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[Grant Hart](#) – Hot Wax ([Con D'Or / MVD Audio](#), CD/vinyl/download)

Since the bloody dissolution of Hüsker Dü in 1987, singing-songwriting drummer Grant Hart has never had it easy. Hart's post-Dü path (under his own name and with the short-lived Nova Mob) has been overshadowed by the commercial and critical successes of his erstwhile bandmate Bob Mould (especially with the unit-shifting Sugar), dogged by music press ambivalence and frustrated by ill-fated record label arrangements that have left most of his solo repertoire out-of-print. Yet slowly it seems, the tide is finally returning to pick Hart up again; with likes of The Hold Steady and The Foo Fighters having both openly acknowledged his influence (with the latter covering his Dü classic "Never Talking To You Again" in concert), slow positive reappraisal of his early solo wares (especially 1989's one-man [Intolerance](#) and Nova Mob's ambitious 1991 concept LP, *The Last Days Of Pompeii*), the promise of some retooled reissues, some better organised touring in the pipeline and a one-off live rapprochement with Bob Mould at a medical fundraising show for Soul Asylum's now-departed Karl Mueller. The much-delayed *Hot Wax* therefore has much greater chance of pulling Hart out for some constructive rehabilitation.

Even though it's not quite the earth-shattering creative rebirth loyal fans might have wished for, *Hot Wax* is still a creditable return-to-form after 1999's flawed and murkily-produced *Good News For Modern Man*. Recorded in Minneapolis and Montreal, with some unexpected help from members of Godspeed You Black Emperor, Silver Mt. Zion and Rank Strangers, *Hot Wax* is a fertile mix of raggedness and richness, revisiting the garage-rock passages within *Intolerance* whilst reaching into more beatific baroque-pop terrains. From the former strand, the results are a tad lopsided. So whereas the MC5-meets-VU chug-rock of "You're The Reflection Of The Moon On The Water," "California Zephyr" and "Sailor Jack" are convincingly energized, the careening "Narcissus Narcissus" and "My Regrets" are over-egged and let-down by rawness turning to sloppiness. Hart performs better on the ballads overall, where his weathered and torn tones appear less strained and more warming. The rueful "Schoolbuses Are For Children" feels like a less overwrought and wiser sequel to "No Promise Have I Made" (from Hüsker Dü's *Candy Apple Grey*); the Weimar Republic waltzing of "I Knew All About You Since Then" is a fleeting yet enduring curveball; and the delightful harmony 'n' horn-drenched "Barbara" could happily be mistaken for a lost late-'60s collaboration between The Beach Boys and The Beatles. Ultimately, as with his seemingly disorganised approach to business affairs, Hart could have done with a little more benevolent patriarchal direction on *Hot Wax* from a solid but not overbearing producer, to help apply a little more finesse and ramp up the stronger sides of his talents. Hopefully this long-player should at least be enough to get Grant Hart back to loving ears that might spark a fuller re-blooming next time around. For now, it's just nice to have him back in circulation.

- Adrian Pannett