

Reviews & Previews

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the song is that it has motion. From its orchestrated string intro to the accents of Latin guitar throughout the verses and bridge, the song is constantly forward moving, just like the relationship Cox is describing in the song's lyric. From "the best of friends, with no intention of falling in love" to "that day in September when we fell in love," the song unfolds at first with hesitation and grows to a more passionate vocal style, just as the love in the story grows, illustrating how a song's lyric and track can complement each other perfectly. It's well-written, expertly performed, and creatively produced. Cox obviously isn't done with her current album yet.

★ **GUY** *Why You Wanna Keep Me From My Baby* (5:00)

PRODUCER: Teddy Riley
WRITERS: T. Riley, T. Rich
PUBLISHERS: Donril Music/Zomba Music Publishing, ASCAP, Blue Butter Songs, BMI
MCA 112-054 (album track)
As an anthem for fathers, this track should go over big with male listeners—especially after the string of male bashing records in the past year. While this is not what one might expect from a Guy reunion, the track is strong, with all the elements in place to ascend the charts: classic Aaron Hall vocals (and Riley is at his best here) and a theme that relates to men and is capable of eliciting empathy from that female core. "Why You Wanna Keep Me From My Baby" is constructed around a heavy drum track that builds slowly to an agonizing plea; you can truly hear Hall's frustration throughout the song. As the track ends abruptly, he returns with a spoken-word statement—telling his son he'll always be there—that will leave listeners drained. With radio instantly gravitating to this cut off the album, it was a no-brainer as the next release. It's also probably the strongest track on the album and the one that could help keep Guy on the radio through 2000.

COUNTRY

▶ **ALAN JACKSON** *The Blues Man* (4:30)

PRODUCER: Keith Stegall
WRITER: H. Williams Jr.
PUBLISHER: Bocephus Music Inc., BMI
Arista 3193 (CD promo)
The is the latest single from Alan Jackson's acclaimed "Under The Influence" al-

TARA MACLEAN *If I Fall* (4:00)

PRODUCERS: Malcolm Burn, Bill Bell
WRITER: T. MacLean
PUBLISHER: not listed
Capitol 13804 (CD promo)
Tara MacLean introduces her upcoming major-label debut, "Passenger," with this killer, adult-leaning track. Vocally, MacLean might draw compar-



isons to Aimee Mann or Canadian chanteuse Chantal Kreviazuk at their best, but in no way should she be so compactly categorized. This soaring midtempo song sounds like a breakthrough hit; it's a spine-tingling joy to listen to, with MacLean's crisp, passionate vocals taking command of a testy but lovesick sentiment, while the melody and chorus neatly walk the

line, a collection of cover tunes that celebrates country music's classic roots. It also only further demonstrates the vocal talent and inimitable sense of musical style that has made Jackson one of the most important country artists of the last decade. On this newest outing, he revives a well-written Hank Williams Jr. tune about a world-weary musician who is saved by the love of a good woman. Jackson delivers a brilliant performance that resonates with warmth and personality. His phrasing is loaded with a smooth Southern charm and vocal elegance that make this a joy to listen to repeatedly. Jackson's performance is supported by Keith Stegall's understated production, marked by tasteful guitar and lovely mandolin touches. Country programmers should once again appreciate Jackson's ability to blend classic and contemporary country into the best of all possible musical worlds.

CHAD BROCK *Yes!* (3:22)

PRODUCERS: Buddy Cannon, Norro Wilson
WRITERS: C. Brock, S. Smith, J. Collins
PUBLISHERS: McSpadden Music/EMI Blackwood/Singles Only Music/Starstruck Angel Music, Make Shift Music, Cuts Are Us Songs, BMI
Warner Bros. 100074 (CD promo)
Speaking of Hank Williams Jr., Chad Brock's last outing was his revival of Williams' "A Country Boy Can Survive," in which he updated the Bocephus classic with a little help from its original purveyor. He follows that redneck anthem with a lively little uptempo tune that will be the title cut of his forthcoming sophomore album. Co-written by Brock and Music Row tunesmiths Stephony Smith and Jim Collins, the song boasts a buoyant melody and positive lyric that captures all the excitement and emotional energy of a burgeoning relationship. The chorus is absolutely infectious—one of those sing-along refrains that makes for a great radio song. Brock has a personable, Everyman kind of quality to his voice that makes this tune readily relatable. All in all, it's a solid outing that shows he may be one of the newcomers to have staying power.

RAP

DRAMA *Left, Right, Left* (3:36)

PRODUCER: Shawty Red
WRITER: T. Cook
PUBLISHER: Tight 2 def Music, ASCAP
Atlantic 300047 (CD promo)
As the Southern sound of hip-hop sweeps

the nation with acts like the Cash Money Crew, Trick Daddy, and others, radio has been embracing all the "dirty South" it can get its hands on. And so it has taken to 19-year-old, Atlanta-born Drama (whose moniker stands for Drastic Retaliation Against My Adversaries). This MC is a self-proclaimed "Gritty Bebe," or in layman's term, child of the streets, and it comes through loud and clear on his first outing. Like its title suggests, "Left, Right, Left" is a chant record, a military march. And Drama's raspy voice could easily be confused with that of any hard-edged military sergeant. But while the song establishes ground at radio in the South, it may have a hard time creeping past a nights-only slot in other parts of the country. It also has the potential to burn on listeners quickly, considering its strong dependency on a monotonous chorus: "Left, left, left, left, left, left, right, left/Get on up, get on up, get on up, right, left." Makes you want to get down on the ground and give 'em 50 push-ups, doesn't it?

ROCK TRACKS

BERNARD BUTLER *I'd Do It Again If I Could* (3:26)

PRODUCER: Bernard Butler
WRITER: B. Butler
PUBLISHER: Universal Songs of PolyGram International, BMI
Creation/Columbia 48766 (CD promo)
Former Suede guitarist Bernard Butler conjured one of the finer musical moments of 1998 with "Not Alone," a blend of joyous Britpop spiced with avant-garde production. On this first single from "Friends And Lovers," due Feb. 12 on Reaction/Columbia, he turns up the guitars and returns to his rockier roots, but not at the cost of a glorious, robust melody. "I'd Do It Again If I Could" can be taken in two ways: For rock fans, the track possesses a meaty vocal reminiscent of the lighter side of heavy metal in the '80s, while for those leaning a little more toward the Britpop landscape, there are plenty of pleasing elements, like a groovy organ, harmonies drenching the chorus, and a refrain that roars right through a green light. Radio might be hesitant to entertain the wishes of this entertainer whose star no longer shines quite so brightly in the U.S., but listeners would lick this one up like icing off a spoon. Try it out, yes?

NEW & NOTEWORTHY

line between credible and catchy. Born on Prince Edward Island, MacLean has been working at her craft for years, earning stripes as a warm-up to Paula Cole, Barenaked Ladies, and Sarah McLachlan. She also was a featured performer at all three Lilith Fairs. Her previous indie release, "Silence," on Nettwerk, sold 25,000 copies—just the beginning for this stirring presence, who appears to have the chops and artistry to fuel a bonfire. You must find this one; it is intensely pleasurable. And look for "Passenger" Feb. 29.

FAB! *Something's Gonna Have To Change* (3:54)

PRODUCER: Ben "Jammin'" Robbins
WRITERS: Fab!, Ben Robbins
PUBLISHERS: Peermusic/Copyright Control
Republic/Universal 1602 (CD promo)
Here comes another youth-oriented group—this time a quartet of Irish lasses who have been lighting up the charts at home for some time—but as we all know, gold nuggets do wash ashore, and this infectious ditty is all too captivating to discard along with the mass of similar label offerings. "Something's Gonna Have To Change" structurally assumes the main melody line of Bobby Brown's 1989 No. 1 "My Prerogative," with an unusual instrumental backdrop of eerie organs

straight from "The Phantom Of The Opera." Together with a chorus that beats the band and sends it packing, this standout track will have the masses singing along with the fervor usually reserved for mainstays Britney and Christina. Fortunately, the vocals here are more mature than the likes of many other groups vying for their



moment in the light, adding to the delightful charm of this runaway could-be smash. Two versions are offered on the promo single, one with and one without a rap. Sure, the rap may further Americanize the song, but skip it and hold tight to the delicious all-pop rendering. Like honey on toast, this sweet tidbit is a great way to start the day. Now get going.

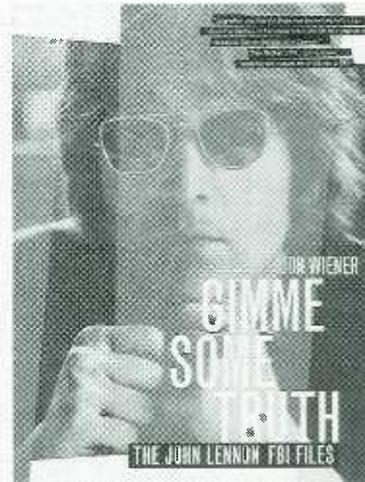
IN PRINT

GIMME SOME TRUTH: THE JOHN LENNON FBI FILES

By Jon Wiener
University of California Press
\$17.95; 344 pages

Shortly after the assassination of John Lennon, historian and writer Jon Wiener asked the government to open its files on the former Beatle. As a result of his initial request under the Freedom of Information Act, the FBI in 1981 released just a handful of heavily censored documents while admitting to the existence of 281 pages of intelligence reports concerning the rock icon. In fact, 199 pages were withheld in their entirety for various reasons, including—of all things—national security. In 1983, Wiener filed suit to recover the missing files.

Thus began the 14-year legal struggle behind "Gimme Some Truth: The John Lennon FBI Files"—involving three presidential administrations, the FBI, the CIA, the Supreme Court (among others), and a host of lawyers—to expose the J. Edgar Hoover version



of pop history. As can be imagined, and as is evidenced in the volume by extensive reproductions of Lennon file pages, the FBI fought Wiener and his team of American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) lawyers tooth and nail over the release of its intelligence reports on Lennon's political activities (none illegal and all protected as speech).

Thanks to sympathetic court rulings and the tenacity of the ACLU's Dan Marmalefsky and Mark Rosenbaum, as well as executive decisions by the vaguely more sympathetic Clinton administration, the FBI settled with the author in 1997 and released most of the remaining Lennon files. From his efforts, Wiener—now professor of history at the University of California, Irvine, and a contributor to the Nation magazine—claims to have uncovered what was nothing less than "an abuse of power, a kind of rock 'n' roll Watergate."

An international musical superstar and renowned as a peace activist, John Lennon was first noticed by the FBI on Dec. 10, 1971, for singing his song "John Sinclair" at an Ann Arbor, Mich., rally in support of the eponymous jailed radical and former manager of Detroit proto-punk band MC5. (A transcription of the lyrics by an FBI operative at the concert

remained confidential for 12 years.)

Organized by members of the notorious Chicago Seven—who had disrupted the 1968 Democratic National Convention—the event (and Lennon's first post-Fab Four concert) was meant to be "a trial run for a national anti-Nixon tour, on which [Lennon] would bring rock 'n' roll together with radical politics in a dozen cities."

To the benighted Nixon administration, this was a declaration of war. The authorities, egged on by conservative firebrand Sen. Strom Thurmond (today the Senate's sole nonagenarian) early in 1972, sought to "neutralize" Lennon's opposition to the re-election of the president by any means necessary.

It mattered not at all that the possible tour (which never came to be) and all the other FBI-reported activities of Lennon and his wife, Yoko Ono, were protected by the First Amendment and thus could not be legally used as a rationale for surveillance. Lennon was considered an enemy of the

state, and the testament in documents brought to light by Wiener shows the petty, shortsighted apparatus of the Nixon White House for what history proved them to be—felonious and entirely self-interested.

As portrayed in this documentary report, the paranoid Nixon regime forms a stark contrast to the inclusive, far-reaching genius of the timeless musician and social critic it had hoped to contain through underhanded means. The primary device used to silence Lennon was deportation proceedings against him and his wife—a very public harassment that ended only with a public hue and cry in support of Lennon. The surveillance itself would not end until Nixon was re-elected.

The full story of Lennon's political development and struggle against deportation is detailed in Wiener's classic 1984 study "Come Together: John Lennon In His Time." But as a procedural history of a battle for the facts, "Gimme Some Truth" (the archival basis for the earlier book), is as thorough and on-point regarding the Lennon case as one could hope for—and a potent reminder that, while information may want to be free (as Netizens argue), it can take a significant struggle to release it. **CARL ROSEN**