

DOWNLINERS SECT



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1964–1966</i>	<i>Classic rhythm'n'blues</i>	<i><u>One Ugly Child</u> (1964)</i>

Only Solitaire

Artist: *Downliners Sect*

Years: *1964*

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THE SECT

Album released:

Dec. 18, 1964

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Tracks: 1) Hurt By Love; 2) One Ugly Child; 3) Lonely And Blue; 4) Our Little Rendezvous; 5) Guitar Boogie; 6) Too Much Monkey Business; 7) Sect Appeal; 8) Baby What's On Your Mind; 9) Cops And Robbers; 10) Easy Rider; 11) Bloodhound; 12) Bright Lights; 13) I Wanna Put A Tiger In Your Tank; 14) Be A Sect Maniac; 15*) Baby What's Wrong; 16*) Little Egypt; 17*) Find Out What's Happening; 18*) Insecticide.

REVIEW

If we agree to qualify «garage rock» as a trans-national rather than US phenomenon (and there is really no serious reason why we shouldn't); if we agree to limit its definition to «the meanest, nastiest, loudest, sloppiest» form of rock'n'roll that was technically possible in the pre-Hendrix era; and, most importantly, if we concede that in order to be called a «garage rock band», you did not officially need to start out in a garage (as opposed to, say, a basement) — then I am pretty sure that **The Sect**, the Columbia-released debut LP by a Twickenham band who called themselves Downliners Sect, was the UK's very first garage-rock *album*. (Technically, you could reasonably claim the Kinks' 'You Really Got Me' as the UK's first garage-rock single, but the Kinks' first album as a whole was far too tame to match the moniker — perhaps things would be different if brother Dave Davies had asserted complete rule over the band, but he never did). Okay, so you can never really guarantee anything, but at the very least, it was the UK's very first garage-rock album by a band competent enough to have a contract with Columbia Records.



And a pretty interesting band at that, too. Look at those happy faces on the front cover — they make the Rolling Stones and the Animals look like choirboys in comparison; these are the sort of chumps you'd probably wish to avoid meeting in a back alley after an evening out in the local pub. Not a lot is remembered about the Downliners these days, other than that their

main creative engine consisted of Don Craine on guitar and vocals and Keith Grant on bass; and that Don Craine's primary trademark was a deerstalker hat which was as treasurable to him, day and night, as the newsboy cap would later be to Brian Johnson. It is said that they named themselves after the Jerry Lee Lewis song 'Down The Line' (though I kinda doubt that), played mainly at the Eel Pie Island Club in Twickenham, and were good friends with bands like Them and the Small Faces, because, well, like attracts like, apparently.

The early classic sound of the Sect, however, is most reminiscent of another «raw and ugly» British band — the Pretty Things; indeed, **The Sect** and the self-titled debut of the Pretties have a huge lot in common, including a very similar list of musical influences, a very similar approach to abusing their instruments, and a very similar drive to go one step further than the Stones and the Animals and substitute both the sly, seductive sexiness of a Mick Jagger and the manly, brawny straightforwardness of an Eric Burdon for sheer nastiness and thuggishness. One can clearly picture the likes of a girl who would want to go out with Mick (Chrissie Shrimpton!!), or hang out with Eric (Twinkle!!); a girl who would be attracted to the likes of Don Craine probably had to be a terrifying creature indeed, biting off beer bottle caps with her teeth or robbing banks on her day off.

All of this is already clearly established on the band's very first single, a cover of Jimmy Reed's 'Baby What's Wrong', which is not as musically intriguing as the Animals' version, but is faster, sloppier, and raunchier than the latter by a good old country mile. Terry Gibson's lead guitar is simplistic, shrill, and screechy; the harmonica keeps blasting through the entire song as if it were a rhythm guitar; and Craine's and Grant's «harmonized» vocals have all the passion of two totally sloshed working lads down at the karaoke bar. George Martin would probably have fainted upon hearing this, but Iggy Pop would almost certainly be a lifelong fan.

The only problem — but a crucial one — is that once you have properly appreciated the sound of the Downliners, there is not much left to do. Everybody in the band shared the spirit, but nobody seemed to have any songwriting talent: the very few tunes credited to band members are fairly obvious re-writes of outside material, e.g. 'Lonely And Blue', credited to Grant and Gibson, but in reality = Jimmy Reed's 'Honest I Do' with new lyrics (though the song's major attraction, that ornate little winding guitar riff shadowing the vocals, so nicely preserved by the Stones in their own version, was taken out altogether — either to prevent being sued for breach of copyright, or because nobody in the band could play it, which, I suspect, could be closer to the truth).

The band's producer, Mike Collier, actually tried to remedy the situation by contributing some titles of his own, as well as

capitalizing on the band's moniker to build up a shroud of personal ritual and mythology: since the band was a «sect», it was all too appropriate to provide it with religious ceremonies of its own, hence the two tracks named 'Sect Appeal' (which Craine quite unflinchingly spells out as "sex appeal") and 'Be A Sect Maniac' — clearly oriented at the context of live performance, when the audience could become one with the band in a primal rock'n'roll ritual (take a lesson here, Mr. Pete Townshend). And it is quite possible that the ritual worked well at Eel Pie Island, but as far as the recordings are concerned, there are two problems — (a) both tunes are really exactly the same song, except that the first one has more lead guitar and the second one has more harmonica; (b) both tunes are really 'Bo Diddley', only with a snotty young British gangster in the place of an imposing African-American dude.

Another compensating maneuver is that, apart from the inclusion of Chuck Berry's 'Too Much Monkey Business' which was played by pretty much every British R&B band at the time, most of the band's covers are generally more obscure than those performed by the Stones, the Animals, or the Yardbirds. For instance, they do two songs by an almost unknown American performer, Larry Bright: 'One Ugly Child' (with none other than John Paul Jones, working as a session musician at the time, guesting on piano) and 'Bloodhound', whose aggressive lyrics tie in perfectly with the band's image — the first one ironically relates to the band members' own appearances ("you're one ugly child, who can your mama be? / If I was your daddy, I'd go and jump into the sea"), and the second is an ideal companion for Craine's Grimpen Mire-style hunting hat. We shall omit the unfortunate circumstance that 'One Ugly Child' was really a rewrite of Bo Diddley's 'Roadrunner' (this is where the tortured guitar string noises at the end of each verse come from), and 'Bloodhound'... well, it's also clearly a rewrite of something, I just can't hold that many rock'n'roll classics in operative memory all the time.

Other «obscurities» include 'Hurt By Love', a very minor hit by the siblings Inez and Charlie Foxx (the same songwriting team who originally did the classic 'Mockingbird') which is really Marvin Gaye's 'Can I Get A Witness'; Chuck Berry's 'Our Little Rendezvous' (which was itself a mish-mash of 'Wake Up Little Susie' and 'Good Morning Little Schoolgirl'); and Muddy Waters' 'Tiger In Your Tank', which was so visibly secondary for Muddy himself that only a few British bands bothered covering it (Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated did, though). All in all, this odd quest to uncover hidden and untouched treasures at the bottom of the rock'n'roll well painfully highlights the limitations of the genre at the time — most of these «deep cuts» were «deep» for a very good reason. But at least you are in for some momentary intrigue while gazing at these song titles and — probably — recognizing far fewer of them than you'd expect from a 1964 covers band; I, for one, was quite humbled at only recognizing approximately one half of these titles.

So, is the record worth seeking out for anything other than historic purposes? This certainly depends on how deep your adoration for garage-rock goes. For my money, as I already mentioned, the Pretty Things did something very similar with their debut LP *and* managed to show faint hints at future evolution and maturation at the same time; **The Sect** shows absolutely nothing that would suggest the band wanting to take you higher some time in the future. Yet there is also something to be said about the religious rigidity of sticking to the exact same formula — ironically, as we shall eventually see, the Downliners Sect crashed and perished at exactly the moment when they took the decision to exchange that formula for a completely different one.

At the very least, if you feel like specifically building a shrine to the year 1964, **The Sect** should most definitely be in that shrine, somewhere at the far opposite end to the Dave Clark Five, or to Gerry and the Pacemakers. Me, I like my mean and nasty music with a pinch of satanic mystery to it, which is why I shall always prefer the Stones' first albums; or, pending that, with tighter and more impressive musicianship, which is why the Animals and Yardbirds also outrun these guys by a mile. But as a major believer in the power of proto-punk, I would never deny these guys their «sect appeal», either, and the album remains perfectly listenable in our day and age just as well.

