

SEEING RED

Communards Release New Album on Eve Of American Tour

by ADAM BLOCK

"This time we really are coming," The Communards' Richard Coles insisted from his Hampstead flat. "There will be a ten-city minitour of the States in April." It's about time.

It has been three years since Jimmy Somerville, then the brazenly gay, socialist lead singer for Bronski Beat (who was topping the dance charts with his confessional "Smalltown Boy" and was scheduled for an American tour, opening for Madonna), was arrested on a charge of public indecency in London's Hyde Park; the lads' American itinerary was scotched. Rumors circulated that Somerville had been denied a visa and that he couldn't tour here; the rumors have persisted.

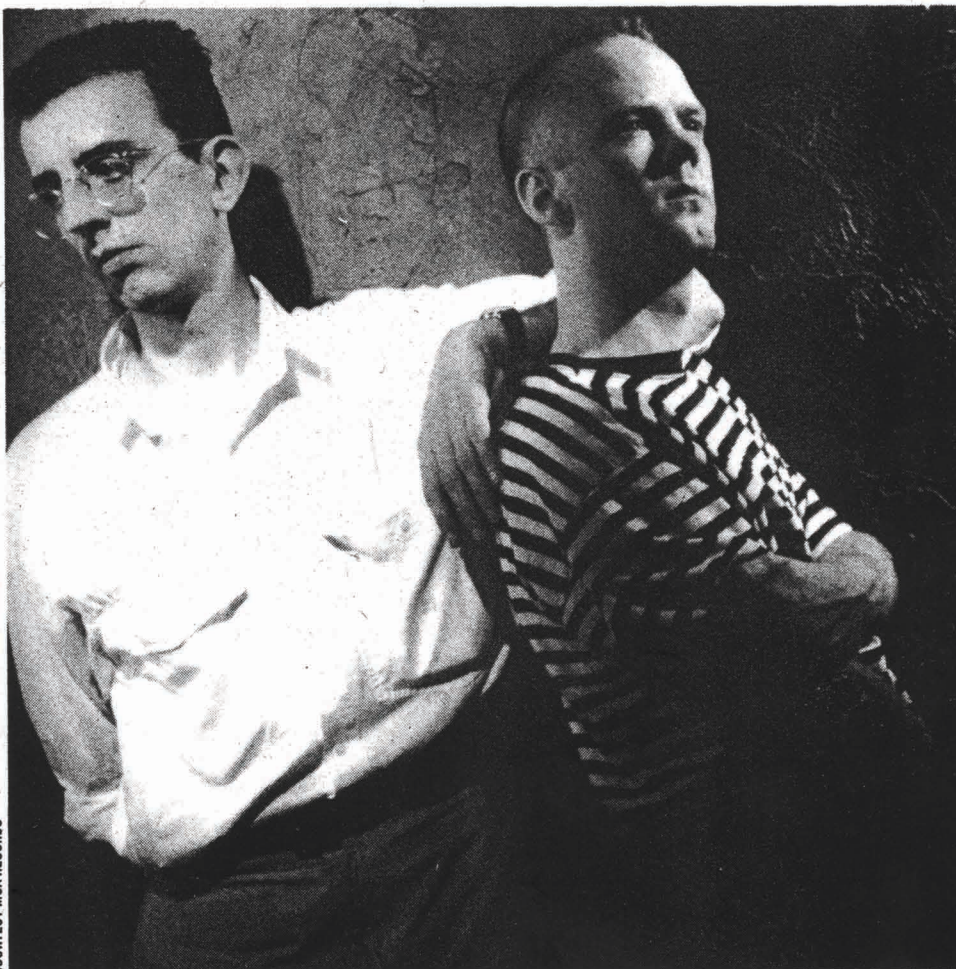
"Those were all just ridiculous lies," Coles confessed, "and Jimmy and I were instrumental in spreading them—to get him out of something he didn't want to do. Actually, it was a bit pathetic."

Somerville quit Bronski Beat in May 1985 to join forces with his classically trained gay buddy Coles to form The Communards. The duo's debut LP last year sold 1.5 million copies in Europe, where the group toured extensively and were key players in last April's International AIDS Week shows across the United Kingdom. In the United States they moved 150,000 copies after failing to tour.

With the current release of their second LP *Red* (MCA) and a thrilling cover of the disco classic "Never Can Say Good-bye" tooling up the dance charts, the group—dubbed by critics as "the gays next door"—finally feels confident enough to bring its show stateside.

The new disc is dedicated to Mark Ashton, though that information, lyrics, and credits appear on an inner sleeve omitted from the U.S. package—much to Coles's surprise and irritation. "I'm sure that was a mistake," Coles sighed, "though I've found that such 'mistakes' cover a multitude of sins."

He explained the dedication: "Mark was a neighbor, when Jimmy and I first moved to London and both ended up living in Kings Cross, who became a good friend and influence on the band. He was very



COURTESY MCA RECORDS

Communard comrades: Richard Coles (left) and Jimmy Somerville were dubbed by one critic as "the gays next door." Their new album, *Red*, is topping British pop charts.

politically active, chairman of the Young Communists League, and an absolutely *evil* queen—quite entertaining as well—and instrumental in our forming our politics. Last year, at 26, he was suddenly diagnosed with AIDS just as we were leaving for Spain, and within ten days—before we got back—he had died of pneumocystis [pneumonia]. That was a tremendous and traumatic shock. It was really the main reason we got so involved in International AIDS Week and many other projects, and it prompted the one song on this LP I wrote completely on my own."

Coles generously annotated the new disc's ten cuts: "Tomorrow" was the first single here and probably my favorite cut. It's a nice little upbeat tune about a battered wife caught in a marriage that's going badly and making up her mind to get out.

"TMT Loves TBMG"... musically that one is a lot like Abba, whom we both like. Lyrically it is very straightforward [laughing]. 'There is more to love than boy meets girl.'"

"Matter of Opinion" is another of my favorites, a nice little melody with lots of strings and horns. I don't think the lyric actually refers to anything.

"Victims" is a song about AIDS, meant to point out that no one is to blame: There are only victims. And the tune is quite lovely.

"For a Friend" is a ballad—I think the first we've ever done—and it is about Mark.

"Never Can Say Goodbye" is a nice cover of the Gloria Gaynor single with no political subtext, just a song we really liked. The one cover we haven't recorded yet which everyone seems to really like is 'Dancing Queen,' that old Abba song.

Great tune and very appropriate for us.

"Lovers and Friends" is the song I wrote on my own after Mark's death.

"Hold on Tight" is a very soulful cut. It is sort of our anthem of advice in current British society: to hold on tight 'cause Thatcher's reign will end.

"If I Could Tell You" is the tune Jimmy wrote to this homoerotic Auden poem. I think if you're a gay man living in London, it is obligatory to have at least one slim volume of Auden on your bookshelf. This is the tune where The Communards get a bit nasty.

"C Minor" is our big camp number—that's the one that Shirley Bassey should do."

Asked if the young girls who have thrown bras at the band in concert really realize—or believe—that the lads are gay, Coles offered, "I think anyone who knows the band knows that we're gay with the lengths we've gone to to stress that, but I think that when young girls scream and throw things at pop stars, it's almost a ritual. I don't think they throw bras because they want me to fondle their chests—it's just an expression of enjoyment. I know that is how I feel when I throw my bra at a pop star."

The band has lately been fighting Thatcher's notorious Clause 28. "It's to prohibit local authorities from actively promoting homosexuality," Coles explained, "and was intended to eliminate teaching in schools that this is an 'alternative life-style.' But it is written in such a way that it could be used against literature, theater, music: It could apply to us!"

In a recent full-page ad protesting the measure in the British press, jurists, actors, authors, and clergy were joined by a handful of rockers: The Communards, Erasure, The Pet Shop Boys, and Paul Weller. There are also plans for a duet by Erasure's Andy Bell and Jimmy Somerville this year, possibly as a political fund-raiser.

WONDERS ON THE HORIZON

Coles will take time off from The Communards to write and produce an LP with Morrissey for '60s pop torcher Sandi Shaw this summer.

Meanwhile Morrissey's first post-Smiths LP is in the can and slated for a March 22 release, possibly preceded by the single "Suedehead." The new LP is titled *Viva Hate* (Sire), and the 13 cuts include such winning titles as "Bengali in Platforms," "Hairdresser on Fire," and "Margaret on a Guillotine" plus propulsive pop melodies; the fey fabulist remains pained and irrepressible. Hairdresser on fire indeed!

Joni Mitchell's latest is due on the same day and is touted as her return to form. The LP, *Chalk Mark in a Rain Storm* (Geffen), includes covers of "Corrina, Corrina" and the cowboy classic "Cool Water" as well as a duet with Billy Idol on her new rocker, "Dancing Clown." And she gets assistance from Tom Petty, Peter Gabriel, and Willie Nelson on the ode to Injuns, "Lakota."

Look for the new Talking Heads LP, *Naked* (Sire), to hit the stores in tandem—promised as a Latin-flavored return to the rhythmic richness of *Remain in Light*, probably to be preceded by a dance 12-inch take of "Flowers."

Finally, Erasure write from London that the follow-up LP to *Circus* is nearly complete, with a first single, "Ship of Fools," due on April 18, complete with a sheet-tearing cover of Ike and Tina's "River Deep/Mountain High" tentatively slated for the B side. And there will be a U.S. tour in the fall. Meanwhile, San Francisco's original male disco diva Sylvester is in the studio collaborating with a series of producers and songwriters for an LP (the hopeful promising it will be his own *Private Dancer*, a long-overdue crossover blockbuster), which likely will hit the stores about the time Erasure hits these shores.

It is still winter as I write, but '88 is promising an earful. Stay tuned.