPI Awards. "We do awards if they give us an award," Neil – ever the aesthete – commented at the time. "If we don't get an award, we don't do it. They're bollocks basically. My main argument against the BPI Awards is the hideousness of the logo."

The sleeve of *Introspective* may not be a favourite of the duo, but it stood out on record store shelves at the end of 1988 and remains timeless in its simplicity. Each format of the release used a different combination of vibrant coloured stripes. Manager Tom Watkins reportedly joked that subliminally, people would feel compelled to buy a copy of the album every time they saw the testcard on TV. The album contained just six tracks and in 1988 became their top-selling album, so perhaps the ever-shrewd Mr Watkins was on to something.

"I quite often look through our records and think how fantastic they look," summarised Tennant. "You want to make the record something special. It's not just nothing, the sleeve. I personally think it's as important as the music. You're buying an object, so you want it to be a beautiful object."

## IT ALWAYS COMES AS A SURPRISE

*Introspective's* follow-up in 1990, entitled *Behaviour*, saw a return to form in terms of minimal design, if not sound. White space was back, making a perfect complement to some of the album's sombre lyrical themes. The flowers in the cover photographs may seem to reference mortality but later sleeve booklet notes surprisingly reveal the intention was quite otherwise, according to Neil Tennant. "We had this idea with the roses because we'd been to Liza Minnelli's apartment in New York," he said. "She had this

fantastic photograph, I think by Richard Avedon, of Judy Garland as a tramp holding a bunch of red roses. So we just nicked the idea." In contrast to the album's whiteness, hidden away inside *Behaviour's* original vinyl release was a wonderfully indulgent exercise in design decadence and detail – a sleeve lined in deep rose red.

In 1991, *Was It Worth It?* was released. By this point, Tennant and Lowe had grown tired of appearing on their sleeves, so this single instead featured them as dolls, handmade by a fan in Japan. "We thought they were really fantastic and we said at the time that they'd make a great sleeve. They seemed to capture something about us. All the drawings they do of you in Japan always present you in this same strange way, with big eyes, and we've always liked that." The caricatures showed the duo with bunches of flowers, an homage to the photographs used on the sleeve of *Behaviour* the previous year.

## WE CAME FROM OUTER SPACE

For the two singles that trailed the 1993 album *Very*, Pet Shop Boys were transformed in a couple of other-worldly ways. For *Can You Forgive Her?* they wore orange suits with matching striped cone hats. For the follow-up single, *Go West*, they appeared in blue and yellow uniforms with matching dome helmets. In 1993, with the pop chart saturated with Britpop mundanity, none of their looks could exactly be considered typical attire.

For the packaging of *Go West* these images were reproduced in red, white and blue and presented in a brash promotional style, the kind of thing commonly associated with US presidential campaigns. It was a bold statement that was playfully extended to the promotional materials for the single, which included campaign badges and stickers.

In a move that likely helped it on its way, the 1988 chart-topping hit *Heart* was supplied in two alternate versions, one with a neatly-dad Tennant and the other with a rainproof Lowe



Right: *Introspective's* neon stripes were rearranged in multiple ways across different formats, editions and mix versions. Inside were portraits of Neil and Chris cuddling a small and obliging dog

Pet Shop Boys, annually.





PROSPECTIVE/PET SHOP BOYS



Behaviour.



Being Boring.



The postage-stamp portrait theme was artfully undermined by *Was It Worth It?*'s pair of PSB dolls, an on-tour present from a Japanese fan. Tennant also liked the "Christmassy" colours



"I quite often look through our records and think how fantastic they look. You want to make the record something special. It's not just nothing, the sleeve. I personally think it's as important as the music. You're buying an object, so you want it to be a beautiful object" **NEIL TENNANT**



Vote Tennant and Lowe: the all-American imagery for *Go West*'s cover and promo material suited the song's subject, its Village People origins and the presence of a Broadway-style choir









## DECADENCE

The album *Very* was an extravagant affair in every respect – the costumes, promotional videos, packaging and live presentation all pushed creative boundaries in 1993. For the

album's sleeve design, the duo had grown tired of the standard CD format and wanted to completely rethink the packaging concept. "We thought it was pathetic that, because of CDs, record design has just become a booklet behind a piece of transparent plastic," they commented.

The duo gave Daniel Weil from Pentagram the audacious task of coming up with something unique. He delivered about a dozen viable concepts, two of which were chosen – one for initial quantities of the standard CD and another for *Very Relentless*, the limited edition double-pack. Mark Farrow worked with Daniel Weil's textural packaging to devise some pop art-style graphics for the album, mainly

consisting of the duo wearing their *Go West* costumes.

These images also featured on a limited edition of 500 highly collectible

*Relentless* DJ promo sets, pressed onto magenta, cyan and yellow vinyl with matching outer sleeves.

## SOMEBODY ELSE'S BUSINESS

In 2002, Pet Shop Boys once again did something unexpected: for the first time in their career, they went to a different design company to work on the sleeve graphics for their next album, *Release*. Visionaire in the USA came up with a design solution

that built on Tennant and Lowe's continuing desire to explore imaginative alternatives to the normal CD package. The case's text was printed in white onto a solid white case, which was then enclosed within a foiled slipcase – an elegant end result that went on to be nominated for a Grammy award. In the UK, four different coloured variants were available, each featuring a different debossed image of a single flower in bloom. The cover subject was germane to the album's title, which was suggested by photographer and collaborator Wolfgang Tillmans. Some rejected titles for the album included *Whatever*, *Lovely*, *Tragic*, *Transition*, *Touché*, *Position* and *Home*.

## WAS THAT WHAT IT WAS?

In 2003, Pet Shop Boys released *Miracles*, a single that trailed the release of their *PopArt* greatest hits collection. The album cover's bold typographic design referenced a couple of iconic moments in Pet Shop Boys design history – Chris Lowe's Issey Miyake sunglasses from *Suburbia*, and orange stripes lifted from the pointy hats of *Can You Forgive Her?*

Despite reaching the Top 10 in the UK singles chart, *Miracles* is an often-overlooked track that's rarely played live. It's a shame, as the song and its sleeve design are both high points for the duo. Essentially a love song, *Miracles'* lyrics refer to the wonders of nature, and this is what inspired Farrow's idea to elegantly combine silhouettes of Tennant and Lowe with images of cherry blossom.

"We really wanted the sleeve to be perfumed, as the promo versions had been, but by the time we had printed blossom onto every single surface inside and out, die-cut silhouettes of Neil and Chris into the cover and pressed the record on white vinyl, EMI finally applied the brakes," Mark Farrow reported philosophically. "Well, if you don't ask, you don't get..."

## THAT'S MY IMPRESSION

In 2009, Pet Shop Boys released one of their most 'poppy' albums to date, entitled *Yes*. In some ways, this album's sleeve may appear to reference that of their debut album, *Please*. Both rely heavily on squares, but on this occasion, inspired by Gerhard Richter's 4900 art exhibition, colour was

introduced and the concept was turned on its side. "Although the Richter paintings look stunning on a gallery wall, as an idea for a CD cover it felt a little tired and we felt we had 'been there'," said Farrow.

The 'square' theme was also extended and adapted for use on the album's singles, and was imaginatively brought to life by acclaimed creative director and set designer Es Devlin for the supporting *Pandemonium* live tour. During these performances, everyone on stage at various points wore coloured cubes as headgear or had them incorporated into the various costumes. On top of that, Chris Lowe's keyboard set-up strongly resembled a luminescent version of a Richter artwork.

For Pet Shop Boys' most recent album, *Super*, released in 2016, the coloured squares of *Yes* were upstaged by circles, and the minimalism advanced further with the exclusion of even a band name on the packaging. A wider palette of vibrant colours was implemented across the various formats for CD, vinyl and streaming services.

"In our initial conversations with Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe they described the album as being brash, pop and perhaps a little 'unhinged'," Farrow Design's Gary Stilwell explained in an interview with *Creative Review* magazine. "They also suggested a few titles, and we all agreed that *Super* was the strongest."

"The simple brief was to encapsulate all these reference points in a single image. We quickly decided the cover should not be photographic and began to investigate bold graphic patterns and typography. Gradually, we reduced and refined these until we were left with a single fluorescent circle that, to us, conveyed the idea of *Super*."

Pet Shop Boys are now rumoured to be hard at work on their 14th studio album and whilst we know nothing about what's around the corner, it's probably safe to assume that it will have a one-word title and a compelling sleeve design. 35 years into their career they continue to surprise and delight a global fan base, and even if their next step is unknown, it's highly likely that we'll never have reason to accuse them of ever being boring. ■





# CLASSIC POP

## FUTURE SHOCK

Phil Dent captures Pet Shop Boys in futuristic apparel live onstage in 1998. Despite the noticeable lack of material released that year, it was a characteristically colourful period. Not only did the duo enjoy a four-concert sojourn to Russia, but they also composed a song – *Screaming* – for Gus Van Sant's big screen *Psycho* remake, commenced work on a stage musical with Jonathan Harvey, duetted with visual artist and friend Sam Taylor-Wood on Serge Gainsbourg's unashamedly provocative *Je t'aime... moi non plus*... and Neil found time to curate an album of Noël Coward songs.





# CLASSIC POP

## STAGE STRUCK

It took a number of years and much hard work to finally come to fruition, but just as their stubborn early manifesto had proudly suggested, the Pet Shop Boys live experience was to be like no other. Early shows opened the floodgates for a surge of collaborative creativity that introduced their now feted and highly-elaborate wardrobes, grand, often surrealist themes, and gigantic theatrical ambition.





# CLASSIC POP

## STARS COLLIDE

Dusty Springfield shared a unique chemistry with Neil Tennant onstage at the British Rock Industry Awards (now the BRITS) in February 1988, albeit miming to their recent hit *What Have I Done To Deserve This?* Tennant and Lowe had helped their Sixties soul-singing heroine back into the saddle, helping take her from motel recluse to a new (electronic) lease of life. Her PSB-helmed return to form, *Reputation*, was soon to follow...





# CLASSIC POP

## H E A V E N S E N T

It isn't often that we see the Verve presented in relaxed mode, though backstage held an air of theatre. Here, Mick Hutson captures the duo in their dressing room in 2001. It was a fertile year: the musical *Closer To Heaven* came to the London stage, with its companion album released later; their first six albums got the deluxe reissue treatment; and they collaborated with Peter Rauhofer — as The Collaboration — for a cover of Raze's house classic *Break 4 Love*.



# CLASSIC POP

## FLYING COLOURS

Chris Lowe in meshed metallic helmet, bathed in fluorescent green light, bringing the Bestival weekend festival to a dramatic close in 2017. The twosome hijacked the festival's 'colour' theme to concoct a visually innovative, truly psychedelic spectacular that exhibited lasers, bubbles, Rubik's cubes, smiley faces, hologram jackets and more. The set took in highlights from across their career, from the hits to some lesser-spun cult classics. "You are amazing!" Tennant told the audience, who happily revealed that the feeling was mutual.





A full-page photograph of Neil Tennant of the Pet Shop Boys performing on stage. He is wearing a black jacket with long, thin, metallic-looking fringes that radiate outwards, giving him a sea anemone-like appearance. He is holding a microphone to his mouth and singing. The background is dark blue with some stage lights visible.

# CLASSIC POP

## AROUND THE WORLD

Neil Tennant, costumed as a futuristic jet-black sea anemone, adopts a fiery pose for snapper David Wolff-Patrick at Le Grand Rex on June 11, 2013 in Paris, while on the Electric tour. With creative visionary Es Delvin in the director's chair, Tennant and Lowe fashioned an elaborate, pixelated plateau of chrome minotaurs, space age circuitry, giant technicolour screens and cybernetic love, and took it on a mammoth world tour to the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Australia.




ARCHIVE  
INTERVIEW

# NEIL TENNANT

IN 2009 PET SHOP BOYS WERE HONOURED WITH THE LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD AT THE BRITS, CLOSING THE SHOW WITH A MEGAMIX THAT TOOK IN EVERYTHING FROM *GO WEST* TO *BEING BORING*, WITH GUESTS LADY GAGA AND BRANDON FLOWERS. TAKING A TEA BREAK DURING REHEARSALS, NEIL TENNANT REMINISCED WITH *RECORD COLLECTOR* MAGAZINE ABOUT A QUARTER-CENTURY CRAMMED WITH RECORDS, REMIXES AND COLLABORATIONS...

IAN PEEL



Neil on the microphone at a concert at the Jackie Gleason Theatre in Miami Beach, Florida in October 2006 on the Fundamental tour







Tennant and Lowe together in rehearsal for their spectacular and wildly-received career-summarising set at the 2009 BRIT Awards

"AT SOME POINT CDS CAME ALONG AND I THREW ALL MY ALBUMS AWAY. THE ONE THING I DID KEEP WAS MY EIGHTIES 12"S. I'VE GOT A FEW HUNDRED BECAUSE I THOUGHT THESE THINGS WERE IRREPLACEABLE"



**W**ith the Pet Shop Boys catalogue taking in everything from electro to orchestral, most people would assume you must have an amazing record collection...

I'm not really a record collector, but I am in a way. When I lived in my studio flat on the Kings Road, when I was working for *Smash Hits*, it was completely full of records. You couldn't move for records, because of course I lived in the world, in those days, of free records – which is a great thing because you listen to things you wouldn't otherwise hear. At some point CDs came along and I threw all of the albums away. Obviously I kept a few odd ones, like the copy of *Futuristic Dragon* that Marc Bolan gave me, because I'd got him to sign it. The one thing I did keep was my Eighties 12"s. I've got loads, a few hundred, because I thought those things were irreplaceable.

I love the dance mixes, the Extended Mixes, that people did in the eighties. Prince did some amazing

ones, but even Culture Club and people like that. The 12" of *Victims*, or *Time (Clock Of The Heart)*, or *Do You Really Want to Hurt Me?*, or *War* – the 12" of *War* was really good. My friend, the writer Jon Savage, just sent me a CD compilation of dub mixes, and I was listening to that this morning. It's got the Dub Box mix of *Rock The Box* by Sylvester, the dub of *Welcome To Techno City* by Cybertronic, which is the most amazing record, *Situation* by Yazoo... all of those kind of things. I've also got a fantastic Bobby O Eighties collection. So I don't still collect but I've kept my collection, and occasionally I like to dig them out.

**That's the one thing I'll spend money on, Eighties 12"s, and I've started a compilation CD series called *The Art Of The 12"*.**

Well, you know, they're really worth having. It's good there are people bringing them out on compilations these days. We occasionally get requests to be included on them.

**I went to my local record shop to buy *West End Girls* because I thought "this is a song that has to be bought on 12"". They'd sold out so I went for the 10" instead that came in a circular sleeve...**

That one was only on sale for a week. In those days there weren't so many rules about formats, which was great. Parlophone did a really good job: every week





The BRITs once more, and Brandon Flowers – who praised Tennant for his execution of “that devilish right eyebrow raise” – joins in for *It’s A Sin*

Dave M. Benett/Getty Images

they were putting out a new format to give it an extra shove up the charts. *West End Girls* went through a load of different formats, and so did *Love Comes Quickly*, which had a weird 10” in just a plastic bag with a poster. It’s actually not designed. We weren’t happy about it at the time. But we were all in a panic because it had charted low.

We’re going to use the 10” mix of *West End Girls* at some point. I don’t think we put it on *Further Listening 1984-1986* [Please’s accompanying album when it was re-released in 2001] and we dug it out recently and I thought “Oh God, did we not put that on *Further Listening*?” because I love it. We put our 12” mix on there but the 10” was done by Stephen Hague. I like that extra verse we put in there... “We can work something out” and all that stuff.

There’s this other legendary thing, of course, which is “was there a picture disc of *West End Girls*?” The truth is that one was designed, but it was never actually made. But it did have a catalogue number. The rarest one now, though, is *The Truck Driver And His Mate* 12” with the two penises. We did – as a joke – a dance 12” of a song before, in the mid-Nineties, with a limp penis on the cover. And then when we did the B-side, *The Truck Driver And His Mate*, we had the bright idea of doing the truck driver, penis number one, and his mate, penis number two. And that’s just very silly! It’s a really good track, actually. It fitted in with the Britpop thing and EMI wanted to do 12”s for indie clubs. The funny thing was that we thought the record company would be horrified, but Atlantic in America wanted to release it commercially and we prudish Brits said no... so that served us right!

### What was your role on Rufus Wainwright’s album *Release The Stars* in 2007?

I was the executive producer and what that meant was Rufus sent me the demos, and then he did a lot



The 1985 10” mix of *West End Girls*: “We’re going to use it at some point,” said Neil

# WE WERE NEVER BEING BORING

NEIL’S EARLY DAYS AS A GUITAR-STRUMMING TROUBADOUR

This interview was originally published by *Record Collector* magazine in 2009, with Neil being interviewed by *Classic Pop*’s Ian Peel. Ian also spoke with Neil when what is possibly the rarest and most legendary Pet Shop Boys-related recording was unearthed: a BBC session tape recorded by his first-ever band. And it couldn’t have sounded more different to the music he has become famous for...

“My first group Dust was a four-piece folk group, consisting of two boys and two girls, inspired by The Incredible String Band,” Neil explained. “I and the other guy played acoustic guitars. The girls sang and I also sang. Early in 1971, when I was 16, we recorded a session of five songs for BBC Radio Newcastle which was broadcast, one song per day, on their breakfast show. Four of the five were written by me. The tape was thought to be lost until recently when a friend was clearing out his father’s house

and discovered it. Dust broke up in early 1972 because I wanted to go pop/rock and the other guy wanted to stay folk. He died in 1989, and the Pet Shop Boys’ song *Being Boring* is about him.”

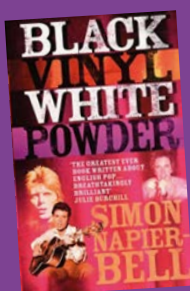


of recording in Brooklyn, and I listened to what he’d done and then made comments which he either listened to or ignored, as appropriate. Then, when he was recording in Berlin, we were on tour but I spent a week in Berlin and ended up playing on some of the tracks. He then left Berlin for a few days to go to the opera in South Germany and that’s when I played the synth on the front of one track – and, on *Do I Disappoint You?*, I played a sample of a didgeridoo, amongst other things. In fact, that whole album starts with my didgeridoo! I also did the backing vocals on the song *I’m Not Ready For Love*, which I really like. It’s my favourite track on the album.



# WE WERE NEVER BEING BORED

DROP THE ROCK: CHRIS LOWE'S STATEMENT OF MUSICAL INTENT



"The mid-Eighties had its usual share of newcomers searching for the public's attention," recounts Simon Napier-Bell in his excellent memoir of the British pop scene, *Black Vinyl White Powder*, "but no one did it more modestly and with better music than the Pet Shop Boys."

This good taste and modesty was perfectly summed up – at the outset – by Chris Lowe. While he's often seen as the silent partner of the duo, a sample of Chris being interviewed by US TV that was used in their classic track *Paninaro* has become the band's (and their fans') default manifesto. The interview itself showed up on YouTube recently, a 1986 news report about "the British pop invasion of America" by investigative reporter John Stossel on a show called *20/20*. Chris' comment? "I don't like country and western. I don't like rock music. I don't like rockabilly, rock'n'roll in particular. I don't like much, really, do I? But what I do like, I love passionately."



## Would you like to do more work like that?

With Rufus Wainwright, I was someone for him to bounce off, that's all. It is quite interesting doing that. As for more, it would have to be the right project. If it was a real production thing I would want it to be the two of us, it would be me and Chris.

## The biggest Pet Shop Boys productions for me have always been with Trevor Horn, like *The Sodom And Gomorrah Show* from 2006's *Fundamental*...

That track is the reason we went to Trevor Horn to produce that album. It was one of those songs where I had the idea for the title first, *The Sodom*



Award-winner Neil and Lady Gaga at the BRITS. "It was a dream come true," gushed Gaga. "And my first awards show. You popped my cherry!"

Brian Kasic/Getty Images

And *Gomorrah Show*. It's funny because the record company assumed it was something to do with gay sex or something, but actually it was a war on terror kind of thing. It was about the way the war on terror issues got reported as "exciting" news. Everything was reported like that, like an exciting panic. And that's filtered right through the media now. The recent weather has been reported as one panic after another, but actually it was just February and it snowed! I don't really get it... So the idea of *The Sodom And Gomorrah Show* was a TV show, that's why it's got the silly thing at the start. It's because it's like a TV show where everything is exciting, regardless of the morality or the human issues.

We worked on this track a lot with Trevor and we actually put the demo on iTunes, so you can hear how it started. It could have gone down a slightly corny, Pet Shop Boys-by-numbers, *It's A Sin* sort of thing – which some people would probably like us to do – but we always like to do a variation on that. And so we worked on it a lot. In fact, it was very much influenced by Jacques Lu Cont's Thin White Duke Mix of *Mr Brightside* by The Killers. We had that in the studio, playing it to Trevor – and that's probably why it's got the guitar that comes in – and Trevor changed the chords in the verses, in a very Trevor way.

## When you're in the studio like that, how much will you surrender to a producer?

We'll surrender a lot. Because a producer has got to be someone you trust. If there is an occasion where you get a producer you don't trust, the relationship will fall apart or we'll probably storm out of the studio or something. Although I can't actually think of an





Neil with the BBC Concert Orchestra for *Battleship Potemkin*, 2004: "We've always had a fascination with the orchestral thing"

Hayley Madden/Redferns/Getty Images

instance of that happening. So having employed the producer to do the job, to make the record better – which is why we want a producer – we take note of what they say. We might then of course go round in a full circle a bit, and go back towards the direction that we came from, but that process will normally have improved the whole thing anyway.

For instance, on the *Fundamental* album there's a song called *Lunar Park* and there's a mix, which I just put on our website finally, where at the end of it we said to Trevor, "Well, we just need to get Axl Rose to sing on this!" because it had gone so rock. Although now on reflection I actually think that's the best mix of the song. But we took it slightly more stripped back, in the original electronic direction.

**Have you ever thought about stripping it back even further, to piano/vocal renditions of classic Pet Shop Boys songs?**

Not quite that but, when we did a Barfly gig for Warchild a few years ago, we did it with me and Chris and a laptop. And Chris had a keyboard, in fact I had a keyboard, too. And it was very stripped back. We actually rearranged all the songs. I think we did a great version of *Nervously* from *Behaviour* where we changed it completely. All of them we changed, actually. And the *It's A Sin* one we put on that *Popjustice* compilation (2006's *PopJustice: 100% Solid Pop Music*).

As to us doing it with a piano, I've always had this vision of us in our seventies doing a 'season', rather like those old Jazz On The Park concerts, with Chris playing piano and me sitting on a stool, with a glass of white wine. And we'll talk through the songs a bit, and then play them on piano! Although to be fair to the songs, some of them were, but most of them weren't really written to be performed like that.

"I'VE ALWAYS HAD THIS VISION OF US IN OUR SEVENTIES DOING A 'SEASON' WITH CHRIS PLAYING PIANO AND ME SITTING ON A STOOL WITH A GLASS OF WHITE WINE, AND WE'LL TALK THROUGH THE SONGS A BIT"

There was also an Australian revue at the Edinburgh festival called *Seriously*, and they performed our songs with a string quartet and a pianist. It was really beautiful, it was done as if it was Stephen Sondheim. And we've done orchestral a lot, of course. Ever since the second album with *It Couldn't Happen Here*, where we got Angelo Badalamenti to arrange it, we've always had a fascination with the orchestral thing.

**On the orchestral thing, the first time I saw you perform with an orchestra was at Trevor's concert for The Prince's Trust in 2004...**

That was great! Actually that performance of *Left To My Own Devices* is absolutely bloody brilliant. It was totally, 100% what it was meant to be. And we did that again for our Concrete thing (2006's concert at the Mermaid Theatre for Radio 2 with the BBC Concert Orchestra). But Trevor's whole thing was a bit bigger, it was really great. Coming on stage to that intro was just fantastic. Also when Frankie did *Two Tribes* at that concert it was verging on better than the record. I don't

know what happened to that project, Frankie Mk2 or 3 or whatever it was called, but that kid [Ryan Molloy] was a great singer. He did very, very well.

The BBC Concert Orchestra is so great. We've worked with them three times. They did *Battleship Potemkin* with us last year at The Barbican, we did the Concrete concert with them, and we've written a one-minute score for them (for BBC Radio 3's *Music And Chance*). For the first time ever we've written this one-minute orchestral score, us and 11 other composers, including Anne Dudley. They chose the order by chance, time and chance, and they gave you the last eight bars of the previous minute and then they stick all the pieces together and perform it. ■









# TOP 40 ESSENTIAL POT POT SINGLES SINGLES

NEIL TENNANT AND CHRIS LOWE HAVE  
A KNACK OF COATING THE BITTEREST PILLS,  
THE MOST LITERATE IDEAS AND THE SWEETEST  
OF LYRICAL TREATS IN RADIO-FRIENDLY CANDY.  
CLASSIC POP PIGS OUT ON FORTY OF THEIR  
VERY BEST, FROM 1985 TO 2016...

IAN WADE

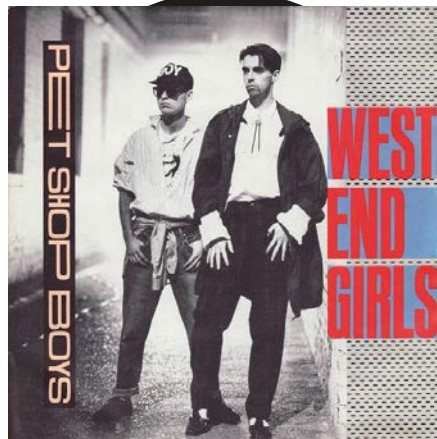




**P**et Shop Boys are one of pop's most successful duos of all time – national treasures, even – and have an enviable back catalogue from over 35 years of hitmaking, from *West End Girls* through to 2016's *Undertow*, via four UK No. 1s and 13 Top 10 studio albums. We have no less than 56 singles complete with their B-sides to consider – many of those flips are worthy of top-billing themselves and could fill a Top 40 alone – plus tracks from their 13 (famously one word titled) studio albums, eight compilations and two live sets. For our chart, however, we have decided to focus on singles (with a couple of cheeky exceptions) and have selected them chronologically, as at least half of them would be strong contenders for PSB's best.

Neil Tennant came up with the term 'imperial phase' to describe an artist's commercial and creative peak. He was then referring to the period from the release of album *Please* in 1986 to *Domino Dancing* in late 1988, but in reality, the career of Pet Shop Boys is littered with such phases. If the singles that stormed the top of the charts became instant fan favourites, others have grown in stature over the years, and the ones that caused alarm bells to ring when they failed to replicate earlier successes often become the most well-loved. The duo have also been adept at covering other people's music too, such as U2, Elvis Presley, Coldplay, Madness and "the English group Blur".

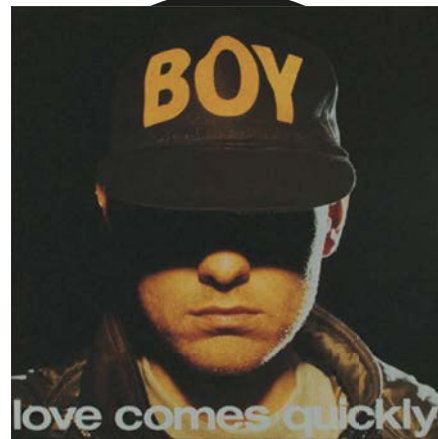
So sit back, and let us regale you in songs about Oscar Wilde, Tony Blair, Che Guevara (and Debussy to a disco beat), the Gulf conflicts, the things Chris Lowe hates, Zelda Fitzgerald, youth cults (both Italian and French), Madonna, Marx and madeines. These are tunes that marry high art and low life, glamour with grime, the has-beens and the have-nots, the intelligentsia and the inbred. There are tales of kept women, dejected husbands, jealous lovers, pompous rock stars, closet cases and New York City boys, with musical references and nods to Desireless, Purcell, Exposé, Take That, Village People, Michael Nyman, Grandmaster Flash, and Pachelbel. There are walk-ons from Johnny Marr, Dusty Springfield, Robbie Williams, Ian McKellen, Example, Kylie, David Bowie and Liza Minelli; there's the producers too, some of the finest knob-twiddlers such as Stephen Hague, Stuart Price, Xenomania, David Morales and Trevor Horn, who have all laid their hands on a PSB production. And all this output is invariably housed in impeccably designed sleeves with a creative aesthetic that has been a constant presence. Consistently compelling, endlessly inventive and never boring, they were, and still continue to be, one of the very finest things to have



40

**WEST END GIRLS**  
RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1984/5**

Originally produced by Bobby O and released in '84 on the Bobcat label, *West End Girls* became a US club hit and made small inroads across Europe. After Neil and Chris signed with Parlophone, the Stephen Hague version became an international No. 1 single in early 1986. With influences ranging from Grandmaster Flash to TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*, it was voted Best Single at the 1987 Brits and Best International Hit at the Ivor Novellos. Any fans planning to make a pilgrimage to the Dive Bar will be sad to learn it's now a Chinese restaurant.



39

**LOVE COMES QUICKLY**  
RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1986**

*Love Comes Quickly* detailed how you can give up hope of ever finding love and then, suddenly, it finds you. Making only No. 19, it caused a bit of one-hit-wonder worry, yet it's one of PSB's favourite tunes. The sleeve, with Chris in a BOY cap, was later admitted by Neil to being the band's 'coming out' moment; "In the 1980s, we didn't say we were gay. We had a big teen following and I've always thought it more exciting when the sexuality thing is all mysterious... but that BOY cap, I thought 'That's incredibly gay! We're OUT!'"



38

**OPPORTUNITIES (LET'S MAKE LOTS OF MONEY)**  
RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1985/6**

Another early single that had failed to ignite the upper reaches of the charts, *Opportunities* was given a welcome reboot when Stephen Hague re-recorded it with a new vocal from Neil. The song was seen as a celebration of Thatcherism, but a closer look at the lyrics suggests that all the claims made will result in no one making any money at all. Thus began the 'ironic' tag that's been dogging the duo ever since. A Top 11 hit in the UK, it went one better in the US.



37

**IN THE NIGHT**  
RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1985**

The Zazous were a subculture in France during the German occupation in WWII. Distrusted by both the Nazis and French Resistance, they were only interested in clothes and music. Neil had read about them in David Pryce-Jones' book *Paris In The Third Reich*, and questions whether their apathy essentially led to cooperation with the enemy. Issued only as the B-side to the first release of *Opportunities* – and as a promo in Germany – *In The Night* enjoyed a decade-long spell from 1987 on as the theme tune to the BBC's *The Clothes Show*.



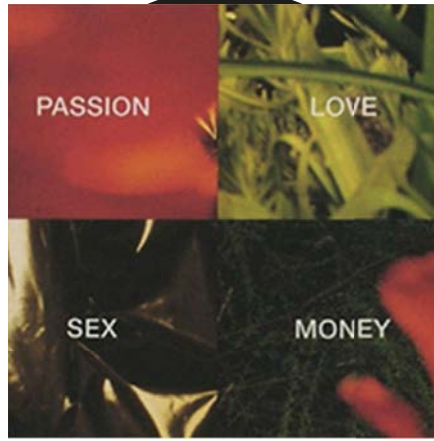


36

### SUBURBIA

RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1986**

The fourth PSB single took inspiration from unrest in Brixton and also Penelope Spheeris' 1984 film *Suburbia*. Re-recorded from the *Please* version, doofed up with the addition of snarling dogs, *Suburbia* reached No. 8, and is best experienced in its Full Horror extended version. The duo filmed some of the video in LA with director Eric Watson when they were over for a MTV Awards do. It was released across a variety of formats, including a double-pack seven inch, and the B-side *Paninaro* would take on a life of its own...



35

### PANINARO

RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1986**

While touring Italy promoting *West End Girls*, Chris noticed a cult-like group of kids known as the paninari, who wore designer clothes while eating sandwiches and listening to early Eighties disco. Originally released as part of the *Suburbia* package, this rare Chris vocal item featured on *Disco* but was only released as a proper single in Italy. A re-recording, *Paninaro '95*, was released ahead of the B-sides compilation *Alternative* (which featured the original), with updated lyrics, notably shifting the line "You are my lover" to the past tense.



34

### IT'S A SIN

RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1987**

And so began the duo's 'imperial phase'. *It's A Sin*, a song about Neil's Tennant's Catholic education at St Cuthbert's High School in Newcastle upon Tyne, had been demoed as far back as 1984 as part of their sessions with Bobby O. It became the first single of the then-some-months-off second album *Actually*, and their second UK No. 1 in July 1987. It was also the best-selling single across Europe that year, and reached No. 9 in the US. The video, featuring Neil being imprisoned by Chris, was the first of several hook-ups with Derek Jarman.

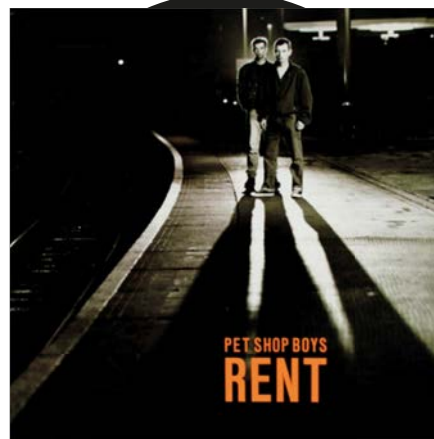


33

### WHAT HAVE I DONE TO DESERVE THIS?

RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1987**

Dusty Springfield had been an enormous star in the Sixties but had gone into a semi-reclusive state after she left the UK for the US in 1974. She had become all but forgotten until Neil – who counts 1969's *Dusty In Memphis* as one of his favourite albums – began a campaign to reel her in. The song raced to No.2, giving Dusty her biggest hit in decades. Neil and Chris would work with her again on *Nothing Has Been Proved* and also help out with her comeback album, 1990's *Reputation*.

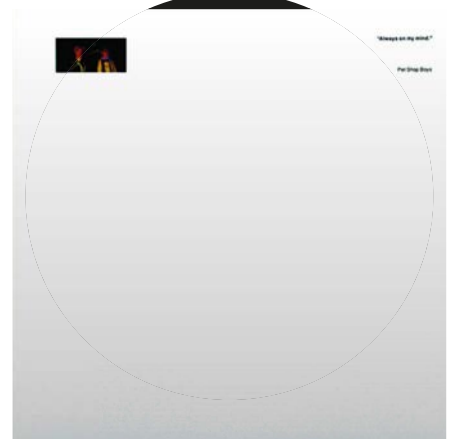


32

### RENT

RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1987**

*Rent* was not, in fact, a topical essay about a relationship with a 'kept man' or rent boy, a fascination with the tabloids at the time. "I've always imagined it's about a kept woman," Neil mused in the *Actually* sleeve notes. "I vaguely thought of one of the Kennedys, for some reason, and imagined that this politician keeps this woman in a smart flat in Manhattan, and he's still got this family, and the two of them have some sort of relationship and they do love each other, but it's all kind of secret." It was a No. 8 hit in October '87.



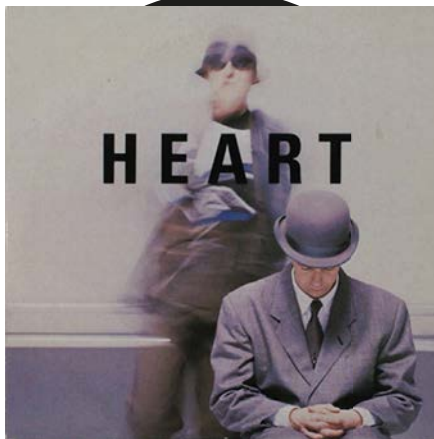
31

### ALWAYS ON MY MIND

RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1987**

To celebrate a decade since Elvis died, ITV decided to cobble together a show called *Love Me Tender* with covers sung by the likes of Meat Loaf, Kim Wilde and Boy George. The PSB performance of Willie Nelson's *Always On My Mind* was deemed so good that they decided to release it. It became 1987's Christmas No. 1 – keeping The Pogues' *Fairytale Of New York* off the top – and was accompanied by a video featuring clips from their rum feature film *It Couldn't Happen Here*, with Joss Ackland singing along in the back of a taxi.





30

**HEART**RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1988**

The story of Pet Shop Boys' fourth No. 1 is one of many 'nearlys'. It stems back to the early sessions for *Please*, when the duo wrote it with Madonna or Hi-NRG lungsmith Hazell Dean in mind; it turned out to be the wrong tempo to be used in the film *Inner Space*; and it was called *Heartbeat*, until Culture Club sticksman Jon Moss launched a new band of the same name. The vocal refrain is made up from vocals by Neil, Pavarotti and Wendy Smith of Prefab Sprout. While the duo aren't too keen on the song, it's become a big fan favourite.



29

**DOMINO DANCING**RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1988**

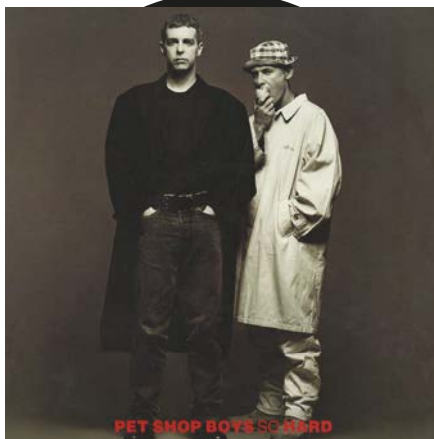
Inspired by Latin pop and French chanteuse Desireless' *Elle Est Comme Les Étoiles*, *Domino Dancing* was helmed by Exposé producer Lewis A Martinée. Neil and Chris were expecting the same level of success they'd been enjoying, and were a bit disappointed. Tennant remembers: "It entered the charts at No. 9 and I thought, 'that's that, then, it's all over'. I knew that our imperial phase of No. 1 hits was over." It fared better when Swedish tribute turns West End Girls took their version to No. 3 on the Swedish charts in 2005.



28

**LEFT TO MY OWN DEVICES**RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1988**

A soup-to-nuts production job by Trevor Horn, *Left To My Own Devices* is the tale of someone spending a day alone and indulging in occasional flights of fancy. Full of quotable lines, it's Pet Shop Boys in excelsis, combining the mundane with the extravagant. Neil's mum was apparently upset when she heard it, thinking that the lines "I was a lonely boy" suggested that he'd had a sad upbringing. Bonus pub quiz-type fact: the 'party animal' is rumoured to be writer/cultural historian Jon Savage. It was a No. 4 hit that November.



27

**SO HARD**RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1990**

The first single from *Behaviour* was recorded with a selection of old technology, but David Morales had a tinker and turned it towards the dancefloor. In fact, at a party in LA, Frankie Knuckles played a mix of it that caused Neil to ask Chris "Why don't we make records like this?", to which Chris replied, "Neil... it is us." Keen-eared listeners may detect a sample from a 'special interest' film where the title is moaned by one of the actors, though it was actually nabbed from Modern Rocketry's 1987 track *Deeper And Deeper*.

At a party, Frankie Knuckles played a mix of *So Hard* that caused Neil to ask Chris, "Why don't we make records like this?", to which Chris replied, "Neil... it is us"



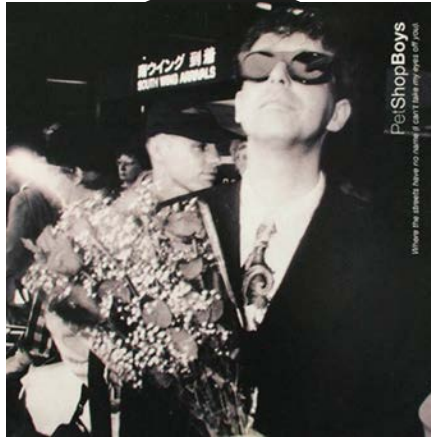
26

**BEING BORING**RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1990**

Now considered one of the duo's greatest songs, *Being Boring* managed only a measly No. 20, although this was possibly down to Bruce Weber's video, which featured some gents in the nip. The title was taken from the Zelda Fitzgerald quote "she refused to be bored chiefly because she wasn't boring", and is about a childhood pal of Neil's: the two had moved to London together, but the friend had eventually succumbed to AIDS. George Michael selected it as one of his Desert Island Discs in 2007, and it's one of Axl Rose's favourites too.



Having tackled Elvis and de-pomped U2, it was hard to imagine how Neil and Chris could top those covers and out-gay the Village People – but Go West managed it



25

### HOW CAN YOU EXPECT TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY?/ WHERE THE STREETS HAVE NO NAME (I CAN'T TAKE MY EYES OFF YOU)

RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1991**

A snarl at the hypocrisy of megastars such as Bono, Phil Collins, Sting etc, although Neil has never admitted to it being about anyone in particular. It was released as a double A-side, cut-and-shutting U2's *Where The Streets Have No Name* with *Can't Take My Eyes Off You*, the Andy Williams fave, although one suspects Neil and Chris were referencing the Boys Town Gang's cover.



24

### JEALOUSY

RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1991**

Chris wrote the music to what was first called *Dead Of Night* on the piano at his parents' house in Blackpool in 1982, and Neil's lyrics turned out to actually be about Chris – although other interpretations can be drawn from Neil's reciting of Iago's lines to Othello on the 12-inch version, as the hero succumbs to the jealousy that will be his downfall. A version has been pencilled in for each of their albums with a view to getting Ennio Morricone to score it, but he never got back to them, so Harold Faltermeyer did the honours instead.



23

### DJ CULTURE

RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1991**

A song ostensibly about the 1991 Gulf War in Iraq and how the way George Bush and the media spoke about it as if it were WW2, and also about how people would sooner pretend rather than authentically experience life, or create themselves out of nothing; with the saturation of media and opinion, there are no longer genuine responses, only fake ones which increasingly drown out reality. Recorded with Brothers In Rhythm and released as a new track to accompany the hits on *Discography*, it's one of the duo's favourite songs.



22

### CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?

RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1993**

A tale about a young man who can't accept his own gayness, and is being teased by his girlfriend about how 'girly' he is and his memories of love for a school chum. The generalisation "you dance to disco and you don't like rock" was intended as irony, but further reiterated the potential homosexuality of the subject, playing on stereotypical notions. The song was written in 6/8, making the music sound 'sneaky', as Neil suggested. With a video of the pair in conical hats, it kicked off the *Very* campaign, reaching No. 7 in June 1993.



21

### GO WEST

RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1993**

Having tackled Elvis and de-pomped U2, it was hard to imagine how Neil and Chris could top those covers and also out-gay the Village People original, but they managed it. They'd performed it in 1992 at the Hacienda for an AIDS benefit; now they threw in a new verse, amplified the musical nods to Pachelbel's Canon and the Soviet national anthem, and added an all-male Broadway choir to update the carefree feeling of the original into something much more intense, doof and post-AIDS. It now has an interesting afterlife as a terrace chant.



New York City Boy could be regarded as a tribute to The Village People. Full of nods to disco bangers such as *McArthur Park*, the video was even filmed at Studio 54



20

**LIBERATION**RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1994**

Very was considered to be the album where Pet Shop Boys 'came out', and it was around this time that Neil confirmed he was gay in an interview with *Attitude* magazine. In truth, you'd have to have been fairly thick not to have noticed via telling tracks such as *I Wouldn't Normally Do This Sort Of Thing*, as well as this. Neil plays an ex-cynic who thought falling in love would end up as a series of compromises, but is proved wrong by how liberating it is. The computer-generated video was also used to demonstrate IMAX film technology.



19

**BEFORE**RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1996**

The lead single from *Bilingual*, certain lines in *Before* ("a man who loved too much – he ended up inside a prison cell") were believed by fans to be about Oscar Wilde, but the lyrics echo a letter that OJ Simpson wrote before his arrest in which he stated that if he and his late wife Nicole "had a problem, it's because I loved her too much". The single promos came in eye-watering sleeves featuring a flaccid male member (Chris' idea, according to designer Mark Farrow). Neil and Chris have assured fans it didn't belong to either of them.



18

**SE A VIDA É  
(THAT'S THE WAY LIFE IS)**  
RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1996**

Recorded to cheer one of Neil's friends up, *Se A Vida É...* (actually a translation of *If Life Is*) shares a writing credit with Nego Do Barbalho, Wellington Epiderme Negra and Ademario of the group Olodum; their *Estrada Da Paixão* had been a favourite when the duo toured South America, and the melody and arrangement had been lifted by Neil and Chris for this song. The whole *Bilingual* project was a rejection to the then-prevalent Britpop mood, and it worked... *Se A Vida É* became a No. 8 hit.



17

**NEW YORK CITY BOY**  
RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **1999**

*New York City Boy* could be regarded as a tribute to YMCA hitmakers The Village People. There were hopes that they might record the backing vocals; it didn't happen, but Randy Jones, aka The Cowboy, recorded a cover of it in 2006, so the circle is sort-of complete. It was produced by David Morales and was full of nods to disco bangers such as *Native New Yorker* and *McArthur Park*; the video for it was even filmed at Studio 54. It became their first Billboard Dance chart-topper since *Where The Streets Have No Name* eight years earlier.



16

**YOU ONLY TELL ME YOU LOVE  
ME WHEN YOU'RE DRUNK**  
RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **2000**

Originally written for their *Closer To Heaven* musical until the character they had in mind got dropped from rewrites, this is the nearest the duo get to a country song – especially with BJ Cole's pedal steel and Neil's prominent acoustic guitar, which he produces whenever the song is performed live. Neil wearily details his other half's 'performance' with an air of both exasperation and dark humour. The third and final single from *Nightlife*, it was the only one to reach the Top 10.



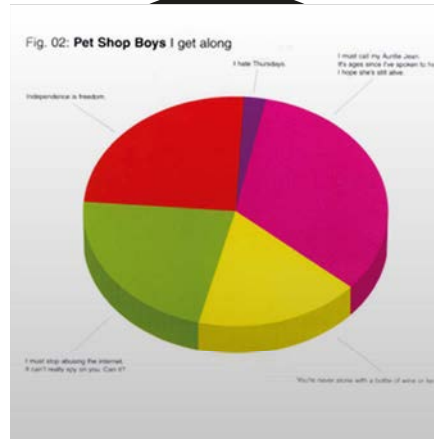


15

# HOME AND DRY

RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **2002**

The 2003 album *Release* saw Neil and Chris depart from their traditional template and embracing pianos and guitars, with seven of the 10 tracks featuring the finger-hurting stringed instrument. Neil admits that the theme of lovers separated by oceans and flights meant *Home And Dry* took on further poignancy after 9/11, although he'd written the lyrics long before. Some suggest that the video – which consisted mainly of some rats enjoying scraps of food in London's Tottenham Court Road tube station – might have held it back a bit.



14

# I GET ALONG

RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **2002**

*I Get Along* starts off unlike any other PSB number, beginning in an almost ersatz Beatles manner, not too dissimilar to the sound of Oasis. While the tradition of 'getting along well without you while patently not' is not unusual in showbiz, the song was revealed by Neil to be about ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair having to fire his close friend and ally Peter Mandelson. Seeing as Pet Shop Boys had been no fans of Britpop, *I Get Along* could be seen as a gentle puncturing of the whole Cool Britannia nonsense that Oasis had been complicit in.



13

# MIRACLES

RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **2003**

One of two new songs that the duo recorded for *PopArt*, *Miracles* was co-written by drum'n'bass type Adam F and featured orchestration by Anne Dudley. Sounding not unlike something out of a musical, the song details that "the jasmine gets stronger" – a nod to a Stephen Sondheim line – and "rain wouldn't dare to fall near you" in the spirit of a besotted lover in the first flush of obsession. The B-side features their cover of My Robot Friend's homage *We're The Pet Shop Boys*, which they went on to record with Robbie Williams for *Rudebox*.



12

# FLAMBOYANT

RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **2004**

The other track recorded for *PopArt*, *Flamboyant* followed as a single in March 2004 reswizzled by *Loneliness* hitmaker Tomcraft, reaching No. 12. It addresses 'an archetype of a celebrity', albeit more fondly than *Shameless* did. As Neil said, "It's about the importance of flamboyant people in our way of life... people like Oscar Wilde and Quentin Crisp, Boy George and Marilyn, Elton John and David Beckham... anyone with a bit of sparkle." The single sleeve is written in Katakana, part of the Japanese writing system.

"It's about the importance of flamboyant people in our way of life... people like Oscar Wilde and Quentin Crisp, Boy George and Marilyn, anyone with a bit of sparkle"



11

# I'M WITH STUPID

RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **2006**

Trevor Horn returns to the PSB orbit to produce this first single from 2006's *Fundamental* album. An update on the old T-shirt slogan, while the lyrics are initially abstract to suggest a love affair going badly, it's actually about Blair's 'special relationship' with George Bush Jr. Especially in regards to the Iraq War, it questions whether Bush and Blair are genuinely stupid, seeing as Bush was supposedly highly educated but tended to play dumb to his electorate. Ah, how 2006 seems so long ago and innocent by comparison to now.



Neil got the idea for the song from an email he received from a friend, who signed off with 'Love, etc.' – which he found to be a bit strange, but rather good as a title



**NUMB**  
RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **2006**

Neil and Chris had come across the Diane Warren-written *Numb* ahead of compiling *PopArt*, but ended up holding on to it for *Fundamental*. Diane, best known for countless Lovely FM classics by Celine Dion, Cher, LeAnn Rimes and Toni Braxton, had originally offered this song about the death of her mother to Aerosmith (they said no); she also pitched Pet Shop Boys another song called *Kisses On The Wind*, but Neil flatly rejected it due to its title. *Numb* made No. 23 in October 2006.



**INTEGRAL**  
RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **2007**

*Fundamental* may not have set the charts alight as previous albums had but many consider it to be one of their best, as well as one of their more political. *Integral* dealt with the government's Identity Cards Act 2006, and referenced Yevgeny Zamyatin's book *We*; it was this issue that made Neil decide to end his support of Tony Blair. Remixed and released as a digital promo ahead of *Disco 4* as their first download-only single, the 'cover' was – rather fittingly – a QR code.



**LOVE ETC.**  
RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **2009**

For their tenth album *Yes*, the Pets joined forces with the production team Xenomania, led by Brian Higgins and Miranda Cooper, who'd been behind hits for Girls Aloud, Saint Etienne and Rachel Stevens. This 'post-lifestyle' anthem didn't sound like anything the duo had put out before, as it was revealed that Xenomania had worked on the backing track before Neil and Chris got involved – luckily they liked it. Neil got the idea from a friend's email, who signed off with 'Love, etc.' which he found to be a bit strange, but rather good as a title.



**IT DOESN'T OFTEN SNOW AT CHRISTMAS**  
RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **2009**

Pet Shop Boys have long had a jolly tradition of sending fan club members a card or CD each Christmas, and they first issued *It Doesn't Often Snow At Christmas* back in 1997. Fans started clamouring for the duo to release it, and they eventually conceded with an EP called *Christmas* in 2009. Neil's anti-Bing lyrics resonate much better with the real, slightly damper, UK festive experience – "Christmas is not all it's cracked up to be/ Families fighting around a plastic tree".




**WINNER**  
RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **2012**

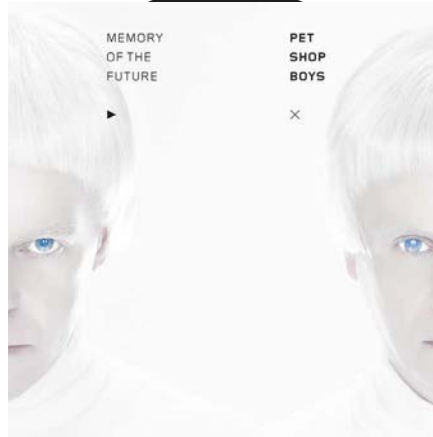
*Winner* hadn't been planned to be the first single from 2012's *Elysium*, but with the 2012 Olympics in London in full swing, it seemed a natural choice. The boys performed *West End Girls* at the closing ceremony, and supplied a special performance for Team GB outside Buckingham Palace. The video was notable for featuring all-women team the London Rollergirls and their new transgender member, Dirty Diana. Afterwards, the duo received a letter which thanked them for positively showing the transgender community.



05


**LEAVING**  
RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **2012**

 *Elysium* begins and ends with songs about death. *Leaving*, written in 2010, although focusing on the death of Neil's parents within 12 months of each other in 2008/9, is also about believing in love after the 'death' of a situation. It originally had the working title of *Heaven Is A Playground*, and was based around some music Chris had written. Some of the original lyrics are said to appear in or at least have inspired the rap section in the duo's dancier Side-by-Side remix of the track.



04


**MEMORY OF THE FUTURE**  
RECORD LABEL **PARLOPHONE**  
RELEASED **2012**

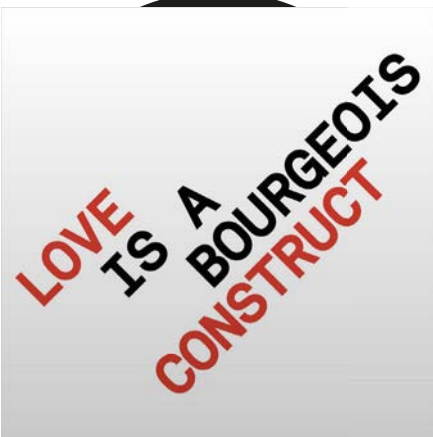
 *Elysium*'s working title *HappySad* summed up the mood of the album, with *Memory Of The Future* certainly summoning both emotions. Neil's addressing a lover, someone who has come into his life and was fated to be part of it from then on. He also manages to squeeze a dab of Proust into proceedings, with the line "I keep tasting that sweet madeleine", referencing his *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search Of Lost Time*), in which the French sponge treat triggers a childhood memory.



03


**VOCAL**  
RECORD LABEL **X2**  
RELEASED **2013**

 Held over from *Elysium* and the first official extract from *Electric*, *Vocal* was given the full bells-and-whistles single release treatment. Described in the press release as being inspired by "the way British youth found its own freedom with a new culture epitomised by dance music and raves", it's a first-person hymn to dance music and the communal experience. To emphasise the rave nation feelings, they have also taken to using elements of *Alright* in the version they play live.



02

**LOVE IS A BOURGEOIS  
CONSTRUCT**  
RECORD LABEL **X2**  
RELEASED **2013**

 Based in part on *Chasing Sheep Is Best Left To Shepherds* from Michael Nyman's score for the 1982 film *The Draughtsman's Contract*, itself based on a bit of Henry Purcell's 1691 opera *King Arthur*, *Love is A Bourgeois Construct* also takes inspiration from the novel *Nice Work* by David Lodge. Neil portrays a man who has been living a respectable life until his wife leaves him. A stand-out track from *Electric*, what it lacked in chart position, it made up for in 'best of the year' lists.




*The Pop Kids* was inspired by a friend who had dived into London nightlife with his partner. It's the quintessential PSB song – an ode to the power of music and the way it connects us



01

**THE POP KIDS**  
RECORD LABEL **X2**  
RELEASED **2016**

 Chris had composed a piece called *Munich* while on tour with Take That. It made Neil think of a title he had, *The Pop Kids*, inspired by a friend who, drawn to London by university, had dived into the city's nightlife with his partner. The Full Story version catches up with the pair of them in the present day – no longer together, but still in touch. A Stuart Price production from 2016's *Super* ("Electric, but more so"), it's the quintessential Pet Shop Boys song – a glorious ode to the power of music, and the way it connects us.



## INTERVIEW

## JJ JECZALIK

AFTER AN INITIAL RELEASE PRODUCED BY BOBBY O, PRODUCER AND ART OF NOISE CO-FOUNDER JJ JECZALIK REBUILT *OPPORTUNITIES (LET'S MAKE LOTS OF MONEY)* FROM THE GROUND UP, FAIRLIGHT BOOM BY FAIRLIGHT CRASH, INTO A BRAND NEW VERSION THAT HIT THE CHARTS IN 1986. WE DISCOVER HOW HE APPROACHED THAT RECORDING AND HOW HE FEELS ABOUT THE PROJECT OVER THREE DECADES ON

IAN PEEL

**C**an you remember when the call to produce *Opportunities* came in? I remember getting the call – I think it was from their manager, Tom Watson. They'd already done a version of the track with Bobby Orlando and I suspect they may have also played me the demo. Somehow or other we managed to concoct a Fairlight CMI backing track with Chris and Neil. I remember we were at The Manor studios in Kidlington. We then also worked at Sarm East – Nick Froome was engineering that – by which point we ended up with everything pretty much on the Fairlight, and then put that down as the backing track.

**How much of a free hand did they give you on that backing track? Did they say "We trust in you, go off and do this..." or was it kind of a three-way split?**

That's an interesting question and as I remember it, I came up with a view of how I thought it might sound, which was kind of money, gold bars, crashing – that sort of business. I thought from the start it should be a quite aggressive sound, loud and rattly. But I can't say, hand on heart, that I remember the conversations that the three of us had about whether there was much agreement on that or not.

I've got to say that my production style at that time was derived from Trevor Horn's approach. If you were to analyse the stuff I did, I very much referenced his style. For example, he often used to put a piano in the third chorus – things that I identified as being key elements that he, consciously or unconsciously, repeated in all his work. The location of the pianos and what the guitar parts would do and how they would come in and go out, giving some of the phrase and not all of the phrase... it was quite a complex thing that he did. I'm not sure, ever, how conscious it was, but when I started to deconstruct what he did I began to appreciate what he had been doing.

But, upon reflection, Trevor's style was also fairly autocratic, although he was always pushing for the best of everybody and looking for a unique style for a record. So I think that, if there's a weakness in what I did with the Pet Shop Boys, it was that we probably could have had more discussion about the overall style and feel of what they were trying to achieve.

**Do you feel your production approach has evolved over the years since then?**

Yes, because I stepped outside the music business for a while and got into teaching, which made me very aware of the need to engage with people – 'stakeholders' as they call them – which I think is terribly important, to talk with the people who are involved in something and get a view. I have to say, back then, that's not what I thought about a lot. I was probably quite nervous about getting it all together – including making it work technically, to be honest.

As I was approaching *Opportunities* as somewhat of a newbie producer, I was taking a much more painting by numbers approach. Also, given the way you have to work with the Fairlight, you were given lots of numbers to work with! I was always copying numbers on Page R; I'd have 'chorus' highlighted in pink, verses in blue, and all that sort of stuff. I was thinking, literally, in blocks of colour and in segments and in iterations and so on. Literally and metaphorically, I was painting by numbers.

So that's the way I approached it at the time, but I can't say that I had any long conversations with Chris and Neil about that. With the benefit of hindsight, if a band came to me now and asked if I wanted to produce their record, I'd spend quite a lot of time talking to them about the overall picture, what songs they wanted, finding a style they could see used into the future that they would be happy with.

**A painting by numbers approach was quite popular, back in the day...**

True – and, in a funny sort of way, it was a deconstruction of art. Some people would say it ruined art... but not for people who couldn't paint! It put people into an area where they could complete something and stand back from it and go, "Yeah, that looks alright". Of course, what's happened with digital workstations and music making now, and the fact that it's become much more democratised and cheaper in recent years, there seems to be a lot of painting by numbers going on with people making records. It's come full circle. Personally, I don't know whether that's a good thing... I think that perhaps people need to do what Chris and Neil continue to do, and tear up the rule book a bit more. ■



**JJ Jeczalik:** "If there's a weakness in what I did with Pet Shop Boys, we could have had more discussion about the overall style and feel"

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PET SHOP BOYS

OPPORTUNITIES

[let's make lots of money]

Introspective  
Pet Shop Boys



# LOVE ME TINDER

THE SECRET INGREDIENT OF "THE  
BEST COVER VERSION EVER"

JJ Jeczalik is well known in Pet Shop Boys circles for reworking their track *Opportunities* into its final hit single mix, but the pioneer of sampling is less famous for playing a vicarious role in their 1987 hit *Always On My Mind*. In the sleeve notes to the 2001 Further Listening edition of the album it comes from, *Introspective*, Neil Tennant notes how "at the end you can hear fireworks from JJ Jeczalik's party. JJ was having a bonfire party and [producer/engineer] Julian Mendelsohn went along to it, so I said to him, 'Tape his fireworks – we can use those on the record!'"

JJ remembers it well. "I was living in Berkshire, next to a farm, so I decided to have a bonfire party and loads of people came," he says. "We had a lot of fireworks. I mean, seriously, we had a mess of fireworks, including some of those four-inch mortars that you had to bury that go 'fump!' They soar clear into the sky and then go BANG! Tremendous things. Yes, and Julian brought his Sony F1 [an early digital tape recorder] and taped it all."



RENOWNED FOR THEIR LIVE EXTRAVAGANZAS, PET SHOP BOYS' ABILITY TO STAGE SHOWS STRIKING THE PERFECT BALANCE BETWEEN ENTERTAINMENT AND INNOVATION IS UNRIVALLED. WHETHER STRIPPED-BACK OR IN FULL-ON FLAMBOYANT MODE, THEY REMAIN ONE OF POP'S GREATEST LIVE DRAWS... **MARK LINDORES**

# Pet Shop Boys In Performance

"**A**nd they said it would never happen!" Neil Tennant proclaimed from the stage in Hong Kong on the opening night of Pet Shop Boys' first tour. The three-year struggle to the duo's first-ever full concert had been a journey beset by setbacks: technological, logistical, financial... and a lack of confidence. But on taking to the stage on 29 June 1989, Tennant and Lowe finally raised the curtain on three decades of synthpop spectacles which have brought us everything from minotaurs and monoliths to synchronised dancers dressed as priapic schoolboys... all brought to life via their own unique perspective.

Pet Shop Boys had long faced critics' accusations that they were unable to replicate the innovation of their studio-enhanced electronica in a live setting. Fans had been upset about it, too. However, the 1989 live venture – known, officially, as the MCMLXXXIX Tour – put that to rest.

"After *Please* had been a big success in 1986, all these rock designers came in and did little models of their own suggestions," Tennant recalled in 2004's *Performance* tour DVD. "We couldn't believe how corny every idea was. It was always things like, at the end, the lights spelling out 'Pet Shop Boys' behind us and flashing. So we never ended up doing anything, and when we decided to tour a couple of years later, we worked with Derek Jarman."

## PARTY LIKE IT'S 1989

With PSB having long harboured ambitions to produce a show which incorporated elements of theatre, dance, fashion and art, the MCMLXXXIX Tour played in Asia and the UK. As it was the duo's first tour and they wanted to ensure they enjoyed the experience before committing to anything on a grander scale, the enterprise lasted just three weeks.

Directed by Derek Jarman, whose films were presented

as backdrops to the show (one of which depicting two men kissing led to the tour promoter being arrested on the grounds of indecency following the opening night of the tour in Hong Kong), the MCMLXXXIX Tour was a grand spectacle which featured six dancers, four back-up singers, an extra keyboard player, a percussionist, and up-and-coming jazz saxophonist Courtney Pine.

"Before that tour we didn't see any reason for us to tour in a naturalistic way," Tennant explained. "We wanted to define a way Pet Shop Boys could perform live without turning into a rock band. Other groups who make music using synthesisers and sequencers in the studio always tend to turn into rock bands live, and it never sounds as good."

"MCMLXXXIX was an attempt to get round that by putting on a kind of multimedia show. It was quite pioneering because we were working with the dancers who taught Michael Jackson to breakdance and the moonwalk, and Derek Jarman made all these films for us. An amazing designer called Sandy Powell, who has won Oscars, did the costumes. It was very enjoyable and really exciting – especially being the first time we toured."

Although short-lived, the MCMLXXXIX Tour played a fundamental role in shaping the performance side of Pet Shop Boys. The fusion of technology and theatricality became the impetus of their identity as a live act, and, having surprised themselves by enjoying the experience of being on the road, the boys began putting the wheels in motion for their next outing – one that would realise a long-held ambition.

According to Tennant, "Performance was the theatrical performance we'd always wanted to do. Since the beginning we were interested in visualising music on stage, so every tour we've done we've worked with someone from the theatre. We had decided early

on in our career that when we toured it would be with a theatrical show in the tradition of David Bowie's *Diamond Dogs* or Grace Jones' *One Man Show*.

"To this end, we wanted it to look like an opera, so we met with opera director David Alden and theatrical designer David Fielding to discuss creating a show with them along the lines of what they'd done for the English National Opera in London. It was an ambitious pop music show with no visible musicians, but with every song visualised and choreographed within the context of a narrative which stretched from childhood to death to afterlife."

Kicking off in March 1991 for a three-month tour of the UK, Europe, Asia and the US, *Performance* set a precedent – not only with its theatricality, but also by including a narrative, perhaps the first pop concert to do so. With graphic depictions of sex, electroconvulsive therapy, masturbation and violence, the groundbreaking show drew comparisons to Madonna's *Blond Ambition* tour as well as the aforementioned Grace Jones and Bowie shows. However, Tennant and Lowe took *Performance* a step further, not just by not having any musicians onstage at all but by incorporating album tracks, B-sides and songs they'd written for other artists as well as remixed versions of some of their hits, all in a theatrical context.

"We were doing theatre in rock venues with that

In PSE's live career they have illustrated their catalogue with costumes and scenes that are typically arch and self-deprecating – yet quite unforgettable



"WE WANTED TO DEFINE A WAY TO PERFORM WITHOUT TURNING INTO A ROCK BAND. MCMLXXXIX WAS AN ATTEMPT TO GET AROUND THAT WITH A KIND OF MULTI-MEDIA SHOW. IT WAS QUITE PIONEERING"

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Close to Heaven was widely panned by the critics, with *Variety* calling it "sentimental and ceaselessly dire"



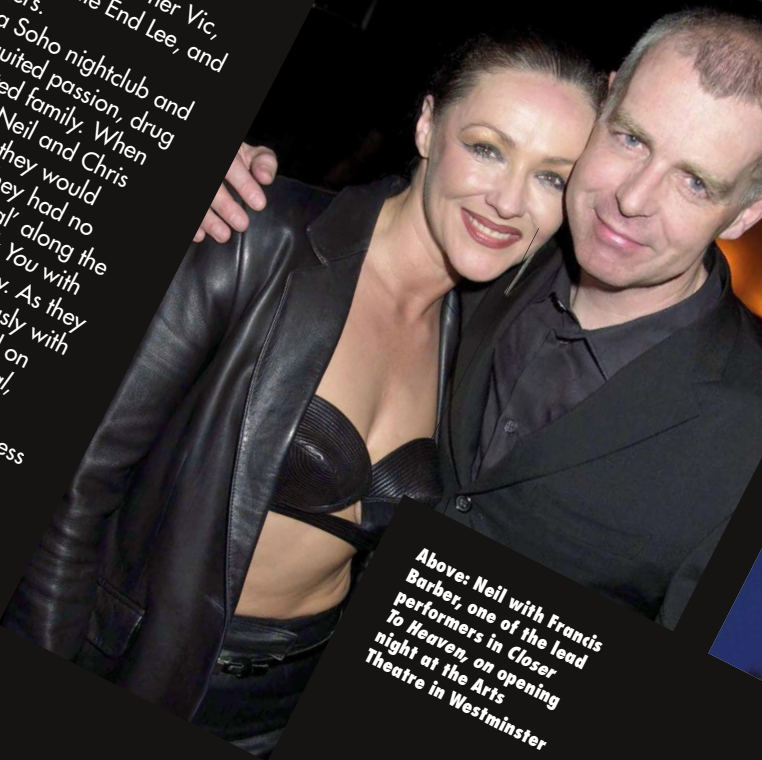
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# CLOSER TO HEAVEN

SEX, DRUGS AND SOHO – THE PET SHOP BOYS' FIRST WEST END FORAY

Based on a book by Jonathan Harvey, the "Pet Shop Boys musical" – as it became known – opened in London in 2001. Telling the story of arriving in the capital, the show explored the relationships between a cast of club regulars including a retired rock icon called Billie Trix (played by Frances Barber), the club owner Vic, record producer Bob Saunders. The plot all took place in a Soho nightclub and featured love triangles, unrequited passion, drug addiction, death and fragmented family. When Neil and Chris had agreed to write a musical, they had no interest in creating a 'jukebox musical' along the lines of *Mamma Mia* or *We Will Rock You* with their hits shoehorned into a clichéd story. As they worked on *Close to Heaven* simultaneously with *Nightlife*, some of the tracks were released on that album (including the title track, *In Denial*, and *Vampires*). Alas, the musical was not a commercial success and closed just months later. It has subsequently been staged in the US and Australia, and was also briefly revived in London in 2015.

© REX



Above: Neil with Francis Barber, one of the lead performers in *Close to Heaven*, on opening night at the Arts Theatre in Westminster

show," Tennant mused. "We did what nobody else was doing. It made you think about the songs more, and it was more enjoyable to watch and to perform."

"We had no interest whatsoever in cliché-ridden traditional rock shows. Nobody comes to a Pet Shop Boys show to see two virtuoso musicians – they come for an incredibly visual experience."

Although *Performance* was a personal triumph for Pet Shop Boys – and a critical and commercial success, with most shows playing in sold-out venues –

the tour was not without its problems. The grandiose production values meant that profits were minimal, and with 10 dancers and three singers onstage with Neil and Chris and costume changes for almost every song, it was a gruelling experience. "It wasn't as much fun as the first tour, but we were very excited about the production," reflected Tennant. "I remember it being more exhausting, and the atmosphere being slightly more frenetic when you're in the centre of it and there were so many people involved."

## VOYAGE OF DISCO

Having accomplished a tour they were immensely proud of, Pet Shop Boys took a different approach when it came to hitting the road again in 1994. In many ways, *DiscoVery* was a direct reaction to its



© Getty Images

Below, Lowe and Tennant in a Nineties performance: would return once again for the Electric Tour

"THE ATTITUDE OF THE DISCOVERY SHOW IS MORE FREE-SPIRITED, WE DO WHAT WE WANT, PARTY ON DOWN. IT'S MORE ROCK'N'ROLL IN ITS ATTITUDE... YOU GET TO EXPRESS YOURSELF AND TAKE YOUR CLOTHES OFF"

© Getty Images

Chris Lowe behind the keyboard at the Sultan's Pool in Jerusalem in June 2000 on the Zahah Adid-designed Nightlife tour

predecessor – the light to Performance's darkness. Touring in support of two dance-based albums, *Very* and the remix package *Disco 2*, the live show had a much more relaxed feel, drawing inspiration from Brazilian clubs and carnivals and New York's dance mecca the Sound Factory, where pulsating house records were accentuated by drummers and percussionists and semi-naked go-go dancers.

"The attitude is very different," Lowe said. "We're more free-spirited, we do what we want, we party on down. It's not a totally choreographed, staged and rehearsed show. We didn't use trained dancers – they can't dance naturally. When they try, they're embarrassing. For this, you need people used to dancing in clubs. I suppose it is more rock'n'roll – you get to express yourself. And take your clothes off."


Very much a crowd-pleasing gig, DiscoVery was a fun, hit-packed show which incorporated amped-up remixes of familiar material plus covers of Eurodance hits such as Culture Beat's *Mr Vain* and Corona's *Rhythm Of The Night*. Because the tour's itinerary took Pet Shop Boys to places where they hadn't previously played, such as Australia and South America, it made sense to reprise some of the costumes and video projections from previous tours ("It's our environmentally-friendly show," Lowe joked). "It's still got pretentious elements," Tennant added. "But since the last tour, we've done four one-off shows which we've really enjoyed, so we decided we'd do something like those... much less structured."

Having gone from never touring to three ambitious outings in five years, Pet Shop Boys didn't want to restrict themselves to the tired formula of releasing an album and touring it immediately, and sought other avenues to present their music. In 1997, instead of hitting the road, they staged a three-week residency at London's Savoy Theatre for a show in collaboration with artist Sam Taylor-Wood. Entitled *Somewhere*, it was once again an example of Pet Shop Boys breaking new ground of what was expected of a pop act. "We are always looking for things that no band has ever done before, and no pop group had done a residency in a theatre," Tennant pointed out.

### THE GREAT OUTDOORS

By 1999, having long been courted by organisers of festivals such as Glastonbury and T In The Park, Pet Shop Boys were ready to try something else new to them – making their festival debut at Creamfields. ►





Pet Shop Boys made their long-awaited *T In The Park* debut in 1999, delivering an acclaimed 21-song set in King Tut's Wah Wah Tent

"I GOT MUCH MORE CONFIDENT AS A SINGER ON THE RELEASE TOUR BECAUSE I WASN'T HIDING BEHIND ANYTHING. WE WERE LEARNING ON THE TOUR IN 1989 – I'D NEVER REALLY SUNG IN FRONT OF AN AUDIENCE"



With a vibe akin to the outdoor raves of the late Eighties, it was the perfect setting to launch their clubby Nightlife Tour. With a theme of "collaboration between different creative mediums", they lighted on an unusual choice – esteemed architect Zaha Hadid – to design their show.

"Over the years we've worked on creating shows that have a very strong theatrical element, but nonetheless it's a practical issue that the show can be taken down and off somewhere else the next day," explained Tennant. "When we put a show together it has to be able to work in all sorts of different venues."

"We might be playing a rock festival to 60,000 people, we might be playing in an arena or in a 2000-seat theatre... so we have to have the more practical idea to have a set which adapts to the different sizes of venue. So, in the case of the Nightlife Tour, we thought, 'Let's treat that as an architectural problem and bring in an architect.'"

The plan worked, and by the end of the Nightlife Tour in February 2000 Pet Shop Boys had earned a reputation as a versatile live act that could translate in small clubs, festivals, arenas, theatres and artworld gatherings. They delivered a storming set the following June for their Glastonbury debut, capping a decade of groundbreaking live performances (they returned in 2010 as headliners).

## WE'RE WITH THE BAND

In many ways, PSB's next tour would be the most unexpected and bravest of their career to date. Taking a step back from the big-budget, theatrical marvels they had become renowned for, a short University tour followed by the Release Tour saw some very different shows: stripped of outlandish costumes and arty films, they were paired-down affairs, placing Neil and Chris in – shock, horror – a traditional rock combo formation accompanied by two guitarists and a percussionist, presenting new arrangements of some of their most recognisable material.

Tennant feared he wouldn't be able to complete the tour, so far removed was it from his comfort zone; however, the challenges proved to be hugely beneficial. "I got so much more confident as a singer on the Release tour because I wasn't hiding behind anything," he said. "The thing with us is; we didn't have any live experience, so we were learning on the Derek Jarman tour in 1989. One of the reasons we wanted to do those big, theatrical shows was because I had no real confidence as a live performer... I'd never really sung live in front of an audience."

Personal issues dealt with, Pet Shop Boys were ready for the next phase of their touring life. 2006's Fundamental Tour marked the beginning of a hugely successful relationship with theatre designer Es

Left: with Es Devlin's imagery on show during Fugitive, the Electric tour arrives at the Festival Jardins de Pedralbes in Barcelona on June 8, 2015

The Pets at Moogfest 2014 in Asheville, North Carolina, performing I Wouldn't Normally Do This Kind Of Thing in electro-meets-Nordic horned masks



"YES WAS VERY POPPY,  
SO THAT SHOW WAS  
REALLY FUN AND  
POPPIER THAN *ELECTRIC*,  
WHICH WAS HEAVIER.  
WE WANTED LASERS  
AND LIGHT, FILM AND  
DANCERS – FAST AND  
EXCITING, ELECTRONIC  
ENTERTAINMENT"

Devlin, who has designed all of their subsequent tours. Es had originally worked on their musical *Closer To Heaven* in 2001 and, unbeknownst to the boys, had moved into working on pop concerts for acts such as Kanye West when they approached her to design their *Fundamental* show.

"I love working with them because I'm also an advocate of trying to alter the genre of the rock concert," Devlin says. "People are doing various things with technology but very few are doing anything with content and trying to make the thing mean anything more. People are pushing boundaries and using technology to create wonderful visual things, but very little of it has got anything to say."

Utilising her background in theatre design, Devlin has consistently strived to cultivate the perfect performing environments to house Neil and Chris' live extravaganzas, utilising such methods as prisms, plinths, monoliths, cuboids, banks of light, moving platforms and video projections. The fruits have been a new, slick, innovative kind of visual futurism, with each tour perfectly encapsulating the tone of the album it is representing.

**Above: Neil in the spotlight at the Manchester Arena on 19 February 2017, a date on the Super Tour**

"Every time we tour we do a completely new production, and we always bear the tour production in mind when we plan the album," Tennant explained in the *Cubism* DVD. "*Pandemonium* was a completely different production to *Fundamental*, with different people in it. After that we toured our album *Yes*, which was very poppy, so the show was really fun and much poppier than *Electric*, which was heavier. We told Es 'You know, it's called *Electric* so it's gotta be electric' – we wanted lasers and a lot of light. It had a lot of film, and dancers. It was very electronic, exciting, it was in four different parts, had costume changes and all the rest. But the idea was that it was very fast and electric; it was electronic entertainment."

Most recently, Devlin and Pet Shop Boys collaborated on the *Super Tour*, a trek which is due to wrap soon after spending almost two years on the road – their biggest to date. Since kicking off with *Inner Sanctum*, spending four nights at London's Royal Opera House, it has had to logistically adapt – as with most of the duo's recent tours – to different venues and audiences. As the pair increasingly play to audiences not there exclusively to see them, as is the case with festivals (or when supporting acts such as Take That, as they did on their *Progress Tour* in 2011), the challenge is to create a show that will



# BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN

CLASSIC IMAGES AND A PULSING SCORE: AN UNLIKELY TRIUMPH

The brainchild of Philip Dodd, director of the Institute Of Contemporary Arts, *Battleship Potemkin* was a screening of Sergei Eisenstein's classic Russian silent movie from 1925 replete with a brand new score from Pet Shop Boys, performed live with a 28-piece orchestra, the Dresdner Sinfoniker.

"When Philip asked us if we'd like to write a score for the film *Battleship Potemkin* and perform it as a free concert in Trafalgar Square, we sort of thought it was a slightly ridiculous and an appealingly ambitious idea," Neil says. "We discussed it between ourselves and thought it was a real challenge to see if we could write an hour-and-a-quarter of continuous music, and see what it would be like. We really got very involved in it and very intrigued by it, and so for us it represents a completely new departure."

"The film itself is quite a romantic and hard-hitting film, and I think with the music we tried to bring out those aspects of it, and also to bring out the emotion as well – the excitement, the horror, the freedom... all those things."

After Trafalgar Square, *Battleship Potemkin* screenings took place in Germany, Spain and at the Swan Hunter Shipyard in Wallsend, Newcastle in 2006.

**Battleship Potemkin**

Original music by Pet Shop Boys  
for the film by Sergei Eisenstein

Music and lyrics by  
Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe  
Orchestrations by Torsten Rasch  
Performed by Pet Shop Boys  
and Dresdner Sinfoniker  
conducted by  
Jonathan Stockhammer

PSB performed *Battleship Potemkin* in Trafalgar Square to an audience estimated at 25,000 – probably the largest-ever crowd assembled for an art movie show

hook the casual fan too, thus creating something visually stimulating or intriguing to ensure the crowd stays for the set beyond the big hits.

Playing on bills with other acts clearly inspired by them and at a time when dance acts are producing stimulating shows, Pet Shop Boys remain one of the most pioneering live acts working today, striking a perfect blend between innovation and entertainment. With the Super Tour reaching its conclusion, and PSB heading back into the studio to complete their trilogy of dance albums with Stuart Price (who has also overseen the sound of their most recent tours), where the Pet Shop Boys bandwagon ends up next, nobody knows. The only certainty is that it will be the kind of enthralling spectacle only they are capable of delivering. ■



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## INTERVIEW

## TREVOR HORN

TREVOR HORN HAS PRODUCED PET SHOP BOYS TWICE, BOTH TIMES AT PIVOTAL MOMENTS. HE STEERED THE TRANSITION FROM THE SYNTHPOP OF *PLEASE AND ACTUALLY* TO THE FIRST FULL REALISATION OF THEIR EPIC ORCHESTRAL POP AESTHETIC ON *INTROSPECTIVE*. THEN, FIVE ALBUMS LATER, THEY REUNITED FOR *FUNDAMENTAL* AND ITS TRIO OF ONE-WORD HIT SINGLES: *MINIMAL*, *NUMB* AND *INTEGRAL*

IAN PEEL

**Y**ou worked with Pet Shop Boys on both *Introspective* and *Fundamental* – but what would be your favourite tracks from over the years?

My favourite Pet Shop Boys album would have to be *Very*. Especially for *Can You Forgive Her?* and also *Dreaming Of The Queen* (which we played live together at the Mermaid Theatre show). As for my favourite song, it would have to be *Being Boring*. I'm in LA at the moment and they're really good to listen to in America because they just remind you of England. If America's getting on my nerves, which it can do occasionally, I just listen to the Pet Shop Boys.

**Neil mentions in this issue that, if they're working with a producer, they're willing to hand everything over to them, in terms of the sound and direction of the record...**

Well, it's true. With the *Fundamental* album and the earlier tracks [*Left To My Own Devices* and *It's Alright* from *Introspective*], I think they gave me free reign... but free resign to do something that they liked! I suppose they'd already figured they would like what I did and, thank God, they appeared to.

With *Left To My Own Devices* I thought the rhythm track [the second attempt; see our Stephen Lipson interview elsewhere this issue] came out great. I was really pleased with it, and I also thought Steve Lipson came up with a great bass part. In terms of their presence in the studio, once Lippo and I'd got the bass and drums right, from that moment on they were there, because they were so particular about what they liked. Chris, particularly, will tell you in no uncertain terms if he doesn't like something. Neil and Chris are great in the studio. For a kick-off, they know how to treat a producer! They're also very funny and great to talk to, great company. Some of the conversations we would have in the studio were just so hilarious. But completely unprintable, I'm afraid.

Also, one thing Neil and Chris have never done whenever we've made a record is become wishy-washy. Sometimes the worst thing that somebody in the studio can say is, "I don't know... what do you think?" I prefer it when people go, "I love it" or "I hate it". And Chris, for sure, is always "love it", "hate it". It's definite.

**Does this point to the reason that – as with Seal – you've worked with the Pet Shop Boys more than once, which you rarely do?**

Yeah, it is. It is. I mean, Seal and I have had our fallings out, but most of the time, we get on really well. And he's very funny, he's a very funny guy, and so are the Pet Shop Boys. Musically, I can sometimes get a bit carried away and do too much and go too far. For example, I loved it when we were doing *Fundamental* and I got a bit carried away on one track. That was the only time on the album, I think, that they didn't like something that I'd done. And they were just so diplomatic with me. It was hilarious. I said, "It's alright, it's alright, you know, it's fine. I don't mind, I was just trying something."

**Can you remember the track? My guess would be either *The Sodom And Gomorrah Show* or *I Made My Excuses And Left...***

You know, I can't remember which track it was. What I do remember of *The Sodom And Gomorrah Show* was when we played at a concert for the BBC [May 2006's show at the Mermaid Theatre for Radio 2's *Sold On Song* programme and later released as *Concrete*]. I always remember it because it was myself, a drummer, and two guitar players – Steve Lipson and Phil Palmer – and we were playing so quietly at that show that we were able to have a conversation whilst we were playing! Why? Well when you're playing with an orchestra like that, you have to play incredibly quietly. Of course, they would come to me to turn down the volume on Lippo, because they were too scared of him!

**You're in quite a unique position to observe and ponder Pet Shop Boys' longevity...**

Well, aside from everything else we've talked about, the other thing the Pet Shop Boys have got going for them is Neil's voice. It's one of those kind of voices that you don't get tired of quickly. With some people, you can only last two or three songs. I know Eminem is a different sort of character, but I can only take two or three Eminem tracks before his hectoring tone starts to get on my nerves. Whereas although Neil has a very deadpan delivery, I don't know... it just sort of works for me every time. ■

**Trevor Horn: "Whenever we've made a record, Neil and Chris have never been wishy-washy. Chris for sure is always 'love it', 'hate it'"**

BMG Music 2017

# ARCHIVE INTROSPECTION

LONDON'S FAMOUS SARM WEST STUDIO STASH IS STUFFED WITH PSB NUGGETS

Having spent many years running Sarm Studios' tape archive, it's absolutely a musicologist's/popologist's dream job – because not only does it also include the complete works of Trevor Horn and labels including ZTT, but it also shows, first-hand, the dotted lines that interweave between all of them and with the Pet Shop Boys' own history. In Trevor Horn's archive, for instance, he still possesses a copy of

the duo's first demo tape. There are 10 tracks in all, including an early take on *Rent* and a piece called *In The Club Or In The Queue*, with a logo designed by their then-manager – who also designed the interiors of Sarm Studios and early ZTT sleeves, and tried to get them signed to the label – Tom Watkins.

That was on an early-Eighties cassette. However, from the late-Eighties F1 era (a

digital format that pre-dated recordable CDs), Sarm still holds various shelves of backups from the *Introspective* sessions. Tape was at a premium then, so more than one holds tracks from the other project Trevor and Stephen Lipson were working on in the studio at the time, an unreleased, post-Propaganda solo album by Claudia Brücken called *Prima Donna*.  
**Ian Peel**



# THEIR DOWN DEVICES

WITH CAREFULLY-CHOSEN COLLABORATORS, WRY HUMOUR AND A DEFIANTLY ANTI-ROCKIST STANCE, PET SHOP BOYS SUBTLY CHANGED THE ESTABLISHED RULES OF THE PROMO GAME AND PUSHED VIDEO-MAKING TOWARDS BEING A MODERN ARTFORM

IAN RAVENDALE

**E**ven though Eighties protocol required Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe to appear personally in their videos, the standard trope of hiring somebody hip and expensive and, well, showing off a bit was never for them. Perhaps it was Tennant's youthful sessions at Tyneside's long-established People's Theatre that instilled far loftier ideas, and from the beginning the duo's visual promos always steered clear of cliché.

Talking to *Creem*'s Harold DeMuir, Tennant explained that their philosophy was to avoid what he terms the "false enthusiasm and rock tradition" of most pop vids, even at the cost of feeling, frankly, "a bit self-conscious" about the process. The result, theorised DeMuir, was an intriguing and curious blend of sincerity and archness, simultaneously effervescent and morose. Sylvie Simmons, also writing in *Creem*, enlarged on this by suggesting that Pet Shop Boys were an outfit that "manages to









"FOR SO MANY BANDS THEIR PERSONA IS BEING BIG, OR LARGER THAN LIFE. PET SHOP BOYS BOTH HAD A SENSE RIGHT FROM THE START THAT BEING SLIGHTLY DISTANT WAS MORE INTRIGUING AND INTERESTING"

be naïve and sophisticated, sincere and insincere, cheery and miserable all at the same time". In a May 1992 interview, Tennant agreed. "Irony and us is very exaggerated," he offered. "We have written ironic songs, but we've also written tons of sincere songs. Although we do have a sense of humour."

Andy Morahan, who went on to work with a who's who of pop and rock superstars including Michael Jackson, Paul McCartney, Elton John, AC/DC and George Michael, directed the pair's first three videos. "I knew Eric Watson, who was their photographer," Morahan relates. "He'd never made a video. The band wanted me to do a couple with him so he could go off and do it on his own, which was fine."

With a budget of between £5,000-£10,000, it was decided to shoot the video for *West End Girls* on home turf. "They wanted something that was evocative of London. The nightlife, the underground... we took them out for the day, went into back alleys, markets, the Embankment, and then ended up on Leicester Square. It was an away-day with Pet Shop Boys! There was a sense of movement, a journey, with nightfall coming down. Today, I'm not sure how we got all those people to appear in the video without getting them to sign anything..."

### APPARENTLY NOTHING

The *West End Girls* promo established Pet Shop Boys as video performers on their own terms. "Looking at it now, I can't believe Chris does nothing!" Morahan marvels. "He's made a career out of looking like he does nothing! Behind the scenes, he does a lot. For so many bands their persona is being big, or larger than life. Pet Shop Boys both had a sense right from the start that being slightly distant was more intriguing and interesting."

"A lot of that video was a happy accident. In the opening, where they're walking through a market, this homeless guy walks in step with them – you can see Chris glance across. The guy probably didn't even know. We didn't ask him, he just happened to walk through the shot. We were trying to keep everything edgy and real, to not be contrived."

"Videos can date, but there's something quite comforting in that one. Like the shop window scene... you used to see dummies dressed in kids' clothes years ago. It takes you back to the Seventies and Eighties, when life was less sophisticated."

In 1985, when *West End Girls* was shot, music videos were still in the early stages of development, both artistically and technically. "It was pre-sophisticated grading techniques in post production," relates Morahan. "The colours are a little all over the place for me – it's green and weird in places. Five years later we could balance all that stuff out, but in those days we were transferring stuff shot on film to video tape to cut and master. *West End Girls* was shot on film, a combination of 16mm and Super 8. There's some very strange polarisation. I look at it now and go; 'Oh dear! Did we really do that?'"

"We wanted to be big and epic to go into the instrumental break. We were trying to soar away above the city. We couldn't afford a helicopter, so we got some stock footage of Tower Bridge. In those days to get stock footage you had to go to a lab in West London and go through film cans that were about to explode... it wasn't an easy process. The grading really crushed the black, which sticks out compared to the rest of the video. In terms of content that moment works, but the execution could have been better."

In 1988, noted director Jack Bond – famous for the 1967 film *Separation* and numerous documentaries on subjects including Roald Dahl, Charlotte Rampling and Catherine Cookson for *The South Bank Show* – was enlisted by Lowe and Tennant to direct *It Couldn't Happen Here*, a surreal full-length feature film with guest appearances from Barbara Windsor, Joss Ackland, Neil Dickson and Gareth Hunt. Even before the film received a title, it was devised as a compilation of interrelated music videos. Once Bond was appointed as producer and co-writer as well as director, the project expanded into a fully-fledged film.

Bond also shot the promo for *Heart*, the duo's 1988 No. 1 single. The video is based on the classic 1922 horror film *Nosferatu*. Shot in Slovenia, at that point still one of the Yugoslavian republics, it opens with Tennant and his bride (played by Croatian actress Daniella Colic) on honeymoon. They are being driven by chauffeur Lowe to the gothic Mokrice Castle, with their mode of transport alternating between a modern-day limo and a coach and horses. In the sky, a CGI bat clumsily flutters by. Tennant prepares to take his new bride – by now resplendent in stockings and suspenders – to bed, but the mysterious inhabitant of the castle, a vampire played by Ian McKellen, is spying on the loving couple. He starts plotting his next move, miming Tennant's vocal for the "My heart keeps missing a beat/ I'm in love with you" line in the process. McKellen's long fingernails, sinister smile and creepy movements are given some light relief when he waltzes with himself as he set off to





# POP OR ART?

THIS 2003 DVD PROVIDES 41 OPPORTUNITIES TO ADMIRE THE DUO'S VISUAL ANGLE



Released 15 years ago, *PopArt: The Hits* assembled Pet Shop Boys' largest successes, and a DVD collection was released at the same time as the CD. Unlike the album, which is divided into 'Pop' and 'Art' sections, the DVD is arranged in chronological order and also features a revealing commentary by Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe chatting to biographer Chris Heath. The tone and pace of Pet Shop Boys videos have altered noticeably over the years, and the duo have no qualms about poking fun at their evolving fashions,

the occasionally dated production values, and their attempts to make promos that are mainstream enough to get on *Top Of The Pops* and the all-important Saturday morning kids' TV shows and yet cool enough to satisfy Neil and Chris and the more sophisticated segment of their audience. Bonus tracks on the DVD include both videos for ❶ *Opportunities (Let's Make Lots Of Money)*, *Was It Worth It* (which doesn't appear on the CD version), the Germany-only single *London*, and extended videos for ❷ *Go West*, ❸ *So Hard* and ❹ *Domino Dancing*.

By 1990 the Pets had tired of playing the pop game, and homoerotic videos like Bruce Weber's promo for ❺ *Being Boring* and Howard Greenhalgh's ❻ *Paninaro* (featuring a spoken lead vocal by Chris Lowe) clearly aren't meant for Saturday mornings. It's difficult to say who (if anybody) Wolfgang Tillman's promo for 2001's ❼ *Home And Dry* is aimed at, as it consists primarily of rats busily scurrying around the railway tracks of London's Underground mixed in with the occasional shot of Tennant and Lowe miming the song. The DVD was included in the November 2007 reissue of the *PopArt* CD.





# WHAT THEY DID TO DESERVE THIS

TO HER FANS' DELIGHT, THIS VIDEO COAXED A STAR FROM OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Directed by frequent PSB collaborator Eric Watson, the video for *What Have I Done To Deserve This* (co-written with American songwriter Allee Willis) was one of four songs penned or produced in the late Eighties by Chris and Neil for Dusty Springfield – *In Private*, *Reputation* and *Arrested By You* being the others.

Glamorous showgirls and tuxedo-clad musicians (including Neil) are waiting in the theatre wings to go on stage. There is no visual sign of Dusty until 1m 36s, although her voice is heard. A stage hand pulls open a red curtain and we witness the singer's first UK public appearance in 10 years. Her famous 'directing traffic' hand movements are to the fore as she launches into her solo section of the song. At the side of the stage Chris Lowe is walking between two curtains; then he jumps in the air, turning as he goes. A couple of steps are taken and he then puts out his arms, spins, nods to the right and walks off past the shadow of showgirls as if nothing has happened. The curtains rise and there are Lowe, Tennant and Springfield taking the song home; Dusty is dancing, but the Boys are static. The song was a major hit in both the UK and US and brought Springfield back into the spotlight and helped her – financially – to return to the UK, where she lived until sadly passing away in 1999.



waylay the bride and take her for his own. Daniella is unable to resist the vampire's bite and falls under his spell. It's curtains for the groom; Chris Lowe mans the coach and horses that carries Nosferatu and his conquest away, while the defeated groom watches mournfully from a castle window.

## CAR PARKS TO PRESIDENTS

Unlike the widely-slated *It Couldn't Happen Here* film, the entertaining video for *Heart* was universally liked. It garnered a lot of TV exposure and undoubtedly helped the single to reach No. 1.

Famously, Neil Tennant had worked as a journalist on *Smash Hits* magazine, but Andy Morahan opines that his past role didn't necessarily help Pet Shop

Boys in their early days. "They weren't a *Smash Hits* band – they were more NME," he points out. "Slightly alternative, with roots in electronic music and the gay scene. Neil didn't say 'I'm going to put a band together and *Smash Hits* are going to love it...' Probably completely the opposite."

For the *Opportunities (Let's Make Lots Of Money)* video shoot, Morahan, Tennant and Lowe swerved the streets and railway stations of London and dived deep into a subterranean car park where Neil would eventually be seen crumbling into dust.

"It's a very odd video," Morahan acknowledges. "As I remember, there's two things going on there. We wanted to take 'underground' and make it literal... deliberate irony. The *Opportunities* video is exactly the opposite to *West End Girls*. It's very contrived. The song comes from the Thatcher era, the 'let's make lots of money' culture... it predicted the dark side of that. We had one afternoon to do it, so didn't have time to expand the story. We wanted an arresting image, so we tried these weird prosthetics and dust. It looks a bit hokey now! We were trying to do something that looked interesting. Everything returns to dust eventually, maybe. In those

days a lot of videos weren't sophisticated. If we'd made it 10 years later then there would have been a lot more in it. It was just an idea that Neil, Eric [Watson] and I had, and we probably blew the budget on the special effects!

"There's a moment where Chris lip-syncs the word 'money'. Where else has he ever said anything else in any PSB video, before or after? It's a slightly odd song. Most of the

Pet Shop Boys music seems completely effortless, but that song feels a bit forced."

Tennant and Lowe have never been afraid to poke fun at themselves, and the video for 2006's *I'm With Stupid*, filmed at London's Alexandra Palace, utilises the talents of Little Britain's David Walliams and Matt Lucas, auditioning to play the part of Pet Shop Boys. The comics don't look much like their subjects: the lanky Walliams sports joke-shop teeth and towers over the considerably smaller Lucas, who bears no resemblance whatsoever to Chris. At first the doppelgangers' bodies have been replaced by puppets and we just see the duo's heads. These are replaced by orange jumpsuits and comedy hats as a cod-cosmic backdrop is rolled out behind them.

The *I'm With Stupid* single has a line about a "special relationship", almost certainly alluding to Tony Blair and George W Bush's partnership in the Iraq war. A Pet Shop Boys appearance on *Top Of The Pops* did feature dancers wearing masks with the two leaders' faces on, alongside (for the sake of political impartiality) those of Bill Clinton, David Cameron, Menzies Campbell and Vladimir Putin. The video steers clear of any sort of political imagery, though, and the *Little Britain* pair played it for laughs. "Well, what do you reckon?" enquires Walliams at the end of the song. The audience had been the real Neil and Chris, tied to chairs to guarantee their undivided attention. The duo's response is silence.

Finishing up his trio of Pet Shop Boys videos, Andy Morahan co-directed 1986's *Love Comes Quickly*



"THERE WAS DEFINITELY A GROUNDSWELL OF GAY CULTURE COMING THROUGH. NEIL WAS ONE OF THE FIRST PEOPLE TO TAKE THAT FROM THE UNDERGROUND TO THE OVERGROUND"

with the late Eric Watson. The treatment and rhythm of the video reflects the mood and tempo of the song. "It's based on double exposure, which Eric knew how to do from his photography," Morahan explains. "The other stuff – overlays and so on – was from me. I love that song! When Neil is reflective, it's very powerful."

One of the most important elements for Morahan is liking the song that's being promoted: "They never work otherwise," he emphasises. "On the half dozen I've done in my entire career where I wasn't crazy about the song, I haven't done the greatest job. Sometimes everything aligns. *West End Girls* was such a great lead-off record... and the video works for that moment in time."

### IT'S NO SIN

A Channel 4 screening of *Caravaggio*, a biopic of the Baroque painter, motivated Tennant to approach the film's director Derek Jarman to direct 1987's *It's A Sin* (he subsequently also directed the video for *Rent* and staged and made films for Pet Shop Boys' first tour in 1989). Jarman had directed 1978's *Jubilee* but his work with Lowe and Tennant was his first introduction to a mass mainstream pop audience.

*It's A Sin* has Neil shackled in a dank medieval basement, pleading for his life with chief executioner Ron Moody and a bunch of hooded monk inquisitors. Despite Tennant's beseechments his tormentors aren't impressed and Chris drags him off to be burned at the stake. The video is full of digs at religion: references to the seven deadly sins, candles, breaking bread, and 'body of Christ' wafers. *It's A Sin* was probably written about Tennant's time at the strict all-boys St Cuthbert's Grammar School

in Newcastle and the discomfort he felt growing up "with a sense of shame". Jarman frequently included gay references in his films and would have enjoyed being able to go to town by having Tennant burned alive for his sexuality.

With the 1987 video for *Rent*, Jarman has Tennant playing the chauffeur to Margi Clarke's exploited wife, trapped in a relationship based on financial dependency. In echoes of *West End Girls*, Lowe – looking like he's auditioning for Dexys Midnight Runners – is mooching around King's Cross station while the less-well off do all they can to keep their lives afloat. Neil sings "I love you, you pay my rent" as the uptight Clarke fumes in the back of the car. The video has a happy ending when the car pulls up and Margi Clarke rushes into Lowe's arms.

Using a publicly gay left-field film maker like Jarman to make their videos was quite a courageous move on behalf of Tennant and Lowe. Says Morahan; "There was definitely a groundswell of gay culture coming through. Neil was one of the first people to take that from the underground to the overground."

"Their roots were in that sub-electronica, gay-clubby thing. Neil obviously knew the right people to go to. Producers, record companies... he was very smart. But then, they were always visually and culturally literate. They took the medium forward." ■

**Below: friend and admirer of the Pets Ian McKellen is best known nowadays for his roles in *X-Men* and *Lord Of The Rings*, but it was he who played the bride-snatching vampire in the video for *Heart***





## INTERVIEW

STEPHEN  
LIPSON

AT THE END OF THE EIGHTIES, THE RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK-STYLE ERA OF BOMBASTIC POP WAS COMING TO AN END, HOUSE RHYTHMS WERE COMING TO THE FORE AND PET SHOP BOYS WERE DEVELOPING A LUSH, ORCHESTRAL SOUND AND EXPERIMENTING IN THE STUDIO MORE THAN EVER BEFORE. STEPHEN LIPSON REMEMBERS THE MAKING OF TWO OF THIS PERIOD'S MOST WELL-LOVED TRACKS, BOTH OF WHICH HE CO-PRODUCED

IAN PEEL

### Tell us how your work with Neil and Chris came about...

Well, let me preface this by saying that memory's a funny thing, so I'll probably inadvertently rewrite history. You might hear other views about all of this, which will be different. For my side, I was working with Trevor Horn and he might have said, "I've been asked to do a Pet Shop Boys thing. Would you produce it with me?" To which I would have said "yes" and off we went. My memory tells me we only actually did one song.

### There were two, in fact – *Left To My Own Devices* and that incredible proto-acid house B-side jam, *The Sound Of The Atom Splitting*.

Yeah, but *The Sound Of The Atom Splitting* was rubbish. It was just messing about. It just wasn't anything, to my brain. It wasn't really a song, it was just a thing, the sort of thing one could do all day, every day. Unless it's curated and given a name, like 'The Art of Noise', it's just nonsense. It was a bit silly. There's actually a few tracks on *Slave To The Rhythm* [Lipson's genius work with Trevor Horn and Grace Jones] that are very much loved and they're just rubbish as well, so there's no accounting for taste.

### How did the track even come about? When I think of a 'jam' we usually think of bass, drums, guitar and keyboards kind of knocking about... but what was a jam in that sort of environment?

Oh, that's a good question. I'd need to listen to it again. Hang on... let me just see if I can find it [pulls out 1995's *Alternative* album]. Ah okay, so I can hear this would have been based on the Synclavier [sampler]. Just one, though, they cost about a million quid each. So basically this track was just me, f\*\*\*ing around on the Synclavier, being corralled by everyone in the room – and, most likely, Neil coming up with random lyrics over the top. But I can't really remember, probably because drugs and what have you have addled my somewhat limited brain anyway... but, yeah, it would have all been based around the Synclavier. Because, when you think of it, *Left To My Own Devices* was basically the Synclavier and an orchestra.

### Speaking of *Left To My Own Devices*, how did it sound when you first heard it? What did Neil and Chris bring in to the studio?


I can't remember, but without a shadow of a doubt it would have been in pretty good condition because they always have such a clear vision of what they want to achieve. Having said that, it wouldn't have had that middle eight section, where there's the bunch of different chords and a pause that goes into the third verse. That would have been structured in the studio. But, in terms of what they arrived with, Chris did very near-finished demos. And I say that because he didn't participate greatly in the studio, because I think he considered he'd already done his bit. So, I would imagine we were given a demo, then Trevor and I worked on it alone for a while. Then Neil and Chris came in and Chris would have advised... "Oh, we don't need much of this, or that".

I do remember that I originally programmed the whole thing with a completely different rhythm. I read something about Neil saying I'd done it all, but I didn't. I programmed something quite groovy, and he said, "No, you need that sort of house rhythm". I was quite pissed off, because I loved the rhythm I'd done. So I took the mickey out of him and I went, "Oh, you mean like this...?" and I knocked up a new rhythm in about 10 seconds. But he said, "Yes, that's it, that's the rhythm we need!" I'd taken two weeks aching over that original rhythm and then 10 seconds later it was completely different... but, of course, it was just what he wanted, and perfectly correct for the track.

Another memory, a thing that occurs to me, is that they were far more macro than micro. In other words, it would be remarks like, "The rhythm's wrong", or "I don't like this". Not on the micro scale, like "Can we fiddle about with this part..." I don't think they were interested in the minutiae.

### Neil tells us they feel that if you're going to have a producer, you should be ready to hand over control. If you're going to produce it yourselves, then maybe that's when they go micro.

Exactly! And, of course, that's the best thing. That's part of their strength: their ability to let go but – at the same time – maintain a complete overview. ■



Stephen Lipson: "Chris is quite enigmatic but he does so much work. And Neil is just incredibly bright and has a unique overview"

# TENNANT, LOWE & NILES

STEPHEN LIPSON ON PET SHOP BOYS AND THEIR WILDCARD ARRANGER

"I think they're quite remarkable, actually. Their longevity, their songs, their behaviour... their whole way of working." That's Stephen Lipson's take on the Pet Shop Boys – but what does he put that down to, given his insider view from the *Introspective* sessions?

"Well, Chris is quite enigmatic, it's very hard to say. But he does so much work. I never really saw him where he hadn't done all the work in advance. And Neil is just incredibly bright and has a handle on things... a unique overview."

The other key player in the *Introspective* sessions was orchestral arranger Richard Niles. "He's unbelievable!" Lipson says. "There wasn't anticipation before we heard anything, there was fear, complete fear. If he had another life he would have liked to have been Groucho Marx. His string arrangements are very flamboyant. He wasn't very good at saying 'This is what I plan on doing for each section', he'd just turn up and go, 'Here is my masterpiece!' Which, of course, it generally was."



Public investigations:  
Tennant and Lowe  
would begin their  
association with their  
beloved idol Dusty  
Springfield in 1987

© Getty Images

**POP\_UP** Neil's praise for Dusty was unstinting: "For me she has one of the most beautiful voices anybody's ever had in pop or soul music... the vulnerable quality in her voice, the way she phrases things"







# Outrospective

WHETHER PRODUCING, WRITING, REMIXING, PERFORMING OR EVEN BEING LABEL BOSSES, PET SHOP BOYS REMAIN STEADFAST IN THEIR ENTERPRISES. HERE, WE EXPLORE THE BULK OF THEIR MANY MUSICAL ENGAGEMENTS

RIK FLYNN

Think of heaven-made partnerships, and Pet Shop Boys' as-yet-unreleased dalliance with Olly Alexander of hip synthpop trio Years And Years certainly qualifies. A song inspired by Margate's trendy theme park, *Dreamland* is expected to be something special. Alexander has described the threesome's sound as "somewhere in the middle of Pet Shop Boys and Rhianna", and if there's to be any passing of batons, then they're as good a prospect as any.

Typically, Tennant and Lowe's involvement holds high the importance of political comment – in this case Trump. "I felt like I didn't want to write about politics simply because I felt like I should," Alexander explained to *The Guardian*. "While I was writing it, Neil Tennant said to me: 'This makes sense right now with Trump closing the borders,' and the song became something that touched on what's going on in the world. I'd write lyrics and he'd say: 'No, it needs to be more direct'. He'd take a simple line and interject a subversive political statement. That's the challenge as a pop writer, to do both at once." It's an artistry central to the Pets' success; "Pop's best when it reflects what's going on without banging you over the head," Tennant told *PopJustice* in 2017.

Refreshing to think that, rather than joining the vapid ranks of countless remote studio collaborations, now very much an apathetic norm, this particular collusion seems rooted in far firmer ground, and Alexander will surely emerge all the better for his masterclass. What's clear about Tennant and Lowe is that time invested in another artist isn't taken lightly, be it comeback albums to enliven the careers of past icons, or remixing Rammstein.

## GOLD DUST

As early as 1985, before Pet Shop Boys had recorded much at all, the tables were turned when it came to personal heroes. *What Have I Done To Deserve This?*, that seminal duet with blue-eyed soul diva Dusty Springfield, was originally intended for *Please*. "Various notable female contemporaries were suggested, but none sounded right," Tennant admitted to *The Sunday Times*. "We wanted a woman with a voice suggesting both experience and vulnerability, warmth but also a tough take-it-or-leave-it attitude." Tina Turner was touted as an alternative, but the Boys held fast. An initial delay meant the song was shelved, but mere months after their debut album found the summit on both sides of the Atlantic, their reclusive labelmate made the call.

"She arrived at the studio on time, in a black leather designer jacket and high-heeled boots, with blonde hair and black eye make-up, clutching the lyric-sheet of the song, annotated and underlined," Tennant remembered fondly. "Chris Lowe, Stephen Hague and I began to consult with the legend about how to sing our song and she was very nice, surprisingly a little lacking in self-confidence."

Neil and Dusty stirred up a discrepant blend, engaging in that wonderfully apposing sparring session delivered over taut keyboard stabs that segued into an unexpected flickering synthpop chorus. It was a fusion that proved hard to resist, falling just one spot shy of the top in the UK and the US.





"I'D HEARD THE PET SHOP BOYS – I NEARLY HAD AN ACCIDENT ON THE FREEWAY WHEN I FIRST HEARD *WEST END GIRLS* ON THE RADIO. I NEVER IN A MILLION YEARS THOUGHT I'D WORK WITH THEM"

**Above: Dusty Springfield's album *Reputation* was her most successful since the Seventies. "Working with Dusty is one of the things of which I'm most proud," Neil Tennant said**

Dusty's unforgettable chorus line was written, not by PSB, but by US artist-songwriter Allee Willis, initially hired to create a portrait for the duo's fan club material. On *Rock Talk TV* Willis remembered Tennant's eureka moment as he posed. "All of a sudden he looked at me and went, 'Are you the A Willis on all those Earth Wind & Fire records?'" A union was inevitable; one week later, the song was in the can. "The chorus was very sweet-sounding," Willis continued. "It was music I had written years ago and never did anything with, but I thought that would sound great glued onto this... incongruity to me is what makes everything interesting" – a sentiment no doubt shared by Tennant and Lowe.

Despite being such a huge star, Springfield had fallen short in America. The success of *What Have I Done To Deserve This?* revealed just how mighty the British duo had become so early in their careers. No hubris here – in fact, the boyish glee on Tennant's

face as he remembered on a 1996 documentary of being "thrilled to death that we had this on one of our records" is wonderful to behold. When the track finally appeared on *Actually*, it set the bar almost too high for future collaborations.

A lucrative second wind followed for Dusty with her 1990 album *Reputation*, aided by the Pets' production and writing skills. The boys penned three tracks. *Nothing Has Been Proved* – commissioned for the 1989 film *Scandal* – featured Dusty's silky narration of the unfolding drama behind the Profumo Affair floating over hypnotic electronica. Written by Tennant pre-PSB and with Dusty's voice very much the focus, the track's gentle automation was beautified via swaying, widescreen orchestration from *Twin Peaks* composer Angelo Badalamenti. It was a delightful addition to the PSB CV, and Dusty's finest work in years. Elsewhere on *Reputation*, the starry-eyed soul of *In Private*, written for Dusty, provided a looping comfort zone. In contrast was *Occupy Your Mind*, a stuttering, arpeggiated house track inspired by the UK's infamous hands-to-the-sky Sunrise raves. Though distinctly un-Dusty and an antithetical foil over which to encounter those wistful pipes, it worked a treat.

#### DESK JOBS

The duo's inaugural production work – beyond their own material – had arrived a little earlier. In 1987, Neil and Chris manned the console for an old instrumental they'd adapted for Patsy Kensit's *Eighth Wonder*. Having partied together on several occasions, Kensit approached the duo. When the



# POP, PASSIONS AND PERFORMANCE

FROM GIRL GROUPS TO POSTPUNKERS TO VEGAS STARS, PSB HAVE SHOWN THEMSELVES UNAFRAID OF WORKING WITH ARTISTS FROM ANY MUSICAL GENRE

More far-reaching Pet Shop Boys-helmed tidbits from the Noughties included visual artist-director Sam Taylor-Wood's relatively faithful depiction of The Passions' classic *I'm In Love With A German Film Star*. They penned *The Performance Of My Life* for Shirley Bassey, a track that "made (her) sob". The Human League's Phil Oakley joined them amongst the electro-rhythms of *This Used To Be The Future*, produced by UK production team Xenomania. While Xenomania helped with the production of Yes,

they also joined the Pets to lend their skills to one of Girls Aloud's finest moments, single *The Loving Kind* (taken from their *Out Of Control* album); the Girls, it turns out, were recording next door. Elsewhere, in 2011 Chis Lowe offered a fine robotic vocal for Finnish duo Stop Modernists' debut single, a cover of New Order's 1985 single *Sub-culture*, while as a duo they invited producer/rapper Example to contribute a vocal on their unfairly neglected song *Thursday*, plucked from 2013's *Electric*.



***I'm Not Scared* remoulded Patsy Kensit into a character tough and confident enough not to be pushed around by a gangster boyfriend**

time came, Tennant was determined to replace what he saw as the wrongful public perception of her as a 'sexy bimbo' to one of the strong woman he had come to know. *I'm Not Scared*, referred to by Neil as a "Princess Stéphanie record" (after Stéphanie of Monaco's pop career), juxtaposed a Gallic – yet highly feminine – Europop sound with an authoritative lyric. Tennant wanted it to sound "as though it was translated from French", while Lowe has revealed that the 1968 Paris riots provided background inspiration. Despite Kensit's admittedly limited vocal prowess, this sensual Top 10 hit prompted the sort of hushed, tenacious electronica that followed in the Nineties. While Kylie was still peddling *The Locomotion*, *I'm*

*Not Scared* sounded fresher than ever. As hired guns, the Pets were clearly showing a talent for understanding how to present their charge; in fact, for many, the more austere version of *I'm Not Scared* on the Pets' *Introspective* was the lesser of the two.

Having coaxed the best from a part-time vocalist, in 1989 the duo chose to work with a character with abounding credentials. Liza Minnelli had enjoyed a sparkling career in music, theatre and film, but was looking to break into newer territory. It was over a decade since she'd been anywhere near 'pop' other than doling out routine standards. For Minnelli, the Pets' technologically-minded EDM landscapes were foreign ground; "I feel the need to take risks now," she told *The LA Times*. "I don't know why. Maybe it's my age, or those publicised changes in my life [she had recently quit drugs], or maybe it's something bizarre, like the position of the planets, who knows? I just know I was driven to do something different."

Hollywood can be a curious place and it was Gene Simmons of rock peacocks Kiss, then Minnelli's 'recording manager', who suggested a lane-change into a more contemporary arena. As if to illustrate just how much of a change it was, Liza fitted recording sessions around a five-night crooning extravaganza with Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr at the Albert Hall. Having belted out some crowd-pleasers, she would depart to join hi-energy 'midnight sessions' with the Pets and co-producer Julian Mendelsohn.

With nomenclature chosen by PSB, *Results* was a mix of Tennant/Lowe originals and a few covers – including the duo's own *Rent*. "We basically made a Pet Shop Boys album and Liza Minnelli sings it," Neil once remarked. It was a peculiarly effective tack. With one foot planted in both worlds, pacemaker *Losing My Mind* displaced Stephen Sondheim's showpiece (taken from 1971's *Follies*) through



# SHOPPED OUT

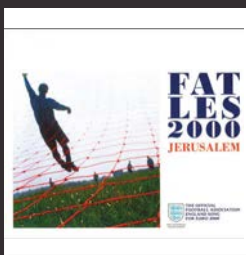
PET SHOP BOYS HAVE REMIXED EVERYTHING FROM BRITPOP AND GAGA TO FOOTBALL HYMNS AND METAL...



## BLUR - GIRLS AND BOYS (PSB RADIO EDIT)

1994

Leading the Britpop vanguard (and PSB remix requests), Blur reached out to the Pets for a remix that both brought them to the discotheque and helped the track attain a UK No. 5, and more importantly became a classic of the movement.



## FAT LES 2000 - JERUSALEM (PSB MIX)

2000

We found it pretty odd to begin with, but in the new millennium, Keith Allen, Blur's Alex James and Damien Hirst's side project Fat Les exchanged oafish footy chant parody *Vindaloo* for a patriotic rendition of *Jerusalem*, intended for the Euro 2000 competition. The London Gay Men's Chorus and The London Community Gospel Choir are in stirring form here atop some driving trance.



## THE BLOODHOUND GANG - MOPE (PSB CLEVER DICK INSTRUMENTAL)

2000

Not the greatest of US exports, this rap-rock outfit picked up street cred in the UK when the Pets removed the vocals from their 2000 single *Mope* and went deep and dark for a disco house interpretation. Frantic, excitable and damn sexy – just ignore the one with The 'Blood's rap on it...



## ATOMIZER - HOOKED ON RADIATION (PSB ORANGE ALERT REMIX)

2002

Hard-edged, squelchy as they come and driving forward at a pace, London-based Belgian electro-punk duo Atomizer enlisted PSB for this filthy single remix – the inaugural release on PSB's vinyl-only Olde English label. The track is available on *Disco 4*.



Neil and Liza: "They're the most complicated people I've ever worked with," said Minnelli. "They won't compromise on anything, which is great"

© Getty Images

a bank of disco-charged synths. It was a very bold move. "Against a jittery electronic dance groove, Ms. Minnelli projects a feeling of barely controlled agitation," opined Stephen Holden in *The New York Times*. "If the mixture of elements seems bizarre, the record communicates a strong dramatic tension." It was an intriguing mix of Broadway melodrama and electro-pop hooks. Plus, it was as much a collaboration with Liza as it was with Badalamenti and Art Of Noise's Anne Dudley, whose sleek orchestrations expertly bridged the opposing worlds.

The Tennant/Lowe song *So Sorry I Said* straddled the chasm between mournful showtune and simplistic synth-ballad. In contrast, Minnelli's rhythmic staccato in *Don't Drop Bombs*, married with sampled snare and arpeggiated electronics, immersed her into the Pets' world; the trick worked with Dusty, so here it was again. Final single *Love Pains*, a minor disco hit for Yvonne Elliman in 1979, sat somewhere between the two. Tanita Tikaram's tender ballad *Twist in My Sobriety*, with drama heightened to the maximum, opened with a rap from Donald Johnson (A Certain Ratio) before morphing into a backdrop of Fairlight loops and bold stabs. The end product was less a collaboration, more the slamming together of two worlds. Minnelli's most ambitious project by far, *Results* won over the Brits, but still stiffed in the States. For the Pets it was another capstone in their career.

## FACTORY LINES

With Liza and Dusty's campaigns in full flight, work began in more familiar territory, with Johnny Marr and Bernard Sumner's on-off 'superduo' Electronic. Neil initially approached the pair in 1989, having heard about the project from sleeve designer Mark Farrow. It was clearly a time of high creativity for all concerned (Marr would later add his signature guitar motifs on two tracks from *Behaviour*). With



**YOKO ONO - WALKING ON THIN ICE (PSB ELECTRO MIX)**

2003

The final song that John Lennon contributed to, *Walking On Thin Ice*, was given a chunky dancefloor makeover by Tennant and Lowe and it duly reached the summit of the Billboard Dance Chart. Give this, too, a listen on *Disco 4*.



**RAMMSTEIN - MEIN TEIL (PSB YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT REMIX)**

2004

Rammstein remixed by the Pets was always going to be marvellous. Translated as 'My Part', this industrial romp played on the track's cannibalistic lyrics and – perhaps most importantly – maintained the German metallers' many, many crunching guitars.



**MADONNA - SORRY (PET SHOP BOYS MAXI MIX)**

2006

Up until this point, any PSB collaboration with Madonna had, for whatever reason, failed to materialise. This was soon put right when the Boys dropped a vocoder-loving remix of her *Confessions On A Dancefloor* single.



**THE KILLERS - READ MY MIND (STARS ARE BLAZING MIX)**

2007

Brandon Flowers wasn't shy of sampling Neil Tennant for his own purposes on *I Can Change* from his second solo album, but when The Pets added surging disco beats and elegant backing vocals to The Killers' 2007 single *Read My Mind*, it found its way into an array of DJ's record bags.



**LADY GAGA - EH EH (NOTHING ELSE I CAN SAY) (PSB RADIO MIX)**

2009

A massive improvement from the calypso-pop lite original taken from Gaga's 2008 debut, this stomping PSB creation appeared on Gaga's dance mix collection *The Remix* (although not in the US), adding drama, dynamism and... well, everything her version didn't.

unquestionable credentials and formed under the banner of the iconic Factory label, it was one of PSB's most hotly-anticipated commissions. Everyone (critics included) wanted to love it – and the majority did.

*Electronic* followed in May 1991, with two tracks involving PSB. The mid-tempo *Patience Of A Saint* was a sparse affair with a fine vocal from Neil and musical input for Chris. But surrounded by the likes of Jive Bunny and Jason Donovan, it was the irrepressible *Getting Away With It* – a Tennant co-write – that got all the attention. Miserabilist lyrics found Tennant and Sumner singing "from Morrissey's point of view" and with Dudley's lush strings on point, this was unshakable synthpop. Its Peter Saville-designed sleeve sealed the deal.

It was with *Electronic*, in August 1990, that Neil and Chris first appeared on stage in the States, for two nights at the LA Dodgers Stadium in support of Depeche Mode. The apex of PSB's involvement with *Electronic*, however, would follow in June 1992. For the single *Disappointed*, inspired by *Désenchantée* by Eurobeat chanteuse Mylene Farmer, Neil delivered both lyrics and melody. He joined Stephen Hague for a transformational mix in Paris. It became the group's biggest UK success, reaching No. 6.

**CRYING NEED**

The first artist signed to PSB's own Spaghetti Recordings was the Scottish-American keyboardist and singer David Cicero, an eventual PSB protégé. Cicero had slipped

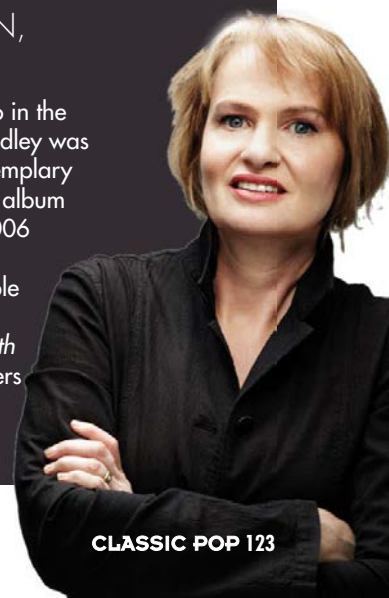
the duo a demo via an assistant in Glasgow and found short-lived success under the duo's stewardship. While PSB were clearly an influence, and helped produce his 1992 album *Future Boy*, a 1991 edition of *Literally* denoted they were 'at pains to point out that "he's written all of it".'

First single *Heaven Must Have Sent You Back To Me* had no Pets involvement other than a Chris Lowe-directed video, filmed in Blackpool. "The whole thing was an excuse for me to get back at video directors for all the pain and inconvenience they cause to artists," joked Lowe, "so I got Dave dancing in the sand dunes in the rain, in the night, wrapped in just a pair of swimming trunks. I also made him go on the Revolution loop-the-loop ride three times in a row." The intimate spoken-word of single

## MORE DUDLEY

TOP-RANKING SUPPLIER OF ORCHESTRATION, KEYBOARDS AND MUCH MORE BESIDES

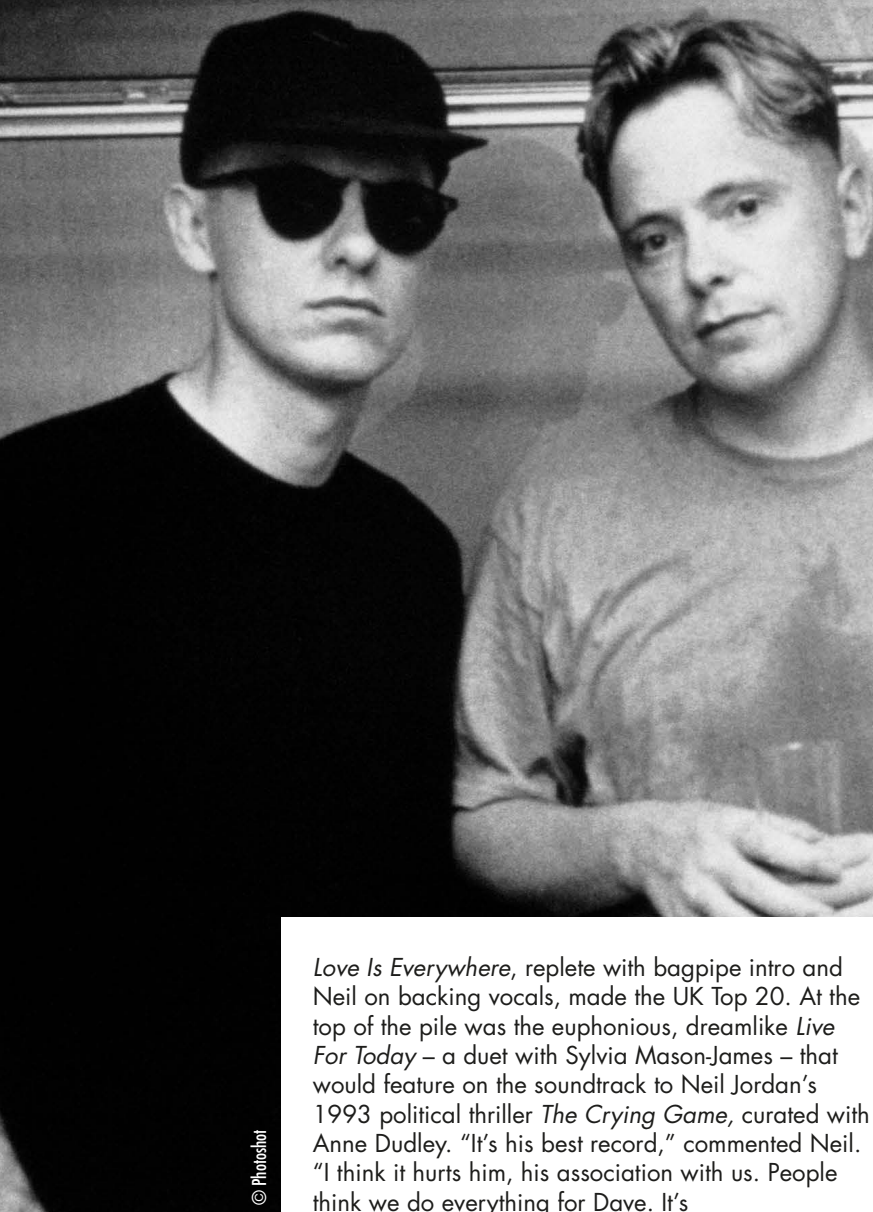
Having found success as keyboardist in Art Of Noise and also in the classical arena, Academy Award-winning composer Anne Dudley was integral to the Pets' many stirring orchestrations. From her exemplary work in the late Eighties for the Boys on Liza Minnelli's *Results* album through to providing an epic score for their big-production 2006 live album *Concrete*, Dudley should likely be considered one of PSB's foremost collaborators. Incidentally, of all the incredible projects she's been a part of, Dudley's own personal favourite is supposedly *Electronic*'s PSB collaboration *Getting Away With It*. Whether working alongside Pet Shop Boys or elsewhere, hers is a CV that shines far brighter than most.



**POP UP** Cicero's press bio included the info that he owned a Yorkshire terrier, Mitzi, and two goldfish, George and Mildred







© Photostat

*Love Is Everywhere*, replete with bagpipe intro and Neil on backing vocals, made the UK Top 20. At the top of the pile was the euphonious, dreamlike *Live For Today* – a duet with Sylvia Mason-James – that would feature on the soundtrack to Neil Jordan's 1993 political thriller *The Crying Game*, curated with Anne Dudley. "It's his best record," commented Neil. "I think it hurts him, his association with us. People think we do everything for Dave. It's funny because in fact, unlike us, Dave even programmes all his own stuff. He really is musically very, very talented." Nonetheless, Cicero and Spaghetti parted company after the campaign.

A bigger name to feature on the soundtrack was Boy George, chosen to sing the film's haunting theme – a cover of Dave Berry's 1964 hit – backed up by Neil and Chris, who also produced. Dudley assisted with a plaintive supporting score. With a keyboard line that Chris supposedly wrestled with for two days and a hastily-recorded take from George, it may have been hard-won, but the results were stunning. It reached UK No. 22 and was George's highest-charting US single. "I'm as happy as a sandboy," commented George. Plans, ultimately unfulfilled, were made for further collaborations.

#### VARIETY CLUB

In 1994, a who's who of dance pop emissaries, including Brothers In Rhythm, Saint Etienne, M People, The Rapino Brothers – and PSB – were brought in to assist Kylie Minogue's emergence from underneath the Stock Aitken Waterman machine. Soon winging

its way to pop's newest sophisticate was *Falling*, a demo adapted from a *Go West* remix and intended for this 'grown up' eponymous fifth album. The overtly sensual, indirect stylings of the end product, however, rendered it completely unrecognisable from the stoic Pets original. "It was a little bit contrary of us to give her a song like that," Neil told Chris Heath. "Kylie wanted to be New Kylie, not Old Kylie, and we were being very contrary and did Stock Aitken Waterman Kylie." Although it was a cut that, for Lowe, "worked better as a *Go West* remix", it sat well in its new presentation and helped Kylie into the Top 5.

Minogue would later add vocals to *In Denial* for 1999's *Nightlife*. This grandiose back-and-forth between a daughter and her hedonistic gay dad was taken from *Closer To Heaven*, the Pets' first attempt at a musical, written with Jonathan Harvey and premiered in 2001 (see pg 41).

Another first was on the horizon, when a chat backstage with David Bowie at his Wembley Arena show led to one of the duo's most potent collusions. In 1996 PSB joined Bowie to revisit *Hello Spaceboy* from his 1995 album *Outside*, the results of which were spectacular. It was this disco-fied version and not the album original that made the UK No. 12. PSB slowed the tempo, borrowed samples from the album and kept echoes of Brian Eno's barrage of synths, while audaciously adding a second verse that toyed with *Space Oddity*'s infamous Major Tom character. Its frantic industrial tendencies may have been sidelined, but those dark futuristic thrills still lingered. "They made it danceable," wrote *Rolling Stone*'s Andy Greene. "Not many people were paying

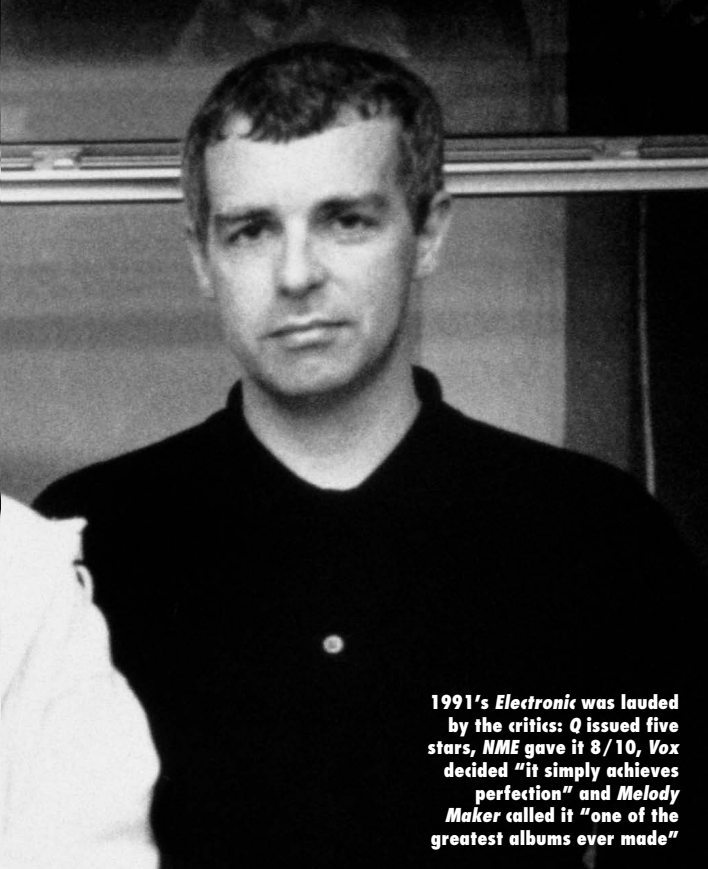
attention and the song didn't do very well, but it was one of the few Nineties songs Bowie kept in his set list after the turn of the millennium." The three performed the track at the BRITS on the day of release; for Neil and Chris, it was yet another "career high-point".

As if to underline the Boys' fearlessness to cross borders and find disparate collaborators, they supplied the commercial love song *Confidential* for



**POP\_UP** PSB always took note of Bowie. "At a concert I don't just want to hear Jean Genie, I want to hear weird stuff from *Diamond Dogs*, some *Side 2 of Heroes*," said Neil. "We've applied that to our show"





1991's *Electronic* was lauded by the critics: *Q* issued five stars, *NME* gave it 8/10, *Vox* decided "it simply achieves perfection" and *Melody Maker* called it "one of the greatest albums ever made"

Tina Turner's *Wildest Dreams* album in the same year. In fact, one-off collusions littered the Noughties: with EDM pioneer Peter Rauhofer – as The Collaboration – for a respectful take on Raze's classic house tune *Break 4 Love*; a reworked 'boy band song' that became *Love Life*, donated to Swedish pop band Alcazar; and the cultish electro-clash, *Jack And Jill Party*, a track judged to be "perfect for Pete Burns". This brash ode to bisexuality was issued as a 12" through the Pets' own short-lived Olde English label.

### CAST IN CONCRETE

PSB were no strangers to Robbie Williams. Not only had he revealed himself a fan via a cover of *I Wouldn't Normally Do This Kind Of Thing* for the flipside of *Let Me Entertain You* in 1998, but he'd also recruited Neil to provide backing vocals on *No Regrets*. Tennant co-produced Robbie's schmoozy contributions to the Noël Coward tribute *Twenty Century Blues* the following year. In 2000, they even questioned each other for *Interview* magazine.

While rumours of involvement in 2005's *Intensive Care* proved false, two PSB collaborations finally appeared on 2006's 'Robbie's-gone-electro' album, *Rudebox*. PSB's slick syncopations provided a comfy bed on which Robbie could do his thing. Inspired by Kraftwerk's *Tour De France*, tongue-in-cheek co-write *She's Madonna* made the Top 20, while a remake of My Robot Friend's *We're The Pet Shop Boys* (in which Rob sounds very Neil) featured both Pets on vocals.

Their flamboyant friend was invited into the fold for 2006's monumental live LP *Concrete* – given its starry magnificence via the BBC Concert Orchestra – along with two others: actor Francis Barber and Rufus Wainwright. Robbie offered a mawkish rendition of *Behaviour's Jealousy*, while Wainwright added stirring layers to the 'ageing fate' of *Fundamental's* infamous philanderer in *Casanova In Hell*. Tennant would go on to oversee the dog-eared opulence of Wainwright's 2007 album *Release the Stars* as executive producer.

We close our investigation with another great EDM pioneer. Jean Michel Jarre welcomed the Pets into

# BUBBLING UNDER

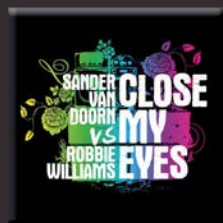
## OTHER COLLABORATIONS OF NOTE



### KIKI KOKOVA - LOVE TO LOVE YOU, BABY

2003

Kokova's (aka Sam Taylor-Wood) shimmering cover of Donna Summer's *Love To Love You, Baby* was produced by PSB and issued through their vinyl-only Lucy Kunst label.



### SANDER VAN DOORN VS ROBBIE WILLIAMS - CLOSE MY EYES

2009

Dutch DJ and Ibiza mainstay Sander van Doorn had help from Tennant and Lowe when it came to creating this grandiose, hypno-trance cut.



### MIYUKI MOTEGI - ALL OR NOTHING

2002

Pet Shop Boys wrote and produced this poppy number for J-pop starlet Miyuki Motegi, with Tennant also chipping in on backing vocals. It featured on her 2002 album *M.I.U.*



### ELTON JOHN - BELIEVE/SONG FOR GUY

2017

First released on a bonus edition of *Nightlife*, this duet/medley with the piano-playing legend was first performed in 1997 for ITV's *An Audience With Elton John*.



### MORTEN HARKET - LISTENING

2012

A-Ha's big-voiced frontman never sounded so good than on the ballad *Listening* from his solo album *Out Of My Hands*, a track penned for him by Tennant and Lowe.



### ABSOLUTELY FABULOUS - ABSOLUTELY FABULOUS

1994

This Eurodisco Comic Relief record made No. 6 in the UK. "I know some people are horrified we did a charity record, but it just seemed a way of dealing with it," said Neil.

the studio for *Brick England*, a cut included on his 2016 collaboration-fest *Electronica 2: The Heart of Noise*. Other guests included such EDM visionaries as Sebastian Tellier, Yello, The Orb and Gary Numan. The Pets fitted right in. ■



## INTERVIEW

ANNE  
DUDLEY

ALONGSIDE RICHARD NILES AND ANGELO BADALAMENTI, ANNE DUDLEY HAS BEEN FUNDAMENTAL TO THE ORCHESTRAL SIDE OF THE PSB SOUND, FROM THEIR LIZA MINNELLI ALBUM *RESULTS* TO TRACKS ON 1993'S *VERY* AND ITS OFFSHOOT *RELENTLESS* TO 2006'S *FUNDAMENTAL*. SHE TELLS *CLASSIC POP* ABOUT ARTISTIC FREEDOM, THE ELECTRONIC COLLABORATION, AND PET SHOP BOYS' REMARKABLE CONSTANCY

IAN PEEL

**T**he first time you worked with Neil and Chris was on Liza Minnelli's *Results*...

I have worked with them, as you know, on and off for a very long time, and that was a very interesting project. Intriguing – the Pet Shop Boys and Liza Minnelli... who wouldn't say yes, really? There were some fabulous songs and they were quite happy to have a big orchestra. They wanted to create quite a big sound around the tracks. I remember doing *Tonight Is Forever* at CBS Studios in London and I had a big orchestra for that. Liza Minnelli's a legend. She was so happy to be there, and I remember she was getting on with Neil and Chris really well.

**The orchestral version of *Rent* with Liza offers a completely different perspective to the version on *Actually*...**

I have to say, I conducted *Rent* and I adapted the arrangement quite markedly, but it wasn't actually done by me. That's credited to Angelo Badalamenti but he didn't come over and do it, he just sent me the orchestral part. But there were various anomalies in the part, so it was one of those situations where one had to be quite creative and use some tricks to make it work and, suddenly, the approach we took became fantastically original. It doesn't sound anything like that Eighties style, it sounded more like a musical.

**The strings on *Getting Away With It* seem to make it lift off as opposed to keeping it grounded, as on *Rent*...**

Neil was the one who got me to do that, and it was difficult, because he said "Do anything you like", which isn't a very clear brief! It's quite an odd track with a vocal set against an austere keyboard line and a very programmed bassline, and some of it's just a bit weird. I couldn't tie down the chords so I had to make the strings float over the top in a world of their own. I did an arrangement that was really quite classical, quite English pastoral. I remember when we took it to the studio, the engineer – a great engineer at Angel Studios who's sadly no longer with us, John Timperley – got it immediately. He said "Oh, I know what to do with this", and he moved the microphones further away from the musicians to get more of a classical sound, more of the room, more air around it.

**Tell us a little about the dynamic when you're in the studio...**

Well, Chris has been, and could be, quite self-effacing, but he's also so bloody intelligent and musically astute. But he's just a little shy about it, it seemed to me. Neil, of course, is very articulate and very good at explaining what he wants. He's also very able to tell people, in a nice way, when something's not quite working. Rather than just alienating musicians and being insulting, there's this feeling that we'll work through this together and we'll find a solution. So they are a very nice pair to work with and whenever they've called over the last, oh, 30 years from time to time, I've always thought, "Good, yes, I'd love to do it". They work so solidly, it's very workmanlike! It's not 20-hour days or anything, it's more nine to five, then they're home, have a meal and come back the next day. Sensible stuff! I don't know if it was always like that, but that's how it's been the last couple of times.

**Having observed from behind the scenes, do you think there's a secret to their longevity?**

It's just hard work, you know? Playing with anybody who's successful over a number of years... it boils down to working hard. It doesn't just happen. I won an Ivor Novello award last year and Neil presented it to me, so I spent quite a period of time with him and he spoke with such enthusiasm about the things they had coming up, the live shows and all the projects they were involved in. He just enjoys it.

**When you've been given the job of orchestrating a piece of Pet Shop Boys music, how much freedom do you get? How much are they steering and collaborating?**

Well, with Neil and Chris, we have an initial meeting and we talk about ideas, and then they'll give me pretty much a free hand. It's the ideal situation because you feel like you've had some of a brief, yet you can go off and be creative and have ideas. And they're very open to new ideas. Maybe, again, that's one of the reasons for their longevity. I think they are both very intelligent and artistic people and are interested in the arts in general, and so they're very happy to take on new ideas. ■

Composer  
Anne Dudley:  
"Chris and Neil  
are always  
delightful to  
work with  
- sardonic,  
laidback and  
intelligent"

# I LOVE YOU MORE

TENNANT, ELECTRONIC AND ANNE DUDLEY'S SWEEPING GRANDEUR

"Anne Dudley's favourite piece of music that she's worked on is *Getting Away With It* by Electronic," David Stubbs wrote in *The Guardian* in 2006. "Her accomplished arrangements and classically-trained playing have lent the glamorous litany of artists she's worked with [the likes of Malcolm McLaren, ABC, Pulp and Pet Shop Boys] an aura of finesse they could never have achieved alone. Without Anne Dudley, *The Look Of Love* would be a mundane set of chords plodding up a keyboard in search of a flourish;

without Anne Dudley, *Buffalo Gals* would consist of little more than Malcolm McLaren standing on a chair in a barn, clapping his hands."

Dudley still looks back most fondly on that 1989 Electronic collaboration with those barbed Tennant/Sumner lyrics that so forensically dissect Marr's morose ex-Smiths partner Morrissey. "At the time, Neil said that he wanted something essentially 'English' in the character of the string arrangement," she considers. "The final mix is rather joyous, I think."





FROM EARLY 7" SINGLES AND LOVINGLY EXTENDED 12" MIXES THROUGH TO MORE UNIQUE PRESENTATIONS AND LUXURIOUS BOX SETS, PET SHOP BOYS' VINYL CATALOGUE OFFERS AN ABUNDANCE OF PLEASURE THAT GOES BEYOND THE CREATIVE REALMS OF MOST ARTISTS. IN FACT, IT MAKES THEM LOOK POSITIVELY PEDESTRIAN. TIME TO ENTER AN ARENA OF POP, PERSPEX AND PERFUME...

RIK FLYNN



### OPPORTUNITIES (LET'S MAKE LOTS OF MONEY) (1985)

A dizzying amount of options to navigate here. The initial Bobby O-produced version remained unreleased, so the first the wider world heard of PSB's satirical initial transmission was the Parlophone issue, produced by Art Of Noise's JJ Jeczalik and Nicholas Froome. Accompanying that ultimately unsuccessful 7" single came a thumping 12" dance version that's eminently collectible. Flip them over for the shady Italo-disco stylings of hidden delight *In The Night*, adopted as the theme for *The Clothes Show*. *Opportunities* unveiled the Pets' beautifully economic 'portrait-box' sleeve motifs; here it's Neil on one side, Chris on the other. £10-20 should secure a good copy.



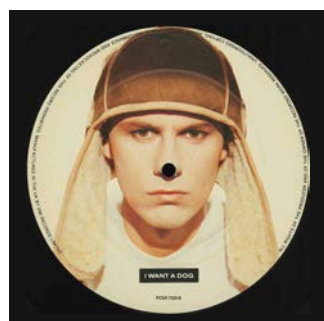
### WEST END GIRLS (1984/5, PARLOPHONE)

Multiple versions to explore here. Bobcat Records' original 12" – a double-A with *One More Chance* – was a minor club hit in 1984 and found release in the UK through Epic (around £30). The updated, Stephen Hague-produced hit version (£5) introduced their design partnership with Mark Farrow, who created an interpretation of the sleeve for the 12" remix version (pictured, £15-20). "I just took all the bits I didn't like off it," he explained. For bigger budgets, there's the 1985 10" Collectors Edition (with bonus 7"), with circular fold-out sleeve and yellow sticker. These vary in value, but £40-50 will bag a still-sealed copy. Take your pick!



### INTROSPECTIVE LIMITED EDITION 12" SET (1988)

The mass-released vinyl LP of this Trevor-Horn produced masterstroke is a marvellous thing, but for the serious collector there are two – far more agreeable – options. The first is a three-vinyl limited edition set of 12" singles with picture labels and coloured die-cut inner sleeves. The other should appeal to those for whom money is no issue: only 10 sets exist of a fabled version of this sought-after package, cut on clear vinyl and originally intended as a gift for EMI execs. With a pricetag of £800-1500, it's one of the rarest PSB items.





### RELENTLESS (1993)

Very is one of the Pets' most prominent and best-loved records, but few clocked its ultra-rare companion album, *Relentless*. While its six mostly instrumental tracks – primarily dance, trance and techno – did appear on a limited edition CD version of the album entitled *Very Relentless*, it's long out of print and was never commercially released on vinyl. Luckily, these hard-to-find compositions were sneakily issued as a mouth-watering promo 12" coloured-vinyl set of three. This neon trio – pressed in fluoro pink, blue and yellow – were housed in matching die-cut inner sleeves inside a central white sleeve that featured Chris and Neil's floating heads on each side in blue and yellow Very-era helmets. One set sold at a recent auction for £400.



### MIRACLES, 12" (2003)

With a sumptuous extended mix on the flip, plus interpretations from Lemon Jelly and Swedish House Mafia original Eric Prydz, this limited white vinyl is surely Pethead utopia. Yet more magnificence from the Farrow/PSB allegiance, it was initially planned to delight more than just the eyes and ears; as designer Mark Farrow explains in our PopArt feature on page 73, the original plan was to perfume every single vinyl of the official release, just like the promo copies, but EMI suffered severe conniptions and nobbled the idea. The 12" mix is ambrosial, while Anne Dudley's spine-tingling orchestration is highlighted for the slender Lemon Jelly mix. The Prydz remake packs a heftier punch. At around £20, this is something of a steal.



### YES, BOX SET (2009)

So stunning was PSB's collaboration with design sophisticate Farrow that it was showcased in the London Design Museum. Inside, the album's 11 tracks are presented over 11 heavyweight 200g vinyl records, each in a different coloured sleeve and each with an exclusive instrumental version on the flip. What's more, the records can be arranged to make either the album's 'tick' motif or pictures of the boys. A 12th (white) sleeve contains a signed and numbered fine art print. The whole heavenly bundle is held within a handmade smoked perspex case with a gold-plated tick insignia. These are now worth anywhere between £1500-3000, if you can find one, as only 300 were manufactured. Surely one of the most collectible records of this century.



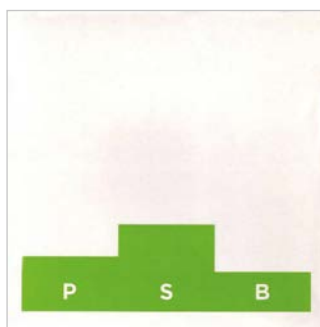
### RECORD STORE DAY VINYL (2010/2014)

PSB have issued several limited runs for Record Store Day. Back in 2010, they unveiled an exclusive batch of 1000 7"s that featured two unreleased tracks: their 2001 demo of *Love Life*, written for Swedish poppers Alcazar, and B-side A *Powerful Friend*, a song originally begun in 1983. Four years later came a 12" containing two alternate mixes of *Electric*'s fifth single *Fluorescent*, issued through the Pets' x2 label. The Indio Mix and Cali Mix were re-recorded with extra lyrics, and the vinyl was housed in a striking light blue die-cut sleeve. This year, the Boys generously gave away an exclusive lithograph of the *Electric* artwork and a special Super slip mat for anyone who bought a copy of the albums.



### THE MOST INCREDIBLE THING, BOX SET (2011)

Containing the Pets' electro-orchestral ballet score, this highly-collectible, highly-limited, highly-appealing offering from the Vinyl Factory offers yet more opulent beauty. A silk cloth-bound slip-case covers a Farrow-designed hardback book that holds seven sleeves: six contain the soundtrack itself on 180g vinyl, plus the original demos, while the last features an over-sized, fold-out print of the sheet music, signed by the Boys. The narrative – based on one of Hans Christian Andersen's lesser-known short stories – is printed on the sleeves, while Andersen's own paper-cut illustrations provided inspiration for the cover image. Only 500 were made, all numbered and signed. Plan for around £300.



### WINNER LIMITED 7" (2011)

When Neil and Chris joined the ice-cool ranks of Electronic Beats clubbers at Berlin's HAU 1 to play a 30-minute showcase of their album *Elysium*, lucky attendees were treated to an exclusive 7" of *Winner*, described by NME as "one of the most uplifting songs in the history of their songs". This exclusive rarity features two unreleased 'HappySad' remixes by Grammy-winning producer Andrew Dawson (one of which is instrumental) and slick artwork, again from Farrow. An Electronic Beats event catalogue came with the record and featured interviews with Farrow, Andrew Dawson and Pet Shop Boys, as well as an essay on *Elysium* written by Chris Bohn. Complete, these sell at auction for around £80-100.



### ELECTRIC, BOX SET (2013)

Again manufactured in partnership with The Vinyl Factory, this numbered 5LP box – signed by Neil and Chris – is yet another refined work of gorgeousness from the PSB/Farrow alliance and, being limited to only 350, is rare as they come. Like the *Yes* box set, this took the format one serious step forward. Housed in a multi-coloured fluorescent-edged acrylic box were five equally lurid 180g records (including a never-before-used colour). Each of the five had bespoke fluorescent outer and inner sleeves and labels. At the time these neon rarities sold for £500, but it may come as an... ahem... shock that they have changed hands for over £1000 since.



### PLEASE, ACTUALLY, INTROSPECTIVE REISSUES (2018)

Set in motion last year with spanning new 180g heavyweight vinyl editions of *Nightlife*, *Release* and *Fundamental*, PSBs' 'Catalogue 1985-2012' reissue campaign continues this year with their first three definitive albums: *Please*, *Actually* and *Introspective*. While this refreshed trio of pop classics are much the same as the 2001 versions, albeit newly remastered, they're vital for fans who missed that first round, which are now out of production. It's a fine chance to venture back into that unstoppable 'imperial phase' with up-to-date, crystal-clear sound quality. Encompassing house, Italo, trance and rap, this is the holy trinity of pop; it's a shame only CD-lovers get the bonus material.





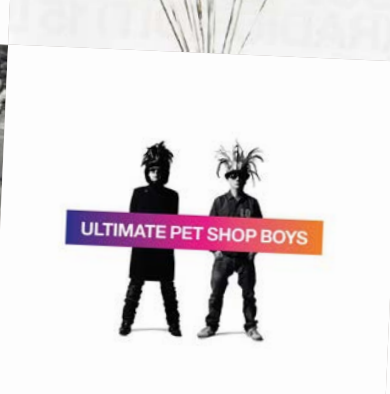
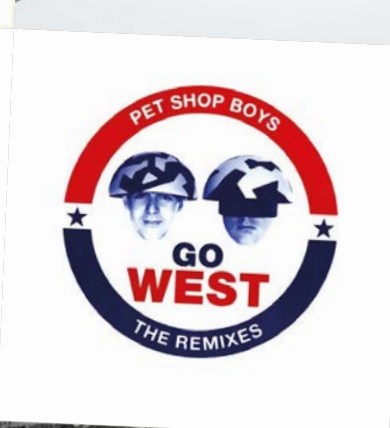
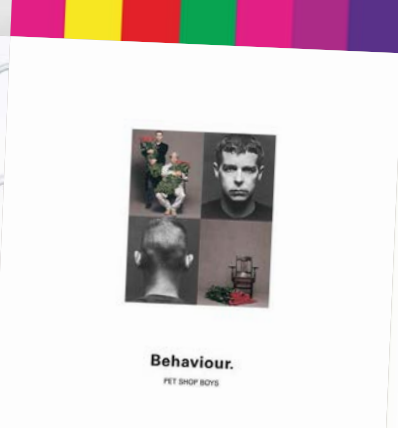
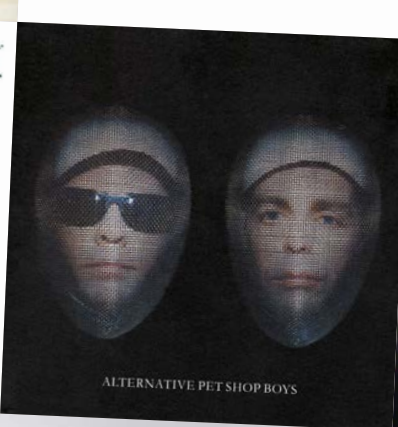
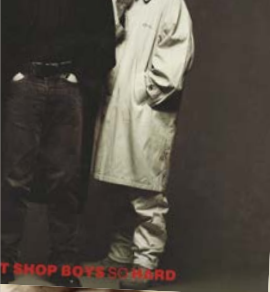
# CLASSIC POP MOMENTS

OLYMPIAN  
EFFORTS

AUGUST 2012

When Tennant and Lowe made their grand entrance at the closing ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics, ushered in on flame-orange rickshaws styled as neoteric chariots of fire, the audience united in effervescent chorus. Add Gareth Pugh's striking black costumes — with requisite pointy hats — and the scene was a real highlight. Their recently-released single *Winner*, a song about "coming from nowhere and finding yourself a winner and the crowd is all cheering" — would have been appropriate, but instead the duo chose their London-centric anthem *West End Girls*. "I think one could say it was unique, knowing that you were going to be seen everywhere in the world," commented Neil. "We were only on for two minutes, but it was a good two minutes!" Had there been a roof on the Olympic Stadium that night, it would have been long gone.







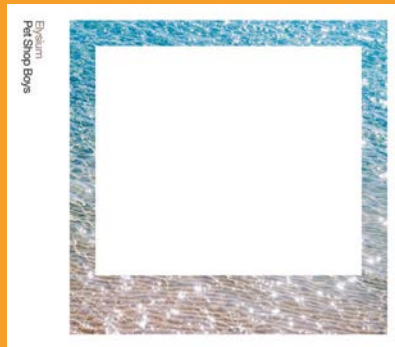
# Pet Shop Boys

## 'Catalogue: 1985-2012'

### Out Now



Yes



Elysium



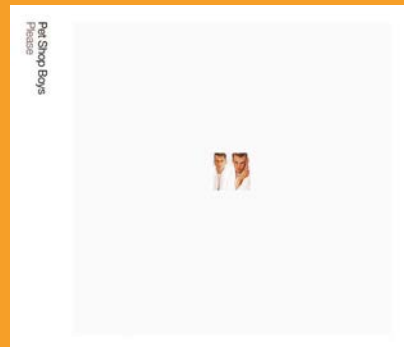
Nightlife



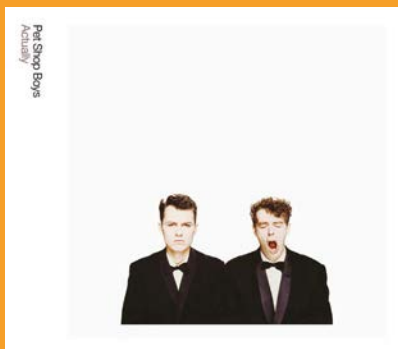
Release



Fundamental



Please



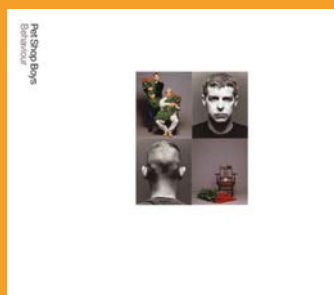
Actually



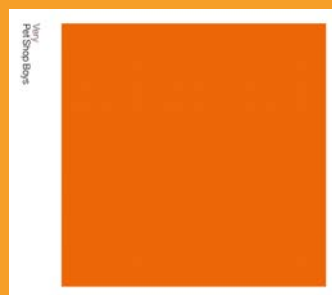
Introspective

The Parlophone studio albums reissued and remastered with 'further listening' albums of additional and previously unreleased material

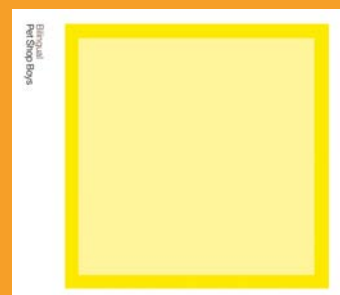
### Coming Soon



Behaviour



Very



Bilingual

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