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SOUND OFF

REALITY BITES

★★

GROUP: Various
LABEL: RCA

The most telling fact about the *Reality Bites* soundtrack: Ethan Hawke's song is better than most of the other songs on the album.

The next-to-most telling fact about the *Reality Bites* soundtrack: Ethan Hawke is an actor, not a musician.

This means that either Hawke is one romantic novel away from becoming Generation X's Robert James Waller, or the *Reality Bites* soundtrack has some pretty disappointing performances.

The soundtrack packs just enough big names on the back cover to make it look interesting: U2, Lenny Kravitz, The Juliana Hatfield 3, Dinosaur Jr., World Party and Crowded House. Looks aren't everything, though. Few of the big names contribute songs that live up to their reputations.

This has all the trappings of a soundtrack whose purpose is to help sell movie tickets instead of being interesting in its own right (as opposed to, say, *Singles*, which looked like a movie designed to help sell a soundtrack). We've heard most of these songs before.

With a few exceptions (like Dinosaur Jr.'s respectable "Turnip Farm" and Lenny Kravitz's stinky "Spinning Around Over You"), the soundtrack gleans songs from other albums and re-releases them.

Crowded House delivers "Locked Out," the album's best cut. It's one of those "listening to this will send you to the record store looking for the band's latest album" songs.

U2 lends its underappreciated "All I Want Is You," one of a trio of stunning love songs buried in its much-maligned *Rattle and Hum* album. U2 singer-songwriter Bono once called "All I Want is You" better than "With or Without You," which is not quite accurate, but close.

World Party manages to squeeze pop music out of a drums-piano-organ-saxophone arrangement in "When You Come Back to Me." The Posies' "Going, Going, Gone," Me Phi Me's "Revival!" and the aforementioned Hawke's dippy, satiric "I'm Nuthin'" are other highlights.

The rest of the album lurches between mediocre and lame. The Knack's "My Sharona" is the type of song that disgruntled postal workers hear on the way to work before deciding to stop at the gun store. Lisa Loeb & Nine Stories' "Stay" seems to say, "You haven't heard us before. Now you know why." The Indians' "Bed of Roses" isn't much better. (The Indians? Are they from India? Shouldn't they be called The Native Americans?)

This may be cool background music for driving places or hanging around, but it doesn't arouse much sentiment in the listener. Everything is too cool, too devoid of passion and too short of thought: It's angst lite.

Maybe that's perfect for the twentysomething slacker scene. Maybe that's worrisome.

– SCOTT SIMONSON
Oregon Daily Emerald

THONK

★★

GROUP: Michael Manring
LABEL: Windham Hill Records

Thonk. What a name for an album. Even worse, it has a sticker saying this album is "five star chamber thrash."

"Thrash," *Thonk* and the UFO on the cover just don't seem to go with this album.

It's none of those things.

This is a so-so collection of bass guitar/new-age jazz by Michael Manring that tries to hype itself into the realm of youthful mosh music.

The album's lead song "Big Fungus" really sets the tone.

Manring plays up and down the scale. That's pretty much it.

A roller-coaster ride of notes. Big deal.

The second set, "Snakes Got Legs," is pretty much the same, but the audience gets the pleasure of listening to it for five minutes instead of four and Manring gives one of his, again, up-and-down tracks.

Where the musician excels are his solos. "My Three Moons" and "The Enormous Room" are new-age tunes with a lot of personality.

Playing on bass guitar and hyperbass, Manring by himself is great.

But, in all fairness, the album does deserve a star because Manring is a quality new-age soloist.

In fact, the more you think about it, the more Manring deserves another star for naming the thing *Thonk*.

It's the sound the CD makes when it hits the trash can.

Now, that's chamber trash!

– ED KLOPFENSTEIN
Oregon Daily Emerald

WALK THE LINE

★★★

GROUP: Kennedy Rose
LABEL: Kennedy Rose

Creating a hybrid country and rock 'n' roll acoustic sound, the band Kennedy Rose makes some good, honest music in their recent album *Walk The Line*.

But though the band, made up of Mary Ann Kennedy and Pamela Rose, may be hard to peg musically, the message is easy to peg as pro-woman and pro-minority.

"Iron Horse" is a good example.

"Steel on steel, dust to dust; there's an iron horse in all of us."

The song is accompanied by singers from the Menominee tribe of Wisconsin and flute player Bill Miller of *Last of the Mohicans*. His fame represents a good try to group social consciousness and music.

It misses the boat a little with a gruff harmony in the first part of the tune but makes up for it later.

Kennedy Rose's other notable song is "Friends."

High on emotions and equally high on talent, the song sings about, you guessed it, friends.

The agendas dropped throughout the music, though obvious, aren't overbearing. Pop this compact disc in the player, and you won't even notice that Kennedy Rose is weaving love, peace and harmony into everything they're singing.

Even if you do notice, are those bad agendas to push?

– ED KLOPFENSTEIN
Oregon Daily Emerald

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