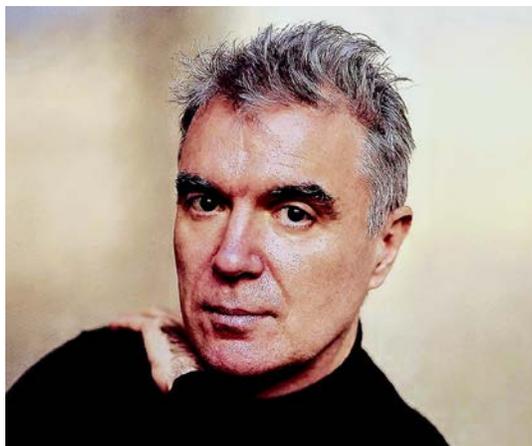


**This interview with
DAVID BYRNE
was conducted by the Library of Congress
on May 23, 2017**



David Byrne

Library of Congress: The songwriting credits for all the music on the “Remain in Light” album are shared by you, the other members of the band and Brian Eno. How did you, as a group, collaborate?

David Byrne: Brian and I had come off making the “Bush of Ghosts” record, on which we more or less took turns improvising repetitive parts over a beat...we’d layer them one on top of another. With Talking Heads, we did the same thing, though some of the initial grooves we had previously worked out in [our] loft practice sessions. We’d lay down some initial parts and then the various musicians would often take turns adding and layering over those. We then created song sections by switching those parts on and off—one group would play over the bass and drums for a verse section and another group would be nominated for a chorus section.

LOC: What were some of the influences you brought to this album? For example, there’s a strong Afro-funk vibe on it. What were you listening to at that time that made you want to incorporate those sounds into the album?

DB: We were listening to African pop music—such that was available—like Fela Kuti and King Sunny Adé, and some field recordings. But we didn’t set out to imitate those. We deconstructed everything as we began to use the process described above, and then as the music evolved, we began to realize we were in effect reinventing the wheel. Our process led us to something with some affinity to Afro-funk, but we got there the long way round, and of course our version sounded slightly off. We didn’t get it quite right, but in missing, we ended up with something new.

LOC: As a vocalist, who (or what) do you think influenced you the most?

DB: My vocal style adapts to the music—sometimes it inspires me to yelp and other times to croon. Sometimes it’s counter intuitive—a croon might be a nice response to a busy energetic rhythmic track, for example.

LOC: Can you tell me how Brian Eno interacted with the band and his role as producer?

DB: Besides being a fifth band member on this record, Brian is a wonderful enthusiast. He sells the excitement and potential of working in a new way—the upside of stepping into the unknown, experimenting and seeing what might happen.

LOC: “Once in a Lifetime” was the breakout hit from the album. Do you have any theories as to why it hit so big and why it has endured?

DB: The nice mix by Dave Jerden helped make the song sound punchy and accessible. The funky bass line (that may have come from Brian) and the hooky “big” chorus (words from me, melody from Brian) also probably helped.

Oddly, maybe, I’m not sure the verse lyrics made that much of a difference. Though yes, the “You may ask yourself” repetitions and “How did I get here?” sure struck a nerve with people and became very memorable; they did seem to speak to somewhat universal feelings and concerns.

If anyone could predict how and why a song becomes popular they’d be wiser than most people in the music biz. In my opinion, one can’t write to please an imagined audience, but if one’s taste overlaps with that of the public, or some part of them, then odds are one will get lucky once in a while.

Thanks.