

# Forget Unplugged — Try Unfiltered

## REVIEW MUSIC

*Bez filtru*, Narvan. BMG/Ariola, 1995. CD  
269 Kč, cassette 169 Kč

Czech bands don't usually begin their careers with a record release. Narvan is an exception: After a small number of live performances, the Brno-based, four-piece band was offered a contract by the Czech branch of BMG, and the result is the album *Bez filtru* (Unfiltered) — a compact, 13-track package that deserves to be ranked among the best local post-revolutionary album debuts.

Narvan's music, composed almost exclusively by the band's leader and singer, Mario Feinberg, is a blend of hard funk and the "Seattle" sound, peppered with rap and hardcore passages — a combination rarely heard amid the stagnant waters of Czech rock 'n' roll.

Instrumentally, Feinberg and company are with it. Based on slapping bass lines and brilliant grungy/funky guitars, Narvan's compositions vaguely resemble the early Faith No More or the Red Hot Chili Peppers. But Feinberg's percussive, roary vocals give the band a hallmark of originality. Feinberg, who won his musical spurs during a yearlong stay in the United States three years ago, developed a distinctively Czech variation of rap, which he combines with thoughtful, absorbed, calm-phrased singing in refrains and slow passages.

The band's lyrics deserve a chapter of their own.

Narvan offers a variety of charged texts — politically and otherwise — in which bitterness marries sarcasm: "... those who were Red yesterday are Pink today/ and how it really was back then nobody will ever learn/ those who led us in the past lead us again/ once they've dealt the cards they won't invite you to join the game."

But the band doesn't necessarily stick to a "grouchy" attitude. In "Bude-li to" (Should It Be), Feinberg proves to be a master of the Czech language, presenting lyrics complete with witty (but, unfortunately, untranslatable) linguistic puns based on noun-to-verb conversion.

After a mere five months of playing together, Narvan skyrocketed in popularity and managed to enter the first league of Czech rock 'n' roll; both drum-pummeler Hans Machala and guitarist Martin Pokora are among the finest newcomer instrumentalists, and singer Mario Feinberg is the most original Czech musical phenomenon in years. BMG once again has shown fine instincts; the album *Bez filtru* undoubtedly will be a hot candidate for record of the year.

— Jan Sliva