

K. L. F.

While the mainstream media talk of a "neo-sixties renaissance" in today's pop music (referring to the 'Manchester' sound), we hipsters know that the 70s is where it's at. Long before Kylie Mynogue gave us 'Step Back in Time', a band called The Justified Ancients of Mu Mu (a.k.a. The Jamms) sampled the archetypal 70s band ABBA for their rendition of 'Dancing Queen'.

That was back in 1987 and the NME gave great coverage of The Jamms' burning all 20,000 copies of their album *1987 — What the Fuck is Going On?* at the behest of ABBA's lawyers. Oddly enough no-one has sampled ABBA since. The Jamms released a follow up album *Who Killed The Jamms?* as well as a few 12" singles.

In order to bolster their finances The Jamms changed their name to The Timelords and wrote the hit 'Doctorin' the Tardis'. Having got the hit (and the money) they resisted pressure to do a follow up and changed their name to KLF, named after their own label KLF Communications, used since the creative partnership of Jimmy Cauty and Bill Drummond first began. I spoke by phone with Bill Drummond in London:

I got a copy of *1987* and then the photos came through of you burning all the records. How did it feel to have to destroy your own, your first album?

"Well, if you've got a copy of the album then you've got one more than I've got. I don't know what happened, a mate pinched it off me

I think. When we first recorded that album we obviously knew what we were doing. Sampling was illegal but we were on such a high we thought: Sod it! It's going to be such an underground record nobody we're sampling will ever get to hear about it anyway.

"We were very surprised when the album came out and it got big reviews in all the English rock papers. We were even more surprised when ABBA actually found out about it. I don't know if it was Benny or Bjorn; but one of them was in a Stockholm nightclub and the DJ played our version of 'Dancing Queen'. They thought we were taking the piss and they took offence and started the (legal) action."

Were you taking the piss?
"That wasn't the case at all. It seems corny now but Jimmy and I were big ABBA fans. I've always been a fan of that sort of mainstream 70s pop, of which they were the leaders, and I've always loved that track. It was the obvious one to use."

What about your "Whitney Joins The Jamms" single. Did you have any trouble with that?

"No not at all, but *that's* an

interesting story. We had the studio booked for five days and we knew we wanted to make a piano based house track. I went round to the local record shop to see what they had. I was actually after something else, we wanted to sample the 'Theme from Shaft', but they didn't have it. In the window they had a big cardboard cut out of Whitney Houston; I'd loved her in the first video and on cardboard she looked like the ultimate desirable woman so I bought the album.

"I got it back to the studio and the best track was 'I Wanna Dance With Somebody (Like You)'. We didn't want to start recording, we were so overcome by that song we just kept playing it over and over again. Finally we came up with that track. When it was finished, because of the trouble with ABBA we thought we better get in touch with Arista (her record company) and get clearance.

"I sent them a letter and a copy of our song, and never heard back from them so we released it. That was all about four years ago. Two months ago we were approached by Arista to sign to them in America. A number of companies have been after us, but as soon as this interview is over I'm off to London on the train to sign with Arista. Part of the deal they offered, as a sweetener, was that we could do a track with Whitney Houston. She would come over to England and do a full session with me and Jimmy, and also that she would wear a KLF t-shirt in her next video. "We couldn't believe it! The irony of it: Whitney *joins* the Jamms. They'd known about the song from the beginning and loved it."

Drummond doesn't dispute my assertion that although *1987* was good, the sampling and production was primitive at best. Betty Boo's PR release trumpets the fact that she recorded most of the samples on her Casio in her bedroom, before going into the studio. Having been a defender of sampling during Hip Hop's early days I put it to him that I can no longer defend people like

MC Hammer when they sample the instrumental versions of others.

"Why should you defend MC Hammer? It's like saying because you like some great rock music you have to like all the MOR crap they put out. It always happens, there's the cutting edge and then it becomes mainstream. It becomes bland and watered down and obviously MC Hammer is just the ultimate pits. The fact that is the most successful Rap music in the world doesn't surprise me, that's what happens to music: it gets watered down for mass consumption.

"That doesn't weaken the arguments for sampling in the first place. It is an incredibly exciting and genuine thing to do. The ability with a sampler to take from all different sources of music and come up with something new was, and still is, a very fresh way of doing things.

"The people who work with MC Hammer wouldn't have been into rap four years ago, they would've been into some sort of bland radio-friendly schmaltz." (Which is how Drummond earlier described Whitney Houston's latest album.)

I asked Drummond about his radio-friendly hit 'Doctorin' the Tardis', suggesting that all it needed was Gary Glitter on lead vocal to truly capture that era of Brit pop known as glam/glitter rock:

"That was a one-off project where we sat down to specifically write a hit. Everyone saw it as a novelty record and it actually became a hindrance to us rather than a help. People who didn't know us as The Jamms thought: oh those guys are a novelty act."

That can't have been a real problem surely? You guys were never featured in the Timelords video, just the car. I notice the car is back for the KLF video for your new single '3am Eternal' I ask Drummond about the black dude rapping in the back of the car, and is there any significance to the image of the white man behind the wheel? Is this a metaphor for what is

happening to black music today? Rap started as a black thing and now it's full of whites using blacks to front in the video. You guys are Scottish for God's sake!

"I'm Scottish but Jimmy's from Devon. I've never really thought of the irony of the video as you're suggesting. Yes, we're white and it's our group so we're in control but that's it. A good proportion of our friends are black, and a good chunk of the people we work with are black so we've never really thought about it.

"The rapper in '3am Eternal' is a friend of ours, Riccardo Light. Actually he's a DJ more than a rapper but he raps over records when he's playing so we asked him to do it. He's just changed his name to Riccardo D'Force so I better get it right."

Your record company bio credits you with coining the term "Ambient House", is this true?

"Yeah, it was sort of a joke really. We were sitting round the kitchen table and we thought: What would a record label call this? They'd have to have a genre title. It was kind of tongue in cheek but the media seemed to go for it."

Well, they love labels don't they? Your single 'What Time is Love?' has been covered 13 times before you recorded it. How did this happen, were you playing it live (at Dance Parties)?

"No, we'd done a version in 1988 but we only did 2,000 copies. Nobody was interested and it got deleted, but then we started getting export orders from Italy and it became huge there. Because we were never able to supply the demand people from different European countries started doing cover versions.

"Originally ours was instrumental but these people were adding raps or sampled vocals. This went on for quite some time and one Belgian group called Liason D did a version they'd renamed 'Heartbeat' which we were sure would become a hit. When it didn't we thought we may

as well do a cover version of it ourselves because if we didn't someone else would, and it was bound to be a hit eventually."

The record company for the Eurythmics has just released a remix of 'Love is a Stranger' because the band aren't producing any new material, it's the same with The Cure, and you guys are already going back to your old stuff. What is this saying about music today?

"Obviously I can only defend what we do. Jimmy and I have always felt that what we've done is 'Work in Progress'. We're going to keep working on our own stuff, redoing our own stuff, for the rest of our life. When we've got a record out we don't think that's the end of that. We go back to it six months later and rework it, we just can't stop ourselves!

"Also, we keep sampling ourselves. If you've got a copy of *1987* you'll notice there's things we've taken off that and put on the new album."

I see in your bio that you've written a book and you're making a film. You must be highly talented.

"The film isn't finished. We've actually spent 200,000 pounds on it already and we'll need another million to complete it. We kind of thought: it takes five days to make a record, and we can have it out in five weeks, so maybe if we take a month to make the film we can have it out in five months. We started from that very naive angle and soon discovered there was a lot more to the film world than we'd imagined. It's a learning process.

"It perhaps sounds pretentious but I don't think I want to be making music for the rest of my life. I'd rather be writing. That's the area I most enjoy, writing. What is the book (Zenarchy) about? Well the title best describes it. It's Zen without the discipline, which is a contradiction in terms. Zen is supposedly a very disciplined way of organising your life. We came up with Zenarchy to describe the way we do things."

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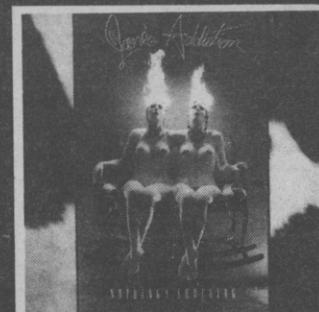
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