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Monday, 07 November 2005

The Human League: Live at the Dome

Contributed by Brent Simon

Thursday, 03 November 2005



comment has come full circle: What once was praise and then probably cause for a bit of derision sounds surprisingly solid again.

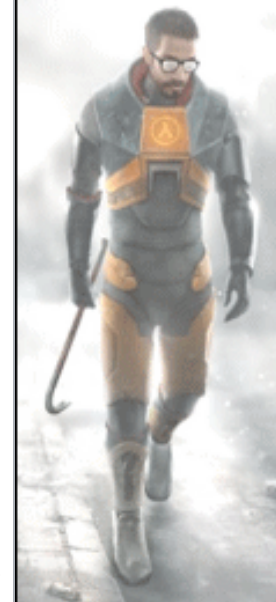
Formed as The Future in Sheffield, England, in 1977 by Martyn Ware, Ian Craig-Marsh, Phil Oakey and singer Adi Newton, the group played locally for a year or so, developing a reputation for their avant-garde, multi-media mixture of sound and image. After Newton moved on (how'd *that* work out for you?), Adrian Wright and bassist Ian Burden joined up, and the group started clawing their way up the charts, an improbably scrappy New Wave synth band before said movement even really had a name. Informed by pained caterwauls, intellectually inquisitive lyrics and grandiose synth arrangements, the Human League put their stamp on 1981 with "Don't You Want Me," perhaps their biggest and best known radio hit in the United States. It anchored their album *Dare*, which went on to sell over five million copies internationally, many of which now reside in the used section at Amoeba Records.

Still, '80s nostalgics should perhaps reconsider their archival dump with respect to the Human League, as *Live at the Dome* — a full-length concert DVD that captures the band in Brighton almost two years ago — amply demonstrates. The groundwork for the Killers and, indeed, even a bit of Interpol, is found in the 17 tunes presented here in collaboration with Susan

"Listening to the Human League is like listening to 1980," David Bowie once said. Of course, he said that in 1979, almost two years before the group's *Holiday '80* EP scored them a spot on *Top of the Pops* and the single "Empire State Human" helped them secure Stateside distribution for their debut album. It was meant as a high compliment then, an appreciative nod from the glam showman himself toward the futuristic mash-up of synth-leaning musicality and slide show-centric concert performances. The funny thing is, a full quarter century later, that admiring



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Anne Sulley, Joanne Catherall and Oakey. "Don't You Want Me" comes relatively late in the proceedings, followed by "Empire State Human" and "(Together in) Electric Dreams." But astute radioheads will also recognize "Darkness," "All I Ever Wanted," "Mirror Man," "One Man in My Heart" and of course "Human."

Live at the Dome isn't a knock-your-socks-off experience — the group doesn't have a swagger that seizes your attention. Additionally, the pause triggered by layer transition on my disc caught a bit, causing a skip of several seconds. Otherwise, though, this is a decent evening escape for music fans. The disc is presented in both Dolby digital 5.1 surround sound and a 2.0 Dolby digital stereo mix, so you can get a nice aural experience, and at under \$20 it's certainly cheaper than a couple of concert tickets. B- (Movie) B- (Disc)

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