

Album of the Week: Angelheaded Hipster - The Songs of Marc Bolan and T. Rex

by [Jim McGuinn](#)

September 7, 2020

REVIEWS



Various Artists, 'Angelheaded Hipster: The Songs of Marc Bolan and T. Rex' (*Courtesy of Artist*)

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Jim McGuinn - Album of the Week: Angelheaded Hipster

With *Angel Headed Hipster: The Songs of Marc Bolan and T. Rex* as our featured Album of the Week, celebrate two artists we lost too soon - T. Rex' Bolan, the boogie glam superstar whose life was cut short by a 1977 car crash, and album producer Hal Willner, who we lost to the Corona virus in April.

Marc Bolan worked for years to become a star - arriving on the scene around 1965, just in time to hopscotch from psych pop with John's Children to spaced out hippie folk as leader of Tyrannosaurus Rex, before shortening the name and simplifying their sound to become one of England's most popular artists of the '70s, fronting T. Rex as they scored hits like Jeepster, Telegram Sam, Metal Guru, and his only US hit, Bang a Gong. Rivaling his frenemy David Bowie for the first half of the decade, "T-Rextasy" took England by storm, and while the punks, ego, and indulgences kicked Bolan off his pedestal by '76, he appeared poised for a comeback when he died in September 1977, leaving behind a young son and wife (Gloria Jones - US soul singer who released the original version of Tainted Love) - along with a clutch of songs and a sound that have inspired generations of rockers ever since. With his whimsical rhymes and "car and guitar as girl and star" metaphors, covering a T. Rex song is like a right of passage for thousands of musicians.

But it's the twist on Bolan's songs that makes *Angelheaded Hipster* such an interesting collection. Producer Hal Willner, who made a jump from doing music for Saturday Night Live to producing albums by the likes of Lou Reed, Marianne Faithful, and Lucinda Williams, while also gaining a reputation for his skill at crafting compilations and tribute albums, organizing an eclectic stable of artists to cut everything from tributes to Kurt Weill, Leonard Cohen, Charles Mingus, and even Pirate Songs (you haven't lived til you've heard Bono sing a sea shanty).

For the T. Rex tribute Willner invited some of his usual contributors - from U2 (with Elton John on piano) to Lucinda Williams, Todd Rundgren, David Johanson, Nick Cave, and Gavin Friday, but also added in curveballs - like Peaches, Kesha, Father John Misty, Sean Lennon, King Khan, Gaby Moreno, and even Nena - of 99 Luftballons. The results are dizzying - and pushes Bolan's music into directions he never explored. Instead of taking the songs modern or rocking, a lot of the performances bring an almost stately quality - there's definitely more vibes and stand-up bass than I expected!

Not unlike the early Velvet Underground songs of Willner's old friend Lou Reed, the childlike simplicity of T. Rex songs opens up limitless possibilities, and that's what makes *Angel Headed Hipster* such an enjoyable tribute record. The album veers from Kesha and Joan Jett rocking out to U2 taking us to New Orleans, Peaches to the disco, Todd Rundgren channeling Bill Murray's lounge singer, from delicately sweet performances from Devendra Banhart and Father John Misty, and dramatic readings from Soft Cell's Marc Almond and Nick Cave. Not every reinvention works, but enough do to make this final project of Willner a joy to listen to, and illustrates how much more there was to Marc Bolan's songs than what appeared at the surface.



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|----|----------------------------|------|
| 1 | Children of the Revolution | 2:35 |
| 2 | Cosmic Dancer | 5:54 |
| 3 | Jeepster | 3:57 |
| 4 | Scenescof | 2:36 |
| 5 | Life's a Gas | 4:03 |
| 6 | Solid Gold, Easy Action | 2:19 |
| 7 | Dawn Storm | 5:07 |
| 8 | Hippy Gumbo | 3:05 |
| 9 | I Love to Boogie | 3:30 |
| 10 | Beltane Walk | 3:38 |

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1 Photos



Marc Bolan (T Rex) from a 1973 ABC Television In Concert performance. (Wikimedia Commons)

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John @ Stony Brook · 10 hours ago

Good grief - the Joan Jett-executed cover is flat, uninspired - horrendous... I suspect the mute button with earn its keep this week. Thank for the summary.

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