

Sparks - *No.1 In Heaven* & Noël - *Is There More To Life Than Dancing?*

Special double coloured vinyl release – April 20th

CD releases – May 17th



Celebrating the 45th anniversaries the Sparks album *No.1 In Heaven* and the Sparks written-and-produced lost gem *Is There More To Life Than Dancing* by Noël, these two albums are now released on colour vinyl – white and green respectively. Released worldwide on April 20th through Lil' Beethoven Records, in America this special double LP release will be exclusively available in independent records stores for Record Store Day (US). Both albums will also be released worldwide on CD, with an abundance of bonus tracks, on May 17th.

In 1979, Sparks' *No.1 In Heaven* introduced 33 revolutionary minutes of synth-pop to the world that would change the face of pop forever. 45 years later, it still sounds like the future.

Recorded with legendary Italo-disco maverick Giorgio Moroder, Ron and Russell Mael proved that rock and roll people could inhabit an electronic world - or any other genre or subgenre for that matter - at a time when record buyers were overburdened with ideas of authenticity.

Like floating avatars, Ron and Russell switched up and appeared in a new empyrean realm of icy futurism. Reinvention is practically expected of artists these days, but Sparks' pivot from a band situation to a synth-pop duo was more radical than anything even David Bowie had tried up to that point. Moreover, they invented the synth-pop default archetype of the 1980s and beyond... you know the one... flamboyant singer up front, inscrutable keyboard player at the back. It's a visual dichotomy that would be adopted by Erasure and Yazoo, the Pet Shop Boys and Soft Cell, The Communards, and many more besides.

Moroder already had form shaping what was to come, of course. He'd previously bestowed the mighty 'I Feel Love' with Donna Summer onto an unsuspecting world in 1977, a 7" that Brian Eno famously waved at Bowie proclaiming it to be the future. Conversely, the Maels' fortunes had been mixed during the latter part of the 1970s, though their decision to seek out Moroder proved to be a masterstroke.

"One of the few things that we've learned over time is that putting ourselves in a frightening situation with no clear view of the result can be the way to achieve a result that was both unforeseen and beyond one's wildest creative expectations. That was the case with the *No.1 In Heaven* album. Even putting ourselves in the hands of a great producer such as Giorgio Moroder and relinquishing complete control over the outcome was a leap of faith. What can seem like an obvious move in hindsight can be not nearly as obvious at the time. We're glad we dove in!" – Ron and Russell Mael.

No.1 In Heaven would go on to provide Sparks with their biggest hits since the Island years: the near title song 'The Number One Song In Heaven' went top 20 and the irrepressibly catchy 'Beat The Clock' went top 10, while third single 'Tryouts For The Human Race' proved Sparks were a band who were never short of ideas - and they're still not - proving that fact time and time again over 26 albums and six incredible decades.

Their eighth studio album also boasts some terrific non-singles - 'La Dolce Vita' and 'Academy Award Performance' both exceed the usual 120 BPM of disco to inhabit some elevated electronic nirvana, and 'My Other Voice', which has a backing track that had been intended for Donna Summer, was transformed into what many regard as the most mysterious song of Sparks' entire career.

And speaking of mysterious, it was at this time whilst signed to Virgin that the Mael brothers found their own enigmatic and statuesque diva in the shape of Noël, a remarkable singer they first saw by chance performing at the Troubadour in West Hollywood. There were even rumours at the time that Noël was in fact Russell, as the timbre of their voices are similar and they both shared an intense stare on stage. Ron debunked that theory when speaking to Electronic Sound in 2019: "Oh, I can categorically say it's definitely not Russell. I was there. I'm a witness."

They had carte blanche to work with their new "discovery", the first artist Ron specifically wrote for other than Russell, before Telex, and a long time before scoring musicals like *Annette* and *X-Crucior* (watch this space for the latter). There are five pumping, irrepressible disco bangers in all on *Is There More To Life Than Dancing?*, which segue seamlessly into each other in the Tom Moulton/Fire Island style that was à la mode in 1979. The album, which was previously available as a picture disc, has become something of a holy grail for Sparks fans.

Including 'Dancing Is Dangerous' - a song that deserved to be a hit but has instead gathered a cult momentum over the decades - this Noël adventure is the untold part of the story where *No.1 in Heaven* is concerned... until now that is. *Is There More To Life Than Dancing* is a lost gem that Sparks have decided to finally release on their own label, Lil Beethoven, such is their high regard for it.

"Noël is a great singer and we're so pleased to re-release this singular and timeless record. We hesitate to produce other artists, knowing that we have a moral responsibility to put them in a musical setting that they're comfortable with, but also allows some shaping by us. Screwing up our own records (in a good or bad way) is easier for us. However, it was inspiring to work on this album and inspiring to work with Noël. We hope that people will rediscover what a lost gem this record is." – Ron and Russell Mael

Furthermore, Sparks managed to track Noël down to ask her to write the liner notes for the CD release of this special edition. "I am thrilled they've decided to re-release this wonderful recording and asked me to provide insight and perspectives of my recording and touring experiences," she writes in the sleeve notes. "Their songs are timeless, and some stellar musicians performed on this recording. I am forever grateful to them for providing me the opportunity of a lifetime, and to you, dear fans, for your support."

Sparks' masterpiece with Moroder was voted "the greatest synth-pop album of all time" by *Paste Magazine* last year, beating off stiff competition from Kraftwerk and Depeche Mode, among others. *Paste* wrote: "Though many of the albums on this list are masterpieces to some degree or another, this Sparks record is the one stroke of brilliance that any band or artist who wants to make synth-pop should look at first and foremost... *No. 1 in Heaven* is not just the greatest Sparks record of all-time; it's the greatest synth-pop record ever made, with a nebula soundscape as technicolor as it is curious and era-defining."

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