

Gaucho by Steeley Dan

Like their chronological contemporaries, and fellow denizens of Los Angeles, Warren Zevon and Randy Newman, Messrs Walter Becker and Donald Fagen have constructed a hugely successful body of work by chronicling celebrity folly and human frailty with an arched eyebrow and a disgusted sneer. *Gaucho*, released to critical applause near the close of the 70s, effectively represents the end of Steely Dan Mk.1, prior to a collective silence spanning almost two decades. For many, it's the duo's definitive work. Now, as then, *Gaucho* sounds clinical and without a beating heart. As ever, faultless musicianship smothers every second and the anecdotes surrounding Fagen's infamously perfectionist approach to production are the stuff of rock biography legend. The impeccably slick *Babylon Sisters* slithers from the speakers on pushing 'play', and immediately the snide setting is nudged to eleven-"love's not a game for three," indeed. Worthy of much respect in particular is veteran sticksman Bernard Purdie who gently propels his fellow sessioneers along with his assured shuffle. Bizarrely, track two-the sinister, muzak-esque *Hey Nineteen*-remains by far the Dan's most profitable single cut. Essentially, it's an aging lothario's slime-stained account of lusting after nubile young things seeking their star in the firmament ("She thinks I'm crazy/But I'm just growing old"). Similarly, *Glamour Profession* benefits greatly from Fagen's atypically dispassionate vocal delivery, to say nothing of perhaps the most bruising lines he would commit to vinyl -"Brut and charisma/Poured from the shadow where he stood." On the eminently danceable title track, the Dan don't so much rock as sway, a triumph of horns and many years holed up in bedrooms endlessly practising guitar, another opportunity unveiling itself for Walter Becker to flaunt his unquestionably fine six-string skills. Meanwhile, on the subsequent *Time Out of Mind*, references to narcotics abuse abound ("Tonight when I chase the dragon/The water will change to cherry wine"), offering an ample substitute for the paucity of sincerity dominant elsewhere on this nevertheless superb album. (As an aside, Dire Straits aficionados may be interested to learn that Mark Knopfler guests on this track, providing a mellifluous solo.) Thereafter, the concluding *Third World Man* delivers a mid-paced, sublimely wracked feel, for which much credit must be awarded to synthesizer virtuoso Rob Mounsey. Over a backing of muted electric piano and subtle acoustic touches, the dictatorial Fagen (who amusingly earned the sobriquet 'Mother' during the pertinent recording sessions) essays a despairing tale of middle-class paranoia and encroaching madness-"I saw the fireworks/I believed that I was dreaming..." Frankly, it makes for an entirely appropriate final scene for what is an inherently bleak treatise on deception, falsehood and amorality-which, equally suitably, renders the stylised and blotchless musical content contained within all the more fitting.

About the Author

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