

# Music

**'I'm a live-in-the-moment person but I appreciate the past. I've done the trip, run the gamut of what it's about'**



RAPTURE: Chris Stein, top left, Debbie and the band in 1979

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A portrait of a man (John Wesley Harding) sitting at a table with a cup of coffee. A vase with a single orange flower is on the table.

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# Review

**I**N THE restaurant of London's most rock'n'roll hotel, belonging to the hairy hard-rockers Iron Maiden, Debbie Harry and Chris Stein's jetlagged chat is drowned out by the hiss and gurgle of an expensive coffee machine. It's Chris who suggests we relocate to the peace of a basement cinema and, as we both leave the table to check it's empty, Debbie Harry is left alone with my Dictaphone.

"They have both left and I am here alone," she murmurs seductively, I discover later when I play the tape back. "And I think I'm going to make out with myself."

Well, who can blame her? At 65, Debbie Harry is still unequivocally hot. She freely admits to submitting to cosmetic surgery ("I'm like, get over it, so what?") but that has left her looking well-preserved, rather than wind tunnel. However, for all her legendary beauty, for all the pin-up, fantasy glamour that Debbie Harry injected into the male-dominated late Seventies music scene, Blondie's music is the reason they have sold 40 million albums. That said, the band behind *Heart Of Glass*, *Atomic*, *Sunday Girl*, *Denis*, *One Way Or Another* and many, many more vignettes of feisty pop perfection, currently find themselves without a record deal.

"Record labels look at older bands' value being in their catalogues," says Debbie. (When asked whether she prefers to be called Debbie or Deborah, she shrugs: "Whatever. I don't really care.")

"Most of the time when you get a band like us, you'll find it's two new songs with a bunch of old songs. It's not really a vote of confidence for a band. The current thing that we are, they're not interested in that. It's annoying. It's frustrating."

They also believe they're having to work harder to carve a niche as part of the first generation to sustain such a long music career.

"When we were in our 20s, there weren't people their 60s or 70s playing," says Chris. "The older singers were Andy Williams and Frank Sinatra, Tom Jones; they were the older generation." Debbie agrees: "We weren't even considered legitimate music, it was the counterculture, but now the counterculture has been absorbed into this massive culture worldwide."

As they point out, their back catalogue means they could make a killing trading on nostalgia but they have never lost the creative urge. Fans have waited eight years for *Panic Of Girls* though, in part because the band spent a couple of years navigating a record industry in a state of flux, before releasing the record themselves.

The wait is also partly because Chris had two children with actress Barbara Sicuranza. While Debbie is their godmother, she has remained childless. She wouldn't rule out adoption but, as in the Seventies and Eighties, work remains her primary focus.

The partnership with Chris goes back to 1973 when they met in a pub, Debbie performing in a band, Chris an art student who asked to photograph her and they fell in love, spending 15 years together. Debbie recently described him as the love of her life. However, the band fell apart in 1982 when Chris was diagnosed with a life-threatening autoimmune disease and Debbie spent four years nursing him through it. Finally, in the late Nineties, manager Harry Sandler persuaded them to reform and Blondie even enjoyed a number one hit in 1999 with *Maria*. Today Debbie still writes most of the lyrics, Chris, most of the music.

Both freely admit to more regrets than they can mention, having been among that legion of naive artists who were stumped up by their record contract. Even when Blondie started making money, they invested in a tax avoidance scheme that went bust. Still, even if they were as rich as Croesus, they would still work. "I think I can be reclusive and antisocial but I get bored," says

**Even after more than 30 years in the business Debbie Harry and Chris Stein of Blondie are still cool, still credible and still hoping for another number one, discovers CHARLOTTE HEATHCOTE**

Pictures: RICHARD YOUNG; BRIAN RASIC/Rex



# Still blonde, still ambitious

Debbie. "I get total cabin fever and I have to go out, I'm an old dog really." Chris agrees: "We both have enough egomania to be seeking out this kind of stuff [making music]."

"If I just went to parties every night, that'd be OK," adds Debbie. "I'd always run into people in New York but a lot of our contemporaries aren't here any more."

"Mostly we don't see them or they're dead," says Chris, matter-of-factly. "Joey Ramone, Johnny Thunders and Jerry Nolan [from New York Dolls]."

They cite drugs as another way in which their generation was naive. "It's a phase a lot of people go through but it certainly isn't a sustainable way of life," says Debbie, who once admitted she was a junkie for a couple of years after Chris recovered from his illness. Eventually the couple went into rehab together.

"I'm a live-in-the-moment kind of person," says Debbie, "but I appreciate all of the past and what it's done and what it's been. I'm having more fun in the studio, more fun doing shows. I don't know why. I'm

better at it. I guess I can relax behind it a bit more. I've done the trip, run the gamut of what it's all about and I can laugh at it more. I still have a tremendous amount of ambition but some of the desperation is gone."

A big part of Debbie Harry's impact was the woeful lack of women in a testosterone-fuelled industry. "It was a boys' club," says Chris but, for Debbie, there was no conscious decision to break down barriers or to blaze a feminist trail. "I think if I hadn't been Chris's girlfriend, if we hadn't been a team, I probably wouldn't have kept at it, it would have been more difficult. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time and, whether or not I did it, there would have been someone else."

● *Panic Of Girls* is out now as part of the *Blondie Fan Pack*, available in music shops, newsagents and supermarkets (Future Publishing, £14.99). For more details visit [blondie.net](http://blondie.net)



## CD RELEASES with DAVE ESSON

### THEA GILMORE ★★★★☆

**John Wesley Harding** (Fufill)

Maybe just sending a card would be easier, but Thea decided to commemorate Bob Dylan's 70th birthday by covering his 1967 album in its entirety. A brave decision, but one which an outstanding singer-songwriter takes in her stride. Don't dismiss this as merely of interest to Dylan and Gilmore completists. She inhabits the songs well and isn't afraid to tinker with some arrangements - All Along The Watchtower, Drifter's Escape, Wicked Messenger and I'll Be Your Baby Tonight are personal favourites. Bob should be delighted by this unusual present.

### IRON MAIDEN ★★★★☆

**From Fear To Eternity: Best of 1990-2010** (EMI) Maiden headed up the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal back in the 80s, but after 30 years in the business, does NWOBHM just stand for Now Worryingly Old But Hirsute Miraculous? This compilation of their best bits over the last two decades shows they can still teach the young pretenders how to rock out, and is a good history lesson for young metal fans.

### DEPECHE MODE ★★★★☆

**Remixes 2: 81-11** (Mute)

Sprawling triple-disc set reworking Dave Gahan and the boys over the years. As with most of these endeavours, it's a cross between being too radical or too reverential, but big names like Roxy Music, Eric Prydz, UNKLE, Orbital and ex-Moderine Clarke make an impression. Personal Jesus gets buffed up three times.

### KITTY, DAISY AND LEWIS ★★★★☆

**Smoking in Heaven** (Sunday Best)

The Durham siblings appear to have been buried in a time capsule, then dug up to innocently entertain with a quirky nostalgic mix of rockabilly, ska, jazz and blues. Championed by Chris Martin, who had them open for Coldplay on their US tour, their second album unfortunately lacks bite.

### THE PIERCES ★★★★☆

**You & I** (Polydor)

Another act getting a boost from the Coldplay lads, as their Scottish bassist Guy Berryman produces Alabama sisters Allison and Catherine's fourth album. This could be the one to break them in the UK, as Berryman gets the radio hooks into their material, while their Stevie Nicks meets Mamas and the Papas vocal style on tracks like Glorious and You'll Be Mine shine through.

### FELICE BROTHERS ★★★★☆

**Celebration, Florida** (Loose)

Having mined the rootsy Americana of the Band, the Felices spread their wings a bit - with mixed results. Ambient synths, the odd horn section, dub bass, drum machines and children's choirs all pervade these new songs. On Cus's Catskill Gym, Honda Civic and Ponzi, the transformation is quite startling. Fans of their past work may wish to hang on to tracks like Dallas and Oliver Stone.

### WALDNER ★★★★☆

**Found & Lost** (Blue Fleur)

Pleasantly melodic pop-rock from Canadian David Waldner, who has upped sticks and moved to London to search for fame. Think of Beatles-influenced contemporaries like Brendan Benson, Jason Falkner and Mull Historical Society, and you get the driving force behind songs like Rude Awakening and Heaven Only Knows.

### PHAMIE GOW ★★★★☆

**Road Of The Loving Heart** (Wildfire)

For someone principally revered as a harpist, this collection of original compositions for piano is enchanting. These classical-new age pieces were put down live and unedited near the Scot's new home in Montpellier, France, and the melodies in tracks like Carousel and Regresso a Chile are spellbinding. Having worked with such diverse acts as composer Philip Glass and southern rockers Band of Horses, Phamie, left, is building a reputation as a multi-instrumentalist of note.