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THE HUMAN LEAGUE

"The foremost exponents of electro-disco-pop" is what one music critic said of the Human League. In Britain, where the band is big and getting bigger, raving mouthfuls like that are not uncommon. *New Musical Express* proclaimed the quirky sextet "the penultimate pop group," citing their "delicious seriousness." *Melody Maker* praised their latest as a "definitively daft album."

All of this might easily be dismissed as the latest tree-shaking of the critical breeze, if it wasn't for the fact that thousands of League followers have found that they can dance, as well as think, to this "daft" music. A string of hit singles (including the No. 1 "Don't You Want Me") suggest that there's something more going on here than lots of typewriters overheating. The Human League has connected with the people.

It started, innocently enough, in 1977 when computer operators Ian Craig Marsh and Martyn Ware teamed up with plastic surgery theatre porter Philip Oakey. Although none were trained in music, they were united by a common desire to pursue electronic adventures within the pop context. In 1978, after playing their hometown area of Sheffield, the Human League signed with Fast Records and subsequently released the singles "Electronically Yours" and "The Dignity Of Labour" before signing with Virgin Records.

In 1979, the band's first LP, *Reproduction*, was released to thunderous critical acclaim. The music's pioneering attempts at fusing futuristic electronics to pop had struck a nerve. The League's next outing, the double-pack single "HOLIDAY 80," featured an updating of Gary Glitter's "Rock 'N' Roll" which landed the band in the charts and on Top Of The Pops. A second LP, *Travelogue*, followed in April of 1980.

Differences over the proverbial "musical direction" split the Human League in October. Philip Oakey and Adrian Wright (originally the group's "visual director," he programmed slideshow accompaniment to the music) retained the band's name and soldiered on.

After regrouping, the League staged its comeback, which included a new lineup: singer-dancers Joanne Catherall and Susanne Sulley, and keyboarder Ian Burden. Hit records weren't far behind the new aggregation; Burden's song "Boys And Girls" hit first, followed by "Sound Of The Crowd" and the Top 5 "Love Action."

The final installment in the League saga is the recruitment of former Rezillos leader Jo Callis. Now a full-fledged Leaguer, he played a key role in assisting Oakey and Wright in composing material for *Dare*, the band's third LP, their first to be released in the States.

Even taking into account the pioneering steps taken by the band in its earlier incarnations, *Dare* presents us with one of the most radically innovative bands of the current generation. If the League made its name, as *Melody Maker* put it, "tramping all over rock traditions," the group now makes its mark by integrating a variety of traditions. *Dare* music is synthetic in the best possible sense; "Open Your Heart" is colorful, contemporary, fusing electronics with a melody as expansive as those associated with Phil Spector's brand of superpop. "I Am The Law" and "Seconds" are provocative inside moves, insistent and inescapable, while "Get Carter" lines out a compelling experimental turf with rich keyboard textures.

Best of all, there's "Don't You Want Me," the latest word in the reunification of pop and rock. Its refrain haunts and lingers, and its momentum has the grace and style that's always characterized the purest of Top 40 pop.

With "Don't You Want Me" and the rest of *Dare*, the Human League throws a delicious curve at what many observers complain is a surprisingly predictable domestic music scene. Records like *Dare* are, thankfully, always surprising. Their likely success and the continuing ascension of the Human League are testimony to the necessary rejuvenation of the scene now taking place. Like the pathfinders before them, this League was born to lead.



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