

1056 — Talking Heads / David Byrne

An Evening of Acoustic Music, 1995

Phantom Blues, 1996

Señor Blues, 1997

Taj Mahal and the Hula Blues, 1997

SELECT AWARDS

Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Blues Album for *Señor Blues*, 1997

SEE ALSO: Clapton, Eric; Davis, Miles; Dylan, Bob; Hendrix, Jimi; Hooker, John Lee; King, B. B.; Lennon, John; Marley, Bob; Neville Brothers, The / Aaron Neville; Pointer Sisters, The; Raitt, Bonnie; Rolling Stones, The; Who, The.

Talking Heads / David Byrne

Talking Heads

ORIGINAL MEMBERS: David Byrne (b. 1952), Chris Frantz (b. 1951), Tina Weymouth (b. 1950), Jerry Harrison (b. 1949)

FIRST ALBUM RELEASE: *Talking Heads*: 77, 1977

David Byrne

BORN: Dumbarton, Scotland; May 14, 1952

FIRST ALBUM RELEASE: *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, 1981 (with Brian Eno)

MUSICAL STYLES: Punk rock, new wave, disco, funk, Cajun, country

Formed at a time when punk rock and disco represented two extremes of the rock music continuum, Talking Heads successfully fused these two disparate styles—as well as a number of others—into a unique sound, one which had significant appeal to the college crowd and the art scene. Because of this postmodern blend of influences, Talking Heads has both attracted and defied labels ranging from new wave icons to minimalist preppies. From its beginnings, David Byrne represented the somewhat unsettling, surrealistic embodiment of Talking Heads not only through his clever, absurd, often nihilistic lyrics, but also through his clean, spare guitar playing, elastic voice, and nervous stage presence. However, upon inspection of the individual members' work outside of Talking Heads, it is apparent that the

group's success was the result of a true synergy of creative efforts.

The Early Days. In the early 1970's, David Byrne, Chris Frantz, and Tina Weymouth were fellow art students at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). Weymouth and Frantz specialized in painting, while Byrne's interests were more conceptually oriented, incorporating photography, video, painting, and poetry. While at RISD, singer-guitarist Byrne and drummer Frantz formed the Artistics, which was primarily a cover band, although Byrne contributed a few original songs to their repertoire. The Artistics broke up in the spring of 1974, at which time Byrne, Frantz, and Weymouth moved to New York City, sharing a loft in the Lower East Side. Byrne and Frantz were interested in forming a new band, and encouraged Weymouth, whose primary musical experience was as a singer and guitarist, to learn the bass. The trio began working together in January of 1975, building upon the repertoire of the Artistics by combining Byrne's original songs with an ironic mix of 1960's "bubblegum" tunes and punk covers. In June of 1975, the group adopted the name Talking Heads (the television term for a head-and-shoulders camera shot of a speaking figure) and presented their first public performance, opening for the Ramones at CBGB's, one of the leading punk-rock venues in lower Manhattan.

And Then There Were Four. The trio made its first demos in early 1976, and in November of that year signed with Sire Records, recording their first single, "Love Goes to Building on Fire," the following month. During this period, the group was in search of a fourth member to cover keyboards and rhythm guitar. Jerry Harrison was an art student at Harvard University, studying painting as an undergraduate and playing keyboards (and later guitar) in a number of bands. The most successful of these, the Modern Lovers, lasted until March of 1974, at which time the original members disbanded and Harrison returned to Harvard, continuing graduate studies in architecture. Harrison left school to join the Talking Heads in late 1976, and the band recorded its first album between April and July of 1977. (Inciden-



Talking Heads in 1983: David Byrne, Jerry Harrison, Tina Weymouth, Chris Frantz (Deborah Feingold/Archive Photos)

tally, it was also at this time that Frantz and Weymouth were married.) *Talking Heads: 77* was released the following September and proved to be an auspicious debut, establishing the group's reputation through such works as "Psycho Killer," with its schizophrenic bilingual monologue and its eerie, quasi-dadaistic refrains.

New Directions. The next three studio albums chronicled the group's artistic blossoming—including an augmentation of the band's personnel and the exploration of African rhythms in its continuing foray into funk music—and exhibit the influence of former Roxy Music keyboardist Brian Eno as coproducer (on *More Songs About Buildings and Food*, 1978, and *Fear of Music*, 1979) and as producer and co-lyricist (on *Remain in Light*, 1980). Over hypnotic grooves supplied by the enlarged band (which included such distinc-

tive personalities as King Crimson guitarists Robert Fripp and Adrian Belew), Byrne's paranoid, stream-of-consciousness monologues provided a starkly surreal counterpoint in songs such as "Born Under Punches" and "Once in a Lifetime," while in "Life During Wartime," Byrne admonishes "This ain't no party, this ain't no disco,/ This ain't no fooling around."

The next two albums, 1982's *The Name of This Band Is Talking Heads* (a double-album collection of greatest hits culled from live performances between 1977 and 1981) and *Speaking in Tongues* (1983), were released following solo ventures by Byrne, Harrison, and the Tom Tom Club (Frantz and Weymouth's project), amid rumors that the band was breaking up. *Speaking in Tongues*, however, dispelled such rumors, selling more than one million copies in the United States with its

more direct rock-and-roll sound, evidenced in such hit singles as “Burning Down the House” and “Girlfriend Is Better.” The “Speaking in Tongues” tour was the subject of Jonathan Demme’s 1984 film *Stop Making Sense*, and the image of lanky David Byrne twitching marionette-like in a grotesquely oversized suit remains one of the most memorable icons of 1980’s popular music.

The next two albums represent further explorations into popular music idioms, with a dilution of the band’s hard edged aesthetic of its early years as a natural consequence. *Little Creatures* (1985) marked a return to the leaner sound of the early quartet’s recordings, though they incorporated elements of folk, country, and Cajun music with the addition of steel guitar and accordian. Byrne’s eccentric persona was perhaps alluded to in a line from “Creatures of Love” (“Doctor, doctor, tell me what I am/ Am I one of those human beings”), while “Road to Nowhere” delights in an ironically joyous existentialism. *True Stories* (1986) was a collection of songs from Byrne’s 1986 feature film of the same name and included such popular singles as the playfully raucous “Wild Wild Life” and the nostalgic “City of Dreams.”

Released in 1988, *Naked* was to be the final Talking Heads album, although the group did not officially break up until the end of 1991. Recorded in Paris with an international lineup of musicians, including a full horn section, this album presented yet another side of Talking Heads, with influences of salsa and Caribbean music evidenced in such songs as “Blind” and the unabashedly extroverted “Mr. Jones.” Four songs recorded by the group following the release of *Naked* were included in the double-album compilation *Popular Favorites 1976-1992: Sand in the Vaseline*, released in 1992.

Independent Ventures. Arguably the creative impetus behind the group, David Byrne had perhaps the most varied and successful solo career of all of the members of Talking Heads. Beginning in 1981 with *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, a joint venture with Brian Eno, Byrne has collaborated with some of the most influential artists of his generation, including choreographer Twyla Tharp (*The Catherine Wheel*, 1981), stage director



For the Record

“The big difference between us and punk groups is that we like KC and the Sunshine Band and Funkadelic/Parliament. . . . You ask Johnny Rotten if he likes KC and the Sunshine Band and he’ll blow snot in your face.”

—Chris Frantz, in a 1977 *Rolling Stone* interview with Michael Aron

Robert Wilson (“Knee Plays,” 1985), minimalist composer Philip Glass (*Songs from Liquid Days*, 1986), and film director Bernardo Bertolucci (*The Last Emperor*, 1987). Byrne established his recording company, Luaka Bop, to promote the music of Brazilian, Cuban, and Asian artists, in addition to his own solo releases, including *Rei Momo* (1989) and *Uh-Oh* (1992).

In an effort to establish some creative independence from Talking Heads, Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth formed Tom Tom Club in the early 1980’s, releasing their self-titled debut album in 1981. The group toured as the opening act for the Talking Heads’ 1982 tour, and in 1989 staged a solo tour to promote their third album *Boom Boom Chi Boom Boom*. Jerry Harrison has been a frequent collaborator as both performer and producer, working with such renowned artists as the BoDeans, Fine Young Cannibals, Violent Femmes, and Crash Test Dummies. He has also pursued a solo career with such albums as *The Red and the Black* (1981) and *Casual Gods* (1988).

Following the breakup of Talking Heads, Frantz, Weymouth, and Harrison formed the Heads, releasing their debut album *No Talking Just Heads* (a not-so-veiled reference to the conspicuously absent David Byrne) in October of 1996. To substitute for the lack of a regular lead singer, the Heads’ first project included a variety of singer-songwriters (including Andy Partridge of XTC and Deborah Harry of Blondie), each of whom contributed original material to the album.

—Joseph Klein

SELECT DISCOGRAPHY

■ ALBUMS

- Talking Heads*: 77, 1977
More Songs About Buildings and Food, 1978
Fear of Music, 1979
Remain in Light, 1980
The Name of This Band Is Talking Heads, 1982
Speaking in Tongues, 1983
Stop Making Sense, 1984
Little Creatures, 1985
True Stories, 1986
Naked, 1988
Best of Talking Heads, 1992 (compilation)
Popular Favorites 1976-1992: Sand in the Vaseline,
 1992 (compilation)

SELECT AWARDS

Academy Award for Best Original Score for *The Last Emperor*, 1987 (David Byrne with Ryuichi Sakamoto and Cong Su)

SEE ALSO: Eno, Brian; King Crimson; Ramones, The; Roxy Music / Bryan Ferry.

James Taylor

BORN: Boston, Massachusetts; March 12, 1948

FIRST ALBUM RELEASE: *James Taylor*, 1968

MUSICAL STYLES: Pop, rock, folk, blues

James Vernon Taylor was born to a wealthy southern family living in Boston while his father was an intern at Massachusetts General Hospital. Encouraged by their mother, a soprano who had studied voice at the New England Conservatory of Music, the Taylor children learned to play several instruments. James studied the cello as a child, but soon lost interest in the instrument, favoring the guitar instead. At age twelve his parents gave him his first guitar as a gift. The family often played and sang together at gatherings when the children were in high school.

Getting Started. At age fifteen, Taylor and one of his close friends, Danny Kortchmar, won a local hootenanny contest. When Taylor and Kortchmar performed, they alternated on vocals, with Taylor playing guitar and Kortchmar playing harmonica.

Their interest in folk music was eventually eclipsed by a love for rock music. At age sixteen, Taylor left high school to join a rock band, known as the Fabulous Corsairs, with his older brother Alex. Taylor eventually returned to the boarding school he had previously attended, but at age seventeen became increasingly despondent and suicidal. In 1965, he spent nine months in the McLean Hospital, a mental institution, located in Belmont, Massachusetts. Soon after, Taylor graduated from high school and left for New York to join Kortchmar in a new band. Known as the Flying Machine, the band traveled throughout the New York area playing low-paying shows.

Taylor's first big break in the music industry came in 1968, when he left New York for London. Frustrated by his situation and consumed by a drug habit, he saw the move to London as an opportunity to straighten out his life and escape his heroin addiction. His involvement with drugs did not diminish, however, as Taylor was introduced to acid by his friends in London. Determined to break into the music business, Taylor rented a studio and recorded some demo tapes of his material. Like so many aspiring musicians, he distributed the tapes to several record companies. Apple Record Company producer Peter Asher liked Taylor's musical style and offered him a three-year contract. His first album, *James Taylor*, was released in 1968 but sold poorly, in spite of high praise from critics. Paul McCartney was so impressed by Taylor that he played bass background for part of the album. One single from the album, "Carolina on My Mind," did become a Top-40 hit. Taylor's successful break into the music industry did little, however, to rid him of his all-consuming drug habit. In December of 1968 he was admitted to another mental hospital, Austin Riggs of Stockbridge, Massachusetts, for drug-addiction treatment.

The Big Break. By mid-1969, Apple Records was in financial difficulty, and Taylor managed to acquire a new contract with Warner Bros. His 1970 debut album with the label, *Sweet Baby James*, sold more than two million copies. The platinum album, and its top-selling single, "Fire and Rain," were nominated for five Grammy Awards. His first