



Propaganda Propaganda

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Forty years since their inception, and almost two decades since their last release, art-synth auteurs Propaganda return with a brand new chapter in their enthralling story. This self-titled set from principal songwriting partnership Ralf Dörper and Michael Mertens embodies the depth and drama of their early work, while exploring fresh sounds and styles, and reflecting the personal and societal changes since their last outing. Conceived and crafted entirely in their native Düsseldorf, a deliberate decision to help them stay true to themselves, and featuring guest appearances from the acclaimed Hauschka and ascendant Thunder Bae, this is Propaganda at their most essential.

Though an embryonic incarnation was formed by Ralf Dörper, former synthesist with electro-punks Die Krupps, and Andreas Thein in 1982, it wasn't until the addition of Düsseldorf Symphony Orchestra percussionist Michael Mertens that the outfit emerged as the dark synth-pop powerhouse which would see chart success as part of the ZTT machine. Upon signing with Trevor Horn's irreverent imprint in 1983, Propaganda, now comprised of vocalists Claudia Bruecken and Susanne Freytag alongside Dörper and Mertens, delivered their classic debut LP *A Secret Wish* and a slew of international hit singles, "Dr Mabuse", "Duel" and "P Machinery", leaving an indelible mark on the alternative scene and securing an enduring place within the pantheon of synth-dance greats.

After a late 80s hiatus spent escaping their unfavourable contracts, during which the singers went their separate ways, the project returned on Virgin in 1990, with a new line-up, including Betsi Miller on vocals and former Simple Minds rhythm section Derek Forbes and Brian McGee. Working alongside producers Ian Stanley and Chris Hughes, the ensemble delivered the smoother sophomore offering *1234*, featuring collaborations with the likes of Howard Jones and David Gilmour. After which our protagonists pressed pause and pursued separate goals, Dörper resurrecting Die Krupps and Mertens moving into TV and Film composition and providing a conduit for Düsseldorf's experimental electronic scene via his Amontillado Music label.

The intervening decades passed with the persistent rumble of reunion from outside voices, but it was a 2015 remix request from Zang Tumb Tuum chum and former Frankie Goes To Hollywood frontman Holly Johnson which finally prompted the pair to reconvene behind the console. The success of those sessions behind them, Dörper and Mertens began to consider what the Propaganda of the present would be. A lot had changed since 1990 – they had changed since 1990, and a new incarnation of the project would have to reflect that. So they waved goodbye to the Pop-aganda of the past, left the clubs to the kids, and pressed forward with complete creative freedom. The result is the immersive, emotive tour de force *Propaganda*.

At once sleek, sensual and cerebral, album opener “They Call Me Nocebo” is the perfect introduction to their sonic evolution. This taut and toxic love/lust song is imbued with the nocturnal mood of vintage Propaganda but expresses itself within the context of the IDM and electronic sounds reverberating through the 21st Century. “Purveyor Of Pleasure” provides the perfect foil, as a rhythm section of infectious synth drums and swelling bass recalls the dance floor preoccupations of the past, but sates itself with a supporting role here, allowing the widescreen chord progressions and Thunder Bae’s expressive vocals to take centre stage. Their lyrical lineage of subversive subject matter remains intact, but these meditations on sex and sin contain seasoned self-reflection.

The operatic inflections and cinematic grandeur of “Vicious Circle” (emphatically reworked from its 1234 origin), “Love:Craft” (with its lyrical homage to the American master of cosmic horror) and neo-classical instrumental “Dystopian Waltz”, attest to Propaganda’s perennial penchant for the dramatic, now enriched through Mertens’ subsequent soundtrack work into searing, swooning heights. Elsewhere, “Tipping Point” offers an ecological poem set to the trancelike chug of swirling arpeggiators, and “Distant” dissects loneliness and isolation, particularly poignant after the shared experience of lockdown.

The beautifully gothic “Wenn Ich Mir Was Wuenschen Duerfte” closes both the album and a loop, its English translation “If I Had A Wish” harking back to the title of their debut album, while the song itself continues the exploration of new sonic territories. A German standard from the thirties, written by Friedrich Hollaender and popularised by Marlene Dietrich’s 1960 recording, the song presents sadness as political strength, and remains as pertinent and powerful now as it ever has. This rich and textured rendition, featuring haunting prepared piano from Hauschka, a long-time musical acquaintance of Mertens’ and now Academy Award winner, is a fitting finale to this powerful album.

And make no mistake, this is an album. In an era of impermanence, Propaganda wanted to produce something real - to be played from start to finish, with artwork and packaging which allows a deeper understanding of the theme of the release. Finding the perfect label to match their ambitions in Bureau B, Propaganda have delivered a third album well worth the wait.

Tracklisting

- A1) They Call Me Nocebo
- A2) Purveyor Of Pleasure
- A3) Vicious Circle
- A4) Tipping Point
- B1) Distant
- B2) Love:Craft
- B3) Dystopian Waltz
- B4) Wenn ich mir was wünschen dürfte

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- C1) Not Good For You
- C2) Solace In Sin
- C3) World Out Of Joint
- D1) I Feel Mysterious
- D2) The Calling



Promotion

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