



## ALPHA SEVEN

Great TV Masts Of The UK

SOFACOM

**Retro ambient trip hop explores the psychogeography of elderly communication technology.**

**As you do...**

'Great TV Masts Of The UK' is an electronic concept album, bound together very literally by TV masts of the UK. Just how great they actually are is debatable, but in the same way people find themselves ensnared in esoteric research of bygone technologies, so Pete Roberts, aka Alpha Seven, has fixated on TV masts and the analogue signals they once beamed across the nation.

This nostalgia of the futurist is a strangely strong current in contemporary culture. Maybe Kraftwerk started it. Blame them. You can also hold them responsible for the track 'Emley Moor', which has a riff strongly reminiscent of 'Tour De France', but adds a guitar motif for a kind of melancholy Chris Isaak feel. The mast itself collapsed in 1969, victim of entirely unexpected stress failures caused by ice build up on the mast itself and the guy wires. The collapse sliced a church in half and left the north of England without ITV and BBC2 for several days. And there you were thinking TV masts were dull.

Half of the 14 tracks here are named after TV masts, the other half are less directly about the masts and more around the subject. Like 'Pages From Ceefax', that early text-based information interface with its agonisingly slow load times, football results, weather, breaking news and cheap holidays. There's also 'Testcard Bossanova' and 'Programmes For Schools Follow Shortly', which will stir memories in anyone who grew up in the 1960s or 1970s when we'd sit in front of the school telly waiting for the BBC broadcast to start, while the teacher snuck out for fag and perused the sports pages of the newspaper.

'Great TV Masts Of The UK', then, is a project built from fragmented memories of growing up in the UK, having strange testcard images beamed at you by the TV channels when they weren't broadcasting any actual content. That idea is, in itself, a novel one in these times of 24-hour access to all the content you can eat,

via whatever device you happen to favour. And so it's fitting that the sonic template for this project is also a retro flavour, namely trip hop. The album is infused with the loping sound of beats manipulated to dozy bpm's in a sampler, slightly lo-res for that authentic grit.

And in the same way trip hop gained much of its uncanny familiarity from the use of samples, so 'Great TV Masts Of The UK' keeps joggling the memory with melody you seem to recognise, only for it to pass, leaving an impression of itself that gradually fades like the white dot on the cathode ray tube when you reached to switch the TV set off and sat back to hear the ticking of cooling vacuum tubes and inhaled the familiar smell of burning dust on hot components. All faded memories now. And the music? It's lovely.

MARK ROLAND

