



Rusted Root
Rusted Root
(Mercury)

How do you reconcile a band that claims its latest release is its most inspired with a fan base that proclaims it a disappointment? Is it fair to begrudge a band its natural tendency to explore? Is it fair to deny fans what they've come to expect? Rusted Root's latest self-titled release is a bit of a mind-boggler. All the elements that make Root unmistakably distinct remain:

hypnotic rhythms, perfectly matched harmonies, catchy melodies. But somehow, the sound is different. Is it a good kind of different? Sure, why not.

One of the most prominent forays into newness is the wispy "Moon." Though not really that far from where Root has been before musically, it is distinguished by cofounder Liz Berlin's debut on lead vocals. And it works. Even "Kill You Dead," a hoedown gone blues that, like Remember's "Virtual Reality," throws a wrench into the album's fragile mood, is a solid enough tune to hold up against the others. The hardest to accept, though, is the quippy "Magenta Radio," the first single. The song has too many vocal tracks and an incessant underlying scratch loop, and its greatness is made obvious, then openly destroyed. This one may well be unforgivable.

Regardless, this album has its immediate gems. "Rising Sun" is a stripped-down, slow treat, while "Airplane," a more complex Middle Eastern-inspired composition, includes some enticing cello and then segues into "Agbadza." The familiar four-and-a-half-minute drum excursion doesn't disappoint either, with the "Airplane" chorus returning at the end to unite a perfect pair.

An admirable cover of the Rolling Stones' classic "You Can't Always Get What You Want," featuring Furthur friends Hot Tuna, aptly closes the album. Disgruntled fans will probably agree: You can't always get what you want. But if you try sometimes, you might find...

Robin A. Rothman
Time Out New York
Dec. 31, 1998-Jan. 7, 1999