

CONFORM TO DEFORM:

The Weird and Wonderful World of *Some Bizzare*

BY WESLEY DOYLE - JAWBONE

The story of *Some Bizzare Records*, its maverick label-boss Stephen Pearce, commonly known as Stevo, and its roster of bands including Soft Cell, The The, B-Movie, Einstürzende Neubauten and others.

Over 30 years ago I read that Matt Johnson had signed his The The record contract with CBS Records up on one of the lions in the middle of Trafalgar Square. It was my first time reading about the bizarre antics of Stevo. The story is retold in Doyle's thrilling oral history, it turns out that Matt Johnson wasn't there: "I didn't go to the infamous signing ceremony because I was embarrassed by the whole tabloid exposure it would entail." Instead Stevo and CBS's Maurice Oberstein parked on a double-yellow line on the Square at midnight. Stevo jumped up on one of the lions but Oberstein refused to get out of the car. Stevo recalls: "We didn't sign the contract on the lions, but when the media say that we were up there signing away, what am I going to do? We got a load of press, and it was good for the artist."

It was just one of many incidents that would make Stevo's name as an eccentric music industry outsider who for a couple of years in the early 80s was running one of the most exciting labels in the UK. Stevo himself described *Some Bizzare* as: "Like either a mental hospital or a community." Hew Feather, whose design work was featured on Soft Cell's record sleeves says, "Some Bizzare was its own thing.

It was fascinating. It was disastrous. It was chaotic. It was the most brilliant thing in the world."

Stevo was the Dagenham boy who left school at 16 and started working for a company that distributed Phonogram Records. He was interested in electronic music and started DJing on Monday nights at Chelsea Drugstore on the King's Road and this led to a gig compiling a "Futurist" chart in Sounds. He released the *Some Bizzare Album*, a compilation that included tracks by Depeche Mode, B-Movie, The The and Soft Cell whom he managed. Soft Cell's Dave Bell, remembers: "We chose Stevo because no one else was interested. He came to meet us in our flat in Leeds, and he said, 'Well, the thing is, I wanna manage yous.' I don't think he knew exactly what being a manager entailed, but then again neither did we. Without legal advice we signed the contract and hoped for the best." Months later 'Tainted Love' was at No. 1.

From the highs of million selling singles we also get in-fighting, drugs, bust-ups, contract and royalty squabbles and great records by Swans, Coil, Cabaret Voltaire, Psychic TV and others. If Stevo's unconventional style enamoured him to people in the label's early days, it eventually became alienating. "It was a strange symbiosis," says Marc Almond reflecting on his relationship with Stevo. "I often think that if I was Stevo's Elvis, then he was definitely my Colonel Tom Parker."



MY #SOMEBIZZARE TOP 5:



1. The The - *Uncertain Smile* (1982)
Jools Holland would provide piano when *Uncertain Smile* was

re-recorded the following year for *Soul Mining* but this first recording with haunting flute and saxophone is the definitive version.



2. Soft Cell - *Tainted Love* (1981)

Marc Almond and Dave Bell took their glorious cover of the Northern Soul classic, first recorded by Gloria Jones back in 1964, to the top of the UK Charts for two weeks selling over a million copies.



3. Soft Cell - *Say Hello, Wave Goodbye* (1982)

Arguably Almond and Bell's greatest song, the third single from *Non-Stop Erotic Cabaret* peaked at No. 3 in the UK Charts. David Gray introduced the song to a new audience when he covered it on his *White Ladder* album.



4. B-Movie - *Remembrance Day* (1981)

Some Bizarre's first single, is a tribute to the fallen soldiers of WWI, it's an atmospheric melodramatic post-punk synth-driven tune from the Mansfield band. A lost classic.



5. Various Artists - *Some Bizzare Album*

The label sampler that put the label on the map. This incredible compilation features The The, Soft Cell, B-Movie, Blancmange and others. It also includes the recording debut of some lads from Basildon called Depeche Mode.