

**Dr. Strangely Strange - KIP OF THE SERENES (COLLECTORS' EDITION)
(Hux 104)**



Outside of the peerless early Incredible String Band albums, Dr Strangely Strange's wilfully wayward wyrd-folk classic Kip Of The Serenes, which appeared with little or no fanfare on Island towards the back end of 1969, has long been one of my most treasured possessions.

If anything, its ramshackle oddball grooves have proved even more thorny and aurally challenging - and rather perversely, more obstinately stimulating

and hard to shift from the consciousness: not as overtly exotic as the ISB, but, it was often argued, structurally more amorphous, sometimes infinitely more idiosyncratic, lyrically more obscure and potentially more confusing to sort.

Frankly, those who encountered Strangely Strange But Oddly Normal on the Island sampler Nice Enough To Eat just didn't know what to make of this band.

For all sorts of reasons, then, it's even more impossible to actually define the music's charms. In other words, it can prove a bugger to connect with! The freewheeling stream-of-self-consciousness unashamedly mixing (predominantly Irish) cultural themes and literary (principally Joycean) references, lyrical poetry, nursery-rhyme, myth and legend, homespun philosophy, childhood fable and comic-book silliness, all stirred together in an acid-folky pot to a soundtrack of equally unabashed hippy-amateur-theatricals.

Joe Boyd, within whose Witchseason stable this album fell, considered the Dublin-based trio (Tim Booth, Tim Goulding and Ivan Pawle) and their sundry adherents "ISB junior", and certainly there were superficial similarities, with some decidedly Williamsonian vocal mannerisms, occasional female backing vocals (Linus) and arcane or creaky instrumentation, but as often as not the Strangelies' off-kilter shenanigans and beautiful chaos sounded more like "ISB to the power of x or the fabled nth degree", with a devil-may-care abandon that offset their (superficially) more folky-Irish demeanour.

Like the ISB, but in a kind of parallel reality, Dr Strangely Strange were both

ahead of their time and of their time. And their music is still thoroughly charming - if not more so - at this temporal remove. What we have here on this collectors' edition of *Kip Of The Serenes* is the entire original album, freshly-remastered from the original stereo tapes and (hurrah!) at the correct speed (back in the 90s, Island's own CD reissue had botched by remastering the LP at a slightly higher speed... thus it played slightly, but oh so noticeably, slow!). The Hux version maintains the label's high house standards: it sounds ab-fab, rendering audible loads of subtle little details now winkled out from behind their mask of vinyl distortion. And after the booze-ridden harmonium-wheezy strains of the final coda of *Donnybrook Fair* have died in the drunken ether, a treat is in store in the shape of four bonus tracks. These comprise two alternate takes (that of *Strangely Strange But Oddly Normal* even appends an acappella snatch of the *Wild Goose Shanty*), an instrumental take of *Strings In The Earth And Air*, and a different take of the curious cosmology number *Mirror, Mirror* which never made it onto *Kip* but recently surfaced on Hux's *Halcyon Days* release (which otherwise mostly charted what the chums did next).

The typically lavish and superbly-reproduced 32-page booklet contains an excellent essay on the history of the band by Adrian Whittaker, some illuminating notes on the songs by the band members, archive photos and drawings, a reminiscence by Joe Boyd, and full lyrics to all the songs. What more could you want?...

At long last, then, Hux have given us a definitive edition of the Strangelies' finest hour, and an essential companion to the aforementioned *Halcyon Days*. One of the finest cultish wonders ever conceived.

<http://www.myspace.com/drstrangelystrange>