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Nouvelle Brings New Theatrical Show to Arena

By Sergei Chernov

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Collin, left, the mastermind behind Nouvelle Vague, the female-led French group that started out playing covers.

ST. PETERSBURG — In the world of pop, you have to run to stay in the same place — or change constantly to keep your work interesting. That's exactly what Marc Collin, the French producer and mastermind behind Nouvelle Vague, does.

The band, or as Collin prefers to call it, the "project," began by adding bossa nova arrangements and beguiling female voices to 1980s punk and post-punk gems, from The Clash to Joy Division to The Undertones.

Nouvelle Vague went on to record with the songs' original singers such as Depeche Mode's Martin Gore, Echo & the Bunnymen's Ian McCulloch and The Specials' Terry Hall, before resurrecting semi-obscure French post-punk material. The group is now looking forward to recording some original songs.

Collin spoke to The Moscow Times ahead of Nouvelle Vague's concert this weekend.

Q: What can we expect from Nouvelle Vague's Moscow performance?
A: In Moscow we're going to perform a new show mise en scene by [designer] Jean Charles Castelbajac [called "Dawn of Innocence"], with lots more musicians, a lot of costumes, a different singer, Mareva Galanter [from the concert Friday in St. Petersburg] and with visuals.

Q: Could you tell us about the project's more recent history?
A: When we started, we were doing covers of post-punk songs into bossa nova. Surprisingly, it very quickly became a huge success all over the world. So we started to tour a lot and did the second album really quickly. I think the second album is better, though. We sold about the same numbers of "Bande a Part" and the first album. We were like the thing of the moment with those two albums.
Afterward, we took some time and wanted to change the concept a bit ... and do something more pop. We asked the original singers of the songs to do duets, so we worked with people like Martin Gore from Depeche Mode, Terry Hall and Ian McCulloch. Unfortunately that album didn't sell much compared with the others. But the concerts were still very strong everywhere.

Q: So the fourth album, "Couleurs sur Paris," was French music?
A: Yeah. It was a bit different because it was French music from the 1980s, and we chose one famous singer per song. All those singers are very famous in France. But people liked it, and they didn't know the songs at all. I mean, abroad, nobody knows the songs that we covered. They think they were our songs.

Q: How did it come about that the original performers of the songs such as Ian McCulloch, Terry Hall and Martin Gore worked with you on the covers?
A: I met Terry Hall (I can't remember where), and I heard that Martin Gore was a fan of what we'd done on "Just Can't Get Enough." I got some management contact, and we just wrote to them: "I heard that you liked what we did, we're going to do another cover of your music, so how about singing something with a girl?" and most of them said, "Yeah, why not?" so they came to the studio in Paris and we recorded the songs.
It was amazing for us because I was a big fan. I saw all these bands live when I was young. Just to have the guys in my studio in Paris working with me was like a dream — it was a great experience!

Q: How do you work on the songs with the singers? Do you discuss the songs' meanings?
A: That has changed. We've been doing it for almost 10 years now. Sometimes we didn't even play the songs to the girls. We just played the melody, showed them the lyrics and said "Do it." They would say, "We don't know the song," and we would say, "It's OK, just do it like that." That's what was really fresh about the songs.
But we gave that up because it was sometimes difficult to find someone who didn't know the songs. When we were covering, for example, "Heart of Glass" by Blondie — everybody knows that song.
It's quite simple now. We just propose songs, and they say, "Why not? Send me the playback," and try to sing over it. That is how it happened with the four albums. But as I said, we're not doing those covers anymore.
From the start, I've tried to change, to have the concept evolve. I try not to get stuck with

the same recipe, like doing bossa nova post-punk with the same singer. I try to do something new every time. I think that's why we're still here and are still touring.

Nouvelle Vague will perform Saturday. 8 p.m. Arena Moscow. 31 Leningradsky Prospekt, Bldg. 4. Metro Dinamo. Tel. 940-6755. www.arenagroup.ru

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