

## Mp3 As U R - A Year Of Wednesdays



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Inspired by classic sounds from the 70s and 80s, with distinct echoes of artists ranging from Tracy Chapman to Bruce Cockburn. 12 MP3 Songs ROCK: Classic Rock, ROCK: Modern Rock Details: [From a conversation with Auckland journalist Paul Stowers] As U R - A Year of Wednesdays. An accomplished debut from Auckland-based duo As U R that draws on the sounds of classic British music from the 70s and 80s. The debut album by As U R (pronounced As You Are) seems to hark back to a time in the late 70s when studio-supremo's were producing glorious and inventive rock music for an audience open and ready for new directions and sounds. Such bands were happy to spend months on end working on single songs that often developed into lengthy and imaginative pieces. These "songs within songs" could capture both the wide screen grandeur of troubled journeys and the emotional conflict of everyday life. But as well as this, these musicians could write and record brilliant and immediate pop gems that would bury themselves into your subconscious and brighten the day of anyone who heard them. For example, Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" breaks most rules of a hit pop record, while a song like, "Crazy Little Thing Called Love" by the same band, embraces them all. Such creative contradictions can also be heard in "A Year of Wednesdays", the brand new album by As U R. Beautifully self-produced and recorded by the band, you could be forgiven for thinking that the group was made up of five or six musicians - all with many releases behind them. However As U R is all the work of just two people, John Stevens and Brett Rogerson, and this is the first CD release for both men. "We met when I was doing the sound engineering for a covers band that Brett was playing in at the time," explains John. "Once we started playing together, initially just on acoustic guitars, it was pretty obvious that we could work together and had a lot of similar music ideas and influences." Rather than doing things the easy way, the pair set about building their own recording studio in an industrial estate in Albany, studying the fundamentals of audio engineering and

then trying to make the sounds and music of two enthusiastic amateurs sound like a full band. But despite the challenges ahead of them, John and Brett persevered and after two years of work have completed an album that they are both very proud of. "The thing that was most satisfying during the whole process was that there were never any barriers. We never got into any arguments or disagreements and we were both very respectful and encouraging of each others work," says John. "In several bands that I've been in before there have been personalities that got in the way or there was some agenda that wasn't working, but as soon as we started on this, the musical ideas took precedence over everything else and it flowed on from there." "A Year of Wednesdays" is a record for the heart and the head, created with a sustained intensity of purpose and commitment by both men. While classic seventies and early eighties rock is one notable touchstone with the group (comparisons have been made with Pink Floyd), elsewhere there are hints and glimpses of such artists as Peter Gabriel and Sting. This is understandable as both members have strong British backgrounds. John was born in Brighton and moved to New Zealand in 1979, while Brett has English parents and has spent considerable time living in the UK, although he was born in Wellington. Both members of As U R say they are intrigued by the different musical comparisons, some of which they describe as "bizarre." "I had one person tell me that on one song we sounded like a cross between Dave Dobbyn, The Boomtown Rats and Enya. But more than anything, people all seem to think the album is reminiscent of a certain era of song writing rather than today's use of loops and samples." The album definitely has a classic British rock sound to it, but this isn't a genre that is troubling the charts and radio formats at the moment. Is this a concern? John: "We never set out to produce a radio-friendly album in the first place. People always say that they just set out to make music for themselves, and that is especially true in our case. Most of the songs were based on our abilities on the acoustic guitar first of all - which is an unfashionable instrument itself at the moment -and the songs grew from there. There was no real plan for anyone to listen to it other than ourselves." Brett: "As we structured the songs more and got them together we realised that it was accessible and listenable, but not necessarily commercial. Every week we would get together and we were really excited about the way a certain song was coming together, what direction they were all taking. I don't remember either of us saying, 'Hey, lets make this song sound like one particular thing or another.'" The album took two years to complete. Was this part of the plan? John: "Well, there wasn't any plan as such. The first few songs took a while to come together not because of the nature of the songs, but because we decided to build a studio ourselves and record

this album by ourselves. So we were not only learning the song and how to play together and write together, we were learning the production skills that were needed to make it all happen. So we built the studio, equipped it and wired it up". Isn't that going about things in a rather tough way? John: [Laughs] "It's only tough if you don't enjoy it, and it has always been a dream of mine to have my own recording studio. Brett was a little less experienced than I was about engineering, so another reason it took a while was because I was doing a lot of instruction on how to use the equipment. I mean, because there were just two of us, he was going to have to be the engineer while I was recording my parts on the guitar or singing. My day job involves broadcasting and audiovisual installation at a technical level, so in terms of wiring and constructional techniques I already had the level of skill and knowledge to put it together, but I was a bit light on the audio engineering skills. I had a lot of knowledge, but not experience." Learning as you go? John: "Trial and error. That's why the two years went by so fast. It didn't help that the first song we tried to do was a big epic that included a section where we were trying to get the sound of a 32-piece Welsh choir totally sung by me. So we had to learn to get the effect of one person - me - being 32 different Welsh miners, in different ranges, octaves and accents. Everything else we'd done up to that point had just been two guys with guitars in the kitchen. So that's why some songs took months rather than days. Then, as we recorded, we realised the shortcomings of the studio and what the equipment shortcomings were, so we revised that too." Brett: "We were lucky also in that we didn't have any time constraints, so we could remain focussed on the music. We were bouncing ideas off each other all the time. If we had just stayed doing covers on acoustic guitars I'm sure we would have lost interest in it a long time ago. I can't imagine us going back and doing it in a different way. In fact, I think two years is a remarkably short time for what we have achieved." Were you working on it full time? Brett: "Oh no, just Wednesday evenings off and on for two years." Is that where the album title comes from? John: "Sure. It's called 'A Year of Wednesdays' because that was our estimated completion time, and that was the initial recording time but there was an equally long time spent mixing and learning about mastering. We both had a great time putting it together, in fact Wednesday evenings quickly became the highlight of my week." "A Year of Wednesdays" by As U R is an independent CD release by STS Pavilion Records.

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