



Gary U.S. Bonds -- *Back In 20*

By Chris Rizik

Gary U.S. Bonds could make an album of 10 Slim Whitman songs sound exciting. Fortunately, he's never had to. His recordings in the 60s are legendary and his three 1980s albums were among that decade's best. However, I expected that 1983's *Standing In the Line of Fire* would, unfortunately, be the last new music I'd hear from Bonds. So I was shocked to hear a few months ago that Bonds was recording his first album in 20 years. The result of those sessions is the appropriately titled *Back In 20*, on which Bonds is back at his yowling, party-making best. *Back In 20* represents what has always been best about a Gary U.S. Bonds album: Great party tunes, a terrific band, his unique, powerful vocals, and the sense that no one is taking the whole thing too seriously. From the hot leadoff duet with Bruce Springsteen, "Can't Teach An Old Dog New Tricks," to the funky James Brown-like closing number, "Don't Do It Here," Bonds moves through a great collection of party rock, Southern boogie, deep soul and hot funk numbers, mostly self-written. Bonds has always had fun with his lyrics, and the songs on *Back at 20* are no exception, covering everything from a giant party his buddy won't host to a crazy number about a dog that won't leave (I'm being PC on that one). And Bonds' voice at age 65 is amazing. Even better, his fellow musicians and singers, including Springsteen, Allman Brothers alum Dickie Betts, Phoebe Snow and Southside Johnny, all appear to be having a blast, making for an album that is fun from start to finish. Highly recommended -- and a very welcome comeback.