

## The Herbaliser Biography

Considering that The Herbaliser is one of the few groups from the heady downtempo days of the mid 90's still making consistently engaging music, one can be forgiven for thinking they know what to expect from a new Herbz album. Fortunately, West London duo Jake Wherry and Ollie Teeba are no more interested in standing still than they are in renouncing their tremendous record collections.

One listen to Same As It Never Was and it's clear that the title is more than a clever turn of phrase. The album sees the group expanding from its core production duo to a line-up of five permanent members. With the addition of frequent touring players Ralph Lamb and Andy Ross, a scratchy, live band funk sound replaces the deep digging loops and samples of previous albums. A heavy soul influence pervades, augmented by the addition of a fiery young vocalist, Jessica Darling.

With the live instrumentation taking the foreground over samples, there is a definite flair for the vintage. But while The Herbaliser's band can funk hard enough to hang with the Dap Kings or El Michaels Affair, this isn't a throwback affair. "We've always had one foot back in the 1960s and 1970s," Herbaliser admit. "But at the same time we pay a lot of attention to making the beats hard and clubby, mixing R&B and hip hop in that DJ Premier or Tribe Called Quest vein."

Although Same As It Never Was may be their most song-driven album to date, the band have not overlooked their tradition of showcasing talented rappers from both sides of the Atlantic. "We've been able to work with really good rappers from around the world," Herbaliser say. "While it's always good to have a hot young MC from the States, it's also important to represent the UK. Yungun was our choice for this record." In addition to Yungun's meditation on technological advances on Just Don't Stop, Toronto based More Or Les and long time Herbz collaborator Jean Grae contribute rich, story laden rhymes.

Jazzy instrumentals also remain a Herbaliser forte. Their love for the lush cinematic soundscapes of John Barry, David Axelrod and Quincy Jones are still evident, albeit augmented by their collaborative approach. Same As It Never Was reaches an epic climax with the gorgeously sensual final track, Stranded On Earth. The natural successor to long-time Herbaliser favourite "Moon Sequence," this astral jazz-soul symphony features a stunning vocal performance by Jessica that nods to vintage 1970s Pink Floyd.

"We were going to call it Dark Side of the Moon Sequence," laughs Jake. "Pink Floyd's 'The Great Gig In The Sky' is definitely a reference point. It's one of my favorite songs on the album. It starts off nodding back to late 1990s Herbaliser, but the stuff that Jess did just takes it to another level."

Indeed, the whole of Same As It Never Was takes The Herbaliser to a higher level. Their musical voyage of discovery continues. Forward, onwards and upwards.