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Nervous Germans – ‘From Prussia with Love’

The Nervous Germans... now that's an interesting band name! Even neater is the fact that this band has existed for over thirty years, and I don't know one person that's heard a lick of their music. John Peel has and he's allowed some of the best in the business to record at his studio sessions, so that says something right there.

Myth, legend and hyperbole aside, the Germans put up a pretty strong set and good numbers on From Prussia with Love. It's definitely a rock album and a layered one at that, but it doesn't sound like much of the rock I've heard in the past three decades. It's 80s, 90s, 2000s, all rolled into a ball of different flavors that are all savory and delicious.

Melody is the key and it's provided in heaps by guitarist Gary Schmalzl in acoustic, electric and dissonant form. He plays to conventional pop structures on the kick-off "Superstars (And Superheroes)", a track that plays like a big 80s rock party where everybody knows the words and is proudly singing along. This soon turns feral when "Liberation Day" eliminates the good times with big riffs and a smashing, punk-laden rhythm section given fathomless depth thanks to Micki Meuser's prowling bass licks. The same standard of quality translates to "Summer Rain," though the track is more firmly in a classic 70s rock as opposed to the snot-nosed punk wallop of the preceding number. They return to those massive 80s merry melodies and workingman grooves on "Living the Dream," another tune that inspires a sing-a-long throughout its entire duration.

"On Fire" is more rock n' roll, like a late 60s song updated to fit the 90s. It's grungy and psychedelic all in the same breath with guitar work sizzling like bacon on the griddle and an explosive vocal performance that is impossible to deny. They keep the hard-edged, crashing mid-tempo going on "Happy Birthday, Major Tom," albeit adding some 80s swagger to. It's the kind of rock you can mosh to or dance with. "Hey Mister Sunshine" and "Sailing Blind" are folk pieces that can be likened to modern champions Mumford and Sons or Of Monsters and Men. They are catchy and heavily apply acoustic guitar to their sonic tapestries. Forlorn, and emotionally damaged, I think the Germans are channeling Joy Division and post-pock on "Modern People" and "In My Mind's Eye." The minimal instrumentation focuses on a buzzy, bass-y low end primed for mental infiltration and deviance. Of all of the tracks, "Paradise Lost" is the most epic and sounds like a four person orchestra unfolding layer after layer, texture after texture of meaningful sound meant to be the soundtrack to a person's life. It's without a doubt the greatest song in the Germans' repertoire.

>From Prussia with Love is a rare gem. It's like the Jewel of the Nile; something that is very hard to come by and worth holding onto once you've found it. This is music meant for those REALLY into music and, even though it tends towards pop, there is so much going on it's hard to keep track of it all. This is fantastic record.

9 out of 10 stars.