



THE SUNDAYS

(Bio Brief)

Harriet Wheeler (vocals)

David Gavurin (guitar)

Paul Brindley (bass)

Patrick Hannan (drums)

The Sundays have won fans the world over for their lilting modern pop. Harriet Wheeler's winsome vocals and David Gavurin's chiming guitar continue to define the band, though they've slightly retooled their creative approach with Static & Silence (DGC Records), their self-produced third album. Says Gavurin: "We regard the songs as quite simple and intimate. We wanted the treatment they received in the studio to reflect that." Lyrically, too, Static & Silence is more personal and straightforward than the band's previous work. Gavurin concludes, "We don't feel part of the current trends in British music – we're just plowing our own furrow somewhere to the side of what's going on." (Release Date: Sept. 23, 1997)

✦ In 1988 songwriters Gavurin and Wheeler moved from Bristol to London, where they teamed with bassist Paul Brindley and drummer Patrick Hannan to form the Sundays. The band was "discovered" by the press at their very first show.

✦ After wading through a slew of offers, the Sundays signed with the independent Rough Trade label in the U.K. and DGC Records in the U.S. Their debut album, Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, appeared in 1990. The band toured internationally in support of the disc, which went gold in both the U.K. and U.S.

✦ The Sundays followed up in 1992 with Blind (released on Parlophone in the U.K., DGC in the U.S.), another gold record in America. The band then took to the road, traversing the globe once more.

✦ After returning from the Blind tour, the quartet took a much-deserved break. During this hiatus, Gavurin and Wheeler had their first child and put together their own recording facility, at which the Sundays wrote and recorded Static & Silence.

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The Sundays' musical career kicked off like a latter-day fairytale back in the summer of 1988. Songwriters David Gavurin and Harriet Wheeler had recently moved from Bristol to London, where they'd written some material for a four-piece band and teamed up with bassist Paul Brindley and drummer Patrick Hannan. The plan at this stage was simply to gain some live experience before even thinking about trying to attract record company interest.

But at the band's first-ever gig – a support slot at the Camden Falcon – music journalists there to review the headliners ended up focusing on the opening act. After rave reviews in the *New Musical Express*, *Melody Maker* and the now-defunct *Sounds*, the Sundays' career was launched.

"We knew next to nothing about the music business," recalls Wheeler, "and felt we had to act as our own managers to educate ourselves, if only so we could tell a decent manager from a duff one further down the line." Facing them were the seemingly bizarre tasks of refereeing an avalanche of record company offers and trying to slow the wave of publicity engulfing them. "We definitely weren't complaining about the press or the music business interest in us," says Gavurin, "but we'd barely played a gig – let alone recorded a note – and we didn't want the hype to turn people off."

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The Sundays signed to the independent Rough Trade label and recorded their debut single, "Can't Be Sure," in 1989. The track became an Independent charts #1 and was listed at #1 in influential DJ John Peel's Festive Fifty of that year. An American deal with DGC Records came next, and in early 1990 the band released their first album, Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. The rest of the year was spent touring worldwide. Meanwhile, the album went gold on both sides of the Atlantic.

Following the financial difficulties and eventual collapse of Rough Trade, the Sundays moved to the U.K.'s Parlophone Records, which released their second LP, Blind, in late 1992 (the band remained on DGC in the U.S). The album prompted a second world tour and another gold record in America.

Gavurin and Wheeler then took some much-needed time off. They rediscovered their social life, had a baby, painted the bathroom red and put together their own studio, where they wrote and recorded the bulk of Static & Silence, their self-produced third album (released Sept. 23, 1997). "Having our own recording setup was something we'd been thinking about for a long time," Wheeler explains. "We'd never particularly enjoyed performing in a studio. Live gigs are one thing, with adrenalin flowing and an audience in front of you. But 11:00 in the morning in front of a row of faces in the control room is another thing altogether."

Adds Gavurin, "There's something satisfying about understanding the process you're involved in, not just being shunted off into the live room and told to start playing." The major downside of taking this route was time consumption; the band had to investigate what gear to buy, have it installed and learn how to use it – all with a one-year-old running around trying to drink tape head cleaning fluid. "To be honest," Gavurin concedes, "promptness has never been our strong suit, and once we decided recording ourselves would allow us to experiment and perform more freely, we just went for it."

The resulting album does not represent a radical shift in musical style for the Sundays – no jazz or jungle here – but more a difference in mood and sound. "It's an atmospheric record," says Wheeler. "It's less grounded in ambient music than Blind, and while Static & Silence, like Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, is very song-based, it's not as youthfully 'pop' as the first album." Assesses Gavurin: "It's a slower, more emotional record than our other albums. We didn't set out with this in mind – it just turned out that way."

And though they didn't have a particular musical agenda for the new album, the Sundays did know they wanted a more direct, less effects-based sound. "We regard the songs as quite simple and intimate," Gavurin continues. "We wanted the treatment they received to reflect that. Even where we've used orchestral instruments, it was never as an afterthought, a 'production idea' intended to add a touch of grandeur to a basic song." Wheeler picks up the thread: "It was more a case of having a musical idea in our heads already and being open-minded about its instrumental form."

Despite the largely introspective, sometimes melancholic nature of Static & Silence, the Sundays insist the making of this album has been the most enjoyable experience they've had in terms of writing and recording. "Right from the start, the songs seemed to come in a very natural way," says Wheeler. "In the past, we'd usually write the melodies after the music. We generally liked the results, but the process sometimes felt a bit clinical. This time – either when we'd work things out with me singing along, or when Dave had already written a song line while coming up with the chords – the melodies were created at the same time as the music and so, in turn, could shape the way the music developed. The whole process felt really fluid and organic."

The writing of lyrics, a duty Gavurin and Wheeler share, took a similar path. "We didn't really search for a specific lyrical style," Wheeler recalls. "The mood and sound of the music suggested one for us – one we hadn't really explored before." Whereas Reading, Writing and Arithmetic featured a fairly light, frequently ironic tone and Blind favored largely abstract, impressionistic lyrics, those of Static & Silence are more straightforward and expressive. "This doesn't mean they can't be poetic or evocative," Gavurin hastens to point out. "But they're quite simple; we've never been into the willfully obscure or ornate."

The Sundays' current stylistic methods thus uncovered, Gavurin notes: "We don't feel part of the current trends in British music, be they Britpop, New Grave, Big Beat or whatever. We're just plowing our own furrow somewhere to the side of what's going on."

"We like to think we've got our own style, our own character," Wheeler comments. "But nobody writes in a vacuum and music continually seeps into our consciousness, whether it's an old Sly and the Family Stone track or the latest Oasis single. Still, there's no particular artist or style we're trying to emulate. If anything, we're influenced by the mood of certain records more than the style of the music itself. With the new album, we didn't set out with the idea of writing more emotional, personal songs, but we'd been listening to a lot of Van Morrison toward the end of the Blind tour and had really gotten into songs like 'Sweet Thing,' 'And It Stoned Me' and 'Have I Told You Lately' – music that really touched us."

Ever candid, the couple conclude their discussion of Static & Silence with some explication of its title: "Firstly," Gavurin illuminates, "we were really pleased with the imagery of that line in the song 'Monochrome,' remembering when we were children watching the moon landings, how those moments of nothingness – when the screen went fuzzy and the sound died – seemed only to heighten the excitement and sense of anticipation." Says Wheeler: "It also works as a description of a more general, shifting state of mind – one minute all is confusion, the next minute there's peace. Oh, and of course, we liked the sound of it."

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, DGC, 1990.

Blind, DGC, 1992.

Static & Silence, DGC, 1997.

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