

Reviews & Previews

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incarnation of adolescent, cutie-pie pop stands best chance in a decade of hitting the charts. Female prepubescent set will warm up to breezy, pop/dance thumper "Más Y Más," shuffling, reggae-tingled "Buscando Un Amor," and seductive title-track ballad.

NEW AGE

▶ OTTMAR LIEBERT

Opium
PRODUCERS: Ottmar & Stefan Liebert
Epic 67083
Ottmar Liebert continues to elude easy categorization on this ambitious and thoroughly intoxicating album. He fuses his trademark "nouveau flamenco" with a more organic approach in the ambient direction of last year's "Euphoria." Divided into two CDs, "Opium" explores the artist's more energetic side on the "Wide-Eyed" disc, painting dramatic scenes with his Luna Negra ensemble and heightening the atmosphere with electric guitar, electric palmas, and MIDI textures. The "Dreaming" disc, on the other hand, is a hallucinatory sound pool on which supple guitar melodies are mixed with ambiances and elusive instrumentation.

CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN

IONA

Journey Into The Mourn
PRODUCER: Dave Bainbridge
ForeFront 5142
This intriguing collection was inspired by a book of meditations on the eighth-century Irish hymn "Be Thou My Vision." The resulting songs are a lovely blend of Celtic melodies and a modern rock sensibility. Iona comprises Teri Bryant, Dave Bainbridge, Mike Houghton, Tim Harries, Troy Donockley, and Joanne Hogg, whose lovely vocals give the songs an ethereal quality. This talented bunch was joined by special guests Robert Fripp, Máire Brennan (of Clannad), and singer/songwriter Chris Eaton. Prime cuts are "Irish Day," "Wisdom," and the title song. This project could find a home at triple-A as well as Christian radio.

CLASSICAL

▶ ANONYMOUS 4

Miracles Of Sant'Iago
PRODUCER: Robina G. Young
Harmonia Mundi 907156
The celestial sound of Anonymous 4 returns with a beautifully researched, packaged, and sung collection of 12th-century French chant and polyphony on the theme of St. James. With the group's avid following, there's no reason this album can't take its place as Anonymous 4's fifth charting release.

★ SCHNITTKE: REQUIEM/ GORECKI: MISERERE

Tõnu Kaljuste, Swedish Radio Choir
PRODUCER: Gunnar Andersson
Caprice 21515
Known for his interpretations of Arvo Pärt's vocal works, conductor Tõnu Kaljuste has produced one of the year's finest choral discs with this dark, deeply affecting album. Though many may turn to the set for the Gorecki, Schnittke's Requiem is the greater masterpiece. The most emotional work from one of the most intellectual of contemporary composers, the Requiem bursts with keening melody and incendiary instrumental color. From the indelibly beautiful Requiem Aeternam to the disturbing Tuba Mirum, it is hard to imagine this work being performed with any more depth. Distributed by Allegro.

SINGLES

EDITED BY LARRY FLICK

POP

▶ GLORIA ESTEFAN Reach (3:50)

PRODUCERS: Emilio Estefan Jr., Lawrence Dermer
WRITERS: G. Estefan, D. Warren
PUBLISHERS: Foreign Imported Productions, BMI; Real-songs, ASCAP
REMIXERS: David Morales, Pablo Flores, Love To Infinity
Epic 7765 (c/o Sony) (cassette single)
La Glo previews "Destiny," her first album of original compositions in English in five years, with a stately power ballad that is the theme song to the 1996 Summer Olympics. She has rarely sounded so vocally flexible and confident, broadening her range to wonderfully appealing heights within a softly building pool of percussion and gospel-spiked choir chants. By the dramatic close, the song has risen to inspirational anthemic proportions. An outstanding recording that is a safe bet for immediate and widespread action at top 40 and AC radio formats. A barrel of kicky disco reconstructions will further open up the single's prospects at club and crossover radio levels.

▶ BONNIE TYLER Two Out Of Three Ain't Bad (4:38)

PRODUCERS: Jim Steinman, Steven Rinkoff
WRITER: J. Steinman
PUBLISHER: Manuscript, ASCAP
Atlantic 6690 (cassette single)
The massive success of Nicki French's cover of the Tyler hit "Total Eclipse Of The Heart" has snuffed the raspy-voiced singer out of hiding. Subscribing to the notion that there is no need for a facsimile when the real thing is available, Tyler gives her all over the frenetic Euro-NRG dance beat that fuels this revival of the Meat Loaf chestnut. Loaded with irresistible camp value, this is good, clean fun that should meet with immediate radio and consumer approval. From the new album "Free Spirit."

BLIND MELON Three Is A Magic Number (3:15)

PRODUCER: Mike Napolitano, Blind Melon
WRITER: B. Dorough
PUBLISHER: American Broadcasting, ASCAP
Lava 6669-2 (c/o Atlantic) (CD single)
From the "Schoolhouse Rock Rocks," album, this tribute to the number three shines as one of the highlights from the lighthearted "rock meets education" collection. Blind Melon has a ball with the funk heavy guitar and bass, and the late Shannon Hoon's quirky vocals find a home in Bob Dorough's catchy hippie philosophy/science.

PULP Common People (4:07)

PRODUCER: Chris Thomas
WRITERS: N. Banks, J. Cocker, C. Doyle, S. Mackey, R. Senior
PUBLISHER: Songs Of PolyGram International, BMI
Island 7138 (CD single)
Programmers could not hope for finer British pop than that being served up by this versatile and talented act. Layered in the fabric of "Common People" are soft keyboard threads and a majestic weave of blazing guitars. All this and witty lyrics to boot.

LAURA MARTINEZ Ritmo Latino (no timing listed)

PRODUCERS: JSJ, Zanella
WRITERS: Zanella, Martinez
PUBLISHERS: Over Exposed/French Licq/Bug/Lo-Walk, BMI
REMIXER: Zanella
Thump 2226 (cassette single)
It was bound to happen. The success of "Set U Free" by Planet Soul and "Feels So Good" by DJ Juanito and Lina Santiago is triggering a spree of dance/pop anthems employing a melange of house, freestyle, and electro-funk rhythms. Mar-

tinez has a charming presence, but she is not given much more to sing than the line "let the music take your body." A waste. Still, this track could easily woo crossover radio taste-makers and teenage listeners alike. Contact: 909-598-7028.

GILBERT Baila Selena (4:33)

PRODUCER: Gilbert
WRITER: Gilbert
PUBLISHER: not listed
Magie 002 (CD single)
Former Beverly Hills, Calif., judge (whose name is pronounced "jilbear") made respectable noise last summer on the top 40 morning-show circuit with the O.J. Simpson novelty ditty "100% Not Guilty." He returns with a more musically pleasing and equally amusing Latin-pop shuffler that will leave listeners awash in soothing images of sun, sand, and surf. He is playfully loose and engaging within an arrangement of fluttering guitars and salsa piano. Surprisingly strong and memorable. Contact: 310-395-1679.

QUINN Ecstasy In Avila (4:11)

PRODUCER: Quinn
WRITER: Quinn
PUBLISHER: Mysterion, ASCAP
Shiro 032 (CD single)
Ambient-pop enthusiasts yearning for the presence of Enigma will find warmth and comfort in this excursion into gentle, plush rhythms and soothing synths. With the only vocal presence being spare and subtle Middle Eastern choir chants, the odds of mainstream radio embracing this single are iffy at best. It really works best within the context of the artist's fine new album, also titled "Ecstasy In Avila."

R & B

★ SHAI I Don't Wanna Be Alone (3:53)

PRODUCERS: Shai
WRITERS: Shai
PUBLISHER: not listed
REMIXERS: SoulShock & Karlin
Gasoline Alley/MCA 3657 (c/o Uni) (cassette single)
One of the front-running acts of the doo-hop movement shows more maturity and potential for career longevity with each new single. This offering from "Blackface" has the soul and vocal sparkle of a vintage Spinners or Stylistics record, as Shai lays a foundation of harmonies that are wisely understated. The emphasis is on a finger-snappin' groove and a sweetly romantic melody. In keeping with the single's musical tone, the lyrics are warm and caressing, triggering a vocal that is heartfelt without flying over the top. A charmer deserving attention from R&B, top 40, and AC programmers.

★ ISLEY BROTHERS Let's Lay Together (4:09)

PRODUCER: R. Kelly
WRITER: R. Kelly
PUBLISHER: Zomba Songs/R. Kelly, BMI
Island 7165 (cassette single)
One good turn deserves another. Ron Isley guests on the current R. Kelly smash "Down Low," and the mega-hot producer/artist returns the favor by co-opting one of his patented slow-jams for this venerable soul clique. Featured on the soundtrack to "Don't Be A Menace . . ." this groove grinds with recognizable heat, though the well-worn vocals of the Isleys elevate this single miles above anything of similar sound. T'would be so very nice to see an act that has contributed so much to R&B music enjoy a long-deserved chart revival.

★ BOO-YAA T.R.I.B.E. Chillin' On The West Side (4:00)

PRODUCER: not listed
WRITER: not listed
PUBLISHER: not listed
First Kut/Samoan Mafia 001 (CD single)
When you think of this gangsta-styled

T.R.I.B.E., the last thing likely to come to mind is a laid-back vibe. But that is exactly what is served on this hit-worthy slow funk jam, on which masculine rapping is framed by smooth harmonies that combine original lyrics with interpretations of the Blue Magic pop/soul nugget "Sideshow." Now, don't start calling this posse soft or sell-outs. Even in this easy and accessible context, the boys come with an edge and assertiveness that befits their past. R&B radio should have a close listen ASAP, while the rest of us should look for the imminent album "Occupation Hazardous." Contact: 818-901-4878.

TEDDY Are You In The Mood (3:54)

PRODUCERS: Tone Capone, Eric L. Brooks
WRITERS: T. Martin, D. Blackman, B. Burrell
PUBLISHERS: Theodore Chipmunk, ASCAP; Nodlew/Bishtic, BMI
Noo Trybe/Virgin 11090 (CD single)
The Noo Trybe label broadens its well-respected gangsta rap creative palette with this smooth slice of old-school soul. Austin, Texas, newcomer Teddy comes to this sultry, easy-paced jeep jam proudly wearing the influence of Al Green and Marvin Gaye, among others. His youthful energy is infectious, as is his hip-swaying sensuality. R&B programmers need to make room for this promising talent—and look for his forthcoming debut album, "Soul."

COUNTRY

▶ REBA McENTIRE Starting Over Again (3:59)

PRODUCERS: Tony Brown, Reba McEntire
WRITERS: D. Summer, B. Sudano
PUBLISHERS: Sweet Summer Night, ASCAP; Right-song/Earbone, BMI
MCA 3701 (c/o Uni) (7-inch single)
The title cut from McEntire's current album of cover tunes, this hauntingly beautiful ballad is probably the definitive divorcee song. Written by gifted singer/dance diva Donna Summer and Bruce Sudano, the tune echoes the ache and sadness of a mature couple's broken relationship. McEntire turns in a polished performance, but this is a song that does not call for gloss or overproduction; it calls for vulnerability and real emotion. Dolly Parton delivered the goods on this tune years ago, and her rendition remains unequalled.

NEW & NOTEWORTHY

KEITH GATTIS Little Drops Of My Heart (3:35)

PRODUCER: Norra Wilson
WRITER: K. Gattis
PUBLISHER: Murbill, BMI
RCA 64488 (c/o BMG) (7-inch single)
This spirited single heralds the arrival of country music's newest potential superstar. This 25-year-old Austin, Texas, native has the voice, looks, and songwriting prowess (he wrote eight of his forthcoming album's 10 cuts), all the ingredients necessary to make him the next big thing. Having toured with seasoned veteran Johnny Paycheck, he has obviously learned the importance of being more than a good vocalist; he is also a true stylist. He leaves a vocal imprint on this country song that is a welcome change of pace from the safe records being routinely tossed out. Gattis has a hardcore, hard-edged sound that serves up the best of traditional country, yet has a fresh '90s energy. Great single from a great album!

▶ MARK COLLIE Lipstick Don't Lie (3:38)

PRODUCERS: James Stroud, Mark Collie
WRITERS: M. Collie, T. Bruce
PUBLISHERS: Music Corporation of America/Mark Collie, BMI; WB/Big Tractor, ASCAP
Giant 7794 (c/o Warner Bros.) (CD promo)
Collie is one of country music's most intriguing stylists, and his latest Giant single tackles one of the oldest themes in the genre. That's right, this is a cheating song. Collie delivers the painful message that "You can fool a true believer with the innocent wink of an eye, but everybody knows lipstick don't lie." This is a solid song, and Collie's on-target delivery should help this single find a welcome home on country radio.

★ KIM RICHEY From Where I Stand (2:59)

PRODUCER: Richard Bennett
WRITERS: K. Richey, T. Silvers
PUBLISHERS: Mighty Nice/Wait No More/Bluewater, BMI
Mercury 111 (c/o PolyGram) (CD promo)
A cleverly written, uptempo tune about how what goes around comes around. This is about a woman who finds herself on the hurting side of a relationship when the man who dumped someone for her is now dumping her for someone else. The chorus says, "From where I stand/I see an old familiar story/Only last time I was in your shoes/Now it's looking like it's my turn to be lonely/And I'll tell you I don't like the view." Richey has a fresh and inviting sound and a way with a lyric. Country radio should give this a chance.

CHET ATKINS I Still Write Your Name In The Snow (2:58)

PRODUCER: Chet Atkins
WRITERS: C. Atkins, B.E. Wheeler
PUBLISHERS: Athens/Sony Tree, BMI; Blue Duck, ASCAP
Columbia 78289 (c/o Sony) (7-inch single)
This bluegrass-inflected vocal track from Atkins' new guitar album, "Almost Alone," is definitely not what people expect from one of country music's distinguished elder statesmen, but that's exactly what makes it so much fun. It is hard to say what, if anything, country radio will do with this unusual little ditty, but some may find it a relief from the flood of sameness out there. Definitely a brave and unusual choice for a single.

TRACE ADKINS There's A Girl In Texas (3:29)

PRODUCER: Scott Hendricks
WRITERS: T. Adkins, V. Vipperman
PUBLISHER: not listed
Capitol 10341 (c/o Cema) (CD promo)
Capitol label chief Scott Hendricks' first signing since he took over the label is a smooth baritone from Sarepta, La., whom he discovered performing in a Nashville club. Adkins has a warm, likeable voice and confident-sounding delivery, but the song is nothing exceptional.

DANCE

▶ MASTERS AT WORK PRESENT NUYORICAN SOUL Mind Fluid (8:03)

PRODUCERS: "Little" Louie Vega, Kenny "Dope" Gonzalez
WRITERS: L. Vega, C.K. Gonzalez
PUBLISHERS: Indilu, BMI; K-Dope, ASCAP
REMIXERS: "Little" Louie Vega, Kenny "Dope" Gonzalez
Nervous 20133 (CD single)
Club loyalists will get a pleasant jolt from this sultry instrumental, which is quite a departure from the typical Masters At Work house music sound. Instead, partners "Little" Louie Vega and Kenny "Dope" Gonzalez offer a stew of live, funk-driven vibes, coated with a dash of ambient keyboard flavor added for good measure. The resulting track is as enjoyable to the relaxed brain as it is encouraging to the twitchin' booty. Be on the lookout for a full-length Nuyorican Soul album later this year on GRP Records. Contact: 212-730-7160.

(Continued on next page)

ALBUMS: SPOTLIGHT: Releases deemed by the review editors to deserve special attention on the basis of musical merit and/or Billboard chart potential. VITAL REISSUES: Rereleased albums of special artistic, archival, and commercial interest, and outstanding collections of works by one or more artists. PICKS (▶): New releases predicted to hit the top half of the chart in the corresponding format. CRITICS CHOICES (★): New releases, regardless of chart potential, highly recommended because of their musical merit. MUSIC TO MY EARS (JM): New releases deemed Picks which were featured in the "Music To My Ears" column as being among the most significant records of the year. All albums commercially available in the U.S. are eligible. Send review copies to Paul Verna, Billboard, 1515 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10036. Send R&B albums to J.R. Reynolds, Billboard, 5055 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036. Send country albums to Chet Flippo, Billboard, 49 Music Square W., Nashville, TN 37203. Send Latin albums to John Lannert, 1814 Fern Valley Road, Louisville, KY 40219. Other contributors: Havelock Nelson (rap/N.Y.); Irv Lichtman (Broadway/cabaret/N.Y.); Heidi Watson (classical/N.Y.); Drew Wheeler (jazz/N.Y.); Deborah Evans Price (contemporary Christian/Nashville); Gordon Ely (gospel); John Diiberto (new age).

SINGLES: PICKS (▶): New releases with the greatest chart potential. CRITICS CHOICE (★): New releases, regardless of potential chart action, which the reviewer highly recommends because of their musical merit. NEW AND NOTEWORTHY: Highlights new and developing acts worthy of attention. Cassette, vinyl or CD singles equally appropriate for more than one format are reviewed in the category with the broadest audience. All releases available to radio and/or retail in the U.S. are eligible for review. Send copies to Larry Flick, Billboard, 1515 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10036. Country singles should be sent to Deborah Evans Price, Billboard, 49 Music Square W., Nashville, Tenn. 37203. Contributor: Brett Atwood (L.A.).