

It's standard procedure these days for a retrospective collection to come complete with liner notes, photos, personal reflections etc. That fact has escaped the folks at Warner Music who leave a great deal to be desired with their packaging of this Herbs compilation. A band with such an interesting history deserves to have it documented and this timely celebration of their career would have been the perfect format. It's just as well that most of the songs here are gems that speak for themselves.

The first incarnation of Herbs was a four-piece Ponsonby band called Back Yard, who became Pacific Herbs, then Herbs in 1980. The cleverest aspect of their music was an undying desire to produce a Polynesian sound through Jamaican music. The first example of this is the now classic 'French Letter' which, alongside 'No Nukes' and 'Nuclear Waste', showcases Herbs career long commitment to environmental concerns in the Pacific.

The track listing avoids running in chronological order so it's possible to pinpoint the different musical styles that Herbs followed as band members joined and departed. Earlier songs penned by Toni Fonoti or Spencer Fusimalohi such as 'Dragons And Demons' and 'Jah Son' are stark and raw reggae rhythms compared to the pop hits 'Long Ago', 'Sensitive To A Smile' and 'Rust And Dust,' written by Charlie Tumahai and Willie Hona.

Accompanying the majority of superb rock/reggae tracks here are two horrendous mistakes. Ray Columbus and the Invaders 'Till We Kissed' and an acappella 'Amazing Grace' are best left unheard, and for some reason they have included Dobbyn's 'Slice Of Heaven' as their own. Mostly though this is a fine retrospective of a band who at their peak were a leading light in the Pacific.

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Primal Scream

singles

A near vintage month for singles, headed by **Primal Scream**. Trying to make the definitive retro single, Bobby Gillespie parades all of his Stones-T.Rex gladrags in the irresistible up-front solid gold easy action boogie of 'Rocks' (Creation). Guitars, horns and Gillespie's incredible nerve in getting away with a line like "get your rocks off honey" combine into a funtime example of a master plagiarist at work. Also on the floor are hot-ass and club mixes of 'Funky Jam' with **George Clinton** and **Denise Johnson** on lead vocals taking the Screams through a muscular funk routine. Don't think about it, feel it!

In the same exalted class are the **SmashingPumkins** whose **Billy Corgan** is rapidly realising his messiah potential in

the varied ways that he gets his pain across. Acoustic guitars, bells and even a swooping string section reinforce the agony of 'Disarm' (Hut) and as he sings "the killer in me is the killer in you" the screwed-up intensity of Corgan's emotions aren't to be doubted. Ouch.

To a couple of soundtracks. **Bono** buries the hatchet and collaborates with arch U2 critic **Sinead O'Connor** on the closing theme song from *In the Name of the Father*, 'You Made Me the Thief of Your Heart' (Island). An appropriately chilling ballad meticulously sung by O'Connor, it's not actually about the Guildford Four but a woman killing her lover in order to keep him. Just thought you'd like to know. **Bjork's** 'Play Dead' (Island) from the film *The Young Americans*, has a similarly impressive melodramatic air as she yelps and coos above a big drum and orchestral arrangement. Good song.

At the front of the month's mere mortals is **Iggy** with another cut from *American Caesar*. In any other month this could've been the single to beat but this time the competition's too tough for Iggy's love

affirmation 'Beside You' (Virgin), a song of faith and self-discovery driven along by **Steve Jones'** guitar. But deduct points for the other three songs being the same as on 'Louie Louie'. What gives? The same question could be applied to **Guns n'Roses** 'Estranged/The Garden' (Geffen), both taken from the three year old *Use Your Illusion*. Clocking in at nine minutes 'Estranged' is a bloated showpiece of all the band's self-conscious rockist bravado and contrived balladry.

So we're down amongst the short straws, yet the **Charlatans** still hint (that's all they've ever done) that they're not gonna slide into oblivion just yet. 'Can't Get Out of Bed' (Beggar's Banquet) is a great title but unfortunately too indicative of a song that hasn't the tune or energy to kick into the day, leaving 'Withdrawn' to be the pick of the three with 'Out' being the instrumental filler. And finally a shirt photo and a vase floating in a pond introduces the Thieves' 'Unworthy' (Hut), a curiously arty cover for a male vocal duo who've got a lush, disarming pop/soul crossover possibility here. Interested?
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