

Mp3 Nigey Lennon - Reinventing The Wheel



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This "movie for your ears" is audible proof that there's life after Frank Zappa. 16 MP3 Songs POP: Quirky, JAZZ: Weird Jazz Details: It's almost impossible to talk about composer/guitarist Nigey Lennon without reference to her old ally Frank Zappa. But while many sad cases have attempted a Zappa homage, this album is the closest thing I've heard to the genuine article. "Reinventing the Wheel" is stuffed with references to nearly every Zappa era (excepting the orchestral works) and you could almost swear that Frank himself had overseen the sessions. In a way, he did. The roots of "Reinventing The Wheel" come from the early '70s, when Frank and Nigey commenced collaboration on a proposed album to be called "Nigey Lennon's Greatest Hits", in parallel with a near-inaudible Nigey guest spot on the Mothers' "Overnite Sensation". Although "Greatest Hits" was never completed, "Reinventing The Wheel" has emerged nearly thirty years down the line, enlisting the services of vocalists Victoria Berding and Candy Zappa (Frank's sister) as well as the guitar and vocals of late-'80s Zappa sideman Mike Keneally. And though "Reinventing The Wheel" could be considered simply another Zappa cloning, it completely and utterly succeeds in capturing his vibe. A lot of credit for this is due to Lennon's collaborator and co-producer, John Tabacco, who has the Zappa technique down so pat that I'm amazed he was never snapped up for one of Zappa's own "rockin' teenage combos". One of the tracks slated for the long-lost "Greatest Hits" is included here in a new version augmented by Tabacco. A chamber-jazz instrumental, 'It Must Be A Cigar' is (appropriately) a hybrid of Zappa's "It Must Be A Camel" and "Twenty Small Cigars", with dashes of "Dwarf Nebula" thrown in. The out-and-out Zappa cover here is the Candy-sung "Any Way The Wind Blows", presented in a kind of carefree military-reggae rhythm, with an arrangement tastefully overladen with splashes of dissonant color. Not to mention the sampled bassoon quotes from "Uncle Meat" and "King Kong". John Tabacco's fabulous voice comes to the fore on the greasy Sha Na Na of

"Just Another Third Rate Clown". Recalling many of Zappa's anti-evangelist lyrics, this song savages the kind of 'guru of the week' that pops up in LA all the time. In "It's Just A Black Guitar", Mike Keneally's guitar pyrotechnics provide an aural representation of the sound of the weekend warriors duelling incomprehensibly in just about any guitar store on a Saturday morning. It's the enthusiastic story of how generations of youth have elevated the instrument to the point of religion. The playing is tight and the song is a ringer for 'You Are What You Is'-era Zappa, with Tabacco sounding virtually identical to Zappa vocalist Ray White. Another influence - that of the laconic Steely Dan - is evident in "Brain Tap Shuffle". Unsurprising, as it's a cover of a lesser-known early Dan track, given a fascinating treatment as Lennon and Tabacco ingeniously and ominously interweave multiple Zappa-isms and Dan influences. They obviously see the similarities between these two disparate, satirical American musical forces. An interesting coupling, and together or separate, a frighteningly original legacy for any musician to live up to. Zappa quotes and textures abound, as do the famous Zappa "modules" (three- or four-second slices of composition recurrently inserted into his songs, often on cue in a live situation). Man, it was a trip to hear the "Be Bop Tango" module resurrected, just over two minutes into "Brain Tap Shuffle". And the last ninety seconds or so unexpectedly open right out into an extensive collage of Zappa-isms, ushered in by Tabacco exclaiming "I'm flipping out!" It's all here. The frantic comedy jigsaw of "Greggery Peccary"; the candid speech and red-herring endings of "Lumpy Gravy"; the tongue-in-cheek Latin rhythm of "Drowning Witch" and even a quote from "Brown Shoes Don't Make It". But despite the homages paid, there's an originality here that deserves attention for its own merit. While still sounding very much like a 'Pretzel Logic'-era Steely Dan (with Tabacco's voice echoing Donald Fagen in a kind of "Twilight Zone" Lone-Ranger-comes-to-Mexico kind of way) "Calle Sin Nombre" gives the Zappa a rest, and testifies to Nigey's mastery with a lyric. In fact Nigey's lyrics are so accomplished it's a shame they are overshadowed by the Zappa-istic instrumental focus all over this album, but at least 'Calle Sin Nombre' gives them the front seat. It's a team effort: like Zappa, Lennon is not afraid to give someone else the spotlight. She's not about ego. "Please Help Me Get To The Bottom Of It All" opens the album as an a-capella mix, but it's the full-blown subsequent version that really lives, Lennon and Tabacco repeatedly singing the title over a track of constantly arpeggiating harp samples and analogue synth, with harmonic texture that's thick, complex and pleasing to the ear. Pretty slick. Another original-sounding track is "Jihad", a jaunty uptempo ditty dealing with religious/political issues of the Middle East. A serious topic

maybe - but the sense of humor isn't far from the surface. Even more of a ditty, but in the style of a sea shanty, is the Keneally-led "Pirates Of Old Northport", inspired by Nigey's move from Los Angeles to Northport on the North Shore of Long Island, New York ("a quaint drinking village with a fishing problem..."). Nigey explains the existence of this slice of comedic nostalgia as "the indirect result of closing Main St's Gunther's Tap Room a few times too many." Perhaps as a parallel to the often rampant sexual overtone of Zappa's songbook, "Reinventing The Wheel" features strong doses of female eroticism. "Messin' In The Kitchen" is a blues ode to takin' it outa the bedroom. For what it tries to achieve, it works rather well. Doing the vocal honours again is Candy Zappa, whose innocent down-home delivery is belied by the maniacal background laugh which Zappa fans will recognize from "Drowning Witch", giving the song a spin that saves it from being just another blues jam (quoted here too is "WPLJ", which Frank released on "Burnt Weeny Sandwich"). Similarly, the adultress' plaint of "Yer Wife Don't Like Me" traverses blues territory in a rather conventional manner. But just when you thought you were safe, the final chorus party is crashed by two more tiny Zappa modules; percussion-based this time. As a twisted finale, Nigey and Mike Keneally relay Urban Gwerder's tale of "Mesmerized Cowboy" with Keneally almost resurrecting the cowboy voice he made so popular on the final Zappa tour in 1988, but swore he'd never do again. Replete with musical quotes from Zappa's "Montana" and "Louie Louie" (much quoted by Zappa, so in this case a quote of a quote), the backing track even suggests early-'70s Mothers members Flo and Eddie's T. Rex contributions, post-Zappa. There's so much to keep up with on this CD. But there again, Nigey successfully demonstrates yet another Zappa idiosyncrasy; the way the music seduces you and helplessly sucks you in, but you never quite get to the bottom of it. -- From the review of "Reinventing the Wheel" in Misfit City online music magazine by Peter Kearns,

Producer/Musician, Los Angeles/New York/New Zealand Nigey Lennon is musically active in the New York City area, collaborating with John Tabacco and Candy Zappa in the nine-piece Lennon/Tabacco/Zappa band. Among their other ongoing projects, Lennon and Tabacco have also completed a musical called "The Miseducation Of Willie The Hill," appeared on the Eyeinhand Records Sampler Vol. 1 CD (along with various Zappa band alumni) and (with Candy Zappa) perform with the Ed Palermo Big Band. She is currently at work on her next CD, "Ship in a Bottle."

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