

DR. JOHN

Gris-Gris

ATCO – SD 33-234

In 1968 Malcolm John Rebennack debuted Dr. John, the Night Tripper, his mysterious, flamboyant stage persona inspired by a 19th-century African prince and medicine man who lived in Rebennack's native New Orleans. His first album under this name, *Gris-Gris*, is a heady brew of the sounds of those streets—jazz, blues, R&B and funk, mixed with doses of voodoo spirituality and the rhythms of second lines, street parades and Mardi Gras. Released during the heyday of psychedelia, it didn't make the charts and seemed to go over nearly everyone's head at the time.

But in the half century since, the rest of the world has caught up with Dr. John.



The man himself is now an award-winning, beloved elder statesman of New Orleans and rock music, and *Gris-Gris* is likewise highly regarded, making such lists as Rolling Stone's 500 Greatest Albums of All Time (No. 143, to be exact). Speakers Corner, the German vinyl reissue label, recently added *Gris-Gris* to its catalog, and the LP sounds as foreboding, enchanting and seductive as ever.

This new pressing replicates the original ATCO album art, record labels and delightfully idiosyncratic liner notes ("I will mash my special fais deaux-deaux on all you who buy my charts"). Pressed on weighty 180-gram vinyl, the record sounds wonderfully warm and clear. The stereo sound is full, but with a rounded, acoustic presence that befits Harold Battiste's original production. *Mama Roux's* percussion is crisp and bright, and the swirling aural menagerie of *Croker Courtbullion* seems to emerge from a tropical haze. Dr. John's vocals sound like he's right next to you, whispering in your ear on the title track, or chanting intently on "Walk on Quilled Splinters," while the backing musicians and singers—including other Crescent City stalwarts like Shirley Goodman and Jessie Hill—hover beguilingly behind him.

Fifty years on, Dr. John's *Gris-Gris* still casts an irresistible spell, and Speakers Corner's reissue package is a perfect reintroduction to its singular musical magic.

—Melanie Young