

EVERY SO OFTEN a pop song arrives that can make you believe it will change everything. In March 1981 it was the turn of Heaven 17's (We Don't Need This) Fascist Groove Thang. John Peel, the music press and smart clubbers all adored it. Within months, white boy electro-funk had exploded. Taking their name from a fictional pop group in the sci-fi novel *A Clockwork Orange*, Heaven 17 were a vehicle for ex-Human League members Martyn Ware and Ian Craig Marsh, also recording as the British Electric Foundation: a sort of Chic Organization built on Northern sensibilities. They posed for fashion shoots in *The Face*. They were, back then, "the now".

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MARTYN WARE

"We're saying the antique image of rock musicians as people of the people or street level, or tortured artists sitting in garrets, is a load of bollocks," Ware argued in 1982. "We're stripping away the veneer of pseudo-mysticism that surrounds the artist. The best and least hypocritical way of doing that is to act as a business." As B.E.F., they released the cassette-only *Music For Stowaways*, an instrumental synthesizer album that harked back to some of their pre-Human League experiments. They also produced Hot Gossip and Sandie Shaw. For the Heaven 17 division of the enterprise, they drafted in Glenn Gregory (with whom Marsh had once played in the tastefully titled *Musical Vomit* in the 1970s) to add a faux-soul croon.

When Marsh and Ware split from The Human League in 1980, critics believed that their old band would flounder. There was considerable acrimony between the camps, and chin-stroking music hacks inevitably sided with Heaven 17's smart, brittle theses. When Phil Oakey was asked in 1982 if he had made any enemies in the music business, he simply replied, "Apart from B.E.F., I don't think so."

HEAVEN 17'S DEBUT album, *Penthouse And Pavement*, cocked a snook at the new world of go-ahead business threatening to engulf Britain, creating an outsiders' pastiche of modern city living. "We applied some of our eccentric theories to our real love, which was soul and funk," Ware said. "I can honestly say that we didn't have the faintest clue what we were doing or how we were achieving it, but it was definitely new and exciting, and it sounded like no one else."



Office angels: Heaven 17 (from left) Glenn Gregory, Martyn Ware and Ian Craig Marsh.

SAVE A PRAYER

HEAVEN 17'S CELESTIAL RHYTHMS FUSED A NEW SOUND WITH OLD-SCHOOL SOUL. AND THE HUMAN LEAGUE HATED THEM.

After a quiet 1982, Heaven 17 returned with their most commercial outing, *The Luxury Gap*. Its key single, *Temptation*, was a Holland-Dozier-Holland pastiche that reached Number 2 in the UK and has, like most of Heaven 17's early work, dated remarkably well. By their third album, *How Men Are*, they were labouring the point, although the standout track, *And That's No Lie*, delivered 10 minutes of gorgeously conceived glory.

B.E.F. also had the honour of re-introducing Tina Turner to the world. Her cameo on 1981's covers album *Music Of Quality And Distinction Vol 1*, performing The Temptations' *Ball Of Confusion*, was the perfect showcase for Marsh and Ware's electro-soul interface. Lightning couldn't strike twice, though, and their collaboration with Jimmy Ruffin on Luther Vandross's *My Sensitivity* in 1986 stiffed.

Heaven 17 split in 1989, but re-formed eight years

later to play live for the first time ever. They still perform occasionally, including an inventive cover of Blue Oyster Cult's (Don't Fear) *The Reaper*. Martyn Ware also collaborates with Vince Clarke as *Illustrious*, creating electronic muzak for art installations, galleries and even a one-off commission for Sellafield.

Meanwhile, Ware says of Heaven 17: "Some days you eat the bear and some days the bear eats you. In this exciting world of random changes and unexpected events, I can only hope and pray that we don't get eaten by the bear." *Daryl Easlea*

IF YOU ONLY OWN ONE HEAVEN 17 ALBUM, MAKE IT... PENTHOUSE AND PAVEMENT VIRGIN, 1981