

Naked Vinyl

The Beatles' Sgt. Peppers, The Sex Pistols' Never Mind the Bollocks, Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon or David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust and The Spiders From Mars. Classic covers simply roll off the tongue. Yet there is a form of vinyl cover art that remains relatively uncelebrated in the music pantheon. Tim O'Brien strips the surface to reveal the bare facts on the secret history of the naked vinyl cover...

NAKED VINYL IS ALBUM ART AND VINYL entertainment. Erotic, populist, sleazy and fun, it's an art form born of a desire to sell comedy and song to the record buying public of America. In so doing naked vinyl encapsulates all that is fine in the worlds of cheesecake and the erotic - aspects of culture that steadily grew more influential on American popular culture in the post-war years. The idea of 'cheesecake' was born to titillate and amuse, blossoming as entertainment for war-weary troops during the Second World War. Cheesecake was an erotic style - a sexy photo, a hand drawn picture on the fuselage of a plane, a fulsome tattoo - always feminine, sexy and alluring. It became an industry in itself and thereafter a staple of the American male psyche. With a patriotic duty to entertain, cheesecake pictures, like cigarettes and the Special Services, helped to keep morale high.

In the post war years the rise of the album as a consumer product provided a new and

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rich furrow for cheesecake to plough. Naked vinyl was born on the back of a new-found worldly liberalism, yet stayed firmly embedded within the morals of the age. And so we were given the nude album, cheesecake for the vinyl voyeur.

The adventures of the war also led to an upsurge in interest in the cultures of the world, and these cultures were captured musically by the worldly rhythmic output of the exotica album. Exotica, inevitably and appropriately, allowed itself to be clothed with the nude cover and albums were themed around Arabia, the Carib-bean, the South Sea Islands and beyond. Hawaii's more home-spun fare providing a particularly rich source of inspiration. Covers followed suit and the women of the world were showcased in all their glory.

Arabia gave us a host of belly dancing records and what better way to portray the talents of the belly dancers themselves than with a sultry nude cover. Sexy belly dancing women simply abounded, providing ▶

