



“I CAN DIE NOW”

Suicide's ALAN VEGA on Springsteen and “Dream Baby Dream” By CARYN ROSE

On the first U.S. leg of the D&D tour, in Chicago, Bruce encored with a haunting song performed on pump organ—“Dream Baby Dream,” later identified as a cover of a song by the band Suicide. The song has closed every show since then. *Backstreets* sat down with Suicide vocalist Alan Vega to discuss what a punk revolutionary who doesn't use guitars—ever—and the Guitar Slinger From Central New Jersey could possibly have in common.

“I never heard anything avant-garde. To me it was just New York City Blues,” Alan Vega has said. Sonic revolutionaries that eschewed the traditional bass/guitar/drum format, Suicide were nothing short of punk auteurs. Featuring Martin Rev on keyboards and Vega on vocals, their minimalist rock and dramatic, confrontational performances would later pave the way for artists such as Soft Cell, Jesus & Mary Chain, Human League and Primal Scream. Following their first album in 1977, Suicide recorded “Dream Baby Dream” in New York in 1979, with Ric Ocasek producing, and the song was initially released as a 12-inch single. Their name came up a lot around 1982 when *Nebraska* came out, the bleak minimalism of that album influenced probably not a little bit by Suicide, and Bruce once called Suicide's “Frankie Teardrop” “one of the most amazing songs I ever heard.” At the end of July in Bridgeport, CT, Bruce dedicated that night's performance of “Dream Baby Dream” to Vega, who was in the audience that night.

ALAN VEGA: I'm still a little high from that show [7/20/05]. Now I can die—not only is he playing “Dream Baby Dream,” but it's the big encore song, the last song of the show. And what blew me more apart was—after the show, people are leaving, the lights go on, and they're playing this music. I go, wow, that's a great thing... this music, it wasn't your typical rock 'n' roll music, it was sophisticated, symphonic—it was really, really great. And I'm standing there, waiting to go backstage to see Bruce, when it dawns on me: this thing sounds familiar! And then, *bam!* It hits me, it's my song, “Dujang Prang”! And he's been playing that all the time! [Editor's note: the usual walk-out song is “Slow Jam” by Four Tet; Vega's “Dujang Prang,” part of Bruce's extensive walk-in selection, was played after the Bridgeport show, obviously in honor of Vega's attendance.]

What did you think of Bruce's version of “Dream Baby Dream?”

This is the first time this has ever happened to me. A lot of bands have done my stuff, Suicide stuff, and they basically try and copy and do the way that you do it. Thank god, finally somebody did their version of it. He interpreted my song, he did it his way—and such a great way, that I'm going to have to sing it that way, or not sing it at all any more!

So when did you first hear that that Bruce was covering “Dream Baby Dream,” and how did you find out?

I forget exactly... [my manager] Liz got a call from somebody, I guess in Chicago... and somebody knows my A&R guy at Elektra, and he sent me an email that said, “Bruce is doing your song.” At first I didn't believe it. And then I heard it was the last encore song, and then more email started coming in, “he's doing it again,” wherever he was. And I thought, “Well, now I can die.”

Who made the arrangements to bring you to the Bridgeport show?

I don't know how it happened—Jesse [Malin] called me, what I heard was that they were talking about me.

What was it like?

I went up to the show, and he's doing the sound-check. I'm sitting with Jesse and three or four other people, and Bruce comes over to the side of the stage with a big shit-eating grin on his face, and he gives me a bear hug. It's like nothing has changed since the last time I saw him, 24 years ago, or whatever it was. That's Bruce. He's so cool, he's down to earth, the way he dresses, and always asking me about my shit.

He said, “You know, Alan, if Elvis was alive today, he'd be you... you know, Alan, you're 20

years ahead of your time.” And I told him that in Europe, people use the word *icon* to describe me, but in America, I'm a complete zero. And he said, “I know, every time I go to Europe, that's the only place I can get your records!” But you know, he understands. Two guys touring, over 30 years of our lives... he's amazing.

I know he wants to be Roy Orbison; I know, deep down, he's going for that high note, that Roy thing. The funniest thing I've ever seen with him is on that Roy Orbison tribute [*Black & White Night*], he talks about trying to get to the high note: “What am I supposed to do? Cut my balls off just to get that note?” [Laughs]

But what a great night, I was flying for days on end. We were in the front row, not quite center, but, hey. And a great meal backstage, I felt like royalty. It felt wonderful—it's one of the highlights of my life, I'll tell ya.

That second song...

“Reason to Believe.”

That singing into the mouth harp, and I immediately flipped—it's like an American Indian thing, and there's a statement right there, too. I was sitting there going, “Holy shit! This is great.” That's the last thing I said to him when I left the show that night: “Bruce, that second song... that was fucking amazing, man.”