

KIRSTY MacCOLL

SEE THAT GIRL 1979-2000

UMC

★★★★

It could have been so different. If Kirsty MacColl hadn't left Stiff Records to record *Desperate Character*, her lauded 1981 debut LP, only to be dropped before her second album... If, after leaving Polydor, Stiff hadn't gone bankrupt, leaving her in legal limbo... If others working with her, or covering her songs, hadn't overshadowed her own recordings... If her diversity were seen as strength, not weakness, and her playfulness



viewed as appealing instead of a novelty... And then, most poignantly, if she had not been run down while peacefully swimming in 2000.

All these scenarios play out listening to this new BCD boxset filled with classic singles, admirable album tracks, demos, sessions and live recordings.

Obviously, a Best Of might serve newcomers more efficiently to encounter evergreens such as MacColl's unforgettable Billy Bragg cover of *A New England*, *Walking Down Madison's* embrace of early-90s breakbeats, and *There's A Guy Works Down The Chip Shop* Swears He's Elvis, also available in American form where he works down a truck stop.

But hers and Shane MacGowan's *Fairytale Of New York* and Bragg and Johnny Marr's *Greetings To The New Brunette* only boost its appeal,



while the range of unreleased and rare material – including a rendition of *Miss Otis Regrets* recorded with the 1st Battalion of The Irish Guards, and a cover at Glastonbury, of The Smiths' *You Just Haven't Earned It Yet, Baby* – is impressive.

It's also matched by an enviable, illuminative introduction to her guest appearances and collaborations, including Happy Mondays, Tracy Ullman, Alison Moyet, Holly Johnson, and her folk singer father, Ewan MacColl.

Still, the real draw is 1983's unforgivably unreleased, New Wave-influenced album *Real. Bad Dreams* is *Scary Monsters* wonky, *Annie* triumphantly Bananarama-esque, while *Camel Crossing* is experimentally Japan-like, and *Lullaby For Ezra* delivers airy synth-pop. *Up The Greasy Stairs'* hypnotic, extended groove, meanwhile, points to further 'what ifs'. In a career straddling multiple styles, it's an album that should have been a highlight long ago. **Wyndham Wallace**

MARC ALMOND

TENEMENT SYMPHONY

SFE

★★★★

On joining Warner from Parlophone, Marc Almond's new label boss Rob Dickins wanted "the definitive Marc Almond" album. Almond was produced for the first time by Trevor Horn – as well as reunited with Dave Ball, via two songs produced by The Grid. Together with his long-time arranger Billy McGee and Nigel Hine, Almond co-produced three songs, too.

If you're struggling to keep up, so was Almond: the singer now views *Tenement Symphony* as

"Two different mini-albums" that don't hang together. While the eclecticism can thrill, you can see Marc's point: rather than definitive, songs like *Vaudeville And Burlesque* feel like they're trying too hard to be *A Moment*.

Neon-lit romance *Meet Me In My Dream* was a bright mid-paced groove with The Grid while, produced by Horn, *My Hand Over My Heart* was Almond/Ball going straight for the extravagance of *Torch*.

The album's Horn half is more convincing, with its covers – of Jacques Brel's *Jacky* and Irish singer David McWilliams' French hit *The Days Of Pearly Spencer* – becoming instant Almond classics. Trevor's luxurious approach is so right for Almond, it's a shame they've waited until Horn's forthcoming solo album to get back in the studio.

If *Tenement Symphony* frustrates Marc, at least the new reissue is faultless: the boxset



comprises six CDs and a DVD containing three videos plus TV shows demonstrating Almond's variety on *Wogan*, *Pebble Mill* and *Bruce Forsyth's Guest Night*.

Those bonus CDs include demos, backing tracks, single edits, B-sides – with *Bruises* yet another promising direction the album could have taken – 19 live songs (a grandiose *Champagne* suiting its location at Leicester Cathedral), a glamorous cover of *Like A Prayer* from famed

NME compilation *Ruby Trust*, and 23 remixes.

Of those extended versions, Phil Harding and Ian Curson add extra gallop to *Jacky*, the 12" Techno Remix does interestingly illicit things to *Beautiful Brutal Thing* and Trevor Horn brings further louche layers in his *Grit And Glitter Mix of My Hand Over My Heart*. There's so much to choose from of the era, Almond can be forgiven for getting a little lost in the weeds. **JE**

