**The Cure Play It Pure**

**Van Gosse**, *Village Voice*, 21 April 1980

MOTHER OF GOD, another good English band. It's getting so people are scared to go near record shops, for fear of parting with their fillings, wedding rings, whatever. So why should Mr. and Mrs. America bother with the Cure? Being critics' darlings is no great recommendation, and if I were to mention songs about fear, loss, alienation, perception, and even the existential dilemma played over a sparse, tense, droning, minimal blah blah you would probably say, "Aw, heck, jack, we've heard all that before, what a bore, dime a dozen, give us a camp dance band from the boonies, or better yet, let's go to one of them rock discos where they play Supremes *all night!*".

Seriously, folks, why should you care about the Cure's first U.S. release, *Boys Don't Cry* (most of their first English album, *Three Imaginary Boys*, plus various singles sides)? The answer is obvious: better songs, better playing. There may be two dozen English groups trying to do what the Cure do, but this is the genuine article. Every little thing's a hook, the bass lines are all melody, the singing rough but instantly sympathetic, nothing dragged out, all compact and precise. Even in Cherry Hill, New Jersey where the Cure opened their American tour Saturday night, people danced. I'd have thought that long ago Talking Heads disposed of the canard that you can't boogie to art-rock, but still it hangs on. Yet the Cure's drummer, Lol Tolhurst, could pack a dance floor all by himself.

The plaintive 'Boys Don't Cry' is as close as the Cure get to straight pop. There are other songs of romance, most notably 'Fire in Cairo' whose incantatory chorus is, over and over, "F-I-R-E-I-N-C-A-1-R-O" (that's what his girl's hair burns like, see?). Which is a long way from "and her name is G . . . ." And a quiet bit of desperation called '10:15 Saturday Night' with lines like "Waiting for the telephone to ring/and I wonder where she's been/and I'm crying for yesterday" would be kitsch but that Robert Smith, the Cure's guitarist and songwriter sings so simply and softly that it's only lonely, not bathetic.

Much more often, he is a hard-eyed observer. He tells a grim little tale of mugging in 'Subway Song', complete with echoing harmonica; sneers at trendies in the jerky 'Jumping Someone Else's Train', and, like any litterateur, adopts personae, as in 'Killing an Arab'. The Cure's original claim to fame, and, as they, put it, "albatross," is based on Camus's *The Stranger*, in which someone does indeed kill an. Arab. The lyrics are deadpan detail and the whole feeling slightly B-movie, all pseudo-Arab silver-toned guitar riffs and dervish bass parts cascading around "standing on the beach with a gun in my hand/staring at the sky staring at the sand/staring down the barrel at the Arab on the ground/the sea is open-mouthed, I hear no sound/I'm alive" – here the guitar imitates waves crashing or a gunshot – "I'm dead/I'm the stranger, killing an Arab." Like 'Psycho Killer' for the Heads, 'Killing an Arab' got the Cure noticed and pigeonholed – hence the "albatross" tag – and they stopped playing it for a while. Now, it's the encore and still a standout because Smith finally lets go on the guitar and plays spidery single-note lines. Otherwise, he strums offbeat chords, his Fender's sound phased or flanged into a chiming constant. Matthieu Hartley, the group's new fourth member on keyboards, handles what were guitar overdubs on the first album; in new numbers from the Cure's upcoming English LP, *Seventeen Seconds*, which form about half the set, Hartley has his own lines.

The English weeklies have the Cure tagged as a "no image band" because there's no ranting or rolling, and nobody jumps around. Hartley is a big guy, sort of like a truck driver, doesn't tap his foot even; Smith, who looks like a malignant Beaver Cleaver, just watches his hands. Only bassist Simon Gallup, also new to the band, smiles and moves around at all, and he'll get over that. This is not a band that tries to win you over, nor are they hostile – they just want to get on with it. When's the last time you heard a frontman say, "Could you not bother with the spotlight please?"

The Cure are part of a long, oft-ignored tradition. Like the very early Who, they play a conceptualized pop music, meant for simultaneous dancing and listening. It is not about triumph through sex (i.e., Stones) or triumph through anger (i.e., punk). Like Siouxsie and the Banshees, Public Image Ltd. and Talking Heads, the Cure are formalists. The songs observe and comment, a viewpoint is expressed, but there are no universal gripes or calls to the barricades. And the beat, found in the perfect tension between each carefully arranged line, is always preeminent. Quietly, without faddism or fashion-mongering, the Cure, and bands like it, are defining the future of what we still call rock and roll music.

**The Cure: Emerald City, Philadelphia**

**Van Gosse**, *Melody Maker*, 26 April 1980

THE CURE HAVE just made their American debut at Emerald City, a huge "rock disco" outside of Philadelphia. Beside Jefferson Starship playing the Roxy, it's hard to imagine anything more clashing than this venue and this band. Stuck in among the potted palms, pinball rooms and endless neon caverns, the Cure gained enormously in presence just by looking what they are: four uncompromisingly ordinary yobs, Brit-musician variety.

They took the stage, more than a little jet-lagged but seemingly quite sure of themselves, opening with two songs that no-one in the U.S. has ever heard, the title cut from their about-to-be-released UK album *Seventeen Seconds* followed by 'Play For Today'. They went over well.

The band then alternated between the older, poppier songs and the new material, which in the studio version sounds mechanised and heavy on the Continental angst, but live, packs a great droning wallop, especially the new single 'A Forest'. Familiar songs like 'Boys Don't Cry', 'Jumping Someone Else's Train' and 'Accuracy' were much more deliberate and solid than on vinyl, where Chris Parry's no-tricks production does not convey the impact of Lol Tollhurst's exemplary drumming.

The new keyboard player, who looked like a roadie at the side of the stage, played well, taking much of the instrumental burden off Smith and Michael Demsey's replacement on bass. Despite his reputation as Mr "self effacing and reticent", Robert Smith looks from here to be quite the hard man who knows what he wants and usually gets it.