

# The Great Rock Bible

## The Bitter Springs

+ {Last Party}

Overlooked for years as SMITHS-meets-FALL-via-Postcard wannabes, LAST PARTY – the moniker they paraded for a decade between the mid-80s to the mid-90s – were thankfully lofted high among a circle of friends and fans around the capital, including John Peel and VIC GODARD. Ditto... The BITTER SPRINGS, whom, with tenacity and dexterity from front-runner, Simon Rivers, never gave up the ghost. Testament to the wistful and wry singer/songwriters's worth were the rave reviews afforded the purist-indie combo's double-CD round-up of recent mp3's, etc.: "Everyone's Cup Of Tea" (2013).

Formed way back in 1982, in Teddington (and Hampton), London, LAST PARTY consisted of Kim Ashford (keyboards), Daniel Ashkenazy (bass), Steve Infield (drums) and the aforementioned Simon (also on guitar). Without a single to their name before the release of their debut LP, **PORKY'S RANGE** (1986) {\*6}, one can't really remember a proper review, issued as it was on their own Harvey Records. Garnering all the traits of their indie-pop peers, tracks that jumped out from the grooves were 'Dossers' (chunky Hook-y bass-line in tact), 'Fire Brigade' and 'Mini Cab To Heaven'. An oversight from the trendy NME-endorsed C-86 indie promotion LP, the music rag and others duly rated high their debut 45, 'Mr. Hurst', the following February.

Meanwhile, they'd supported The STONE ROSES at their first ever gig in Fulham. Supplying 12inch singles from the low-key Idol imprint (they'd also added short-stops Martin Pipe and/or Andy Wadge, plus stalwart drummer Neil Palmer to the act), lead tracks 'Tree Shada', 'Damp' and 'Die In A Spy Ring', were somewhat overshadowed by at least one of the relevant B-sides, namely the jangly 'Hydraulics'.

The quartet finally delivered their long-awaited sophomore set, **LOVE HANDLES** (1990) {\*6}, a record that embraced NEW ORDER, albeit with more than a touch of HALF MAN HALF BISCUIT's tongue-in-cheek humour; examples 'Jesus Hates U2', 'Move Frosty' and 'When The Future Of Man Comes Here Only To Be Met By The Little Pockets Of Resistance Dotted Along The Coast'.

Forced to reach out to German label, Bilberry, LAST PARTY distinguished themselves as one's to watch – but was anyone listening to the excellent early-90s imports, 'Creature Lake', 'Black Leather Sheets', 'Versatility' and the CARTER USM-like 'Barbecued'. Probably not. Back on English terra firma, Dishy Records served up a couple of 45s by way of the worthy, 'Ucit' and 'Selective Memory'.

But something was going wrong and maybe it was all in the name; anyway, Rivers, Ashkenazy, Palmer and newbie keyboardist Paul "The Wizard" Baker, came up with The BITTER SPRINGS moniker, leaving behind an album's worth of outtakes.

Spreading their wares over a triumvirate of singles from various indie outlets: 'The Addison Brothers' (featuring VIC GODARD), 'Absence Makes The Hair Grow Blonder' and 'It's Business', also popped up on the new incarnation's next album, **FROM THE PARISH OF ARTHRITIS** (1997) {\*7}. Vespertine Records winning the signatures of

Rivers and Co (who added accordionist Paul McGrath for Palmer), further sets **FIVE DIE FILMING THIS LAZY LARK** (1998) {\*7} and Mojo fave **BENNY HILL'S WARDROBE** (1999) {\*8}, proved the band were at least prolific in their fortitude to get into the heads of an audience with a floating sense of literal and lateral humour. Okay, Simon hadn't quite lost his Mark E. Smith-esque patter ('Grand Prix Driver'), but in 'Better Looking' and 'The Ballad Of Little Stubby Fingers', there was genius and method to the man's madness.

When other labels shunned the jolly-roger commitment of The BITTER SPRINGS, there was always Dishy Records to fall back on. Despite the up-tempo of openers 'The Red Mist Descends' and 'Muggers Take A Beating', the BS explored quieter moments by way of seventh album, **SUBURBAN CRIMES OF EVERY HAPPINESS** (2001) {\*7}; 'Me And Your Wife', 'Vlad The Inhaler' and the exhaustive 'Vagina Trees With Pennis Leaves', the immediate highlights.

A prolific time behind them, fans had to fast-forward to 2006 for a fresh BS set, **THAT SENTIMENTAL SLUSH** {\*7}; note that violinist Phil Martin was added. A man that always wore his heart on his sentimental sleeve, erudite lyricist Simon Rivers smooched his way into songs about loves lost, drunken soaks and a world in confusion. From 'Attempted Life' and 'Moving To The City' to THE DIVINE COMEDY-ish 'Follow Your Heart' and 'Ice Cold Glass' (and the 14 tracks in between), it seemed Rivers had almost covered every angle.

Deserving of time to recover from the trials and tribulations of life, but still managing to suffer with the odd download or two in their 7-year-itch, The BITTER SPRINGS returned to the fore with a 140-minute double-set, **EVERYONE'S CUP OF TEA** {\*8}. As sprawling and sentimental as ever, cheeky lyrics came easy-as-pie to Simon James Rivers; 'My Life As A Dog In A Pigsty' was apparently about his love of Beyonce, until you find out it's his dog! Anthemic in a glam-meets-punk way, the seaside fairground ride of 'Hail The Lifeboat Man', almost reverted to HALF MAN/HB for mid-80s reference. Swapping the odd eccentric lyric or two for Brit-artistic licence, the squeaky cover of BOBBY WOMACK's 'Harry Hippie' is a street-smart pub-rock sing-a-long, while mock-disco reared its ugly head via 'And Even Now'. Hardly failing to appeal in to "everyone" – as it states in the title! – the listener is treated to 11 minutes of 'Snowflakes In June' and the crusty-esque 'The Life And Not Entirely Uneventful Times Of A McAlpine Fusilier'. And there's more folks! – a case of never giving up on a good thing.

Rivers flowing after only a few years in the proverbial wilderness this time around, The BITTER SPRINGS and a stellar cast of guests (including regular trumpeter Terry Edwards) pressed play on **CUTTLEFISH & LOVE'S REMAINS** (2015) {\*7}. In the interim adding former bassist now guitarist Andrew Deevey and bassist Mark Humphrey, sardonic, bittersweet and melancholia were words to best describe River and Co's jaunty exercises, 'The Hounslow Solicitors' and 'Poetry Emulsion'. Further witty titles like 'Only Sour Grapes Are Free', 'Not Now Mummy's Jogging Dear' and er... 'Cut All Fish', were tracks to raise a smile, whilst the catchy bouncy-castle kids tune 'It's Yer Birthday' might've landed a novelty No.1 had it landed in the 80s.