

Dave Stewart and
Annie Lennox, 1983



EURYTHMICS

THE HITMAKING, GAME-CHANGING DUO HAS CONSTANTLY PUSHED THE BOUNDARIES OF POPULAR MUSIC.

BY ROB BOWMAN

In the 1980s the ultra-modern soundscapes of Dave Stewart and Annie Lennox, a.k.a. Eurythmics, were omnipresent on radio, MTV, and in dance clubs. Stewart and Lennox managed to combine an insatiable quest for growth, change, and at times radical experimentation, with an unerring ability to craft extraordinary catchy radio-friendly singles such as “Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This),” “Here Comes the Rain Again,” and “Would I Lie to You?” For many, the sound of Eurythmics defined much of what was great about the decade.

In terms of sheer sales power, Stewart and Lennox remain the most successful male/female duo of all time. Recording nine studio LPs, eight of which were released between 1981 and 1990, they managed to sell more than seventy-five million albums and place twenty-nine singles on the British pop charts – nine of which went Top Ten. Although not quite as dominant on U.S. radio, they were still a formidable force, racking up fifteen singles on the *Billboard* charts, three of which reached the vaunted Top Ten. In addition, thirteen of their singles were substantive hits on the *Billboard* dance charts.

But more importantly than sales and chart stats, the band constantly pushed the boundaries of popular music. They were instrumental in ushering in the era of synth pop while simultaneously working at the cutting edge of sampling culture. They recorded and then manipulated non-instrumental sounds, such as chirping crickets, fire engines, and children playing, which were then integrated into their futuristic soundscapes (for a good example, listen to “English Summer” from their 1981 debut, *In the Garden*).

Eurythmics never stood still, refusing to repeat themselves and continuously pushing their creative energies. Along the way, they wrote some of the most sardonic, at times dark, lyrics of the 1980s. In a number of songs, they embraced feminist principles and, in lead singer Annie Lennox, projected a frontwoman equal in every way, shape, and form to her male counterpart. Further, Lennox’s vocal technique and imagination was unmatched by any other rock or pop singer of the era. In videos and live performances, she presented gender fluidity long before the term became a part of the lexicon of everyday life. Sonically, lyrically, and visually, Eurythmics captured the zeitgeist of a radically post-punk world with lasting impact.

Lennox and Stewart first met in 1975 at a London restaurant where she was working; the next year they formed the Catch with Peet Coombes. After the band released a 1977 single, they changed their name and the overall concept, adding a rhythm section: In 1979 and 1980, as the Tourists, they recorded three albums and placed five singles on the U.K. charts, the most successful being a spunky cover of Dusty Springfield’s “I Only Want to Be With You.” With Coombes the dominant songwriter in the Tourists, Lennox and Stewart decided to pursue a more experimental path, left the group, and formed Eurythmics in 1981. The duo’s name came from an innovative pedagogical technique developed in the early twentieth century by Swiss musician Émile Jaques-Dalcroze that combined music, dance, and play. As Eurythmics, the duo’s concept was to control their overall creative direction, hiring outside musicians as needed.



Stewart and Lennox performing as members of the Tourists at London's Marquee Club, 1978

For that first album, *In the Garden*, Stewart and Lennox headed to Germany to record with Conny Plank, famous for his groundbreaking production work with seminal Krautrock bands Neu! and Can. While *In the Garden* failed to connect on a commercial level, working with Plank had an inordinate influence on the group. As Stewart told *Classic Pop* in 2018, “Conny just blew my mind because he reinforced the notion that it’s best if you don’t know what you’re doing. There are no rules.” Lennox concurred: “Conny was so special. The air was

thick with experimentation. You entered the studio door and it was like you’d stepped into another landscape.”

The full impact of working with Plank and exploring Berlin’s underground music scene was made manifest on the group’s followup album in 1983, *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*. Borrowing money from a local bank, Lennox and Stewart created their own 8-track studio, outfitting it with an array of synthesizers as well as a Movement MCS Mk 1 Drum Computer. Fascinated by the possibilities that this new equipment offered, Stewart, literally, put his guitar



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: In Holland, 1984; in Chicago, 1984; getting ready to appear in their breakout music video, "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)," 1983; at Radio City Music Hall for the annual MTV awards, 1983.

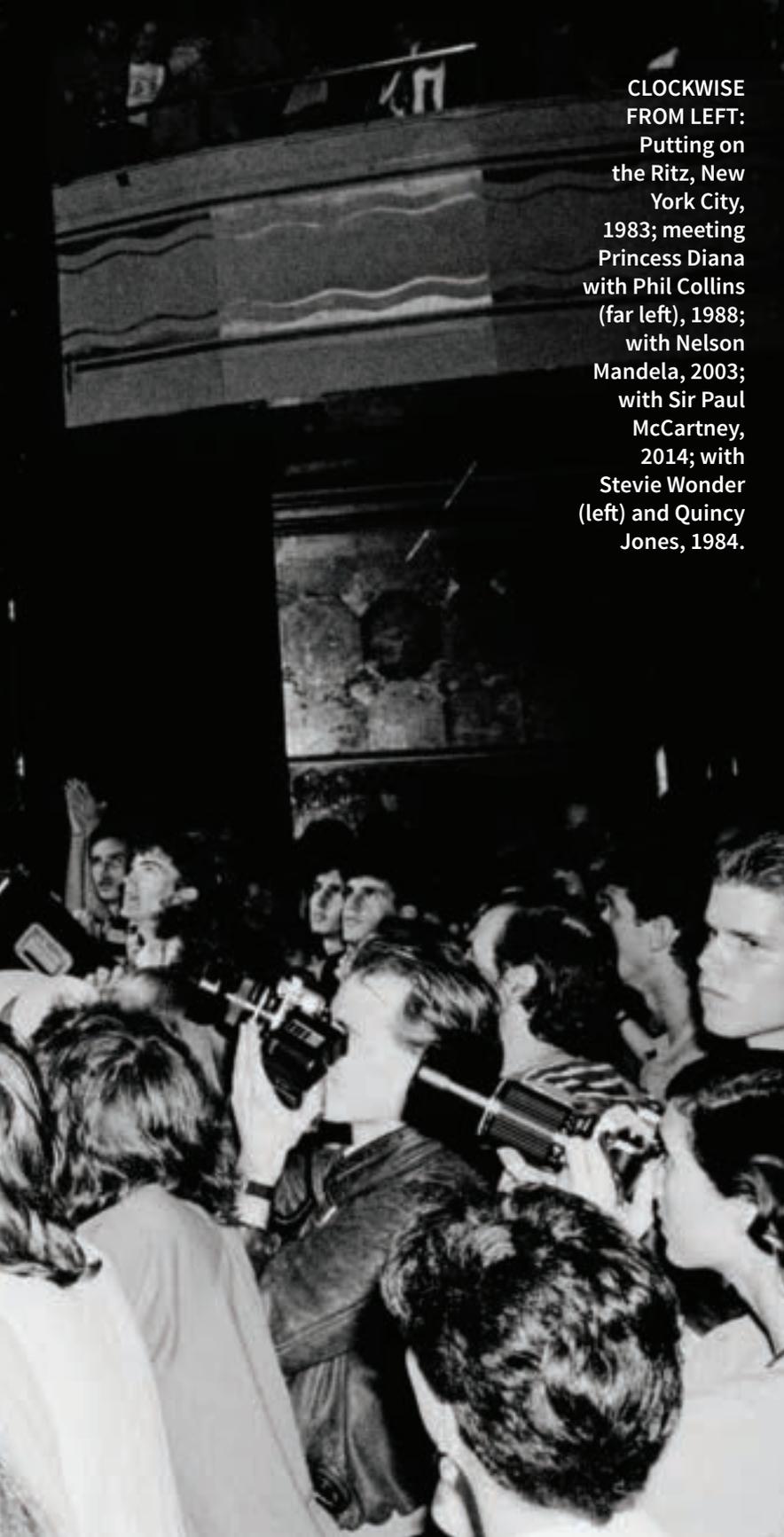


aside and taught himself to play keyboards while simultaneously learning how to program these new toys.

Sweet Dreams proved to be a game changer as an album, single of the same name, and video. The title track featured an earworm in the form of a synthesized bass hook sequenced by Stewart on a Roland SH-101, a four-on-the-floor electronic drum groove (which Stewart would return to many times on later Eurythmics recordings), and an irresistible 8-bar string break created by Lennox on an Oberheim synth. Released in the first weeks of the year, the single stormed its way to Number Two in Britain. Spurred by a gender-bending surreal video featuring Lennox sporting closely cropped flaming

orange hair while dressed in a sharply tailored man's suit, "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)" reached the top spot on the U.S. pop charts while also hitting Number Two on the American dance charts. Both the single and the album gave notice that Lennox was in possession of an extraordinarily flexible voice, capable of myriad timbres that could cover a wide range of the audio spectrum.

Their 1983 followup, *Touch*, included three hit singles: "Who's That Girl?," the calypso-tinged "Right by Your Side," and "Here Comes the Rain Again," which propelled the band to global stardom. Taking a quick right turn, the group's next release that same year was the incredibly dark 1984 (*For the Love of Big Brother*).



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Putting on the Ritz, New York City, 1983; meeting Princess Diana with Phil Collins (far left), 1988; with Nelson Mandela, 2003; with Sir Paul McCartney, 2014; with Stevie Wonder (left) and Quincy Jones, 1984.

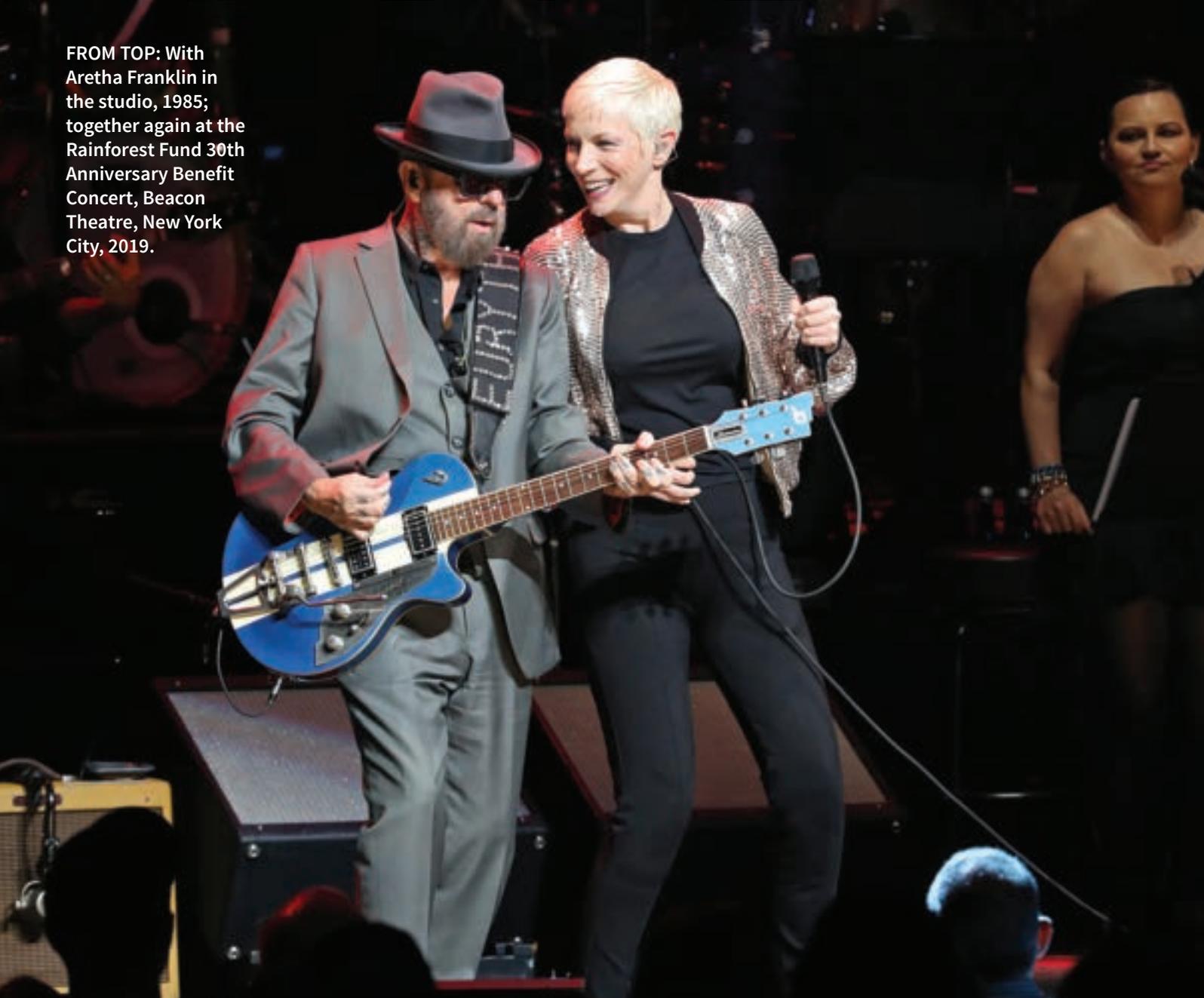


Ostensibly written for the soundtrack of Michael Radford's film of the same name, the album's single "Sex-crime (Nineteen Eighty-Four)" was a Number Four pop single in the U.K. While a little too adventurous for U.S. radio, the track regularly lit up urban dance club floors in the States, reaching Number Two on *Billboard's* dance charts. Stewart described the album succinctly as "Kraftwerk meets African tribal meets Booker T. and the MGs."

The group's mid-eighties albums, *Be Yourself Tonight* and *Revenge*, were their biggest sellers. The former contained four hit singles, including the feminist anthem "Sisters Are Doin' It for Themselves." Originally written with Tina Turner in mind, "Sisters" featured a glorious,



FROM TOP: With Aretha Franklin in the studio, 1985; together again at the Rainforest Fund 30th Anniversary Benefit Concert, Beacon Theatre, New York City, 2019.



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celebratory duet between Queen of Soul Aretha Franklin and Lennox, as well as a crazed, manic left-of-center guitar solo. *Revenge* was even more hard-rock oriented, providing the group with another four hit singles. The last of these, the neuron firing “Missionary Man,” won a Grammy in 1987 for Best Rock Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocal.

From 1986 forward, Eurythmics’ singles would be much more successful in the U.K. than in the U.S., although the group continued to remain popular in American dance clubs and in live performance. This was immediately apparent when their next album, *Savage*

(1987), contained four U.K. hits, with only one album track, the guitar-driven and lust-laden “I Need a Man,” making the U.S. Top Fifty. Wildly experimental, *Savage* was Lennox’s favorite Eurythmics album.

Music videos were always an important part of the group’s artistic expression, its career fortuitously running parallel with the rise of MTV. Lennox, in particular, was fascinated with the form, declaring, “I was like a kid with a paintbox. I could be all these different characters. It was so exciting!” Ever pushing the boundaries, the group issued a companion video album for *Savage* on both VHS and LaserDisc, with most of the videos directed by Sophie Muller. It was nominated for a Grammy in 1989.

After the more mainstream *We Two Are One*, released in 1989, Lennox and Stewart took a ten-year hiatus, issuing a final album, *Peace*, in 1999. True to a pattern that had started in 1986 with “Missionary Man,” the group placed two hit singles from *Peace* on the British charts, including the Number Eleven “I Saved the World Today.” But American radio all but ignored the record. Eurythmics were still loved on American dance floors, however, as another track from *Peace*, “17 Again,” hit the top of the *Billboard* dance charts. For the 2005 anthology *Ultimate Collection*, Lennox and Stewart reunited to record two new songs, one of which, “I’ve Got a Life,” once again topped the dance charts.

While Eurythmics’ sound varied widely from album to album and, at times, from track to track, some key ingredients predominate their recordings. Among them: fat synth bass lines; icy synth textures in the mid and higher registers; sampled sounds from a variety of non-instrumental sources; layered and contrapuntal virtuosic vocal lines often featuring electronically treated yelps, squeals, and howls; four-on-the-floor drum grooves; occasional nods to tribal-inspired drum timbres; chunky electric guitar rhythms and spine-tingling guitar solos; masterful use of horn sections; and stabbing, cinematic strings. The varied combinations of all of the above add up to a distinctive, idiosyncratic body of work that deftly merges the avant-garde with popular culture.

In 2005, Eurythmics were inducted into the U.K. Music Hall of Fame, and in 2020 Dave Stewart and Annie Lennox were inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame. Tonight, they take their rightful place in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Sweet dreams, indeed, are made of this.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

	
Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This) 1983 (RCA)	Touch 1983 (RCA)
	
1984 (For the Love of Big Brother) 1984 (RCA)	Be Yourself Tonight 1985 (RCA)
	
Savage 1987 (RCA)	Ultimate Collection 2005 (Arista)