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### Review: [debut] (Postcards from Berlin, 2015)

 [March 4, 2015](#)    [Valerie Polichar](#)



It's possible that the name of Gareth Thomas' musical project, [debut], is intended to denote the reimagining of

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his 'band' with every new album, fresh cast and new direction (Thomas calls it "a collective venture with a revolving door of talent". It's an admirable goal, but his new release, *Postcards from Berlin*, seems heavily laden with the last 35 years of musical history. If this is a debut, perhaps it's the debut of an unlikely supergroup composed of the ghosts of many musicians past.

*Postcards from Berlin* may please current [debut] fans, and possibly some fans of 80s dark pop and 90s goth pop. The album opens with one of its strongest tracks, "Not the One," with its opening piano riff that immediately recalls Nine Inch Nails, followed by a nod to Ultravox's "Vienna." The song is dark, sleek and catchy, though, like many other tracks on *Postcards*, it fails to mount to a defined climax. Ultravox caught our hearts with the final, triumphant "It means nothing to me." "Not the One," lacking this denouement, builds, recedes, builds and recedes without ever reaching a clear destination.

Cinematic strings and synth pads weight many of the tracks, possibly reflecting [debut]'s past involvement in film and television soundtracks. Sometimes, as on "Everyday I Love You More," the large symphonic sound (reminiscent of, but less effective than, Pet Shop Boys) seems out of proportion to the song. The patch choices could be broader; as is, they lend a canned, heard-it-before quality to much of the album. In addition to the abovementioned artists, the album brings to mind variously Depeche Mode, Everything but the Girl, Evanescence, All About Eve, and Fuel, for starters. Some musical allusion, of course, provides a hook for connection with an album; *Postcards* is so rife with references that it risks appearing a pastiche.

On "Come Around," the sound is theatrical at best, with the pushed-front vocal sounding like a stage musical; at worst, it's Casiotone. An attempt to introduce dubstep sounds in "Open Your Soul" doesn't quite come off. And despite website evidence of a careful writing process, the lyrics on many of the songs are so weak as to actively detract from listening enjoyment. Particular offenders: "Don't hate on



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me” in “Come Around”; “I wandered lonely through the night” and “I can’t live without your love” on Everyday I Love You More.



The album closes with its best track, “Passion” – this track was (wisely) the one selected for inclusion on the *fourculture* fundraiser album. Although still plagued with some Casiotone elements, “Passion” features an appealing piano riff and a bit more shape than some other tracks. In a brilliant Kickstarter move, Thomas promised to fill *Postcards*

with “the voices from all the pledgers” as a virtual choir. Each pledger was to mail Thomas a single note that he would then blend into a choir. A choir sound was used to pleasant, if not monumental, effect on “Passion”, though our demo copy lacked liner notes so we can’t be certain it was the Kickstarter choir.

In all, we must deem *Postcards from Berlin* a well-produced disappointment, a patchwork of familiar scraps into a smooth, faceless whole. *Postcards* was to have been “a collection of songs inspired by the city. Songs filled with the coldness of Eastern European winters, soaring pianos of classical eras gone by and a raw industrial edge that only that city can inspire,” but we could detect no trace of the Berlin provenance. The album is (mostly) not unlistenable, but it could have been much, much more.

*Unappreciated Scholars Review Grade: C*

*Album* is available on [iTunes](#). Follow [debut] on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/debutsounds> and hear recent sounds and samples on [Bandcamp](#). Visit the official website at <http://www.debutsounds.com>

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