

PAUL MCDERMOTT

ADVENTURES IN MODERN RECORDING: FROM ABC TO ZTT

BY TREVOR HORN - NINE EIGHT BOOKS



“
THE MAN
WHO INVENTED
THE 80S

In 2003 Trevor Horn was asked to produce an album for Belle and Sebastian. “Daddy, you’d better not spoil Belle and Sebastian. You’d better not over-produce them,” said Ally, Horn’s daughter, a fan of the band. Her dad was just as anxious, admitting: “I didn’t think I was capable of making an indie-sounding record.”

Trevor Horn is often referred to as “the man who invented the 80s.” *Adventures in Modern Recording* outlines how he produced some of the biggest records of that decade and beyond. He describes the recording of albums by ABC, Yes, Grace Jones, Seal, Simple Minds and many others in magnificent detail.

Horn was an in demand session musician before his band *The Buggles* had a worldwide hit single with ‘*Video Killed the Radio Star*’. His work with Dollar - “a combination of Kraftwerk and MOR” - led to further productions. “A band out of Sheffield - a left-field concern called ABC - had heard Dollar and they had decided they wanted a hit record,” he recalls.

In outlining his pop sensibilities Horn writes, “most bands at one time or another decide that they’d rather eat than continue making challenging and abstract records. Some of them stick to their guns and remain underground. Others make the jump to the mainstream. That jump or lack of it is why most people have heard of, say, the Thompson Twins and Heaven 17 but not Clock DVA or Fad Gadget.” It’s by no means a jibe - for every hit record he produced there were plenty of abstract records, many on ZTT the label he established with studio boss Jill Sinclair (his wife) and

journalist Paul Morley.

Horn explains his role as producer: “A band or an artist comes to you wanting to make a record, and by the time you all wave goodbye, they have one.” He gives us a fly-on-the-wall view of that process, recounting his ground-breaking work with

Malcolm McLaren and *The Art of Noise* as well as his era-defining singles with *Frankie Goes to Hollywood*. His account of hours spent in darkened studios programming a Fairlight synthesizer is enthralling for both fans of pop music and studio boffins alike.

Jill had a tragic accident in 2004 and died in 2014. Horn writes, understandably, “with the feelings of our children paramount in my mind, it’s not something I’ll be discussing here.” He does however write lovingly of their life together, her acumen as a business manager and of their many adventures in recording. It’s an incredible journey.



MY #TREVORHORN TOP 5

1. ‘The Look of Love’ - ABC
“Yippee ai yippee aiay”
Martin Fry’s gold-lamé suit couldn’t overshadow this landmark production.
2. ‘Slave to the Rhythm’ - Grace Jones
Her biggest hit single, the album of the same name contains eight glorious variations of the song.
3. ‘Two Tribes’ (Annihilation Mix) - Frankie Goes to Hollywood
1984 was theirs, and this 9-minute mix is the greatest of them all.
4. ‘Left to My Own Devices’ - Pet Shop Boys
Horn said he was going to try “putting Debussy to a disco beat.” Tennant got a great line for one of PSB’s greatest tunes.
5. Seal - Crazy
We first heard Seal’s incredible voice on Adamski’s ‘Killer’ - ‘Crazy’ made him a superstar.