

VELVET SHEEP

THE BITTER SPRINGS – Lucky 7

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The Bitter Springs photo by Peter Tainsh

LUCKY 7 is the feature where we ask artists to name their 6 favourite songs by others, and a lucky 7th song of their own...today, Teddington lock up your songs & daughters, it's the turn of arch pop punk flaneurs **The Bitter Springs** led by the buttoned down tack-sharp observational songwriting of **Simon Rivers** and now featuring as a permanent organist, the man Marc Riley calls the "greatest living Englishman", longtime collaborator Vic Godard. Despite two decades of recording history as The Bitter Springs (previously they were known as The Last Party – John Peel favs) unbelievably they've never released a vinyl album – until now, with "The Odd Shower" imminent on the ever exceptional Tiny Global Productions (Band of Holy Joy, Blue Orchids, Nightingales). And it's an absolute treat –

sometimes visceral, always intellectual, impeccably magisterial and never unknowingly topical.

If you like The Fall or Half Man Half Biscuit you've got "Angry All The Time", if you like Aztec Camera or The Monochrome Set you've got "One More Sunset", that's not to mention the Delgados'-esque push-pull with songs like "Girls in F.I.T.S" or "Words of Love" with Kirsten Morrison. And with more than one song listing out haunts in old/new Albion it's as English as beans and toast and chicken tikka masala. The record also comes with a limited CD EP called "Excretus In Completus" which features extra Vic Godard's remix of "The Addison Brothers", which Vic himself released as a very limited one-sided 7", with original artwork from Mandy Prowse on the flipside. It's an enticing package – and likewise this Lucky 7 from The Bitter Spring feels long overdue but worth the wait...

Simon Rivers, songwriter, guitar, lead vocals

1. Kitchens of Distinction "The Third Time We Opened the Capsule"

Before The Bitter Springs there was Last Party, my band formed with school friends Kim Ashford, Neil Palmer and Daniel Ashkenazy in the 80's. We'd play loads of gigs and make our own records and even had a couple of Peel sessions.

Quite often, the gigs were poorly attended affairs, but we'd dust ourselves off and get back to it straight away with the next one...

Anyway, we'd organised to play the Half Moon, Herne Hill with some group called Kitchens of Distinction who we knew nothing about, other than we thought the name was a bit iffy.

We watched them sound check and were blown away not just by the music but their attitude, and later on, by the way they seemed so untroubled by the fact the pub was empty. We took everything so seriously and hardly gave ourselves a chance to enjoy what we were playing, and as had happened in the past, I flung my guitar down and jumped on it in frustration at playing to no one.

We saw the band many times after that and supported them on a few occasions – I won't delve into the music they made on here, just to say I could have picked just about any of their songs.

The chemistry between Dan (drums), Julian (guitars) and Patrick (bass/vocals/words) was so uplifting especially live. As a footnote, I was honoured to be asked to sing a duet with Patrick on his latest "Stephen Hero" LP "Deciduous Eccentric" which is, if I say so myself, a bloody lovely piece of work. Our song together is called "Don't Say It's Too Late" and it closes the LP and you can find it here...

2. The Raincoats – Only Loved At Night

More often than not, I like music to have mystery and / or to tell me things I haven't thought of, to throw different instruments together for sounds I've not heard before, and the Raincoats did this on "Odyshape" so brilliantly.

I liked a lot of the male post punk bands, but for me the Raincoats were a different thing altogether, a much subtler musical revolution. The first LP was great, but this is magical, I got it on cassette, and right from the cover onwards, it took me to another world, and perhaps taught me that you don't always have to shout to be heard. Also check out the band's cover of Sly Stone's "Running Away"...it's so good.

Mark Humphrey (bass)

3. Bobby Womack – I Can Understand It

I got into soul and funk music when I was 14; there are so many great soul singers, and Bobby Womack is so underrated but for me he just pushes all the right buttons – he's raw, but so soulful with it, great songwriter, arranger and musician. When this song is on in the car, I turn it up as loud as I can sing and sing along! It does what it should do, makes me feel good!!!

Kirsten Morrison (guest vocals on "Words of Love")

4. John Barry / Nancy Sinatra – You Only Live Twice

I just adore this song. John Barry is my favourite film composer, and as well as being a singer and songwriter I compose music for film and TV, so he has been a bit of an icon for me, as he wrote brilliant songs as well as scores. The intro always sends a shiver up my spine and love Nancy's voice too.

Vic Godard (keyboards & backing vocals)

5. Elton John – Benny & The Jets

I first heard this round one of my mates – probably Steve Slade (his real name) who looked uncannily like Dave Hill and was into all the glam rock stuff. I was a Bowie nut, so my mates thought I was a bit weird, which I most certainly was not. I'd heard Elton John's hits and disliked them intensely, but one day someone played a B-side and I was flabbergasted. It instantly became one of my all-time favourite tunes. I loved the piano – it reminded me of one of my other favourites – "Something In The Air" by Thunderclap Newman. I even liked the vocals, which I assumed to be about Bowie. When I started to learn to piano to play on this Bitter Springs LP, and my own LP, I made it a priority to try and learn "Benny And The Jets". Syncopation has immense healing properties!

Paul McGrath (drums)

6. Stiff Little Fingers – Nobody’s Hero, TOTP 1980

Predictable but I’m going for “Nobody’s Hero” by Stiff Little Fingers.

They were the first band I really followed and felt I had a connection with. Maybe my Irish roots helped. They felt like one of us. When I went to see them at the Hammersmith Odeon, Henry Cluney, the guitarist was in the pub next door before the gig and happy to chat with us. I managed to lose one of my shoes when I saw them at the Hammersmith Palais!! It was all the jumping up and down I think.

This link is a rare appearance on Top of the Pops in 1980.

The Lucky 7th: “Words of Love” is the band’s choice from the new album “The Odd Shower”. In the tradition of epic LP closing numbers, it’s a grand seven-and-a-half minutes long, with an incessant hypnotic vibe to ensure you won’t get bored.

“The Odd Shower” is The Bitter Springs’ first-ever vinyl LP, and if that weren’t special enough, Tiny Global Productions has let the band include a bonus CD with all orders, which we’ve called “Excretus In Completus”, as it’s got four songs which couldn’t fit on the album, plus a version of “The Addison Brothers” remixed by new keyboard player, Vic Godard. “Words of Love” also features the great Kirsten Morrison on vocals.

“The Odd Shower” vinyl album + the bonus CD “Excretus In Completus” are available from:

<https://thebittersprings.bandcamp.com>

THANKS SO MUCH TO THE BITTER SPRINGS AND TO JOHN HENDERSON AT TINY GLOBAL PRODUCTIONS!



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