

RECORD
LABEL
PROFILE



ZANG TUUM TUMB



RADIO BANS, TERRORISTS AND GIRLS DRESSED IN LEATHER... AS RECORD LABELS GO, ZANG TUUM TUMB – WHICH WAS FORMED IN 1983 – WAS ANYTHING BUT BORING. IN THIS FEATURE FROM THE *CLASSIC POP ARCHIVES*, WE SPOKE TO THE MAJOR PLAYERS IN THE LABEL'S HISTORY, AND DISCOVERED HOW TREVOR HORN AND HIS FRIENDS TOOK ON THE WORLD AND WON...

ANDY JONES

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Most of us can remember the first time we heard *Relax* by Frankie Goes To Hollywood – and the first time we saw that video. Rarely had anything this sexually charged been seen or heard in the mainstream – and the insinuation was gay sex, remember; something that was still very much taboo in the 80s. The impact was huge: banned by Radio 1, the single soared to the top of the UK charts, catapulting these five likely lads from Liverpool

But there was a silver lining: “Chris also offered us our own record label because he wanted Trevor.”

So, after Horn had produced ABC’s debut album, *The Lexicon Of Love*, and stood in as singer on the Yes album, *Drama*, in 1983 he and Sinclair formed Zang Tuum Tumb (the name comes from a sound poem by the Italian futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti). Horn would manage the music (he was given a studio, Sarm Studios on London’s Basing Street, as

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RICHARD GREEN

to worldwide fame. And suddenly, everyone who was anyone was wearing T-shirts emblazoned with the words “Frankie Say Relax” – and following the release of the band’s follow-up single, *Two Tribes*, “Frankie Say War! Hide Yourself”.

Representing a band like Frankie was just one of many controversial statements made by the band’s record label, Zang Tuum Tumb (ZTT) – a label whose history reads like a PR executive’s fantasy, but who also made some of the best and most innovative music of the 80s.

IN THE BEGINNING

The ZTT story began in the late 70s, when Trevor Horn, frontman with a new band called The Buggles, asked his girlfriend and manager Jill Sinclair for her opinion on a song that he’d written.

As Sinclair – later Horn’s wife – told *The Independent* in 1999, “Trevor said, ‘Can I play you a song?’ It was *Video Killed The Radio Star*, and that’s when I chased him to make the record.”

But before she could persuade him, Chris Blackwell at Island Records also heard the song and persuaded Horn to sign to them instead. “I lost the deal,” Jill said.

part of the deal with Island), Sinclair would handle the business and NME journalist Paul Morley was drafted in to handle the marketing.

Despite having such a talented team, Horn initially struggled to sign anyone to the label, as his then engineer, Gary Langan, recalls: “I was driving Trevor to a mastering session one afternoon and he said, ‘Oh, God, I need a band to start the label.’ I’d been working with JJ Jeczalik, who was Trevor’s Fairlight programmer. We’d been fooling around with a few tracks using the sampler, and had stolen a drum track from a Yes album we were making at the time, which was highly illegal. But I got the cassette out and said, ‘I’ll fess up, Trevor – JJ and I have been fooling around with an idea.’ And I played him the demo, which later became *Beatbox* by Art Of Noise.

“He said, ‘This is amazing. I’m going to give this to Chris Blackwell.’ Chris flew to New York the next weekend and got the demo cassette played at a club. Then he came back and said to Trevor, ‘You have to sign these people to be the first act on your label!’”

And so, Art Of Noise were born. The faceless band



ART OF NOISE

TREVOR HORN AND PAUL MORLEY JOINED THREE OF HORN’S REGULAR COLLABORATORS – GARY LANGAN, JJ JECZALIK AND ANNE DUDLEY – TO FORM AVANT-GARDE EXPERIMENTALISTS ART OF NOISE. THE BAND BECAME ZTT’S FIRST SIGNING IN 1983...

• “Art Of Noise started out with me, JJ Jeczalik and Anne Dudley,” recalls music engineer Gary Langan. “None of us were oil paintings! At this point, it was just us making tracks and there was no name as such. Paul Morley found the name. He said, ‘Why don’t we do an anonymous band? I have this great name called Art Of Noises.’ JJ said, ‘No, that’s rubbish, it should really be Art Of Noise.’ And that’s really how it all started.”

“None of us had any inclination that we’d be in a band. Yet here we were, thrust into being in a band and doing radio shows and interviews. It’s always good when something comes along in your life that you’re really not expecting. That’s what happened – we really did go from zero to hero.”

Art Of Noise were a big hit on ZTT but enjoyed even greater chart success when they left the label. “We got another deal with Derek Green at China Records,” Langan says, “and it was his idea that we work with other

people. In some ways, we were the first band to do that. He said, ‘Why don’t you do a cover of a Duane Eddy track?’ And that’s what we did with *Peter Gunn*. It got us a Grammy for Best Black Instrumental!”

“We had a great time recording with Duane in Anne’s dining room. It was the middle of winter and Anne’s a bit tight, so she wouldn’t put the heating on during the day. I remember Duane – who’d just come over from Palm Springs – stood there with a sheepskin coat on, recording!”

Langan admits that the band owe a large part of their success to one piece of equipment in particular. “When the Fairlight [sampler] came along, it was built for Art Of Noise, and we wouldn’t have existed without it,” he says. “We had these wacky ideas: JJ and I trying to make records out of a car trying to start, or a tennis match or a ping-pong game. And the only way we could’ve achieved those thoughts was with a Fairlight.”



PROPAGANDA

THE GERMAN SYNTH-POP COMBO – RALF DÖRPER, ANDREAS THEIN, SUSANNE FREYTAG AND, LATER, CLAUDIA BRÜCKEN AND MICHAEL MERTENS, WERE THE SECOND BAND TO JOIN ZTT. JOURNALIST CHRIS BOHN, WHO WORKED AT THE NME, HAD CHAMPIONED THE BAND'S MUSIC TO PAUL MORLEY AND THEY WERE SIGNED IN 1983.

“It was such a bold move,” says Propaganda’s keyboard player, Ralf Dörper, when asked about the creation of ZTT. “Paul [Morley] and Trevor [Horn] going into battle with such a unique bunch of acts – a faceless band [Art Of Noise], partly gay rockers [Frankie Goes To Hollywood] and us, the serious Huns.”

Dörper explains what a creative time it was at ZTT’s Sarm Studios. “It was always crowded and we met quite a lot of bands who were in the charts, down in the canteen or at the pinball machine,” he says. “We spent a lot of time with Frankie at Sarm and got along really well with them. Initially, it was very hard for us Germans to understand them, due to their strong Scouse accents!”

Propaganda also found an early ally in Paul Morley. “There was an intense exchange of ideas,” says Dörper. “I trusted his musical instincts while, initially, I wasn’t so sure about Trevor Horn due to his history with Yes. But his work with Malcolm McLaren – and his linking with Morley – convinced

me that he wouldn’t turn Propaganda into a teutonic prog band.”

Later, the band’s relationship with Morley suffered. “Having read Paul’s book, *Nothing*, I understand his behaviour much better now,” says Dörper. “But he became so erratic, messing around with the songwriting credits, forcing his cover-version ideas onto us, not communicating properly and trying to stir up controversy in Germany by putting RAF – the terrorists Red Army Faction, not the Royal Air Force – quotes on our record sleeves. But now, I realise he was under extreme pressure, being sandwiched between the business limitations and limitless artistic visions.”

“As a city boy (I’m an investment banker these days), I’d say that Zang Tuum Tumb resembled a start-up with a unique idea but not a real business plan,” concludes Dörper. “Not being fair to the artists was so 1960s. It was greedy and greed isn’t good. Holly Johnson won his court case against ZTT and not without reason – he had the same contract we had.”



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would strike a chord both in the UK and, eventually, around the world, with some of the earliest sample-based music, including *Moments In Love* and *Close (To The Edit)*. It was the first success for ZTT, and Art Of Noise were soon joined on the label's books by the German synth-pop band Propaganda. However, ZTT's defining moment was about to arrive – or should we say come? And it all started with a chance performance on Channel 4's cult live-music

become known for his studio perfection and admitted to *The Independent* in 1999, "I keep going with musicians until everybody is knackered, sick to death and can't bear to listen to that particular track again. Then I'll say, 'OK, let's start again. I think I know how it should be.' I've got an awful lot of stamina."

It's alleged that by the time the track was finally finished, vocalist Holly Johnson was the only member of Frankie Goes To Hollywood to feature on it. Whether that's true or

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TREVOR HORN

show, *The Tube*, that should never have even happened.

"*The Tube* sent a crew to Liverpool to film another local band, *Dead Or Alive*," recalls Frankie Goes To Hollywood bassist Mark O'Toole.

"Apparently, when the crew arrived in Liverpool, the band couldn't be found. But, since they were already there, they thought they may as well film something. Somebody put Frankie forward as an up-and-coming band to watch out for, and we found ourselves in a popular club in Liverpool called *The State*, miming to a demo of *Relax* that we'd recently recorded ourselves. It ended up on national TV.

"Meanwhile, in Sarm Studios in London, Yes were recording with Trevor Horn. They were taking a break, watching TV, while Trevor was doing his thing in the control room. This video came on of us on *The Tube*, and they noticed we had two girls dressed in leather gear, complete with whips. They went to get Trevor and he loved the video, so our management were contacted by Zang Tuum Tumb. That's how we got our break: pure luck and lots of hard work."

Horn took the track *Relax* and re-recorded it at least four times. He was to

not be insignificant – it's what happened next that matters.

Relax was a slow burner but, thanks in no small part to Paul Morley's marketing efforts (it's believed that he was behind those "Frankie Say..." T-shirts), the single slowly climbed into the UK Top 10. The overt sexuality of both song and video helped, of course – something that came from the band themselves, as opposed to being manufactured. As Langan recalls, "If you saw the original footage of Frankie on *The Tube*, it was totally outrageous. The whole outrageousness of the band was totally from them."

It was this outrageousness that led Radio 1 DJ Mike Read to ban *Relax* from his breakfast show. A slight over-reaction, perhaps, but this was the 80s and everyone and everything over-reacted back then.

Hair over-reacted to cream, and just look at the fuss made when JR Ewing got shot on *Dallas*. Just imagine how much traffic that would've generated had we had Twitter in those days!

The kids reacted against Read's perceived fuddy-duddy stance and propelled the track to No.1. And the band's



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

MARK O'TOOLE

Q What are your happiest memories of your time with Frankie Goes To Hollywood?

A My happiest memories were of when we were starting out. Reaching No.1 for the first time [with *Relax* in 1983] was nice.

Q It seemed like the band could do no wrong in those days! But can you recall any less-happy times within the group?

A It started to go bad for us as soon as we were signed!

Q What was it like recording for ZTT?

A Sometimes it was fun, but we always worked long hours. I was fascinated with everything to do with recording, so to be able to see how these guys worked was a great opportunity for me.

Q What are your thoughts on the original Frankie line-up getting back together one day?

A We did a Prince's Trust show in 2004 along with most of the acts that Trevor Horn had ever produced, to celebrate his 25 years in music. We used a stand-in singer [Holly Johnson declined the offer to perform] and my brother, Jed, rejoined us on guitar. It would've been great to have the whole original line-up together but that's the way it went, and it was most probably the one time it could've been possible.



subsequent singles, *Two Tribes* and *The Power Of Love* also hit the top spot.

"Frankie Goes To Hollywood made Zang Tuum Tumb," insists Mark O'Toole. "It was never the other way around. Trevor Horn was huge in helping Frankie become what they were but, by the same token, if you took Frankie away from the label, Zang Tuum Tumb would be no different to any other independent label at the time. Zang Tuum Tumb became known because of Frankie Goes To Hollywood."

Zang Tuum Tumb production. That was the whole ethos at Zang Tuum Tumb. It had a really high branding factor to it, in as much as it was style over content – unlike other labels, which didn't focus on things like that."

And with the right people in place, the label enjoyed many more years of success. Propaganda scored record sales across the world (including a No.1 single in Argentina!), Grace Jones released one of the most iconic albums of the 80s in

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GARY LANGAN

"Frankie were the biggest band in the world for a moment," agrees Richard Green, a current BBC radio DJ, less given to random acts of banning. "Everyone wanted a piece of them and *Relax* has to be one of the iconic songs of the generation, especially with the folklore that developed following the ban saga."

Green acknowledges that Frankie's success should partly be credited to the marketing machine that sprung up around the band at the time. "There was the more commercial side with Frankie Goes To Hollywood," he says. "I still marvel at how Paul Morley's imagery and Trevor Horn's infinite remixes persuaded us to buy yet another 12" single, as well as the 7" and the album. The imagery, the wall of sound and the arrogance simply flooded through."

AFTER FRANKIE

Having got a taste for success, Horn wanted more and began to develop the ZTT label. "Yes, there was a plan," Langan says. "Trevor wanted to recreate another Tamla Motown scenario. In other words, within the first four bars of a record, you knew it was a Trevor Horn/

Slave To The Rythm and, later, artists such as Seal and Manchester electro wizards 808 State continued the label's musical legacy.

It couldn't last, of course. Frankie Goes To Hollywood were never going to be the kind of band to tour into their 60s, Rolling Stones style, and imploded following disappointing sales of their second album, *Liverpool*. Meanwhile, Art Of Noise split acrimoniously, reportedly over creative differences.

Langan prefers to remember the good times, however; times when it seemed like it was Zang Tuum Tumb against the world. When asked what it was that set the label apart from their rivals, he doesn't hesitate: "What they set out to achieve was great innovation and thinking," he says. "They were always thinking outside the box and doing things confidently that other people weren't doing at that time.

"It's like all the wonderful things in life: sometimes, you have some great cogs in a gear but they don't all fit in. But what happened with Zang Tuum Tumb was one of these great situations where every cog just fitted together. It was wonderfully creative. A fantastic time."



808 STATE

TAKING THEIR NAME FROM THE ROLAND TR-808 DRUM MACHINE, THE MANCUNIAN ELECTRO KINGS CAPTURED THE UNDERGROUND RAVE ETHOS AND TURNED IT INTO OVERGROUND CHART SUCCESS. THEY SIGNED TO ZTT IN 1990.

• Graham Massey, founder member of 808 State, explains how it was a TV show that first brought the band to the attention of ZTT. "Our manager, Ron Atkinson, tipped off ZTT to watch an 808 State vs MC Tunes appearance on BBC2's *Snub TV*, an alternative teatime youth show," he recalls. "Paul Morley was really enthusiastic. Factory Records and Deconstruction had already made us offers but we could see that ZTT would give us the most attention, in that they didn't have any other acts at that point in time. They were the label least likely to interfere with the music.

"We took Trevor Horn and ZTT out in Manchester a couple of times and I think it was an eye-opener for them. There was *The Hacienda* at full pelt, but we also took them to *The Thunderdome*, a harder rave club where Darren and Andrew from

808 had the Saturday night set. The age group was younger and police helicopters were circling above. I think Trevor thought it was apocalyptic.

"ZTT never imposed anything on us style-wise, as they knew we were in touch with the Zeitgeist. They had a job convincing [parent label] WEA of our potential, though. I mean, we didn't look like Grace Jones – more like a Dickenson street gang."

Massey recognises how much the label contributed to 808 State's success. "It felt like a family business – very parental," he says. "Trevor was so generous. He'd give us old bits of kit and write us proud faxes."

But he also points out 808's importance in the label's history. "I think 808 State were the last great ZTT experiment," he says. "And in ZTT's tradition of radical pop music, we managed to add to the legacy."