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EVERYTHING'S GROOVY -  
The Cherry Drops (MuSick Recordings)

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by Michael McDowell

One attribute that is unique amongst the various generations of garage rock exponents is the fact that many of the current, fifth generation practitioners have no first hand experience of the work of their first generation inspirations. As such, the impact of the first generation garage rockers' respective legacies on them is based solely on their rich bodies of work, rather than any personal participation on the part of the fifth generation observers.

With no preset expectations in that respect to impact their perspective, these artists then persevere with an art for art's sake perspective. That of course means that anything goes, including the assimilation of seemingly incongruous sub-genres into a single piece of original work. It is a practice that gives many a purist fits, to be certain. But it is nonetheless a great opportunity to further the creative process.

The Southern California-based Cherry Drops are one such band of fifth generation garage rockers, whose original material not only draws from the best of garage rock, but from surf, easy listening, glam rock and punk/new wave, as well. Led by their ambitious front man, Vern Shank and Joshua Cobb, the Cherry Drops herein make their recording debut with a collection of originals and duly inspired covers that suggest great promise for the movement at large.

In terms of the former, the Cherry Drops assert themselves most decisively by taking on one of first generation garage rock's definitive masterpieces, the Syndicate Of Sound's 1966 monster classic, *Little Girl* (Bell 640). Not only do the Cherry Drops nail all of its most endearing attributes (including the Larry Ray/Jim Sawyers unique guitar fills and John Duckworth's masterful percussion turnaround during the instrumental break), but their addition of sympathetic vocal harmonies at key points underscores how well the band understands the subtle nuances of the material. That they then turn their attention in terms of outside material to faithful renditions of the likes of the Raspberries' *I Wanna Be With You* (Capitol 3473) and the Sweet's *Wig-Wam Bam* (Bell 45,408) merely underscores the advantages of being unencumbered with cultural periphery.

But it is with their original material that the Cherry Drops ultimately soar. To wit, the opener, *Pop, Pop ('Til You Drop)* belies the cliché overtures of the title with a second generation garage rock and surf rock take on a playful and universal theme. In turn, the decidedly second generation garage rock inspired *Outta Sight* draws from the party atmosphere of Dean Martin's *Let The Good Times In* (Reprise 0538), tempered with a mix of early Imperial-era Johnny Rivers, the Plimsouls and Elvis Costello And The Attractions' *Pump It Up* (Radar ADA10).

Conversely, the drama-heavy *Love Is A Groovy Thing* states its case with the subtle invocation of minors, as well as a judicious helping of horns, echo and reverb. Likewise, the sublime *Melvin's On The Make* takes its cue from Marvin Gaye's *Can I Get A Witness* (Tamla 54087) and filters it through a variation of the adult child dichotomy that continues to work so well for Relient K and the Barenaked Ladies.

All of which makes for a very diverse and entertaining mix. While a title such as *Everything's Groovy* may suggest a limiting adherence to period peripherals, the results nonetheless speak for themselves and in fact reiterate the validity of their mission statement. To be certain, the results are as satisfying as the closer (*Cherry, Lemon And Marmalade Pie*) would suggest.