

The Communards: Don't leave us this way

Jimmy Somerville is a singer whose falsetto range gives new meaning to the word "castration."

BY DR. TANTALUS

The Doctor has been requested to perform some simple diagnostic tests on the Communards, that gay political British pop group whose recent release was a remake of Thelma Houston's "Don't Leave Me This Way." Unfortunately, this task seems more suited to the county coroner, since the Communards are strictly D.O.A.

Readers may recall that a group known

Music

as the Bronski Beat caused quite a stir two years ago with their sizzling and unique brand of gay political dance hits. That band was lucky enough to employ the services of Jimmy Somerville, a singer whose falsetto range gives new meaning to the word "castration." Their blend of gay disco ("Why," "Smalltown Boy"), dance classics ("Heatwave," "I Feel Love") and gay double entendres ("It Ain't Necessarily So") was captivating, original and passionate. In short, Bronski Beat had all those qualities necessary to make a good band into a great one.

Soon after that album's release danger caught up to our heroes and lead singer Somerville left the band to explore other pursuits. As the album cover informs us he decided to join up with Richard Coles, "a classically trained musician" and form the Communards. Frankly, it's difficult to understand why Coles feels compelled to disclose this information. Horowitz seems to get by all right without it. And you rarely hear Keith Richards claiming to work with a "classically trained economist" just because Mick Jagger attended the London School of Economics.

We are also advised that Messrs. Coles and Somerville have named their group after 19th century French political dissidents, always a sure sign of excessive

preachiness on any record. Of course, they fail to mention that the French communards executed the Archbishop of Paris in 1871, but perhaps these are not the actual dissidents inspiring our boys. On the other hand, it is possible that the poor Archbishop may have met his maker after being forced to listen to this album repeatedly.

The Doctor also knows that you will be shocked to learn that the album contains gay disco ("Disenchanted"), dance classics ("Don't Leave Me This Way") and gay double entendres, although "Lover Man" really stretches this point a bit. In other words, it's the same formula used by Bronski Beat, albeit with less originality and passion. It's more like a K-Tel greatest hits version of the Same Old Thing.

The sad part of this is that for all their supposed avant garde radicalism the album is neither radical nor unique. The Communards are covering territory that's already been traversed by better performers, such as Tom Robinson and The Smiths. What seemed so fresh only a couple of years ago now seems like an excuse for Carter's Little Liver Pills. Even the Margaret Thatcher-bashing song, "Reprise" can trace its roots back to similar sentiments in The Beat's "Stand Down Margaret." This doesn't mean that the Communards can't repeat what needs to be said, only that if they are going to do it they better rely on something other than the same old marketing strategy that's been employed on every other album of this type. Even Linda Ronstadt has recorded "Heatwave."

If the Communards truly want to make an impression on this jaded world they might try releasing an album full of songs that have some life, some sense of direction and some swing. They might even try a few songs guaranteed to raise your blood pressure by a few notches. Now that would be radical!

Until then we might as well remove the oxygen mask and stop waiting around for vital signs. Next!

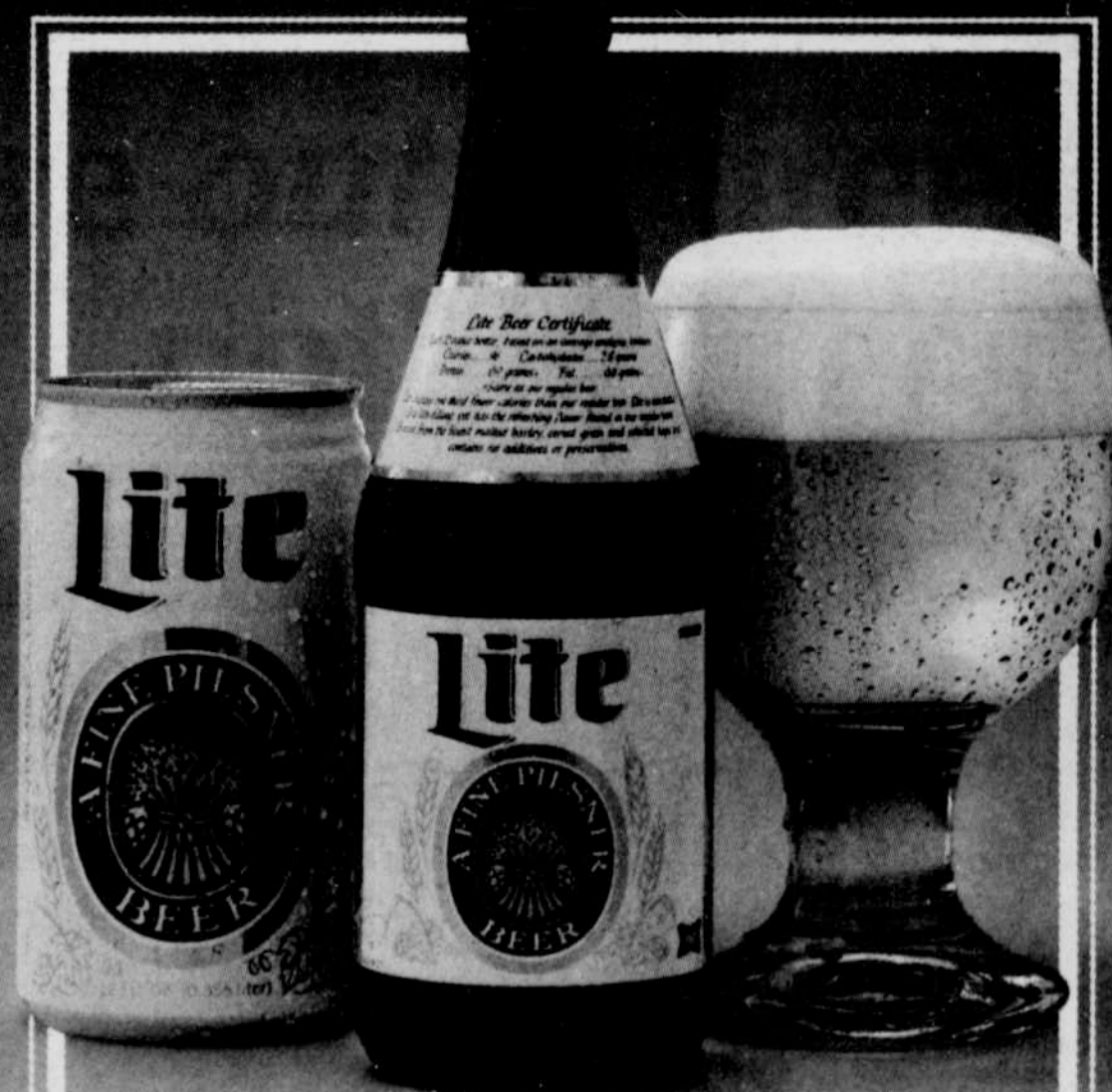
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