

## Melody Gardot - Currency of Man (The Artist's Cut) [2015]

Written by bluesever

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1. *Don't Misunderstand* 2. *Don't Talk* 3. *It Gonna Come* 4. *Bad News* 5. *She Don't Know* 6. *""Palmas da Rua""* 7. *Same To You* 8. *No Man's Prize* 9. *March For Mingus* 10. *Preacherman* 11. *Morning Sun* 12. *If Ever I Recall Your Face* 13. *Once I Was Loved* 14. *After the Rain* 15. *Burying My Troubles*

On 2012's *The Absence*, Melody Gardot made her first shift away from the jazz-tinged ballads that drew such heavy comparisons to Norah Jones and Madeleine Peyroux. Lushly orchestrated, it was chock-full of songs inspired by Brazilian, Latin, and French forms. On *Currency of Man*, Gardot takes on a rootsier sound, embracing West Coast soul, funk, gospel, and pop from the early '70s as the backdrop for these songs. It is not only different musically, but lyrically. This is a less "personal" record; its songs were deeply influenced by the people she encountered in L.A., many of them street denizens. She tells their stories and reflects on themes of social justice. It's wide angle. Produced by Larry Klein, the cast includes members of her band, crack session players -- guitarist Dean Parks, drummer Vinnie Colaiuta, Larry Goldings, the Waters Sisters, et al. -- and strings and horns. The title track is a funky blues with a rumbling bassline, dramatic strings (à la Motown) and fat horns. Gardot uses the lens of Sam Cooke to testify to the inevitability of change: "We all hopin' for the day that the powers see abdication and run/Said it gonna come...." First single "Preacherman" is similar, employing a wrangling, smoldering blues that indicts racism in the 20th century by referring to the violent death of Emmett Till, a catalyst in the then-emergent Civil Rights movement. A driving B-3, saxophone, and menacing lead guitar ratchet up the tension to explosive. A gospel chorus mournfully affirms Gardot's vocal as a harmonica moans in the background. "Morning Sun" and closer "Once I Was Loved" are tender ballads that emerge from simple, hymn-like themes and quietly resonant with conviction. "Same to You" evokes the spirit of Dusty Springfield atop the punchy horns from her Memphis period, albeit with a West Coast sheen. The nylon-string guitar in "Don't Misunderstand" recalls Bill Withers' earthy funkiness. The song's a groover, but it's also a warning to a possessive lover. "Don't Talk" uses spooky polyrhythms (à la Tom Waits) as brooding, spacy slide guitars, B-3, and backing singers slice through forbidding blues under Gardot's voice. "If Ever I Recall Your Face" is jazzier, a 21st century take on the film noir ballad with glorious strings arranged by Clément Ducol that rise above a ghostly piano. "Bad News"

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simultaneously looks back at L.A.'s Central Avenue and burlesque scenes. It's a jazz-blues with a sauntering horn section, snaky electric guitar, and squawking saxophone solo. Vocally, Gardot is stronger than ever here, her instrument is bigger and fuller yet it retains that spectral smokiness that is her trademark. Currency of Man is a further step away from the lithe, winsome pop-jazz that garnered her notice initially, and it's a welcome one. [The Artist's Cut contains five extra songs (17 more minutes of music) sequenced in a completely different running order, making for a deeper, wider listening experience.] ---Thom Jurek, Rovi

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