

Ringo: Give More Love

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Give More Love is far from a great album, but it's hard to hate because Ringo Starr is obviously just having fun. Rich in finance as well as reputation from his stint with the best band ever, he can do pretty much whatever he wants. But he's never been anything like an auteur. If Starr's music is strange, it's less because it's artful than because it's just kind of inexplicable.

For instance: every Ringo album since *Y Not* in 2010 has featured a thick coat of Auto-Tune over Starr's vocals. Can we blame a cut-rate producer who's a little too careless with the sneaky pitch correction on most major-label albums? Or does Starr like the sound? The latter's more likely; Ringo clearly had tons of cash to blow on writers like Van Dyke Parks and Richard Marx.

It works for him, for the same reason it works for a rapper like Chief Keef: There's a visceral thrill in the contrast between an untrained, unsteady voice and the flailing robotics of Auto-Tune abuse. Starr still sounds like the rough boy he was in his Beatles days. Next to John he has the most expressive voice of any of the Fabs, sad-eyed and world-weary and perfect for songs like the tour travelogue "We're on the Road Again," where a line like "*We're gonna kick ass*" sounds less exuberant than exhausted, as if he's been kicking ass every night for fifty years.

Starr comes across as a man who's lived a long time and still loves life, even if it's settled into routine rather than providing any new thrills. His work runs through a wide swath of genres, not because he's keen to put his stamp on them but because he has the resources to make a reggae song if he wants to make a reggae song. Maybe not a *good* reggae song; there's no reason he needs to shout out Haile Selassie on "King of the Kingdom." But he'll still give it a try, and if his experiments fail, he can fall back on his first love, country ("So Wrong for So Long").

This is heavier on the sentimentality you might expect. "Electricity" enshrines his early gigs in Liverpool, and references to canonized rock stars like Bob Marley and Johnny Cash pop up periodically. The title track's a hippie call to heal the world that would be more forgivable if Ringo had voted on Brexit. But it's free of a lot of the trappings of capital-R "rock": No bar-band blooze, no misogynistic devil-woman lyrics, nothing to make Ringo Starr look like anyone but a rich guy who's making music because he enjoys it.

Maybe that's not your thing. Maybe you'd rather artists not already be rich and famous before they're allowed creative freedom on this big a budget. But on how many albums can you hear a 77-year-old British dude sing country ballads through acres of Auto-Tune? Ringo Starr's music is an island of weirdness in the watered-down world of legacy rock, and that alone makes *Give More Love* admirable.

- Label:
Universal Music Enterprises
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