

George Michael - Listen Without Prejudice Vol. 1 (1990)

Written by bluelover

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1. *Waiting For That Day - Sample You Can't Always Get What You Want* 2. *Praying For Time* 3. *Freedom! '90* 4. *They Won't Go When I Go* 5. *Something To Save* 6. *Cowboys And Angels* 7. *Waiting For That Day* 8. *Mothers Pride* 9. *Heal The Pain* 10. *Soul Free* 11. *Waiting* George Michael – producer, drums, percussion, guitars, bass, keyboards, horn arrangements Mixed and engineered by Chris Porter Danny Cummings – drums, percussion Ian Thomas – drums, percussion Deon Estus – bass Phil Palmer – guitar Chris Cameron – keyboards, horn arrangements, string arrangements Anthony Patler – keyboards Andy Hamilton – saxophone

George Michael's follow-up to the massive success of *Faith* found him turning inward, trying to gain critical acclaim as well as sales. *Listen Without Prejudice, Vol. 1* is not an entirely successful effort; Michael has cut back on the effortless hooks and melodies that crammed not only *Faith* but also his singles with Wham!, and his socially conscious lyrics tend to be heavy-handed. But the highlights -- the light, Beatlesque harmonies of "Heal the Pain," the plodding number one "Praying for Time," and also "Waiting for That Day" as well as the Top Ten "Freedom" -- make a case for his talents as a pop craftsman. --- Stephen Thomas Erlewine, AllMusic Review

George Michael's multi-platinum solo debut *Faith* put the former Wham! pin-up in the same league as '80s-pop renaissance men like Michael Jackson and Prince. He wrote, performed, and produced almost all of his own material, and his follow-up, the starkly personal *Listen Without Prejudice, Vol. 1*, was no exception. In fact, the album simultaneously elevated Michael to a level above his contemporaries and effectively set his professional downfall into motion. "I won't let you down/I will not give you up/Gotta have some faith in the sound," he seems to plead

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rather than promise on “Freedom,” a track which directly references Wham!, Faith, MTV, and his once marketable ass-ets. (That said, it’s hard not to read into Michael’s vie for freedom as more than just artistic: “There’s something deep inside of me/There’s someone else I’ve got to be.”)

What with the U.S. still in a gluttonous ‘80s state of mind, the album’s first single, “Praying for Time” (Michael’s “Imagine,” if you will), was a striking bit of socially-conscious pop that seemed a few years ahead of its time. A spare, live rendition of “They Won’t Go When I Go” is just as moving as Stevie Wonder’s original gospel-tinged search for salvation, while “Mothers Pride,” a requiem for a generation of lost husbands and sons and the women they left behind, is still poignant despite being tied to the first Gulf War against the singer’s wishes. Of course, Michael tackles love and relationships as well: “Something to Save” addresses the breaking point of an indecisive relationship; “Waiting for That Day” finds the singer recovering from a broken heart; and the jazzy “Cowboys & Angels” addresses an unrequited love that is both masochistic (“It’s the ones who resist that we most want to kiss/Wouldn’t you say?”) and sadistic (“It’s the ones who persist for the sake of a kiss who will pay”).

Prejudice continues Michael’s deliberate blend of old-school R&B, rock, and pop that began on Faith, only this time the sound is much more organic, even authentic. Tracks like “Waiting (Reprise),” which finds Michael struggling to negotiate his super-stardom (“You look for your dreams in heaven, but what the hell are you supposed to do when they come true?”), are downright folksy, both lyrically and musically. But not all of Prejudice is glum or listless: “Soul Free,” the only bona fide uptempo tune besides the hit “Freedom,” mixes a hip-hop drum loop, a reggae-infused melody, and Michael’s signature bouncy keyboards and falsetto. The overall heaviness of the album, however, may have alienated fans who wanted Michael back to the way he used to be. And the fact that there was never a Vol. 2, which was rumored to be the feel-good dance record said fans were probably waiting for, makes this one seem all the more sacred. --- Sal Cinquemani, slantmagazine.com

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