



Meat Puppets

Up on the Sun (1985)

SST Records

Reviewer Rating:

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Somehow, the Meat Puppets got hardcore kids to like them to some extent, despite even their feral early material not really fitting into the already conservative genre. Though I would have assumed their stellar sophomore album, *Meat Puppets II*, would have been enough to put off most of the harder-faster-louder types, this album is said to be the breaking point between the Pups and the punks. And yet ironically, it's brilliant!

Without wanting to plagiarize, Simon Reynolds, in his excellent book *Rip It Up and Start Again*, puts this down as being somewhat like a cross between Talking Heads and the Grateful Dead, and I would have to agree, though of course it doesn't come across like a mere mash-up of the two. The gorgeous, country inflected opening riff and dreamy spaciness of the title track is deeply psychedelic, but on the other hand, the hyperactive and distinctly un-groovy funk in tracks such as "Away" fits in with the new wave funk groups of the era. The punk element is still there too, notable in the brevity of the songs—there are no 19-minute epics here.

So at times, the songs are slow and luscious, such as the hypnotic "Hot Pink," but at other times they're more manic, like "Buckethead." But besides the occasional tense parts (like "Too Real"), the album has a laid-back, often cheerful feel—in stark contrast to songs from *II* which tend more towards paranoia and loneliness. This is reflected in the easy-going vocals of Curt and Kris Kirkwood, for the most part happily droned, intentionally off-key.

The lyrics are fine stuff, ranging from chirpy nonsense ("*Up in my head there's an animal kingdom / I am the king of the animals there*") to the more insightful and poetic, such as those in the heavenly, drifting "Two Rivers" and the ecstatic "The Creator." The musicianship is also excellent: Curt's gorgeous, shimmering guitar work and Cris' spiky bass compete for dominance in the mix, but work together in lovely unison. Drummer Derrick Borstrom has admitted he is rather more basic in style, but he provides a good, solid backing for the brothers.

Unlike a lot of people I don't see the album as perfection. There are a few parts where I wish the lyrics had been delivered with greater force; Cris' bass can be a little jarring in how it's recorded; and "The Creator" is tragically short. However, this is an excellent album through and through, well deserving of its classic status, which will appease nigh-on every rock fan who doesn't listen to Madball.