

Bee Gees - Odessa (1969)

Written by bluelover

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01. *Odessa (City On The Black Sea)* – 7:33 02. *You'll Never See My Face Again* – 4:16 03. *Black Diamond* – 3:27 04. *Marley Purt Drive* – 4:26 05. *Edison* – 3:05 06. *Melody Fair* – 3:48 07. *Suddenly* – 2:28 08. *Whisper Whisper* – 3:24 09. *Lamplight* – 4:47 10. *Sound Of Love* – 3:27 11. *Give Your Best* – 3:26 12. *Seven Seas Symphony* – 4:11 13. *I Laugh In Your Face* – 4:09 14. *Never Say Never Again* – 3:26 15. *First Of May* – 2:48 16. *The British Opera* – 3:16
Personnel: - Barry Gibb - lead vocals (02,04-06,08,10,11,13-15), guitar, acoustic guitar (04) - Robin Gibb - lead vocals (01,03,09), organ, piano (03), mellotron (03) - Maurice Gibb - lead vocals (07), bass, piano, guitar, Spanish guitar (01), mellotron (02) - Colin Petersen - drums - Vince Melouney - guitars (04,05,08,10,11) + - Bill Keith - banjo (04,11) - Tex Logan - fiddle (11) - Paul Buckmaster - cello (01) - Robin Stigwood – producer

When Barry Gibb sings, "How can you tell that humans are real?" you know that we're not in Kansas anymore. We are in Odessa, the lavish 1969 double album that prompted Robin Gibb's temporary departure, and the one which pundits are often keen to promote as their baroque masterpiece.

In 1968, like many of their contemporaries, the Bee Gees felt the need to experiment as befitted serious songwriters. In this they were encouraged by manager Robert Stigwood to indulge their creative instincts to the max with a collection running to over an hour. A single, *First Of May*, with Barry's achingly forlorn lead vocals, hit the Top Ten, as did the parent album, just like Bee Gees records were supposed to do. However, once the public opened up the expensively packaged velvet gatefold sleeve, the contents failed to find favour.

The poor showing for its 1970 follow-up, *Cucumber Castle*, suggests that punters were truly scared off by the cracked and kooky eclecticism which *Odessa* represents. The presence of over-inflated, psuedo-cinematic arrangements, instrumental tracks, the opening narration of the

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title track, and ambiguous lyrics throughout ("You said Goodbye/I declared war on Spain" from Never Say Never Again), all suggests a wavering, self-conscious grasp at some kind of proto-concept album. Now reissued and given the Deluxe treatment, disc one has a airy stereo mix in which Bill Sheperd's opulent orchestrations dominate. What Disc Two's mono version lacks in supposed hi-fidelity, it compensates by pulling everything into more readily digestible foreground.

However, the most fascinating aspect of the reissue is disc three, Sketches for Odessa. Lasting over 70 minutes we hear demo tracks from the very first sessions cut in New York in between live dates in the USA, alternate mixes and two complete tracks that never made the final cut.

Absorbing the orchestral strains of Scott Walker's increasingly remote output, co-opting The Band's Music From Big Pink, or The Beatles' White Album, Odessa was a clearly a product of its times, whose sense of sprawling ambition was matched only by its failure to recognise its limitations.

Whilst there's some good writing on it, it's also true that this is spread perilously thinly. Falling somewhat short of the hyperbole that heralds any present-day discussion of the record, like nearly every double album ever released, there's probably a great single album lurking between the filler. ---Sid Smith, BBC Review

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