

the bitter springs



Is 1998 going to be the year for The Bitter Springs? The tail end of '97 capped the unbelievably bad luck of a group whose memorable tunes and incisively witty lyrics have been criminally ignored for too long (as this incarnation and previously as The Last Party), when the Christmas series of dates, organised to capitalise on the excellent set of reviews for the single "It's Business" and the awesome album "From The Parish Of Arthritis", had to be cancelled when the vocalist/lyricist Simon Rivers was rushed to hospital with a collapsed lung. At the time of writing, Simon is fit and well again, and January sees a new single release "Manners, Pianos, Mouthorgans" that should be a strong contender for any "Single of The Week" award (as indeed, "It's Business" achieved).

Their tenure as The Last Party brought nine singles and two albums, "Porky's Revenge" and "Love Handles", both suffering the fate of great critical acclaim, but few sales. In an interview with Simon, he explains: "We were getting to the point where if something turned up with 'Last Party' on, we were being written off before we were even heard. It was Neil's (Neil Palmer, drummer) idea to change the name. He said 'We're being ignored, we've done everything we can as The Last Party'".

The debut Bitter Springs release, "The Addison Brothers", was issued as a 500 copies release ("A hundred of which were given away" :Simon). Thankfully, all four tracks are included on their album, as the single was one of the best of '96. The title track, and "Like Boorman's Son", feature the harmonica and vocal talents of fellow postman and Subway Sect punk god, Vic Godard. "I saw a picture of him in a Post Office magazine, under his real name, and I thought - 'That's Vic Godard'. I phoned him up, he was totally evasive, but as I've found out since, that's the way he's like! I pestered him, nothing happened, and just as I thought about giving up I sent him the tape. After a bit of running around, I got him".

Vic later covered "The Addison Brothers" on a Mark Radcliffe session (organised by Simon), and The Bitter Springs played a set with him at The Garage (as Subway Sect!). Apart from the song "Too Little Too Late", available only on the second CD single, "Absence Makes The Hair Grow Blonder", the album is a complete



collection of Bitter Springs recordings from '94-'97. From the humorous "Radio Active Scuba Diver", the catchy "Cloth Eared Press", and two songs which I would personally would kill to have written, "Ken", Simon's eulogy to Messrs Halliwell and Orton, and "It's Business", the best single of '97 and a barbed attack on moneymakers everywhere; "What A Liar And A Cheat You Are/No I Meant An Entrepreneur!" - closing with the killer line; "Got The Words But They Won't Come/Unless The Band Give Up On Their Percentage!" - these are just a small section of an unmissable album which, once overriding the odd one or two production glitches, should become a classic.

"It's Business" reflects Simon's own hatred of the financial side of things, as he confirms:

"Labels have rung me asking for a copy of the CD. That really annoys me because I think 'Who the fuck are you?'. I'd rather give away the CD to someone who really



wants it. Most of the times we've paid for recording, so we're used to dealing with ourselves. It's only in recent times, with PRS money and everything, that things are starting to even out. We've even been told that we're getting money back from the album, which is a first for us!"

The possibility of The Bitter Springs becoming massively well known, oddly, doesn't seem to appeal to Simon that much. "Most people, when they get really popular, they've usually done all their best stuff". If the deserved recognition ever comes to the 'Springs, they definitely have the talent and experience to stay at the forefront of current songwriting craftsmen (yes, they're that bloody good). This is all too evident on the as yet unreleased songs "Barbara" and "Simple Life".

"From The Parish Of Arthritis" - an essential album to any listener with a grain of intelligence and an ear for a catchy hook or three.

Bitter Springs Info: 63 Princes Road, Teddington, Middlesex, TW11 ORZ.

