

The Inner Sleeve

This month's artwork selected by People Like Us
Cover portrait by Val Denham. Photography by Peter Ashworth



Marc & The Mambas *Untitled*

Some Bizzare 1982

Growing up in the early 1980s, my cultural week would consist of listening to BBC Radio 1's lunchtime chart countdown on Tuesday before returning hastily to school, followed by a long wait to find out who would or wouldn't be on *Top Of The Pops* on a Thursday night. One Friday, the day after a duo called Soft Cell first appeared, there was much to discuss at school. This turned out to be the start of a journey that I'm still on.

As a pre-internet only child from a working class background hailing from a small rural town, I was reliant upon some peers to guide me. My limited income stemmed from selling bingo cards and piece work painting uniforms on to Britains toy soldiers. My exposure to music news involved standing at the WH Smith newsstand on Saturday morning, and recording live tapes from the radio.

In the evening, Radio 1's playlist would expand, with DJs like John Peel, David 'Kid' Jensen, Janice Long and Richard Skinner. During one of these shows, Jensen interviewed Soft Cell and I was immediately hooked. I diligently recorded all the music and interviews, which would often detune due to Radio 1 broadcasting on Medium Wave all day, only switching to the superior FM when Peel's show commenced. But I found that listening to it 150 times in a row, I'd decipher it. These evening radio shows also introduced

me to other bands on Some Bizzare, such as The The, Coil, Psychic TV, Foetus, and Marc Almond of Soft Cell's side project, Marc & The Mambas.

It was amazing what you could buy in Woolworths back then: not just Tupperware and tea towels. This was where I purchased *Untitled* on cassette in 1982. The album had an exquisitely painted cover by Val Denham, where Marc was portrayed like an Egyptian god with a halo and huge eyes, and the logo for Marc & The Mambas, if I recall correctly, was crafted by Huw Feather, although it may have been Marc himself. I had some enamel paints left over from the toys and painted the cover on my bedroom wall, in the process poisoning myself from fume inhalation.

The vinyl gatefold featured a spread in red on black, the Mambas colours, and saturated photographs of Marc, Matt Johnson, Cindy Ecstasy and Annie Hogan. The tracklist was embellished with hieroglyphs, snakes and eyes. Dedications mentioned Kenneth Anger's film *Kustom Kar Kommandos*, and to add confusion, Some Bizzare's Stevo included his customary enigmatic message within the text.

The back cover is a photo collage featuring Marc alongside his Soft Cell bandmate Dave Ball, Genesis P-Orridge, Andy Warhol, and various people I still don't recognise. They look like they're having fun. The music is fresh and alive, not overworked, sounding like they are all there for the right reasons at the right time. The title track, co-written with Johnson, underlines that, despite the dysfunction

within Some Bizzare, the label was initially a wondrous community of artists who wanted to work together.

The album features covers of various artists' solo projects, serving as my introduction to Scott Walker, Lou Reed, Syd Barrett and Jacques Brel, much like how this album represents Marc's own solo endeavour. When I recently delved into Wesley Doyle's Some Bizzare book *Conform To Deform*, I learned the album was a swift endeavour, recorded in London's Trident Studios at night due to lack of financial support from the label.

This record and Some Bizzare were my loyal companions and guardians. The subsequent year, following a difficult and isolated summer with 1983's *Torment And Toreros*, I decided to advertise on the penpal page of *No 1* magazine. Suddenly, I found my first network. I can trace the way my tastes and knowledge have broadened directly back to that period when I would attentively listen to a single album over and over, without being bored, not even for a moment.

I later became friends with Peel, Coil, Jim Thirlwell and Matt Johnson, having worked with them all. The 14 year old Vicki would have been astounded by this. However, despite many of my friends being acquainted with Marc, the distance between him and me remains as vast as it was in those earlier days. Let's keep that particular detail hidden from Vicki for now. ○

Vicki Bennett aka People Like Us is in residency at London's Cafe Oto this month: see Out There. peoplelikeus.org