

06/19/2007 REVIEW IN ALL MUSIC GUIDE



The Monks were a band out of time. While they were later embraced by fans of 's **garage rock**, their brittle, discordant sound and ranting lyrical stance had little if anything to do with what teenage fuzztone wranglers were up to during the band's lifespan, and with the possible exception of **the Velvet Underground**, it would be hard to name a band of any note who strayed farther from the template of what was acceptable in **rock** music than **the Monks** before they broke up in 1967. Given how few bands followed **the Monks'** musical path, even after they developed a cult following in the '90s after decades of obscurity, it should come as nosurprise that **Silver Monk Time: A Tribute to the Monks** sets some sort of record among **tribute albums** in how few of the 29 performances sound much like the band being honored. While the primitive stomp of **the Monks** was decidedly low tech, **Silver Monk Time** is dominated by **electronic** artists (especially on disc one), who substitute the steady pound of **Roger Johnston's** drumming with the streamlined pulse of a sequencer, and while **Mense Reents, Alec Empire, 27/11** and **Mouse on Mars** emulate the herky-jerky melodic structures of the original performances, the final product has a clear sheen that was missing in the originals, and **Michaela Melián's** version of "**Blaster**" is pretty in a way **the Monks** never were. While longtime fans like **the Fall, Jon Spencer, the Raincoats, Barbara Manning, the Silver Apples** and **Alan Vega** (the latter two appear together) bring a more organic approach to their selections, they each seem to view the songs in a different way, and take a different sonic path that manages to bow to **the Monks'** originals without sounding like slavish imitations -- cue up **the 5.6.7.8.'s** playful version of "**Cuckoo**" or the organ-fueled menace of **the Gossip's "Drunken Maria"** for evidence. Also, given that **the Monks** recorded only one album during their lifetime, several songs are performed by more than one artist, and hearing both **Jon Spencer** with **Solex** and **Die Goldenen Zitronen** tackle "**Complication,**" or **Alec Empire, Mouse on Mars** and **Charles Wilp** all offering different variations on "**Monk Time**" confirms **the Monks** were an aural Rorschach test, and that everyone who heard them walked away with a different impression. The diversity of the performances also leads to a certain inconsistency, and **Silver Monk Time** is a difficult listen to in one sitting, but at its best the musicians paying tribute to **the Monks** use their songs as a stepping stone to create iconoclastic music of their own, and it's a more fitting tribute than an hour of soundalike covers would be. (Fans should note that original **Monks** members **Gary Burger** and **Dave Day** both appear on this album; **Burger** collaborates with **Alec Empire** and **Faust**, while **Day** sits in with **the Havletones**.)

Mark Deming, All Music Guide