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Edited by Michael Goldberg

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Addicted To Noise

correspondent **Matthew Budman** reports : It's late in London and the Sundays' David Gavurin and Harriet Wheeler have just convinced their 2-year-old daughter Billie to sleep. It's been a long night for the couple, full of all the unexpected twists and turns of parenting.

They even had to pass up a photo shoot because they couldn't find a baby sitter for Billie. There are more important things than music, afterall.

After a five year hiatus that saw them fall from public consciousness, the quartet's long-awaited third album *Static & Silence* (Geffen), the first since 1992's *Blind* , has finally made it to the presses. Now it's time to talk about where they've been and what has come of their music over the years. Sitting by a speakerphone from across the Atlantic, they follow-up each other's points and finish each other's sentences -- that is, when the garrulous Gavurin pauses for a breath.



After five years, David Gavurin and Harriet Wheeler (pictured) are back with a daughter and another collection of 'poetic' pop tunes.

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"It used to be the case that we'd finish the music before we'd even write the melody line on top of it," Gavurin says. "And last of all we'd do the lyrics. But on this album, the melodies came up as the initial idea came up. It felt like a less clinical process. It made for a more direct-sounding album. We kind of wanted it to be quite natural, so the effect is..."

"More human," Wheeler interjects. "And this time we used all live drums. We recorded virtually all of it in our little studio, but to record the drums we had to go to a big studio. Drums don't make for real happy neighbors."

Since the Sundays have been out of the public eye for some time, the new album will reintroduce, and in some cases introduce, many to the band. Longtime fans will find it instantly familiar: offering the same brand of shimmering, strikingly melodic, acoustic-electric pop as offered on the first two releases. Gavurin allows that some listeners will find it *too* similar even. "It wouldn't surprise me if people said it sounded exactly the same -- or if people said it sounded totally different," he says.

But there are real differences. Real horns and strings on a couple of tracks, and -- more significantly -- a more organic feel that likely comes from the way it was written and recorded: at home in the couple's small recording studio. "The album feels less lightly poppy than the first two," Gavurin says. "It's more mature. You don't imagine a 17-year-old band wrote the songs."

Though *Static & Silence* is only the group's third release, the Sundays have been together since 1988. Gavurin and Wheeler met at Bristol University and formed the group that year with bassist Paul Brindley and drummer Patrick Hannan.

On the basis of the band's first album, *Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic*, and its hit single, "Here's Where the Story Ends," Britain tagged the band as the next big thing. But the Sundays' low public profile and meager recorded output have caused public consciousness to slip and rumors to surface that the band had dissolved. "It's not really something we've lost a lot of sleep over," she says, adding that she and her husband put the band on hiatus for a year after their 1993 tour simply to break up the monotony.

"I don't mean to say that we're not ambitious," Gavurin says. "We're happy with how many records we've sold, and we'd like to reach more people -- but not at the cost of who we are. If this record gets a good response, I'm sure we'll be very pleased. But we'll never put out something we didn't believe in just to have something in the marketplace."

"It'd be much worse," Wheeler says, "to put out an album that you don't believe in. If we don't get a good response to this one, we'll be upset, but at least we know that we acquitted ourselves well."

A good deal of why the songwriters say they are happy with *Static & Silence* is the album's lyrics. At 34, they wanted to express thoughts that were more profound, less juvenile. "The album is less youthful," Gavurin says. "It's less quirky and jokey than the first album; that one was more stream-of-consciousness. The new one is more poetic. We took a lot of time over the lyrics. They're hopefully evocative, express a mood, express feelings. The essence of the first album was sort of..."

"Flippant," Wheeler finishes.

The couple says they were not looking to get a message out to the world. They have no story to tell. They just wanted to make good evocative music, Gavurin says. "It's not pages torn out of a diary. It's not autobiographical for either of us. It's just moods and feelings. That's what moves us when we're listening to music."

Drawing inspiration from some of the classics, they cite Joni Mitchell's landmark 1976 *Hejira* album as an influence. "I think we're going to have to update our CD collection!" Wheeler laughs. "The things in the CD player most often lately are Fred Astaire, some very weird French film themes from the 1960s, and quite a lot of Frank Sinatra."

That doesn't mean there isn't something new in their sound though. Wheeler admits to liking "a lot of trance music, ambient dance music," especially when she's driving.

"We do follow the pop world very closely," Gavurin says, "but as you're working on a record, you become very immersed in details, so it's hard to just listen to new pop music without being too intense about it."

Gavurin adds, "I can write songs like the Prodigy!"

A tour is tentatively planned to support *Static & Silence* and Wheeler says the Sundays will play a dozen or so U.S. dates before the end of the year. But one question remains: How to handle Billie on the road. "I don't think either of us are attracted to the idea of having a rock 'n' roll kid," Wheeler says. "So we will take her, but we'll take a nanny as well."

"If (Billie) wants to come at all, she's got to prove herself," Gavurin quips. "We're auditioning her these next few months." [Thurs., Sept. 4, 1997, 9 a.m. PST]