

## On The Spice Girls

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The Spice Girls were one of the defining groups of the past ten years. Though their output was sometimes controversial, none could claim it was not challenging, thought-provoking or ground breaking.

Taking their name from the commodity mined in Frank Herbert's acclaimed Science Fiction masterpiece, *Dune*, few could deny the power that the group wielded over popular culture. Though their visual aesthetics were often lightweight and frivolous, the music was anything but. The lyrics, often impenetrable, with their densely-packed metaphors and multilayered meanings, both puzzled and delighted the general public and created an obsession among fans.

Take this fragment from their breakthrough hit *Wannabee*:

*"Aisle tail ewe wart eye warned  
War tie real leery Lee warned  
Eye warner, eye warned her, eye war now real leery leery Lee won a sicker sicker*

*A few warn abbey mile loafer  
Hue go toga twee them I've wren does.  
May king loafer raver  
French hip nave horrendous."*

The first stanza seems to make a Shakespearean link to the witches in the first scene of *Macbeth*; their references to 'tail's, 'eyes', and 'warts' mirror the similar items the witches use in their diabolical potions. The extract also seems to make frequent religious references: 'aisle', 'abbey', and 'nave' are all mentioned, perhaps hinting at a spiritual dimension to the song - but also notice that these are all physical manifestations of religion. In this song, the spiritual is firmly fixed in the real world! Throughout the extract there is a sense of foreboding, the first stanza refers repeatedly to warning someone, or something, and 'war', 'eyes' and 'leery' are frequently mentioned, seeming to indicate the song is a satirical comment on our war, surveillance and alcohol-obsessed society.

However, the Girls' intelligence was not just limited to the music medium. In 1999 they made the jump into film. The movie was *Spiceworld*, an allegorical retelling of Herbert's *Dune* and a scarralous and biting sideswipe at David Lynch's adaptation, which they felt was "ill-conceived, badly executed and devoid of the edge, verve and energy of the original – a sorry excuse for an adaptation which is almost without merit and destroys anything that was beautiful in the original source text". No wonder that Lynch famously refuses to speak about The Spice Girls and has never mentioned them in an interview.

The accompanying album, also entitled *Spiceworld*, was a conceptual affair based around Herbert's text and, though misunderstood by critics, remains their finest work.

With their intelligence worn firmly on their sleeve and their unashamed love of Science Fiction, it was not long before other female artists took up the Girls' powerfully feminist and unashamedly Geek outlook. Britney Spears took up the Spice Girls' mantle with her 1998 Marquis De Sade-inspired concept album: *Hit Me Baby, One More Time*.

Spears took De Sade's intellectualism, poeticism and sexuality to create a steaming mix of surrealist

imagery. Its origins were in Rene Char, but it was littered with references to the free-associative writings of Joyce and Woolf and flashes of Chaucer, as can be seen in her breakthrough hit, *Hit Me Baby, One More Time*:

*“Mile own lean essays skill in me  
I’m a scone fair’s iced elbow leaf  
When arm gnaw twee the yew aisle ooze my mined  
Soak if mere sign  
He to me bay bee won matt aim”*

The Spice Girls have left an indelible print on contemporary culture with their forthright intellectualism, proto-feminist ‘Girl Power’ sloganeering, and unabashed love of Frank Herbert’s *Dune*. Hopefully their trailblazing impression will be felt for many years to come.

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21/09/09