

He took us to Vienna, fed the world and now Ultravox frontman Midge Ure is back, writes **Sally Browne**

It had never really been done before. “Synthpop” and “ballad” were two words that just didn’t go together. But in 1981 UK band Ultravox released a single that would become a worldwide hit.

It was called *Vienna* and it combined the grandeur of grand piano and strings with haunting, spare synthesiser beats.

The song captured a generation, stayed for a month at No. 2 on the UK charts and was awarded Single of the Year at the Brit Awards for 1981. The video, filmed in its namesake Vienna, also set the trend for music videos to come.

It was shot by noted Australian director Russell Mulcahy, who also made classic videos for acts including Duran Duran, Elton John, Culture Club, Bonnie Tyler and Queen. Dramatic and cinematic, the film clip for *Vienna* was reminiscent of noir film *The Third Man*, set in spy-filled post-war Austria and starring Orson Welles.

The young Scotsman who had penned the lyrics to the unusual song had never been to Vienna until that time.

“It wasn’t until we actually went to the city, I realised that what I’d imagined in my head was kind of real, this decaying elegance, this beautiful city,” Midge Ure says today.

The band had taken a big risk to shoot the video there. They took out a loan of 7000 pounds to fund it.

“Of course, the moment the record company saw it, they paid for it, but that was how dedicated we were,” says Ure. The single kicked off the band’s career, leading to five albums with Ure at the helm. No idle pop star, Ure’s phone was probably one of the busiest in UK pop history. A musician’s musician, he also performed in bands including Visage and Thin Lizzy and had a successful solo career.

He was the guy that Bob Geldof called with his wild idea of gathering a group of pop stars together to raise money for famine relief in Ethiopia. They co-wrote the song *Do They Know It’s Christmas?*

But Ure and Ultravox aren’t just living on past glories. In 2009, after years of little communication, except through lawyers, the band reformed for their 30th anniversary tour. And even better, last year they released a new album. It was their first with Ure in more than 20 years and titled, appropriately, *Brilliant*.

It was a return to their musical roots.

And Ure got to return to those roots again in another way. He recently hosted a documentary for Britain’s Radio 4 about famed nightclub The Blitz. The club, in

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London’s Covent Garden, launched the careers of pop acts including Spandau Ballet, Soft Cell and Visage. It was the place to be seen as young ingenues outdid each other with elaborate costumes, wild hair styles and extravagant make-up.

Before they were famous, members of Spandau Ballet rubbed shoulders on the dance floor with designers like John Galiano. Visage frontman Steve Strange ran the club with DJ Rusty Egan and a young Boy George famously worked the cloakroom. It was a melting pot of designers, photographers, artists and performers, all ready to be stars.

“You’d enter this place and see all these kids all dressed up looking like movie stars,” recalls Ure, whose own look was film-noir inspired.

In 1986, the classic Ultravox line-up of Ure, Billy Currie, Chris Cross and Warren Cann made their last record together. They didn’t part on exactly good terms. And so when Ultravox reformed in 2009, it was as much of a surprise to the band as to anyone.

“It was very significant because it was just never on the cards,” says Ure. “It was

never going to happen. We’ve been apart for 20-odd years and we weren’t talking to each other. The last time we’d seen our drummer, we had sacked him back in 1986. I hadn’t spoken to Billy except for acrimonious legalities. Chris and I were still friends but again hadn’t seen each other for many years.”

In the end, it was a music promoter who suggested they reform for their 30th anniversary.

Curiosity brought them together, but it was chemistry that kept them going.

Playing the old songs was one thing, creating a new record was taking things to a whole new level.

“We ended up recording 80 to 90 per cent of the album on our own, no engineer, no producer. And that’s what you’re feeling on the *Brilliant* album. Once we realised we could do it and we had the spark there, it just flowed.”

Midge Ure performs *Kedron Wavell Services Club* Thursday, April 18.

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