

# 'We Sold Our Souls to the Devil'

■ **Scandal:** In a wide-ranging interview, the duo tell the whole story about what it was like to live a lie.

By **CHUCK PHILIPS**  
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**G**irl you know it's . . .  
Girl you know it's . . .  
Girl you know it's . . .  
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It was Robert Pilatus' and Fabrice Morvan's worst nightmare come true. There they were dancing and moving their lips in front of 15,000 fans. And the sound system broke down. The machine wouldn't say the word *true* and, like a scratched record, began to repeat the opening lyrics of the lip-syncing Milli Vanilli's "Girl You Know It's True."

It was the title cut of one of the hottest pop albums of 1989. Seven million records sold. Videos. Cassettes. CDs. Concert appearances. Merchandising. A gold mine for two young dreadlocked break dancers, a German record producer with a knack for making hits, a huge German entertainment conglomerate and its New York-based U.S. label Arista Records.

And it was all built on a lie that would come to bite them all 16 months later.

*Girl you know it's . . .*

*Girl you know it's . . .*

"I knew right then and there, it was the beginning of the end for Milli Vanilli," recalled Pilatus of the duo's appearance that July, 1989, night in Bristol, Conn. "When my voice got stuck in the computer, and it just kept repeating and

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Fab Morvan, left, and Rob Pilatus on cover featuring new releases from their now-canceled European album "Keep On Running." Their insistence on singing on the record led to the breakup with their producer and last week's revelations.

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repeating, I panicked. I didn't know what to do. I just ran off the stage."

The humiliation that "Rob" Pilatus and "Fab" Morvan suffered that summer evening on the MTV Club Tour proved to be but a hint of problems to come. Those would reach a critical mass as the duo and their producer prepared to release songs from their new album, "Keep on Running," due out in January, 1991.

Pilatus and Morvan insisted that they be allowed to sing on the new record—something they hadn't done on the first. Producer Frank Farian, who owns the name Milli Vanilli, resisted but released in Europe early cuts from the album with Pilatus and Morvan on the cover. It's a collector's item now, for by the time the record is released in the United States, it will feature a different picture and, indeed, a different group altogether.

*Girl you know it's . . .*

Words like *embarrassment* or *sham* or *hoax* were too mild. Milli Vanilli was a scandal fueled, like most scandals, with ambition, greed and mendacity. It was two minor talents manipulated and manipulating to the top rungs of show business. It was the record industry's myth-making machine built with a recording technology capable of deceit and operated by men who chose to deceive. And it was a public that was more impressed by image than talent, more accepting of appearances than demanding of the truth.

"We sold our souls to the devil," Pilatus said during an exclusive two-hour interview over the weekend. He and his partner agreed to talk to *The Times* and tell their story. "We lied to our families and our friends. We let down our fans. We realize exactly what we did to achieve our success. We made some very big mistakes and we apologize."

"Rob and I never meant for it to go this way," Morvan added. "Our producer tricked us. We signed contracts as singers but were never allowed to contribute. It was a nightmare. We were living a lie. The psychological pressure was very hard. It was like we were trapped in some golden prison."

Last week, Farian fired Pilatus and Morvan, and all three admitted that the duo never sang on their 7 million-selling "Girl You Know It's True" album nor at any of their other live concert performances—a nearly three-year-old secret that has haunted every step of their careers.

On Monday, the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences stripped Pilatus and Morvan of their 1989 best new artist Grammy, an award they won during a nationally televised program from the Shrine Auditorium in February.

On Tuesday, the duo was relegated to their own special level of Hollywood hell, publicly defending—or at least owning up to—their roles in the album hoax and playing a tape to a news conference, trying to convince reporters and the public that they really can sing.

"They can sing up to Pavarotti's high C," insisted voice coach Seth Riggs, who was brought in to address an unruly crowd of more than 100 reporters and photographers. "Not as well as Pavarotti, but they did do it."

*Girl you know it's . . .*

The Milli Vanilli fiasco has struck a nerve in the record industry. Pilatus and Morvan plus other sources close to the performers' camp allege that officials at New York-based Arista, parent company Bertelsmann Music Group (BMG) and Gallin Morey Associates—one of Hollywood's leading talent agencies—purposely misrepresented the pop act to the public.

Pilatus and Morvan allege that Arista President Clive Davis and Sandy Gallin, the duo's manager, knew they did not sing on the album at least six months before the Grammy was awarded, but pressed on with marketing the music any way.

As a result of the revelations, the group also faces class-action suits filed by disgruntled fans. An Oakland fan claims in an Alameda County Superior Court suit filed Monday that the duo and their record company of defrauded consumers "out of tens of millions of dollars." In San Diego, attorney Bill Lerach, an attorney who specializes in class-action lawsuits on behalf of disgruntled shareholders of large corporations, on Monday filed suit in Superior Court on behalf of two young Milli Vanilli

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fans in San Diego and Michigan. The class-action lawsuit seeks unspecified monetary damages for fans who purchased the group's records and attended their concerts.

The Milli Vanilli saga begins on New Year's Day in 1988 when techno-whiz producer Frank Farian invited Pilatus and Morvan to his Frankfurt studio to listen to a demo of a new song he produced called "Girl You Know It's True."

Pilatus and Morvan had developed a reputation as a sharp-dressing dance duo on the Munich club and fashion-show circuit. The two knew Farian to be one of Germany's most successful pop producers and hoped to contribute some background vocals to his upcoming projects. Pilatus said Farian had heard that they were "two guys who knew how to look right."

"We got a call to come to his studio and we said, 'All right that's it,'" Pilatus recalled. "We were just dumb little kids, so we said, 'Let's go.' When we got to the studio, 'Girl You Know It's True' was just a demo and he asked us our opinion of it and if we could sing it and we said, 'Yeah, we could sing it.' And he said, 'Oh beautiful, I believe it, but next week we have shows to do, so don't worry, I'll make you into a millionaire.'"

Farian has declined to discuss his relations with Pilatus and Morvan outside of his press conference last week in Germany and some written responses to questions put to him by The Times by fax.

Farian's last U.S. success was in the mid-'70s, when he created the million-selling disco act Boney M. Farian sang solo on Boney M.'s first album, but after the record became a hit he hired four models from the West Indies to front the touring band.

He saw an opportunity to repeat that successful formula in Pilatus and Morvan.

Morvan, now 24, was born in the Caribbean island of Gaudeloupe and raised in Paris. Son of a German mother and American soldier, Pilatus, also 24, was adopted by a German couple and raised in Germany.

"We lived in the [housing] projects. We had no money. We wanted to be stars, that was our main reasons," Pilatus told Tuesday's packed news conference.

Though he dabbled in modeling and deejaying, Pilatus' specialty was break-dancing. He was good enough to get invited to an international competition in 1984 in New York. During a short trip to Los Angeles that year he met Morvan, who was in town for a dance seminar at a disco. A former gymnast who injured a vertebra in a 1983 trampoline accident, Morvan took up dancing as therapy and turned into a club-crawling dance master.

That Los Angeles meeting set the stage for the pair to hook up again in Munich, where they decided to work together as background singers. After adopting the name Milli Vanilli—which they say means *positive energy* in Turkish—the pair recorded an album for a small German label that sold just a few thousand records.

The contract Pilatus and Morvan signed with Farian states that they were to perform on recordings and that Farian was obligated to record at least 10 songs per year with them. It is dated Jan. 1, 1988.

The final mix of "Girl" was finished by studio singers in March and April. By May, Pilatus and

Morvan were in the middle of a non-stop promotion blitz through Spain, France and Italy, which lasted until September.

Immediately after the single became successful in Germany, singer Charles Shaw—a Dallas native studio singer who recorded the soft rap on the song—began telling the European media he was the real rapper.

Trying to avoid rumors in the German press over the lip-sync ruse, Rob and Fab left Munich and moved to London.

"All of a sudden it was like another world," Morvan said. "Tension all the time. You want to tell somebody but you can't. When you realize what you've done, it

hits you like a hammer."

During one live radio interview in London, the show's host demanded that they sing on the air to prove it was them.

"The rumors were heavy right from the start," Pilatus said. "We would ask Frank when are we going to be allowed to give some input and he would say, 'Yeah, yeah, but right now we need you to go out and do promotion. Of course, you'll get to do it, just work with us.' That's how he strung us along."

Farian released the second single "Baby Don't Forget My Number" and asked the duo to forge on. Carsten Heyne, former BMG mar-

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keting director and now the duo's manager, said Farian and BMG attempted to stop Pilatus and Morvan from seeking the advice of a manager, lawyer or agent.

"The record company made sure that it was written on the back cover of the singles and the album that the vocals were by Robert and Fabrice," Heyne said. "The record company did this on purpose in order to avoid all the questions. So they could say to the media look at the cover. What does it say? But it was not the truth."

**B**y the time the "Girl" album was released in Europe in September, 1988, the duo was already locked into the myth.

"After Frank released the album, he told us that it was too late to stop now," Pilatus said. "Because the single was such a big success, he said, 'Now you have to go through with it. I'll cover you guys. Nobody will find out.' He said, 'Here, I'll give you \$20,000 advance money.' We never had a hit before, so we went along with it. We played with fire and now we know, but it's too late."

By December, Pilatus and Morvan realized that Farian probably had no intention of ever allowing them to sing in the studio or on stage. In London, they began hearing rumors about what happened to former members of past Farian bands.

Farian failed to return numerous phone calls, but, according to Associated Press, he said at a press conference last week that he was forced to go public with the revelations when Pilatus and Morvan demanded to sing on the follow-up to "Girl You Know It's True."

"I said, 'No. I don't go for that.' Sure, they have a voice, but that's not really what I want to use on my records," Farian said.

"I talked to the members of Boney M. and I asked myself why they were all so bitter," Pilatus said. "One still lives in the projects in Amsterdam. Frank earned millions with this group and yet there was so much negativity. It started to scare me."

The "Girl You Know It's True" single was released in the U.S. at the end of January, 1989, and climbed the charts swiftly. After Arista released the album stateside in February, 1990, Pilatus and Morvan immediately sought out American management.

"Once we realized what happened to Boney M., we wanted to come to the States," Pilatus said. "In Europe, artists just don't have the same protection they do over here."

Heyne said nobody told Arista that Pilatus and Morvan didn't sing when the company signed on to distribute the product domestically.

"When Arista first decided to release "Girl You Know It's True," it's possible that Arista didn't know about our handicapped situation," Heyne said. "But after they heard the rumors from Europe and after they heard that the live TV show in February, everybody knew."

Arista officials deny that they were ever informed about the lip-sync deception. Farian, the duo's producer, told The Times on Saturday that he never told Arista that Pilatus and Morvan did not sing on the record.

**M**illi Vanilli's problems in the U.S. began after they turned down an appearance on the "Arsenio Hall Show" in April. Hall requires artists to perform live. Pilatus, Morvan and their camp were concerned about their appearing. They never did appear on the show.

On April 29, 1989, Milli Vanilli signed a contract with Gallin Mor-

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ey Associates to represent them and the duo moved into their Beverly Hills home on June 11.

"We thought because Sandy Gallin was one of the top Hollywood agents he would protect us and help us win our right to sing on the next tour and album," Pilatus said.

By July, the duo requested to stop doing interviews after suspicions about their thick European accents arose in the American press. Throughout the summer, Milli Vanilli toured the United States as part of the Club MTV Tour. According to Pilatus, all requests for the duo to take singing lessons were denied, as were requests to sing on tour.

According to Pilatus and memos obtained by The Times, Farian tried to block the duo's efforts to tour. A battle broke out between the performer and their producer on Jan. 16, 1990.

Between January and September, Pilatus and Morvan's attorneys sent more than two dozen letters to Farian, demanding that the duo be allowed to sing on their upcoming album. Arista's Davis was notified of the battle for vocal control on Jan. 18. Alan Mintz, the duo's attorney, alleges that Davis became aware that Pilatus and Morvan were demanding to sing in January.

In a phone interview from New York on Tuesday, Arista's Roy Lott denied the charges.

"Frank Farian and Rob and Fab had a long and stormy relationship after the album was released involving many issues, but the principal one involved Rob and Fab's economic participation," Lott said. "It was their fight and Arista, as merely the U.S. distributor naturally never knew the details of their bitter negotiations. We simply understood this statement to mean what it said. That Rob and

Fab had finally decided to agree to work with Frank Farian again."

"If there is an elephant standing in the room," Mintz said. "It's so big and it's so obvious and everybody can see it, that nobody ever has to say 'Hey there's an elephant standing in the room.'"

Pilatus and Morvan enraged rock critics last February when they were quoted boasting to Time magazine that their contribution to pop music exceeded that of Bob Dylan's, Paul McCartney's and Mick Jagger's.

Pilatus insisted that the reporter (Denise Worrel) (Jay Cox) must have misunderstood him due to Pilatus' poor grasp of the language.

"I was in shock when I read it," Pilatus said. "I am fan of Mick Jagger and the Stones. I mean I knew I wasn't singing, so why would I ever criticize the Beatles. All I said was that Elvis was a big idol in his time and we were big in ours."

Headlee maintains he argued with officials at Arista and Gallin Morey to allow the duo to appear on "Good Morning America" to explain that their quotes were taken out of context. Arista's Davis requested to accompany the Millis during their interview, but was shut out by the television show's staff, Headlee said.

Concerned that the "Good Morning America" spot did little to diminish negative press in the Milli camp, Headlee says that officials at Gallin Morey and Arista contacted Farian to manufacture a phony studio-produced medley of Beatles, Dylan and Stones tunes to lip-sync on their American concert tour. Documents obtained by The Times confirm that Farian was in communication with Gallin Morey regarding production of the medley.

"I warned Sandy Gallin, I advised him that if we did this medley that we would be digging ourselves into an even bigger pit," Headlee said. "I felt that we would be opening ourselves up to allegations that we were trying to perpetrate

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this hoax even farther."

The medley concept was dropped after Pilatus and Morvan refused to participate in the scam. Gallin could not be reached for comment and did not return repeated phone calls.

In May, negotiations between Mintz and Farian in Frankfurt produced an oral agreement which would have allowed the duo to sing on their next album. But by June, contract talks had broken off and Farian refused to talk with anyone but Pilatus and Morvan.

In July, the duo met with Farian in New York to cut a new deal. They were to receive advances for services rendered including video promotions and television shows. Under the deal, the duo was told that they would record lead vocals on the upcoming album in August in Frankfurt.

When they went to Frankfurt, Farian reneged on his promise,

Mintz said. On Aug. 13, Milli Vanilli fired Gallin Morey Associates.

On Sept. 24, Farian debuted the new Milli Vanilli album at a listening party for various European record company officials in his Frankfurt studio. The new album featured a female vocalist and an American street rapper in the lead vocals. Pilatus and Morvan protested the introduction of new voices into the Milli Vanilli fiasco.

Mintz alleges that Arista's Davis demanded Farian recut the tracks with the former studio singers. On Oct. 17, Mintz also says that Farian wrote a letter to Davis confirming that he redid the session. Heyn quit BMG on Oct. 17 to become the duo's manager.

Three weeks ago, Pilatus and Morvan called for a meeting between Clive Davis, the president of BMG and Farian. Farian canceled the upcoming video shoot and a television promotional tour scheduled this month in Spain, the Netherlands and Belgium.

Without the approval of Pilatus

and Morvan, Farian released a new Milli Vanilli 12-inch dance track this month in Europe called "Keep on Running." The record is already reportedly charting at No. 65 in Germany and No. 16 in the Netherlands. Attorneys for the duo are preparing papers demanding a recall of the single. They claim Farian is withholding royalty statements from the duo and are demanding to inspect Farian's books. A lawsuit may be in the works, according to Mintz.

The new Milli Vanilli album that Farian was to release on Arista in January will come out under a different name. Pilatus and Morvan, who will participate in a 10 kilometer race in San Francisco on Saturday, say they are courting offers from several well-known producers.

But what about the 7 million fans they deceived?

"I feel very sad about my fans," Pilatus said. "I know it's going to be hard for the kids to stand behind us. But I hope they understand that we are just two human guys who

were so hungry for success that we allowed ourselves to be manipulated. We wanted to get on the top. We apologize and hope they'll give us a second chance."

"We've always wanted to sing," Morvan added. "We made the mistake ourselves, but it's true, we let our fans down. For them we are idols and they loved our videos and bought the records and we let them down. It's very hard, I know. I just hope they will forgive us."

**Sharon Bernstein and Greg Johnson**  
contributed to this story.

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