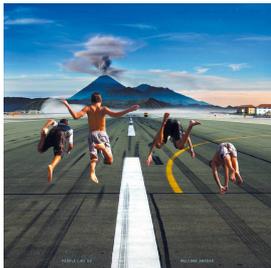


Brainwashed - People Like Us, "Welcome Abroad"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 30 May 2021 00:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 01 June 2021 22:44



I was a bit surprised to see this album getting the "10-year-anniversary deluxe vinyl reissue" treatment, as I did not remember it making a particularly big splash when it was first issued on Illegal Art back in 2011. Then again, I would be hard-pressed to think of *any* album in the "plunderphonics" milieu that has made a big splash in the last two decades, as existing in a legal gray area in a litigious world is not exactly optimal for promoting records. In any case, I missed this album the first time around because I mistakenly thought that I was already reasonably familiar with Vicki Bennett's work and found it charming, fun, and clever, but not quite something that destined to deeply move me or blow my mind. As it turns out, I was very wrong about that, as this album reaches some truly dazzling and remarkably poignant heights. While I do regret that I could have spent the last decade regularly enjoying this magnum opus, *Welcome Abroad*

actually feels like a perfect album to experience for the first time in 2021, as it was recorded while Bennett found herself unexpectedly stranded in the US due to the Iceland volcano's impact on air travel. Consequently, Bennett was preoccupied with themes of "displacement" and "a longing for elsewhere," which are themes that feel especially universal and powerful in light of the last couple years. And, of course, there is no one better at transforming recontextualized fragments of pop culture ephemera into a life-affirming phantasia of mischievous joie de vivre than Vicki Bennett.

[Discrepant](#)

The best way to describe the *Welcome Abroad* experience is that it feels like a once-great Broadway director bottomed out and attempted to make a comeback with a razzle-dazzle, star-studded extravaganza about homesickness. Unfortunately, they needed cash and all of the willing investors had VERY strong and VERY specific opinions about the tone of the production.

Miraculously, the director somehow succeeded in making something dazzling and beautiful, but it absolutely bulged with disorientingly absurd and kitschy leaps between '70s pop hits, vintage cartoons, Weimar Republic cabaret, cowboy movies, easy listening crooners, family sing-a-longs, Bond movies, and campy children's television. And while the show may not perfectly hit the mark with every single number, its many showstoppers are deliriously kinetic, fiendishly clever, and sometimes hit much harder than one would expect from their deceptively cheery tone. The first such gem is "Happy Lost Songs," which sounds like a community theater tribute to John Denver that was infiltrated by a vocal jazz ensemble and several delightful

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Looney Toons characters. "The Look" is more of a slow burn, but the reward is well worth the journey, as a sultry cabaret chanteuse bleeds into a wistful '60s surfsploitation scene, then it all unexpectedly erupts into a spectacular celebration of AM Gold hits (with plenty of overlapping along the way). Elsewhere, "Ever" feels like a delirious swirl of classic '60s girl group heaven, while "Push The Clouds Away" resembles a heartbroken cowboy restlessly playing records while lamenting his loneliness. It is predictably strange and disorienting, but when the right record comes on, it feels crushingly poignant and soulful too. The closing "The Atlantic Conveyor" is yet another emotional depth charge, as the kitschy collision of The Beatles and a schmaltzy Las Vegas crooner melds into a surprisingly moving finale. Nearly everything about this album is both great and fun though, as my notes are riddled with phrases like "The Muppets throw a Mardi Gras Party," "someone gave *Piper at the Gates of Dawn* -era Syd Barrett a variety show," "Satie on Bald Mountain," and "a singin' and dancin' temper tantrum extravaganza." I think Vicki Bennett might be my favorite artist now. This album is brilliant.

Samples can be found [here](#) .