

Force Fed



A Certain Ratio

The sound of A Certain Ratio has always found its way into this country's ears. Albums like *Sextet* and *I'd Like to See You Again* are regulars on student radio — but then again, so is 'Bella Lugosi's Dead.'

What I could never figure out is why 'Wild Party' was never flogged as the frenetic dance single that it is, or why the cosy melodies of 'Life's a Scream' never got on *RWP*. That's not being naive, for by accident or design, ACR are now making a music that beats Top 10 dance songs at their own game.

Martin Moscrop blames two things for ACR's 10-year lack of mainstream success, their early arrogance and their record company. Both have been left behind: their new album *Force* was the last recording the group made for Factory Records and Moscrop now recalls their old "fuck dance let's art" days with a chuckle.

"For the first six years of our existence," he notes, "I don't think we ever had a melody in a song — we were only interested in rhythm. When we got tired of punk in 78-79, we started listening to things like

Kraftwerk and Brian Eno — but at the same time we were listening to James Brown, the Ohio Players and Parliament, and we got into funk rhythms. From that we went to South American, African and reggae music. Rhythm's more immediate, more aggressive if you're young. Although a lot of young people nowadays are interested in a tune, we never were.

"As we grew up we found that melodies can be nice as well and that's what makes our newer music more accessible. But if you listen to *Force*, you can't pick any particular influence — there are so many styles in there."

Perhaps the most unified ACR album was *I'd Like to See You Again*, recorded in Italy.

"Yeah, a lot of people like that one. We hate it. That was a real bad album, the down-point of our 10 years of existence. The band wasn't

getting on together very well so we just went into the studio and made up a few songs. That's why it took so long for *Force* to come out; after that we decided that never again were we going to record an LP until we had so many songs together that we had to throw 10 away."

Matters of Factory

Moscrop picks *Sextet* and *Force* as his favourite albums, saying that the band was "getting back on its feet" during the period when they released the singles 'Wild Party' and 'Life's a Scream.' Nowadays he accepts the peaks and troughs of the creative process but, I ask, wasn't it Factory Records that tolerated — and financed — the band's peaks and troughs for 10 years?

"There's nothing for them to tolerate — they don't do anything. When we say we want to do an album, we go into the studio and do it. They have no say in the matter, which I think is ridiculous."

This state of *laissez faire* peaked when *Force* was released in the UK. It sold out in two weeks but replacement copies of the album didn't find

their way into shops for another six.

"We've got a professional attitude," insists Moscrop. "We go in, book the studio time ourselves, record the LP, produce it ourselves, do all the artwork and get everything together and the record company don't even get the record into the shops. We just got sick of it. We do all this work and nothing happens. In the past, it's partly been us to blame because of our not being interested in selling records, but lately we've been writing more accessible material. And the tunes that we've written since *Force* [nb: now nine months old] are probably even more commercial. But, ah, when I say *commercial*, they're not bland..."

Indeed, ACR are many things, but "bland" isn't one of them. *Force* swings like a well-oiled hinge, gathering up a lot of what ACR have done before, smoothing it out and cleaning it up. Its ancestry (quirky jazz, howling tape loops, easy funk) is as diverse and as colourful as ever but the songs are played and sung with the dizzy optimism that first broke surface on 'Life's a

Scream.' Maybe it was this album that gave ACR the confidence to leave their Factory dwelling; the Benny Bad-man jive of 'Mickey Way' and cute punch of 'Only Together' are the sound of a band more confident and positive than ever before.

Breakout

After recording the album the band lost keyboardist Andy Connell — a departure, however amicable, that must have further emphasised the band's new attitude. Connell had taken accessibility a step further and formed a slick trio named Swing Out Sister in his spare time. Their recording contract was a year overdue when Connell, along with drummer Martin Jackson and vocalist Corinne Drewery, cut their debut album, *It's Better to Travel*. That, along with some killer singles ('Breakout' and 'Surrender') have made SOS hot chart property.

The similarity between the two bands (the 12" 'Breakout' beat is 'Knife Slits Water' but faster) is not contrived, but it's there — hence my desire to see both alongside each other on *RWP*, *Shazam*, the lot.

Moscrop speaks of SOS's record company pressure almost with admiration and seems to enjoy their pursuit of definite goals. Connell keeps in touch with his colleagues and Corinne even pops up on *Force*'s 'Bootsy' for guest vocals. Moscrop seems to feel obliged to talk about "commercial" bands; in truth I suspect that the ancient problem of what is and isn't commercial is no longer something he worries about.

Moscrop finished by asking about touring New Zealand — "Do y'think many people'd come?" As far as summer tours go, I can't be bothered with Bowie and I can't afford the Pepsi guy, so maybe A Certain Ratio will drop in after they've finished their next album for Christmas '87, and give me a "Best Live" name for my "Ten Best of '87" list. In the meantime, everyone — the band included — has a "best" in *Force*. It's aptly named; if you haven't been swindled into buying a whole heap of dullard HM-rock albums, *Force* really is a piece of vinyl you should reckon with.

Chad Taylor



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