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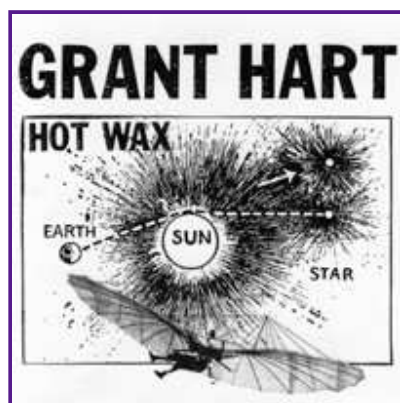
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## Album Review



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Hüsker Dü broke up more than 20 years ago, but in some ways it feels like the dust never completely settled. In fact, Bob Mould and Grant Hart went their separate ways with such force that, if anything, nearly as much dust has been kicked up in the band's wake than even a group as volcanic and vital as Hüsker Dü managed to produce during its alt-landscape-shaping lifespan. In interviews over the years, both Mould and Hart have revealed a

lingering bitterness over the breakup and its aftermath, with only bassist Greg Norton apparently able to totally leave the past behind.

If Norton got off easy it's likely because he got out, pursuing a career as a chef. Mould, on the other hand, has released nine solo albums and a couple with Sugar, each earning comparisons (for better or for worse) to his Hüsker Dü work. Hart, always the poppier and more rousing half of the Hüsker Dü equation, has been significantly less prolific. He was first out of the gate with a solo album, 1989's raw *Intolerance*, but after the failed band experiment Nova Mob, he didn't release another solo album until 1999's equally great but sadly overlooked *Good News for Modern Man*, a DIY affair that found Hart's voice and songwriting in top form.

Another decade has passed, and at last Hart has returned with a third solo album, *Hot Wax*, which he recorded off and on over the past few years in both Montreal and his hometown of Minneapolis, with members of Godspeed You! Black Emperor and Silver Mt. Zion assisting. The pedigree of the collaborators has changed Hart's musical outlook: *Hot Wax* is no slab of apocalyptic post-rock; rather, it's 1960s-infused garage pop clearly from the same soul that wrote all those era-defining Hüsker Dü classics.

Unfortunately, *Hot Wax* isn't nearly on par with Hart's Hüsker highs, let alone his two previous solo albums. While all the parts are in place, the results are oddly unfocused, too unpolished to do Hart's songs justice but too hooky and promising to stop you from considering what could have been. In an ideal world, songs such as "You're the Reflection of the Moon on the Water", "Charles Hollis Jones", or "California Zephyr" would be blasting out of passing cars with all the primal zest of the best garage rock revivalists. Here, however, they come off relatively neutered by lo-fi fuzz, muffled and restrained where they should be exploding.

We do get a couple of stylistic excursions in the form of the British Invasion throwbacks "Barbara" and "I Knew All About You Since Then", each of which displays a firm grasp of the Kinks' theatrically foppish tendencies. At the same time, the power-ballads "Schoolbuses Are for Children" and "My Regrets"-- power ballads once being one of Hart's greatest strengths-- falter where likeminded anthems like "A Letter From Anne Marie" (from *Good News*) soared, and the rollicking rocker "Sailor Jack" never takes off the way ebullient frat rock templates like, say, "Hang On, Sloopy" do.

It'd be one thing if Hart's records graced shelves (virtual or no) more often. But 10 years is a long time to wait for a writer of Hart's stature, and the fact that *Hot Wax* delivers such uneven goods is, let's face it, a bit of a bummer. Hart can do-- and Hart fans deserve-- better. The only silver lining is the fact that the record exists at all, since by ending his silence Hart implicitly suggests there may be more to come. At least, one can hope.

— [Joshua Klein](#), November 20, 2009

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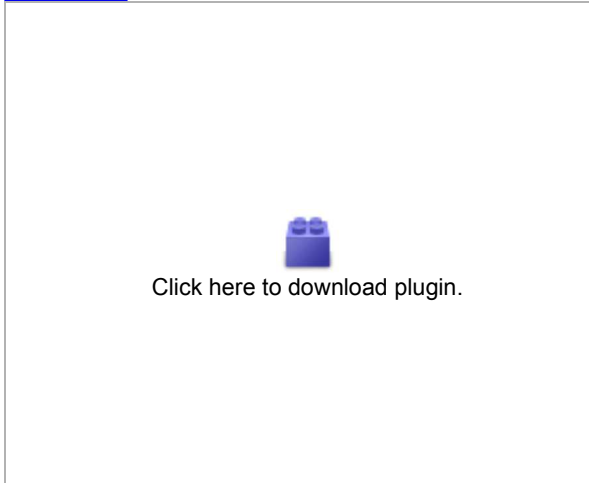
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