

Vents Magazine (CD Review)

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I have to admit to knowing absolutely nothing about The Nervous Germans. A German based band with an Australian singer that took a run at the big time from the late 70s to the early 80s and never really broke into the mainstream. Heck, they never really broke into actual cult status other than noted sessions with BBC legend John Peel. So, as I listen to the band's latest full-length From Prussia with Love, I am both learning and discovering.

The mix here is interesting and the recording is great. They bend genres like a black hole bends time and space; indie, pop, hard rock, grunge, punk, shoegaze, psychedelic, country, blues and drone come together on this record in a coherent whole that never sounds meshed or melded together arbitrarily. At its heart, this is a pop record with a sneering rock edge emphasized by the hook-carved, airplay tailored opener "Superstars (And Superheroes)." This is practically a breezy summer anthem with gusty verses building into vibrant choruses where vocalist Grant Stevens shines as bright as the sun. This is a formula the Nervous Germans rely on and make frequent usage of on tracks such as the acoustically-chiseled, pop-flavored "Living the Dream," "Hey Mister Sunshine," "Modern People" and "Sailing Blind." While this quartet of tracks strip away some of the distortion utilized in the opener, they still dig deep into suave pop hooks and effervescent songwriting.

The remainder of the record refuses to stick to a single vibe or idea. You get the ballsy rock n' roll thunder of "Liberation Day" and "Summer Rain" trading the stock acoustics for bruising riffs from Gary Schmalz's beefy army of guitars. "On Fire" also bares a visceral and direct riff that fuses pop and rock sensibilities expertly and plays simpatico with the rhythm section's work. There's a dark side not present on the rest of the record on the dreary indie romp of "In my Mind's Eye" where the melodies are practically buried in the grave and covered with dirt. It's still a beautiful piece, but it isn't a happy song by any stretch of the imagination. Rich drama, deep orchestration and a symphonic grandeur make closer "Paradise Lost" a journey that lives up to its title. In particular, the vocals ascend daring heights while percussion and bass are delegated to dramatic, complimentary roles and the guitars/keys add a bevy of tasteful flourishes.