

Album Review: Angelheaded Hipster: The Songs of Marc Bolan & T.Rex (BMG)

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A stellar ensemble of artists which include Nick Cave, Lucinda Williams, Todd Rundgren, Joan Jett, two sons of John Lennon amongst others, lay down a worthy and often inspired double album's worth of classic **Marc Bolan** songs. Preceding his induction to the **Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame** later in November this year.

Angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection.

Alan Ginsberg's *Howl* and the Beats were one creative well from which the persona of Marc Bolan arose. He regarded himself as a poet foremost, around which he constructed melodies. Variations on twelve bar blues. Published his collected poems *The Warlock of Love* in 1969. Sold 40,000 but not well received by some critics.

Producer **Hal Willner** regarded him as a serious writer of the calibre of Kurt Weill, Thelonious Monk and Charles Mingus. He passed away in April this year.

Grateful for all his past influences. Played in skiffle bands. In a trio with Helen Shapiro. Took notice of Phil Spector, Bob Dylan, Dion and the Belmonts. Looked like Dylan for a while. Marc's father was a Russian Jew. At some point Feld became Bolan.

To mirror Chuck Berry, he then became the English Poet of Rock'n'Roll. From 1970 to 1973 he took over from the recently split Beatles in popularity. Appeared in Ringo Starr's film *Born to Boogie*. Started Glam Rock. David Bowie took lessons and came up with Ziggy Stardust. We needed him to give us something to listen to when all that Prog Rock noodling was spilling over.

Bang a Gong (Get it On) I recall kicked it all off as a huge hit. Done by **U2** here with **Elton John**, it is generally underwhelming and disappointing.

Much better is the opening *Children of the Revolution* from **Kesha**. An impassioned Soul vocal. **Wayne Kramer** of **MC5** provides some signature electric guitar riffing. A jazzy saxophone gives some dissonant honking. **Rolan Bolan**, Marks son sings in the background.

Cosmic Dancer by **Nick Cave** stands out. He sings it straight and with voice slightly cracking at times. Would fit in to his recent shows here, when he was performing the grief of his son's death on stage. *Danced myself right out the womb/ Danced myself right in the tomb*.

Joan Jett and the Blackhearts cover *Jeepster* as a barroom R'n'B strut. Tasty guitar riffing takes it out. Playful, sexy and light on its feet.

Then we drop back to the earlier psychedelic hippie incarnation of **Tyrannosaurus Rex** and the song *Scenescoff* from the Middle Earth inspired album titled *My People Were Fair and Had Sky in Their Hair*. **Davendra Banhart** plays this soft and dreamy, xylophones and backward tape effects.

The versatility and breadth of Bolan's songwriting is displayed on those first five tracks. Melodies seem simple and tailor-made for the advertising world. You can trace this up to another angelheaded hipster who also displayed a genuine androgyny and a genius for songwriting, Prince.

Hippy Gumbo is the earliest song here dating from 1966. **Beth Orton** takes this psychedelic Folkie tune, slows it down and gives it a sexy Soul workout with ominous little instrumental flourishes.

King Khan and *I Love to Boogie*. Starts with a sitar intro from **Marc Ribot**, and then launches straight into Rock'n'Roll and raises the roof. **Buster Poindexter** adds encouragement to end the song.

Then as **David Johansen** he reprises *Bang a Gong* with more swing and punch than the earlier take. A little of that original Dolls looseness and mess.

Father John Misty sings *Main Man* as Folk Americana with passion. Or, the song shines like a diamond through him as it eventually reaches a soulful crescendo.

Beltane Rock by **Gaby Moreno** starts with congas and has a slight Rocksteady Jamaican feel in the singing as well. Nice strings overlaid, a great guitar solo and it makes this a bright highlight indeed.

Mambo Sun is by **Sean Ono Lennon** and I can't help thinking of Father here. **Charlotte Kemp Muhl** is also present. Rock'n'Roll with a mysterious Sergeant Pepper presence.

Metal Guru by **Nena** (of *99 Luftballons*) also sings with Soul passion. **Marc Almond** on *Teenage Dream* is theatrical and full of bathos.

Dramatic and with some gothic Folk singing is **Maria McKee** and **Gavin Friday** covering *She Was Born to Be My Unicorn/ Ride a White Swan*.

Possibly a neglected Superstar and Artist by the time of his death, just shy of his 29th birthday. The breadth of talent and genius in these songs is astonishing. As he stated himself, he took Chuck Berry, Howling Wolf and Rhythm'n'Blues as far as anyone has gone. He too can claim to be the Poet of Rock'n'Roll.

Rev Orange Peel

Cosmic Dancer interpreted by Nick Cave

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Rev Orange Peel

A child of, and during the sixties. At eleven years old, he attended the Chuck Berry show at Western Springs and saw the light.

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