

CAPTAIN BEEFHEART

Born: 15th January 1941, Glendale, California, USA.

Died: 17th December 2010, Arcata, California, USA.

Born Don Glen Vliet, Captain Beefheart was one of modern music's true innovators. The owner of a remarkable four-and-one-half octave vocal range, he employed idiosyncratic rhythms, absurdist lyrics and an unholy alliance of free jazz, Delta blues, latter-day classical music and rock & roll to create a singular body of work virtually unrivalled in its daring and fluid creativity. While he never came even remotely close to mainstream success, Beefheart's impact was incalculable, and his fingerprints were all over punk, New Wave and post-rock.

In their original incarnation, Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band were a blues-rock outfit which became staples of the teen-dance circuit; they quickly signed to A&M Records, where the success of the single "Diddy Wah Diddy" earned them the opportunity to record a full-length album. Label president Jerry Moss rejected the completed record as "too negative," however, and a crushed Beefheart went into seclusion. After producer Bob Krasnow radically remixed 1968's hallucinatory *Strictly Personal* without Beefheart's approval, he again retired. At the same time, however, longtime friend Frank Zappa formed his own Straight Records, and he soon approached Van Vliet with the promise of complete creative control; a deal was struck, and after writing 28 songs in a nine-hour frenzy, Beefheart recorded the seminal 1969 double album *Trout Mask Replica*. After 1982's *Ice Cream for Crow*, Van Vliet again retired from music, this time for good; he returned to the desert, took up residence in a trailer and focused on painting. In 1985, he mounted the first major exhibit of his work, done in an abstract, primitive style reminiscent of Francis Bacon. Like his music, his art won wide acclaim, and some of his paintings sold for as much as \$25,000. In the 1990s, he dropped completely from sight when he fell prey to multiple sclerosis. Van Vliet died of complications from multiple sclerosis on December 17, 2010 in California; he was 69 years old.