

Music Reviews

Bob Marley

Soul Almighty: The Formative Years Vol.1
JAD Records

You are sitting around with friends. It is evening, the lights are dim, wine is the drink of the hour, everyone is relaxed and happy. But you need some music, and you are not sure what to select...you do not want to destroy the perfect mood. What about the new Bob Marley CD? Excellent choice. Bob is always a fun guest at a party, and his latest release is no exception.

No, Bob has not been resurrected, and there is not a Bob Marley ghost going around creating new songs, but of the twelve tracks on *Soul Almighty*, four are new. The other songs on the CD consist of remixes and popular hits such as "Rock Steady".

Note that the four new songs are not demos, they are the real thing. The reason they have not been released until now is explained by Danny Sims, co-producer of the CD, on the album cover. According to Simms, there were many other labels and albums to keep track of at the time the songs were recorded, and so the songs sort of got lost in the confusion. Then, with all the legal battles over the past 14 years Sims did not feel that "it would have been right for them to release these songs until everything had been settled". Everything is settled.

There is great variation between the songs. The remixes are interesting interpretations of Bob's original creations. All the songs are a combination of mellow with groove, happy with grit, lounge with dance. The beginning of the album is mainly Bob's sound in pure form. As the track numbers get higher, the R&B sound gets more mixed. Track 10 sounds almost like a Salt n' Peppa tune with a Jamaican influence. Track 11 is wicked: "what goes around comes around...same old thing", the lyrics in this song are sung with groove, making the song pleasantly upbeat.

Overall, the CD is fun. So next time you are unsure of a classy cool mood beat perhaps you will consider the latest Bob Marley release.

Rating: ****

By Cindy Venema

Various Artists

Christmas Cocktails
EMI/Capitol

You are sitting in front of the fireplace, sipping hot chocolate and listening to *Christmas Cocktails*.

Christmas music in jazz. The perfect holiday lounge music. "Deck the Halls" and "Ring Those Bells" as you "Cha-Cha All the Way" into the "Winter Wonderland". You will feel warm as you listen to classic tunes done by talented artists such as Nat King Cole who plays "The Christmas Song", and Dean Martin who performs "I've Got my Love to Keep Me Warm".

The first song on the CD, "Rudolf The Red-Nosed Reindeer Mambo" by Billy May is funky mambo, setting the happy mood for the rest of the CD. Kay Starr's, "Everybody's Waitin' for the Man with the Bag" boosts this happy feeling as the listener reaches about half way in the CD.

Jackie Gleason was a sentimentalist, and taken from his "string driven, plush '50s records" is his version of "I'll be Home for Christmas". This is the moodiest piece on *Christmas Cocktails*. Not to worry though, because Nancy Wilson brings the music back up to a funky happy lounge...leaving sentimentality in the fifties with Gleason.

A soul who loves classic movies, red-nosed reindeers, fat bearded men, roasted chestnuts, candycanes, sleighs with bells, piano music, and drinking egg-nog out of a martini glass will whole heartedly dig this disk...ho, ho, ho.

Rating: ****

Ray Boltz

No Greater Sacrifice
(Word)

As much as it pains me to say it, this disc doesn't live up to Ray Boltz's previous albums. He has abandoned the more upbeat and aggressive style he used on recent CDs in favour of the mellow style he used in the '80s. This is regretful, because his fans had gotten to like the new Ray Boltz. Complaints aside, this is not a bad CD. There are a bundle of slow and meaningful tunes, many of which are quite good. The only good upbeat number is "Brave New World", which demonstrates Boltz's ability with fast songs. It is a pity he didn't include a few more of that sort.

The Faith

Supernova
(Harvest Music Group/Word Distributing)

The group took three years to put out this, their second disc, and the maturity shows. The band also had a name change -- they were previously Reckless Faith. The change is appropriate, for they are not as reckless now. They have struck a balance between meaning, truth, and fun, without being quite so confusing as their '93 debut, *Rattle the Cage*. With meaningful numbers like "Genuine" and "Opiate", they show songwriting skill, and tunes like "Cringe" and "Outshined", they demonstrate abundant musical talent. On the whole, many of the cuts are deep, literary, and even enigmatic, but there are enough guitar hooks and catchy drum rhythms to make this disc a lot of fun.

This album is for the thinking fan of alternative Christian music who likes things loud. Oh, and don't let the cover art scare you. Whoever designed it was just having fun.

Jeni Varnadeau

Colors of Truth
(Pamplin/CMC Distributing)

John and Dino Elefante have a skill for finding exciting new artists, and they have a winner in Varnadeau. The inevitable comparisons to Alanis Morissette are unfortunate. Of course, Varnadeau isn't inexplicably angry with the world, and she is uplifting instead of offensive. Only the vocal style is similar. Varnadeau is much easier to listen to. She knows what she's talking about, and says it clearly. The songs aren't simple, however. They require some thought to get the full meaning. The title track is a good example, as are cuts like "Fences" and "I See You.". She also has some fun with numbers like "Why Would You Go Back?", which needs to be played at high volume.

This disc might not be for everyone. Some of the numbers are quite aggressive, and not everyone will like Varnadeau's vocal style. It is definitely worth a listen.

- ***** A bubbling, frothy broth of carnal delight.
- **** Nutritionally complete, high in fibre; tastes great, less filling.
- *** TV diner: Satisfying - could use more salt.
- ** Microwaved Chef Boyardee... not quite done.
- * Cold, clammy, leftover goulash

