

SPEC-ious bull

SPEC RECORDS

No-Cowboys (Spec)

PERVERSELY packaged as 'Spec Records present No-Cowboys', this album sees pragVEC performing under a variety of different names, such as Couch Potatoes, Spec Records, Vince Quince & His Rialto Ballroom Detectives, and the like. Generally speaking, tracks recorded in 1979 are credited to pragVEC, and those from this year to Spec Records. Whether there's been a definite name-change isn't made clear — the first of several annoying factors about the album.

With but a few exceptions, the lyrics throughout are largely indecipherable, the occasional chorus coming through with clarity, but little else. The production, too, is hardly what one could call "sparkling".

Musically, pragVEC — or Spec Records — appear to have moved away from the intriguing structures of their first EP to something approaching relative normalcy, an area in which they fail to distinguish themselves with any degree of originality. The use of Fred Karno drumkits and the like don't in themselves guarantee interesting music, just interesting sounds ...

'No-Cowboys' opens with 'Laugh', a loose, slightly shambolic, slinky rocker punctuated by little Wasp farts. (This is a reference to a synthesiser, not an insect, though it's easy to see how it got its name). This type of format

repeats itself several times throughout the record, and results in most of the better moments, such as 'Nervous', where the jive/swing rhythm gets rent asunder here and there by a single giant piano dischord, to good effect.

Elsewhere, the Wasps take over with a vengeance: 'Mens Casual Wear 1962' is a perfunctory multi-Wasp instrumental slung casually (sic) over an equally perfunctory shuffle rhythm, and 'You're The Gun', though better, could do without the vocal which enters towards the end.

Then, of course, there's the oddities. 'My Name's Eddie', an instrumental built from drum machine, spoken fragments (a radio?) and the occasional Wasp warble, is promising but ultimately unfocused and overlong by a large margin. A failed experiment, then, and as such more satisfying than 'By The Sea', a twee little instrumental decorated with woodblock (?) percussion and a dash of vocals to close.

Perhaps the saddest thing about the album, though, is that the worst track, 'Your Your Lay Lay', a boring, repetitive mess lacking even the barest bones of interest, is the most recently recorded. Not the best of omens.

'No-Cowboys' closes with a live version of 'Cigar-ettes', one of those things that sounds as though it was a lot of fun to do, but much less fun to listen to. Unfortunately, the same can easily be said for the rest of the album.

Andy Gill



Pic: Mike Laye.

"Dammit John, you know what this means?" "Yeah Sue, now they'll never buy a record on spec."