

## Mp3 Astrogen - Dreams And Other Disasters



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Fleetwood Mac on Acid. Sexy psychedelic pop with beautiful female vocals. 12 MP3 Songs POP: Today's Top 40, ROCK: Modern Rock Details: Ten years ago, Dallas musician Caron Barrett planted the seeds of Last Beat Records with the modest goal of helping out some of the talented local bands that she was tired of seeing go nowhere. Since then, Last Beat has thrived, both as a home to diverse acts like Baboon, Fireworks and Captain Audio and as a newly renovated, state-of-the-art recording studio and rehearsal space. But in all that time she worked behind the scenes, helping her fellow musicians get a leg up in the industry on both a regional and national level, Barrett never released her own music on the label. Until now. Dreams and Other Disasters, the remarkable debut by Dallas' Astrogen, marks the first time Barrett's twin passions -- making music and marketing it -- have fully come in sync with each other. The band came together three years ago when Barrett, then playing guitar in the hard rock band Flux, re-teamed with an old songwriting partner, singer Shelli Birdette, after a few years apart and found their old chemistry more potent than ever. Fellow Flux-veterans Michael Ferguson (drums) and Keith Long (bass) came on board, later joined by keyboardist Renee Baalka and additional guitarist Paul Quigg, and Astrogen set to work recording Dreams and Other Disasters with famed English producer/engineer Nick Griffiths (Pink Floyd, Joy Division, Roger Waters, Richard Thompson). "We got lucky," says Barrett of Griffiths' involvement. "I flew him over from England, and we got on fabulously. I was rebuilding my studio, and he gave us a lot of help on that as well -- he thought it was a fun project to rebuild a studio and then produce a band in it." Griffiths readily concurs, summing up his time with the band as "a thoroughly enjoyable experience. I specifically liked Caron's approach to the guitar, and I rarely get to work with female singers such as Shelli that have such control of their voices." Although the band had to get used to Griffiths' precision perfectionism in the studio ("We sent a couple of songs out to be remixed, and one had 74

tracks on it," Barrett marvels with a laugh), both Barrett and Birdette agree that the unlikely combination of "a bunch of Texans and an Englishman" helped take Dreams ... to another dimension. "We're all very diverse players, so when the band started playing together, I could hear us battling each other in the music," explains Barrett. "I thought if we could pull somebody like Nick in from so far out of our element -- not some producer from Austin or L.A. -- he could really pull all of us together somehow. It worked out really well." The evidence is right there in the twilight, liquid grooves of Dreams ..., a collection of twelve original songs ,(including the standout "Why Do I Call,") that Barrett jokingly but accurately describes as "adult contemporary...on acid." Although Griffiths notes that he "didn't want the music to be 'in the style of' anybody," the roots that do bleed through the mix are proud ones -- particularly the warm melodies, evocative of Fleetwood Mac, and the atmospheric production reminiscent of Griffiths' work with Roger Waters and Pink Floyd. ("You can hear a lot of his English influence in it," says Barrett. "They love delay.") And if Birdette's strong but pretty vocals bring to mind Ann and Nancy Wilson, that's no accident, either; prior to Astrogin, she honed her vocal chops touring with a Heart tribute band. But as proved here with her collaborations with Barrett, Birdette is a songwriter at heart, not a covers singer. "She's easy to convey a message to," says Barrett of her songwriting partner, who writes the bulk of the band's lyrics after Barrett comes up with a general idea or melodic hook. "I know if I have something in my head, I can sing a bit to her, and come back in a couple of days and she'll have it finished up." Lyrically, Birdette says the songs on Dreams .... reflect "the roller coaster of life," with an emphasis on love and human relationships and the critical moment when it all skids off the tracks. Some of the songs, like "Why Do I Call," capture the inevitable crash in action -- "It's about when you like somebody, and you're a dork and you call them up just to see if they're excited to hear from you..." explains Barrett). Others, like the meditative "I Realize" and "Blue," pick through the twisted wreckage in the aftermath in search for clues and closure. "A lot of our songs are just about bitter break-ups...or they're just bitter," Barrett laughs. "I think the title of the record, 'Dreams and Other Disasters' kind of fits all the songs because a lot of it's about regrets -- about how you wish you could change things." And though their time spent with Griffiths recording the album in their new studio is one relationship neither woman has any regrets about, both look forward to taking Astrogin out on the road, where -- without taking anything away from Dreams ..... -- the band takes on an entirely new energy. "We don't look like heavy metal heads, but the approach is definitely a lot harder," promises Barrett, a born rocker who fondly alludes to the Kiss posters that

adorned her bedroom walls during adolescence. "I told Nick the other day, 'I don't care what you do on the record, I'm still playing with my distortion pedal live.' And he said, 'Well Caron, I wouldn't expect anything less of you.' I'm like, 'That's right!'"

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