

RECORDINGS FOR DEVIANTS

DEVIANT:
CHRIS ENG

Sex, drugs, and ... what comes next? I'll tell you what - jazz. And if you don't believe me, maybe you'd better have a listen to Harry "The Hipster" Gibson.

Sadly deceased by the early nineties, The Hipster left behind a career spanning almost fifty years. Fifty years full of ... full of ... well, full of a fuckload of drugs, apparently. When he's not singing about pot, he's going on about coke, and when he's not praisin' the blow, he's yammerin' about hash, speed or smack. Oh yeah, he likes to croon about screwin' too. But he seems to enjoy drugs more.

"I'm the kind of guy - always high, on reefer, hash and snow / and I just got a kilo of pot from Acapulco, Mexico / I went to a flick, picked up a chick, just to pass the time away / and after she got out of bed, this is what she said, 'Hey, you just made my day'"

Take lyrics like these and transpose them over some nice jazz piano whilst you're dining with that special someone at a schman-cy dinner club. How's that lobster? Now you're getting the sound. It's all so subtle, and so ahead of its time. Drug humor in music? Twenty years before Cheech and Chong? Outright references to sex? How can that be? The answer is simple - he was "The Hipster." He had his finger on the pulse of the underground, back in the day (and I mean, "BACK IN THE DAY"), and he knew the lingo, so squares beware.

But the subject matter isn't the amazing part; it's the fact that the Hipster was such an accomplished musician. He was a skillful jazz pianist who could weave in and out of other musical styles with ease. Blues, ragtime, dixie, bop, and even rock 'n' roll - he played them all and he played them well. The only problem was that by the late fifties there wasn't a market for jazz in nightclubs anymore, and Harry "The Hipster" was reduced to utter poverty. So, what to do when you're a virtuoso at a musical style that is no longer popular? You wander around from scummy bar to scummy bar, working wherever they'll toss you a fin or a plate of food. And that's where Harry stayed - on skid row, in California - from the late sixties until the day he died.

Six of the pieces on this album were recorded live with an unknown band in 1976 and the other ten are studio tracks laid down in 1989. Even as he neared the end of his life, Harry could still belt out a classic tune with lyrics like these: "I blew some snow, back in San Francisco / it sure was great, it sure was great, flying round on Golden Gate / to be where little cable cars went right straight up to Mars / and flew around the stars, oh yes we did, man you know I wouldn't fib." If Cab Calloway had done more coke he might have given Henry a run for his money. But even Minnie the Moocher would find it hard to compete with the simple sincerity of: "I know you know / I'm gonna go / blow some blow." So tight it's almost Zen. What is the sound of one nostril snorting?

Perhaps Henry knew the end was near, though, since he left us with a final farewell. Not a downbeat eulogy, but a cocky tip o' the hat to everyone left behind: "Thanks for the use of the hall / hope you had a ball, one and all / used up all my coke, smoked a lot of dope / wish you could have made it one and all." You know, Harry, I would've liked to have known you, but I was just a kid. Your hash pipe burned out long before your legend ever will.

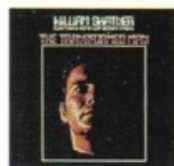
Harry "The Hipster" Gibson's *Who Put the Benzedrine in Mrs. Murphy's Ovaltine* is available on Delmark Records, 4121 N. Rockwell, Chicago, IL 60618

DEVIANT: CHRIS ENG
RECORDING:
SPACED OUT!



Mocking famous people is one of life's greatest pleasures. We like to uncover their foibles and shortcomings and proclaim them to the world. When they do it for us, we enjoy it even more. Case in point: Shatner and Nimoy.

Okay, who told these guys they could sing? Who, during the sixties, got them drunk and told them they had any shred of musical talent whatsoever? I wanna know and then I want to find him, shake his hand and buy him a pint for bringing us these genuine cultural nuggets. These pieces of tarnished lard, these pustules of tone-deaf beauty, these - well, these twenty-four incredible tracks.



In Nimoy's defense, I will say that at least he can carry a tune. Not well, mind you, but compared to Shatner ... well, Shatner does what Shatner does best. In the words of Kevin Pollock, he performs his own inimitable brand of "pause-acting." That's right, perhaps knowing full well his limitations, he doesn't even try to sing or carry a tune - he speaks the songs, reciting the lyrics in ways the songwriters never dreamed of.

Did Lennon and McCartney ever imagine "Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds" being performed in that particular manner? Even in their wiggly, drugged-out, hippy-dippy, "All-You-Need-Is-Smack," sex-crazed maharajah days, the answer is still a resounding "NO!" Did Bob Dylan ever envision a day when his "Mr. Tambourine Man" would not only be rendered intelligible but also pompously overacted? Could he have foreseen the horrified heart-rending scream at the end - "MISTER TAMBOURINE MAN!!!" - intoned, as if the Tambourine Man had trapped Captain Kirk in the heart of a planet and left him to die? He would sooner have garroted himself with an E-string.

Also for our listening pleasure, the nice record company folks have included Shatner viciously mutilating two monologues from Shakespeare, including the soliloquy from Hamlet. No. It's better if you don't ask. It would be helpful, however, if you were assembling a junior high school production of the play and you wanted to instruct the youthful cast on what *not* to do.

Nimoy, on the other hand, doesn't actually sing (he still dwells in that land between speaking and singing - let's call it "spinging"), but he does try to retain rhythm and beat and for that we must say, "Live long and prosper, Mr. Spock!"

Unfortunately, the songs he attempts to inject with a little rhythm and beat fall flat despite his efforts. Take, for instance, "If I Had A Hammer." He just cannot act this jaunty (although near the end, he stops trying to be bubbly and slips into a strange jingoistic monologue). And then, there's "Highly Illogical." As Spock, Nimoy enlightens everyone with his observations about the strange inhabitants of the planet Earth, and as you might have surmised, he finds us, ahem, Highly Illogical. "Take the case of your automobiles / greatest invention, since man discovered wheels / hydro-matic overdrive, four on the floor / push-button windows, push-button doors / double-barreled carburetors rush you any place / but you never can find a parking space! / Highly illogical."

But of course, I can't let Nimoy off the hook without mentioning the reason why I bought the CD - the elusive song that has been haunting me for ten years beyond time and space. I refer to none other than the enigmatic, "Ballad of Bilbo Baggins," or as it might have been called, "Hobbit-A-Go-Go." Imagine a frugging go-go dancer working herself into a frenzy over these lyrics and you've almost got it: "Bilbo (Bilbo) Bilbo Baggins / only three feet tall / Bilbo (Bilbo) Bilbo Baggins / bravest little hobbit of them all."

So, in conclusion, it's worth investigating this portmanteau of cultural oddities, culled from various points in the past and brought into the present for us to gawk at. It's worth it because, if we stop laughing at our celebrities, we might have to start looking at ourselves and the pain that would follow isn't worth contemplating. It's also worth it because how often do you get to hear Mr. Spock cover Joni Mitchell?

Spaced Out! comes from the good folks at the Space Channel and MCA Records.



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