

Mp3 Vivabeat - The Good Life



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VIVABEAT -- THE GOOD LIFE: 1979 -1986 "A retrospective of one of the 80's most interesting and illusive bands. Repeatedly billed in the era, in concerts with the likes of The B-52s, Human League, Depeche Mode and The Psychedelic Furs; Vivabeat, dealt a slightly different hand, would have easily found itself in the ranks of their success. Definitely one to check out." Vivabeat's is the uncanny story of a band that helped define the sound of an era; a band that experienced remarkable strokes of good fortune and tragic twists of fate; got a taste of the best the record industry could offer... and also, the very worst. They left behind a hit dance single, an album on Charisma Records, an impossibly rare European EP, and a clutch of unreleased tracks. A collection of their best work, ironically titled "The Good Life: 1979-1986" was released in Spring 2001 on Permanent Press Records, The roots of the band are in late-70's Boston. Mick Muhlfriedel, who was to become Vivabeat's bassist and main songwriter, played in Human Sexual Response with future Vivabeat guitarist Alec Murphy. Mick met Consuelo de Silva in an electronic music class at Boston University. "She was a Buick heiress," he recalls, "I was impressed because she'd taught herself to play the entire [Genesis] Lamb Lies Down On Broadway album." He asked her to play in a band with him and Alec, who would soon leave for Los Angeles. In L.A., Marina del Rey, who had started out playing keyboards in one of L.A.'s first girl punk bands, Backstage Pass, and participating in the creation of the legendary Masque Club, formed Audio-Vidiot with Alec and singer/songwriter Robert Garman. Alec in turn contacted Mick and Connie in Boston and asked them to join Audio-Vidiot, telling them that there was a record company bidding war going on. They and drummer Doug Orilio traveled west. Mick had immediate creative differences with the Garmen fronted, Audio-Vidiot. After just a couple of rehearsals, he decided to pack it in and return to Boston. Marina,

impressed with his talent, offered to also quit if he would stay and form a new band. Doug, Connie and Alec soon followed. After six months of writing, rehearsing, auditioning lead singers and rejecting a lot of Bachman-Turner Overdrive types, the band recruited a flamboyant actor and singer named Terrance Robay, fresh from the London stage playing James Dean. He was a natural frontman who had once been told by a psychic (whom he believed) that he would win an Oscar and a Grammy by the time he was 30. With Terrance on board, Vivabeat recorded its first official demo, a four song tape, which they began shopping around town. It just so happened that Marina had met Peter Gabriel through her day job at 'Teen Magazine. "It was at a fancy record company dinner at Le Dome," recalls Marina. "We bonded over being vegetarians and I told him that being a journalist was my day job and that my first love was playing in bands. He came over the next evening to hear some of the stuff we was working on and encouraged us to hone the sound a bit more. He said to call if I ever came to England, which I did right after we'd recorded the first Vivabeat demo. Peter used to hold these late night croquet matches, and invited me to one. I gave him a copy of our tape, not really expecting anything to come of it." Then, early one morning, the phone rang with a call from Charisma Record's Tony Stratton Smith in England. Peter Gabriel had passed Vivabeat's demo tape along to his record label and the staff was singing and whistling along to a track called "Man from China." After one Los Angeles showcase (their fourth live show ever), Charisma signed Vivabeat to "a five record deal for an incredible amount of money." Vivabeat was the first American band ever signed to the label. Mick and Marina got married around this time, and Alec and Connie also became romantically involved. However, making the album proved extremely difficult. Charisma wanted the band to use one of the hot British producers of the time, but the band insisted on Jeffrey Lesser, an L.A. producer who had worked with Sparks and Kool and the Gang. Lesser gave the record a rough, hard-rocking edge that was somewhat at odds with the band's more playful and sophisticated vision. There were magical moments though, such as the recording of the stand-out track "I Know Your Room," penned by Mick, for which Terrance recorded his vocal laying languidly on his back and smoking, with the microphone hanging nearby inside a trash can. The track also contains Alec's most memorable guitar solo; it actually has a mistake in it, but when he tried to rerecord it he couldn't capture the same intensity. The overlapping vocal tracks give the track a unique sense of yearning and confusion. Yet the band almost cut the song from the album, and Mick had to threaten to quit to keep it in. Charisma was dissatisfied with the album as it was first delivered, and sent the band back into the studio, where

they proceeded to record two of the album's strongest tracks, the techno-reggae "Working for William," written by Marina about a Machiavellian power-behind-the-throne, and the swirling, Roxy-esque "From the Bop", Mick's vision of a delirious, futuristic party. The bandmembers were given generous stipends by Charisma but told not to play live until the record came out. The idle time fueled the addictive tendencies of Alec, a brilliant guitarist, but also a dark and troubled character. "There was a notorious junkie punk thing happening in L.A. at that time," recalls Mick, "and Connie and Alec both got totally caught up in it. It's tough to talk about it now because we all watched it happen and basically did nothing. We felt desperately powerless." Alec, in particular, embraced the scene, producing hardcore punk bands like The Castration Squad and Rik L. Rik. He would later be immortalized as the dealer who sold legendary Germs singer Darby Crash his fatal dose of heroin in the Black Randy The Metro Squad song, "I Don't Wanna Die Like That Darby Guy." Nevertheless, in 1979 the debut album, "Party In The War zone," was released. "What a nightmare." recalls Marina. "The week our album came out, was the week of the huge Polygram merger and their whole distribution mechanism broke down. We had Program Directors and DJ's all over the country saying they liked the record and would add it to their rotations, but nobody could buy it because most of the copies were sitting in a warehouse in Oklahoma. It didn't last long on the playlists. Our management at the time was embarrassingly weak and we were terribly frustrated." Yet "Man From China" -- ironically, a song about a heroin dealer -- became a dance club hit in England, Hong Kong and France, eventually crossing the ocean to similar success in America's gay dance scene. It would later gain even more notoriety when Peter Gabriel told New Musical Express that the song's whistling hook inspired him to compose his classic "Games Without Frontiers." Vivabeat's ambitions were further thwarted on the eve of their American tour to promote "Party in the War Zone," when Mick dropped a huge amp on his foot, shattering his toe,. The tour had to be canceled. The band eventually played an extended series of shows around California. "It wasn't easy. Alec and Connie would either hock their instruments between shows or turn up too high to play," recalls Mick. Vivabeat was in shambles, polarized creatively and personally by drug addiction. In the middle of it all, with no explanation needed, Charisma dropped the band. There was a terrible scene and lingering bad feelings when Vivabeat finally had to fire their long-time friends Connie and Alec. Vivabeat began working with guitarist Steve Lynch, and studio wizard (and former Sparks member) Earl Mankey (a cover of the Rolling Stones' "2,000 Light Years From Home" came from those sessions). Not long after that, the band suffered another terrible

blow: after leaving Mick's house one night on his motorcycle, Doug was involved in a head-on collision that left him paralyzed. But soon there was another turn of fate when the band recruited a new guitarist, Rob Dean, formerly of Japan, and drummer, Chris Schendel from Toni Childs' band. In 1982 the group hooked up with a new manager, Gary Bookasta, an L.A. music entrepreneur who owned the ground-breaking new wave radio station KROQ, and once ran the Sunset Strip's Hullabaloo club. Bookasta, a slick Hollywood character who wore sunglasses day and night, had big plans for the band. He scored them a deal with PolyGram, and as they began recording the second album with a strong, committed lineup and some great new songs it looked like all the pieces were again falling into place. But, after two weeks of recording, the producer, Joe Chicarelli (of Oingo Boingo fame), took Mick aside and said: "You know, your manager hasn't paid me or the studio yet." The band called Bookasta repeatedly in disbelief but couldn't get a hold of him. Eventually they realized that Bookasta had quietly sold KROQ and disappeared with their advance, and there was no money to finish the album. He hasn't been seen by the band since. PolyGram washed their hands of the affair after that, but the staff at the recording studio helped to smuggle out some of what had already been recorded. Earl Mankey returned to help out his friends, and a limited edition, self-titled Vivabeat EP was released in Europe, primarily for dance clubs. Vivabeat recorded its second single, "The House Is Burning (But There's No One Home)," co-written by Mick and Marina and with Marina sharing vocals with Terrance. The song and the band would later turn up as a video in Brian DePalma's film, "Body Double". The video, helmed by Hong Kong director, Derek Chang won an early MTV award for best video by a "new" group. Finally securing solid management, the band got a chance to tour with 80's legends like Depeche Mode, Gang of Four, Human League, The B-52's, The Thompson Twins and R.E.M. For a time, it seemed every English band that played L.A. invited Vivabeat to open for them. During that period, Dean left to join Gary Numan's band and was replaced by San Francisco guitarist Jeff Gilbert. Shortly thereafter, Terrance left for Germany to star with Dennis Hopper in the film "Whitestar", effectively ending Vivabeat. Mick and Marina were rejoined by Rob Dean, and with the addition of two new female vocalists, Peggy Max and Cindy Hope, began recording as See Jane Run. The group was basically a studio band -- some of their output rounds out the Vivabeat compilation -- and they ended up with songs in several films, including "Heavenly Kid". AIDS eventually claimed the lives of Alec Murphy in 1986, Connie de Silva in 1991, and Terrance Robay in 1994. "AIDS decimated this band in a way we couldn't have seen coming," says Marina. "That whole circle of people,

so many who were close to us -- are dead. The tragic thing is that by the time they died, Connie and Alec had cleaned up and were finally getting their lives back together." In retrospect, it seems that Vivabeat may have been just a little ahead of its time. When they were signed, the L.A. scene was dominated by guys in either skinny ties or safety pins playing stripped down punk and pop. One month after Vivabeat's first album was released, the L.A. Times did a feature story on local bands that had secured record deals and didn't include Vivabeat. Marina -- who sort of knew the Times Music Editor, Robert Hilburn -- called and asked him why they had been excluded. Hilburn responded: 'Oh! We thought Vivabeat was a English band.' Just as Vivabeat's history came to a close, a generation of glamor and electronica bands, such as The Eurythmics, Depeche Mode, Soft Cell, Spandau Ballet and Duran Duran, bubbled to the surface and skyrocketed to stardom. In early 2001, Permanent Press released a critically acclaimed compilation of the band's work, The Good Life: 1979-1986. The 14 tracks include cuts culled from their debut LP and the limited edition European EP, as well as seven previously unreleased tracks. Permanent Press, in true Vivabeat style, when bankrupt and halted operations eight months after the release of the album. The band's experiences in writing songs for movies, led Mick to his current role in life -- composing music for films and documentaries. Marina meanwhile, works in the film industry as a writer/producer. They are still married and raising their son in Los Angeles. Doug returned to Utica, New York where lives to this day. Rob settled in Costa Rica where he works as a naturalist painter and leads bird-watching tours. --Paul Sbrizzi

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