

P.P. ARNOLD: 'The New Adventures Of ...P.P. Arnold' (earMusic)

Written by Charles Waring

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Pat Arnold's solo career started spectacularly with a big bang in 1967 only to disappointingly fizzle out three years later. By 1970, the big-voiced Los Angelino and former Ikette, who had settled in London, was without a record deal but began earning a living as a background vocalist, both in the studio and touring with name musicians. Occasionally she recorded one-off singles under her own name or made cameos as a guest artist on charting dance records (such as The Beatmasters' 'Burn It Up' and Altern-8's 'Evapor-8') but until 2017, when a long lost album from the late 60s/early 70s helmed by Bee Gee, Barry Gibb, was released, she hadn't made an LP since 1968. Appropriately enough, the album was called 'Turning Tide' and loved by the critics, played a pivotal role in reviving the singer's career. Now, finally, we have the first album of brand new P.P. Arnold material since 1968's Immediate LP, 'Kafunta.'

'The New Adventures Of...' reminds us of what the world was missing out on when Arnold wasn't making her own records. Her distinctive, church-reared voice - now weathered but still soulful at 72-years-old - fronts a kaleidoscopic melange of R&B, pop and rock flavours written and produced in collaboration with Ocean Colour Scene and Paul Weller band member, guitarist/songwriter, Steve Craddock. The US soul-meets-UK pop sensibility of the singer's '60s sides for Immediate is present in the DNA of some of the new material. The opener, the infectious 'Baby Blue,' with its subtle orchestral touches, has a nostalgic 60s pop feel, as does the shimmering 'Magic Hour,' while the stirring 'Finally Found My Way Back Home' is imbued with a sanctified gospel feeling.

In acute contrast, the house music-inspired 'Hold On To Your Dreams' has a completely different vibe, evoking memories of Arnold's cameos on '80s and '90s dance records. Different again is the long 'The Last Thoughts On Woody Guthrie,' Arnold's distinctive take on a Bob Dylan poem, which is recited over an eerie percussive groove. She also covers two Paul Weller tunes, the '60s-esque 'When I Was Part Of Your Picture' with baroque orchestration and the more ruminative, 'Shoot The Dove.' The singer's versatility is spotlighted again on 'I'm A Dreamer,' which shows that Arnold can convincingly do anthemic power ballads without making them sound cheesy. Even more powerful is the album's closing song, the haunting 'I'll Always

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Remember You,' which is the singer's moving lament for her daughter Debbie, who perished in a car crash during the mid-'70s. It concludes what is a fabulous showcase for a singer whose talent never received the rewards it deserved.

(CW) 4/5