

Indie Music Reviews

By Craig Bowles

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Nervous Germans – From Prussia with Love

In the worldwide indie music scene, Germany isn't prominently represented. There are, however, a number of acts who have enjoyed widespread commercial success. Nervous Germans first formed in 1979 and earned considerable acclaim as an intelligent purveyor sophisticated musical palettes. The band's initial run ended in 1984 and its membership dispersed into successful, lower-profile musical careers. From Prussia With Love is a reunion album, but the band wisely places new material side by side with choice selections from the band's back catalog. This return to full-time activity is highlighted by a band sure of their own sonic signature and still adept at blending pop and rock with arrangements varying from the subtle to the bombastic.

The album opens with a critical blow, a triple play of rockers with magical pop hooks, each cut getting more and more haggard and blown out as they go along. "Superstars (And Superheroes)" reels you in gently, the guitars not overly distorted and drummer Sabine holding down a simple beat while the bass enforces perpetual motion. The chorus takes flight and everything just gets you into the mood of the album right away. The band then goes into snub-nosed, riff-y rockers like "Liberation Day" and the deceptively titled "Summer Rain" where blues groove bashing, firm-hand percussion and thumping low-end that really gets the adrenaline pumping hard. There's almost a punk-rock vibe to the way this band marches an arrangement around like drill sergeants barking orders. Some of the aggro-fury dissipates when "Living the Dream" threads a dream pop verse into a chorus that really has legs. The band keeps it steady and poker-faced on this one and rarely goes outside of the map markings.

"On Fire" could pass for a Springsteen jam as it's burning up with that type of blue-collar, rock n' roll vigor. Other highlights are the highly melodic guitar riff and intricately meshed rhythms. Vocalist Grant Stevens gives his everything to this piece and proves his pipes haven't been sitting idle these last twenty years of the band's downtime. Some of that fervor would be welcome on the album's agreeable, yet somewhat formulaic, second half. Acoustic-tinged rockers like "Hey Mister Sunshine" and "Sailing Blind" are nice, but borrow too heavily from the Flaming Lips and other such acts. "Happy Birthday Major Tom" could be a companion piece to the Elton John classic and has a rocking groove and irresistible chorus. There's some impressive action happening on the bass neck and the guitars rip n' roar enough to make their point. Elsewhere, "Modern People" slinks before dropping off the face of the Earth into a bleary-eyed ballad, with "In My Mind's Eye" mimicking the same vibe to perfection. "Paradise Lost" is like a mini-rock opera masquerading as a song; not so much a tune as an eclectic amalgamation of booming highs and aquatic lows. A great endnote to a very solid outig.

If anything, only a slight lack of originality and familiarity with other bands removes a bit of Nervous Germans' edge. More often than not they have that certain "it" which is the mark of a truly superior, experienced band. You can feel the chops in the playing and the songwriting does a darn good job of trying different things, most of which work and make for an exciting 45 minutes of music.

7 out of 10 stars.