

Red

THE COMMUNARDS



The Communards were born in May 1985 when ex-Bronski Beat vocalist Jimmy Somerville and keyboards and sax player Richard Coles, an old friend, formed a duo named after a Nineteenth Century group of French political dissidents who, according to Richard, "took control of their own lives in the face of adversity. We're trying to give voice to that idea."

The last two years have proved that Jimmy and Richard's mutual desire has been to break down musical barriers by drawing on a whole range of musical influences whilst developing an instantly recognisable Communards sound.

Glasgow-born Jimmy met the classically-trained Richard back in '82 when they worked together on a video called 'Framed Youth'. Here Jimmy made his vocal debut on a (since much-bootlegged) song called 'Screaming', with Richard accompanying on sax. Their musical paths separated when Jimmy co-formed Bronski Beat in May '83, and Northamptonshire-born ex-chorister Richard began working as a session musician. Their paths crossed again early in '85 when Richard started playing with Bronski Beat on a casual basis at live gigs. Very quickly after forming the Communards, the duo began gigging and recording, the first fruit of which was the single 'You Are My World'.

A grandiose, everything-but-the-kitchen sink gospel disco ballad, 'World' was a brave choice both musically and lyrically, but didn't have that 'instant hit' sound. Still one of the most popular numbers in their live stage act, it only managed to struggle into the lower reaches of the chart. The second single, 'Disenchanted', which saw Jimmy reclaiming the synthy-bop disco sound for which he was so famous, hardly fared any better – though sales in Europe were a good deal more inspiring. "After that I resigned myself to the fact that we were always going to be a cult band", says Jimmy. How wrong can you get?

Their lack of recording success would have phased an ordinary pop band, but the Communards have never been that. For they were building up an uncommonly large and vociferous live following, first through the many benefits for which they've always been renowned (for causes as various as Anti-Apartheid to Gay Switchboard) and then their own medium sized gigs. And – perhaps most of all – on the Red Wedge tour.

Meanwhile they'd recorded their eponymous album. 'Communards' was released in July '86 and soon went gold. An extraordinarily diverse collection of mostly self-composed numbers, its moods range from the exquisite tear-jerker 'Reprise' through the mock-flamenco of 'La Dola Rosa' and the giggle-and-blues of 'Lover Man' to the quintessential disco of 'Heavens Above' and all points beyond. Oh yes, and there was a little number called 'Don't Leave Me This Way' – a brilliant contemporary re-work of the old Harold Melvin/Thelma Houston classic – which just happened to rocket up to the U.K. number one singles spot and stay there for three weeks in September/October '86, going on to become the U.K.'s biggest selling single of 1986 and doing similarly well all over Europe.

By then, as the Communards' sound had expanded, so had the touring band. The first addition was the extraordinary voice of Sarah-Jayne Morris, who sang with the Communards on the Red Wedge tour and duetted with Jimmy on 'Don't Leave Me' and 'Lover Man' on the album. And now they are ten! They all participated in the Communards' recent sell-out European tour – where 'Don't Leave Me' was engulfing every country they visited – and their last SRO British tour, which triumphantly culminated in three packed major London venues – Hammersmith Odeon and Palais, and the prestigious Royal Albert Hall.

With another huge seller in 'So Cold The Night', Jimmy and Richard took a brief rest then began writing new material for their next album, taking the odd break to perform various charity gigs – the last big one at Wembley Arena in April in support of International Aids Day where the band performed in front of a capacity crowd of some 13,000 fans.

The fruits of their labours can be heard on their new album simply called 'Red'. Why Red? "Because we wanted one short word and red is small, compact, perfectly formed, and is associated with passion" said Richard who would neither deny its political representation but nonetheless would avoid obvious political sloganeering.

"Those that see the Communards as just a political band have got it wrong. We're a pop band that write songs about subjects that affect us as human beings, be they political, social, or otherwise and we write them in a popular song context. Some people see us as just a pop band because they like the sound we make. You see we are both these things" says Jimmy.