

YOU HAVE JUST PURCHASED AN INCREDIBLY VITAL AND IMPORTANT ARTIFACT OF POPULAR CULTURE.

If ever there was a rock band that personified the very mind-set and uncontrollable sophomore urges of a powerful musical movement that went heretofore unnoticed, it is that band whose anthology you now hold in your hand. While so many bands of the then burgeoning Cleveland, OH music scene saw fit to don the fine tweeds and patent leather shoes of such British favorites as The Beatles or Paul Revere and the Raiders, these five lads decided there were more important things to be explored in the ever expanding world of popular music - such as loud guitars, subversively sexual lyrics (virtually unheard of at the time!) and inventing a little something that is now known as punk rock.

Their name? The It*Men. Their mission? Rock. We take you back to 1965. A young pool hustler and popular trust fund kid turned street urchin, Ken Janssen, happened to stumble into The Hofbrau, a smoky Cleveland bar in the (then) economically depressed Lower East Side. The band that night - a group of local high schoolers, The Peppers - had taken the stage. Though the band was quite adept at playing the current Motown hits of the day, it was not until the lead guitarist's amplifier caught fire - a pure accident! - that Janssen stood up and took notice. After the gig he bought the boys a round and the saga of the It*Men began.

The road was rough from the beginning - gigs were few and far between in those days, and the band's habits of not finishing songs or forgetting to put strings on their guitars did not help matters. But their incendiary cover of "Devil with the Blue Dress" caught the ear of Tom Vittle, writer for local rock journal Pazz!, who immediately booked them time in a local studio to record their blistering, alcohol crazed sound. The result, 1967's foot-stomping, ground molesting *Don't Feed the It*Men* (Lamerson Records), garnered them local and regional attention, as well as much needed airplay in several key markets, and - not to be underplayed! - might have just invented a little something some of you folks know as punk rock.

The mammoth cock had crowed! The It*Men's meteoric climb had begun. A disastrous but history-making tour of Pennsylvania soon followed. Janssen's erratic stage persona - once removing his trousers (much to the chagrin of housewives in Altoona!) or, in one case, reciting all of *King Lear* mid-set - became the very stuff of legend. Ugly arrests and parking tickets only fueled the tableau. Their sophomore effort on Lamerson, *Givin It to Ya*, heaved another log on the fire with "Come and Get Some" cracking the Top 200 in Indianapolis.

By 1969, Beejay records had picked up our rag-tag bunch of heroes, little knowing the size of the mouthful they had bitten off by signing the It*Men. The Summer of Love had arrived, and Ohio was ground zero for the "beatnik" movement. The It*Men took the issues of peace and love to task with their masterpiece, *Bad Mother*. Their first and only double-sided album, *Mother* was a sprawling epic of loud guitars and misogynistic poetry, closing with the side long epic "Death Machine", a song that is rumored to have inspired Brian Wilson to give his children LSD. Indeed, though the charts told a different story, *Bad Mother* was an instant cult classic. If, for even a second, you doubt its impact, simply listen to Janssen's heartbreaking lament, "Baby I'm Your Man," for a glimpse of the sounds to come nigh on a decade later. Indeed, the It*Men quite possibly, albeit accidentally, created punk rock with *Bad Mother*.



Recorded and Produced by **The It*Men:**
Matt, Ken, Dave, Ben and Charlie
Mixed by **Ben Gmetro**
Additional Mixing and random mobile engineering by **Mike Cormier**
Extra vocals by **The It*Men** plus **Kurt Curtis, Mike Allan and Mike Cormier**
Photographs by **Kristin Nolan Cassidy**



But success, as is so very often the case, eluded these big-hearted troubadours, these It*Men, to no end. *Bad Mother's* lead-off single, "Altamonster", was seen as insensitive after the ill-fated West Coast rock festival in 1970, and therefore failed to get much-needed airplay. Label interest waned and later the same year The It*Men were summarily dropped from BeeJay. But true rock heroes are undaunted, thus by late 1970 The It*Men were back with the sledgehammer biker-rock of *Charlie's Hot Sister*, released on the newly formed, British Katsun label. The Summer of Love now a faded memory, Ken Janssen's lyrics now reflected a more introspective and disillusioned time (check out the prose of "Doing Drugs for You"). The album, though selling modestly, was a critical success, garnering "Album of the Year" in *National Pornographic* and brief consideration for the soundtrack for *Easy Rider*.

But mainstream success was to ever elude The It*Men. Poised for a massive comeback in 1971, the band made a tactical error in naming their 4th album *Zeppelin 4* within a week of the more popular release by the same name. Janssen historically retorted, "Who knew?" Bad luck and bad judgment continued to dog the band when their ill-advised 1972 concept album, *Waterbate* (which rather confusingly attempted to sexualize the embarrassing presidential scandal of that same year), was deemed tasteless by Katsun Records and unceremoniously shelved (editors note: two recorded tracks from the infamous unreleased *Waterbate* record - "Screw the Pooch" and "(Lilly the) Deepthroat Killer" - appear on this very deluxe package!)

The dismal sales figures from the catastrophic *Zeppelin 4* release nearly put Katsun in the red, and the rigors of poverty plummeted Janssen into mental instability. Refusing to shave, taking to wearing only women's pants suits and dabbling briefly with the occult, it took an intervention on the part of the rest of the band to return Janssen from the brink of a total collapse.

After a six-year hiatus, in which Janssen released the criminally overlooked folk album *Hey Strawberry!*, Brian Eno (an avid fan!) approached The It*Men for another go. Desperate for cash, the band agreed. The result, 1977's *It Could Happen 2 U*, was an out of character foray into electronic experimentation and studio gadgetry. The album was not well received, and though songs like "Space Station," "Modified Cobra Position" and "Pretty Boots Starling" have been covered by the likes of Gary Numan and the Beta Band, the new direction alienated the band's core fans. The It*Men called it quits for good.

Why fate must deal such a harsh hand to a band so critical in forging the sounds we hear today is beyond all comprehension. In a perfect world, perhaps, the It*Men's rugged sensuality would have brought the mainstream success it so lusciously deserved. It is for this reason, dear audiophile, that Davenport Records has chosen to hand pick these 16 songs like so many ripe apples and present them to you in this one bushel-basket of rock. Painstakingly re-mastered from original acetate and compressed digitally to remove all pop, crackle, warmth and tone, we present.... The It*Men.

If you truly - truly want to fly, then go ahead and jump.

-Matt Cassidy (no relation), Davenport Records

ADDENDUM TO THE LINER NOTES TO THE DELUXE REISSUE OF THE IT*MEN: GREATEST ITS

When it was announced in early 1994 that The It*Men would be returning to the studio to record their first new music in 17 years, the hipster cognoscenti were forced to put down their oyster shooters and take notice.

The band had barely spoken to each other since their one-off release show for Greatest Its at the Aerosol Nightclub in Parma - yet each had led colorful lives. Ben Gmetro came into a slight fortune when he inherited his grandfather's mitten factory. Charlie Druesdow put his engineering skills to practical use by inventing the world's first Jet Pants. Matt Cassidy developed quite a reputation as an expert on regional children's toys. Recently sacked from an ill-fated Michael Stanley Band reunion tour, Dave Molnar was now living in his mother's garden shed. Ken Janssen was long rumored to have gone missing in the wilds of Steubenville.

It turned out that Janssen had in fact been afflicted with a severe case of onanism that left him partially hypnotized below the waist. He was forced to drive a rascal scooter and consume beer through a large funnel mounted on his microphone stand. During recording sessions, he would often pause between verses to relieve himself in Gmetro's guitar case.

Still, the band struggled on, and soon rekindled the fire that had burned them out many years before. Druesdow, barely recognizable under flowing rolls of fat, quickly reminded all why Droog magazine heralded him as one of their "Ten Drummers to Beat!" in 1969. Molnar kept the low end loose and rubbery, while dueling guitarists Gmetro and Cassidy traded jabs like drag queens fighting over the last pair of pumps at a T.J. Maxx fire sale.

They soon ran over their recording budget and were banned from the studio - but not before squeezing out the six hot musical logs that round out this double LP set.

In addition to over four minutes of never-before-heard music, these tracks also include "re-imaginings" of classic It*Men numbers from back in the day. Notable for collectors is an entirely re-recorded version of "Modified Cobra Position," a song notoriously excised from the It Could Happen 2 U LP. According to legend, producer Brian Eno misinterpreted the instructions on one of his Oblique Strategies cards ("digest the impossible") and swallowed the master tape. The song had to be painstakingly recreated using Molnar's original Stylophone demo as a guide track.

The group celebrated their reunion with the Kandles for Kenny benefit concert, raising over \$75 to cover experimental scrotal replacement surgery for Janssen. With Ken back in action, The It*Men seemed poised to recapture their former glory.

Sadly, it was not to be. Plans for a comeback album were scrapped when a debilitating fear of basements drove Cassidy back into retirement. They retreated once more into obscurity, leaving behind yet another piece to the puzzle that is their legacy.

This deluxe, expanded edition of Greatest Its shall remain the definitive document of one of rock's most important bands - at least for now.

A technical note: The vinyl version of this recording was mastered from the original quarter-inch tapes stolen from a warehouse once rented by Davenport Records. Hundreds of minutes were spent removing the digital compression and "gating" that were all the rage during the compact disc boom of the late '80s. Now you can enjoy this music the way it was meant to be heard: with nothing to protect you from the raw caress of its brutal riffage.

History may never again hear the likes of The It*Men. Thanks to the fine folks at Stow House Records, you most certainly will. Perhaps Ken Janssen said it best when asked by an intrepid reporter to explain the unexpected reunion:

"IT DON'T QUIT!"

- Prof. Orville Pricklepatch, 1994



- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 To Tell You the Truth | 9 What's Up, Action |
| 2 Come and Get Some | 10 Death Machine |
| 3 Baby I'm Your Man | 11 Screw the Pooch |
| 4 That's Not the Way I Heard It | 12 Bowie Dick Test |
| 5 W.I.P.G.A.S. | 13 (Lily the) Deepthroat Killer |
| 6 Doing Drugs for You | 14 Modified Cobra Position |
| 7 Altamonster | 15 Space Dancer |
| 8 (You Gotta) Pay the Man | 16 It*Men Stomp |

