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[Grant Hart | Hot Wax \(Con d'Or/MVD Audio\)](#)  
[Grant Hart | Hot Wax \(Con d'Or/MVD Audio\)](#)

Written by Jason Green  
 Monday, 07 December 2009



*Ten years is a long time to wait for an album. But despite its long gestation period, Hot Wax is not Chinese Democracy—while not exactly tossed-off, it's definitely not an overwrought, over-thought*

*mess.*

"I don't make too many of these," Grant Hart sings on "My Regrets." He's talking about apologies, but he may as well be talking about albums, since he appears to be following the decade plan: after spending the 1980s in one of the most prolific bands in punk with Hüsker Dü—five albums, one EP, and two double LPs in six scant years—Hart quickly launched his solo career with 1989's spare *Intolerance*. He followed that with a pair of albums leading the short-lived band Nova Mob before returning solo ten years after *Intolerance* with 1999's richly orchestrated, multi-layered masterpiece *Good News for Modern Man*. And now, after 10 years of complete radio silence, Hart finally returns with another solo album, *Hot Wax*.

Ten years is a long time to wait for an album. But despite its long gestation period, *Hot Wax* is not *Chinese Democracy*—while not exactly tossed-off, it's definitely not an overwrought, over-thought mess. Like his previous solo albums, Hart once again plays nearly all of the instruments on *Hot*

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*Wax*, but he tends to keep the "band" whittled down to the essentials of guitar, bass, drums, and organ in lieu of the lush soundscapes of *Good News*. Hart outlines his M.O. with the album opener, a Buddhist-inspired kiss-off named "You're the Reflection of the Moon on the Water" that Hart calls "one of the most organic rock and roll songs I have ever written." And he's not kidding: it's a glorious little garage rocker, all hand claps and fuzzed-out guitar and organ. "California Zephyr" is a fun, sunny throwback pop tune along the lines of the Hüsker Dü nugget "Actual Condition," with grungily distorted guitars and the album's giddiest, most galloping drumbeat. Hart also applies the same stripped-down principles to "School Buses Are for Children," a gorgeous ballad filled with rippling organ and a pitch-perfect vocal performance that, unlike most of *Hot Wax*, thankfully leaves Hart's voice unadorned by effects or reverb.

Hart expands the sonic palette on "Barbara," which kicks off with just a plinking piano, a marching drum beat, and Hart's double-tracked voice before transforming into chamber pop as ornately arranged horns and strings (supplied by members of Godspeed You! Black Emperor and the GY!BE spin-off Silver Mt. Zion) gradually join the mix. Sonically, "Barbara" is pure ear candy, but it's ultimately weighted down by its boring, repetitive lyrics. "Narcissus, Narcissus" adds twinkling bells (shades of Hüsker Dü's "Charity, Chastity, Prudence, and Hope") but pushes its fuzzy guitars front and center, leaving Hart's voice a minor footnote as he shouts from behind the din. Faring much better is the big finale "My Regrets," a chugging track with a wall of shoegazer guitars and Hart's finest set of lyrics that ends the album on a high note.

Ultimately, the inconsistent quality is the most frustrating thing about *Hot Wax*. On one hand, it's great to hear Hart's voice again, and four of the new songs ("You're the Reflection...", "School Buses...", "California Zephyr," and "My Regrets") are easily worthy of sitting alongside the best in Hart's canon. But after waiting ten years, getting a scant 34 minutes' worth of new music feels like a let-down, especially when half of that run-time sits around the "merely ok" band on the quality spectrum. After ten years, it's great that *Hot Wax* is here at all, but here's hoping its follow-up is stronger and comes along a lot sooner. **B** |

**Jason Green**

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