

The Go-Go's
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What was your awareness of the Go-Go's before you worked with them and how did you come to be involved in *Beauty & The Beat*.

I kept busily immersed in the New York recording scene throughout the seventies, so I actually hadn't heard of the LA based Go-Go's until Richard Gottehrer introduced them to me in 1981. By that time, Richard (as producer) and I (as recording/mixing engineer) had made over a dozen albums together, working with a wide array of artists such as Blondie (first two albums), Robert Gordon (first three albums), Richard Hell (the seminal "Blank Generation" album), Link Wray, Martha Velez (with The Whalers as backup band), and many others. I believe he recognized that I had strong musical sensibilities in addition to my engineering skills. By that point in my career, I had begun branching out from engineering into producing. So when Richard approached me to work on the Go-Go's debut album with him, I took the opportunity to suggest we take our working relationship to another level and establish a co-production team. I was honored and pleased that he agreed, and the rest, as they say, is history.

What were the sessions like in terms of the band members' particular characters, strengths, and vulnerabilities? What were the internal band dynamics as you saw them? Did you see any of the tensions that were to pull them apart after the third album?

I first met the band members, along with their manager, at a show in a NYC club. Though I interacted only briefly with them that evening, I recall them as being cordial, enthusiastic, and excited to be in New York about to make their first album. What I heard at the show was a youthful, raw and lively energy that we would consciously try to capture going forward in the studio. Making a band sound "live" in a studio environment is always a worthy goal, but one that can be elusive and sometimes difficult to achieve for a variety of reasons. But I know all the band members were onboard with that approach and so, between their hard-hitting, well-rehearsed performances and the wonderful open-acoustic set up I created inside the lively, all-wooden recording room at Penny Lane Studios, I'd like to think we succeeded in capturing that kind of energy to a large degree.

I got to know each of the band members individually during pre-session rehearsals and during our many weeks together in the studio. We'd spend time talking about music and studio techniques. They were eager to learn. During all that time, I found them amiable, hard working, and determined to succeed. It's true they may have shown up to some sessions more than a little hung over from some post-session revelry in NYC, but that didn't seem to interfere with

their productivity during recording sessions. There was also an ongoing barrage of pleasant distractions throughout the sessions—the likes of John Belushi and Dan Ackroyd, members of the E-Street Band, and Elvis Costello’s band—would show up just to hang with the Go-Go’s and to listen to what we were working on. Throughout the project, the Go-Go’s remained confident that they had the songs and the capabilities to make a really great record. They just needed some guidance in getting it all down on tape (as it was back in those day). And honestly, from my first meeting them through the final days of the project, I never sensed any of the potential tensions and conflicts that would erupt between them in the coming years.

What did you make of their songs?

From the moment I got involved with the project, I loved the songs. I’m a big fan of concise, well-crafted pop songs, and the Go-Go’s brought a slew of them in to the project, one seemingly better than the last. “Our Lips Are Sealed” and “We Got the Beat” were both standouts and sounded nearly radio-ready even before giving them the studio treatment. The infectious energy of the rhythm tracks—drums, bass, and guitars—supported Belinda’s singing of those memorable melodies and catchy hooks. It all just worked!

What was your and Richard's task, in terms of the band's expectations and IRS' expectations?

At it’s most basic level, the job of the record producer is to help the artist realize their vision and to package that vision into a commercially viable product. I feel we succeeded in doing both with this album. The band was relatively inexperienced at the time, so they relied heavily on our experience and expertise to help them get through the process of making their debut album. I was not privy to the initial budgetary discussions with IRS Records. But my approach was always consistent: prep well before going into the studio, record in the best facility you could afford, and be as efficient as possible to get the project done in a timely manner. So it was with the Go-Go’s. But after about 10 days of making the album—with only basic tracks plus a few overdubs and scratch vocals (recorded live in a booth during the recording of basic tracks)—I was informed we had enough budget left for a few more days of recording before we’d have to begin the projected week-long mixing process to finish the album. We were all so excited about what we were doing, and recognized the need for more studio time to work on vocals, finishing bits, etc. So I did a round of rough (reference) mixes of all the songs and sent them off to IRS Records in LA. We explained that *this* is where we were at the moment and that we were prepared to finish the project quickly and on budget. However, if they agreed that the tracks were sounding hot, we hoped they would grant us a bit more time in the studio to finish the project properly. They agreed (whew!) and we carried on for another few weeks until the album was complete. In the end, due to budgetary

constraints, we did a super-fast mix (a marathon 30 hours to mix the entire album!) followed directly by a mad dash out the door, into a cab, and straight to Sterling Sound for mastering so as to meet the IRS release deadline.

What did you make of the album once it was done? Did it match the band's and IRS' expectations?

As you get deeply ensconced in the making of an album, it's really easy for all involved to believe it's going to be the best album ever! That's only natural. But all too often, time and disappointing sales punch holes in that thinking and you settle gently back into reality. But in this case, it seems that all our hard work—along with that of the record company, the promotions people, and the band themselves—, all the excitement, and the hype surrounding this album would pay off royally. It became the bona fide hit we had all hoped it could be. I trust our efforts pleased the band, the record company, and all the fans. I know it pleased me very much!

And why weren't you involved in Vacation?

I didn't work on the Go-Go's follow-up album, Vacation, as I was busy out of the country producing other artists at the time they wanted to head back in to the studio. I did get the call, but couldn't arrange my schedule to align with theirs. So I wished them all the best and they proceeded without me.

Did you keep in touch with them after the album?

Unfortunately, I haven't kept in touch with the band members over the years. It seems just the nature of the music business—one gets busy with other projects, time passes. The last time I saw all of the band members was in LA upon their Grammy nomination as BEST NEW ARTIST following the album's great success. I have lots of awesome memories of my time working with the Go-Go's—many from during the recording sessions, and others, like the after-project picnic I hosted at my house in suburban New York during which, in a flurry of backstage-like chaos, the Go-Go's prepared for a show they were putting on that very evening. What did I see? My lips are sealed.