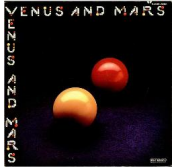


Paul McCartney – Venus and Mars (1975)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 15 September 2011 09:27 - Last Updated Monday, 22 October 2018 19:37

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1. *Venus and Mars* - 1:20 2. *Rock Show* - 5:31 3. *Love in Song* - 3:04 4. *You Gave Me the Answer* - 2:15 5. *Magneto and Titanium Man* - 3:16 6. *Letting Go* - 4:33 7. *Venus and Mars (Reprise)* - 2:05 8. *Spirits of Ancient Egypt*(Denny Laine) - 3:04 9. *Medicine Jar*(Jimmy McCulloch/Colin Allen)- 3:37 [play](#) 10. *Call Me Back Again* - 4:59 11. *Listen to What the Man Said* - 4:01 12. *Treat Her Gently/Lonely Old People* - 4:21 13. *Crossroads Theme*" (Tony Hatch) - 1:00 [play](#) 14. *Zoo Gang* 2:01 15. *Lunch Box/Odd Sox* 3:50 16. *My Carnival* 3:57

Musicians: Paul McCartney: vocals, bass guitar, guitars, keyboards, piano Linda McCartney: keyboards, vocals Denny Laine: guitars, keyboards, vocals Jimmy McCulloch: guitars, vocals Joe English: drums, percussion + Kenneth "Afro" Williams: congas Dave Mason: guitar Tom Scott: saxophone Allen Toussaint: piano, keyboards Geoff Britton: drums

For the first time in his solo career, Paul McCartney (yes yes, Wings too) had HEAT!

No really, he did. *Band On The Run* was a massive success, both critically and commercially. Triple platinum, hit singles, a Grammy, pretty much props from every conceivable angle. Time to keep that momentum rolling, right? And they did. I don't think McCartney ever took a real break from recording in the 70s. Although the *Venus and Mars* sessions wouldn't properly begin until November of 1974, Paul (and Wings) had a busy year. They spent January and February recording tracks for the "McGear" project, a project for McCartney's younger brother Mike (sessions which included new Wings lead guitarist Jimmy McCullough). By July the Wings line-up (with short term drummer Geoff Britton) were in full swing. The hit single "Junior's Farm" was among dozens of tracks recorded during this time, including many for the film "One Hand Clapping", "The Backyard", and something to do with Geoff Britton's karate tournament.

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In November, the line-up sat down to start working on Venus and Mars in London and continued recording through February 1975, moving the production to New Orleans. Britton and McCullough appeared to have conflict issues and Britton left the project, replaced with drummer Joe English. (Britton performs on “Love In Song”, “Letting Go”, and “Medicine Jar”; the rest feature English).

The album dropped in May 1975 to big success. It hit #1 on the US, UK, Norwegian, and New Zealand charts, and was Top 10 elsewhere. It was the 5th bestseller of 1975 in the US and went Platinum in the US and UK. Reviews were mixed but generally positive; the consensus seemed to agree that while it was no “Band on the Run”, Venus and Mars was one of McCartney’s stronger efforts thus far.

I came out of Venus and Mars liking it a LOT more than I originally had. There is a definite feeling of McCartney and co. branching out, spreading their “wings” if you will (sorry), contemporizing their sound to fit in with the sounds and production values of the era. Is it another “Band On The Run”? Nope, but it’s close and a damn good record in its own right.

The album begins with the soaring 12-string harmonies of “Venus and Mars” which segues right into the crashing guitars of “Rock Show”. The songs are pretty much inseparable; “Venus and Mars” is more like “Rock Show”’s acoustic opening rather than a song in and of itself. No matter. Great opening nonetheless. Paul’s rock chops haven’t softened one iota. I only don’t like when he tries to do “stage chatter”, especially on record (it closes out the song, so no biggie). With these two tracks, the album opens strong.

This momentum is slowed down by the dark, haunting “Love In Song”. This song is an underrated gem in McCartney’s catalog. Rich with minor key changes, jangling 12-string acoustic guitars, tasteful orchestrations, and strong Beatlesque vocals, this is top-notch songwriting and performing by McCartney. I used to skip past this track frequently when listening to this album. No idea why now. I must have been on dope.

I dare anyone — ANYONE — to not like “You Gave Me The Answer”. If “A Night At The Opera” hadn’t come out the same year, I’d say Paul would have been aping Freddie Mercury’s proclivities towards big-band old-school dance numbers. This is a charming, whimsical Music Hall throwback (which he dedicated to Fred Astaire on the live “Wings Over America” number). It’s short, toe-tapping, goofy yes but a winner.

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So depending on how you look at it, we've had 4 great tracks in a row. This album is shaping up pretty well so far! The momentum continues with McCartney's channeling of two (well, three) Marvel Comics villains in "Magneto and Titanium Man" (and the Crimson Dynamo, who didn't get name-checked in the title but it pretty prominent in the song). Paul's evoking Stevie Wonder here, no question. The driving electric keyboard line anchors a silly but fun song, with great hooks and layered harmonies.

"Letting Go" is a memorable R&B number, impeccably produced with strong horns, a funky bassline, and piercing licks off the lead. It's a good song, no question, and another generally winning song, but for reason I'm not completely enamored with it. Nonetheless, it finishes off Side 1 perfectly. So far six songs and not one piece of filler or mediocrity whatsoever.

Side 2 starts off with a futuristic "Venus and Mars (Reprise)", in which the setting is transported from a mid 70s rock concert to a sci-fi Cathedral that somehow doubles as a starship spaceport. Okaaaay... it segues directly into the percussive opening of "Spirits of Ancient Egypt", which is notable enough for being Denny Laine's first lead vocal appearance on a Wings album (he had previously sung on a B-side). It's a serviceable tune, but it doesn't really go anywhere and is the album's first real filler.

Guitarist Jimmy McCullough takes lead vocal duty on the next track "Medicine Jar", an uptempo bluesy rocker that is a definite improvement over the previous track. The irony of the song's anti-drug use subject matter isn't lost on the fact that McCullough sadly died of a heroin overdose four years later. Although McCullough's vocals are a bit on the thin side, the song generally works well.

Paul regains the mike for "Call Me Back Again", showing off his love of 50s doo-wop and 60s Motown (when he sings "I ain't never / no no never" you can't help but think of Aretha). The strong horn section doesn't hurt either. It's a good enough song, maybe not a standout but as an album cut it works fine.

The first album single comes up next, the #1 single "Listen To What The Man Said". A gentle, rollicking number, this simple toe-tapper is hard not to like. You could say that this brought Paul into severe Yacht Rock / Easy Listening territory, a condition he would never be able to truly shake off for the rest of his career. And yet, as a song it's a fun, deeply melodic and finely

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layered piece of pop confection. “The wonder of it all baaaabyyyy...” The orchestrations that end the song lead directly into “Treat Her Gently / Lonely Old People”, a slow piece of balladry that doesn’t do anything for me whatsoever. It meanders too much without any compelling material to keep me interested.

Finally, the album ends with Wings covering the theme song to the British soap opera “Crossroads”. A serious WTF moment, it’s an odd way to end an album. I suppose it’s a neat lark for mid 70s British soap opera fans, but buh wha? Oh well. It’s harmless at just over a minute. It’s too bad that such a strong album ends so... bizarrely.

Side 1 of Venus and Mars is definitely the highlight here, all killer and no filler, but Side 2 has some good tracks as well (“Medicine Jar”, “Listen To What The Man Said”). The only weak track is “Treat Her Gently / Lonely Old People”, which is pretty forgettable, but noting horrid or anything. Overall, Venus and Mars is definitely a highlight in the McCartney/Wings catalog, and an essential album for fans. ---Hokeyboy, millheiser.com

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