

CD reviews

Eclectic artists release new flavors on CDs



To the Teeth ★★★★★
Ani DiFranco

In her 13th release, Ani DiFranco takes her political views "To the Teeth."

Continuing from her past two releases, "Little Plastic Castles" and last year's "Up Up Up Up Up Up," DiFranco continues to sing about social upheaval and continues to fight The Man. On the title track, she sings about violence and guns at the dawn of the new century. Although DiFranco's anti-gun stance is clear, she urges listeners to "open fire" on Hollywood, MTV, the television networks and the NRA.

The rest of the CD alternates between serious issues and messages to downright silly songs. She never loses sight of her audience though, and this is her best CD to date.

Fans have come to appreciate her sound with what many consider her best effort, "Not a Pretty Girl," but "To the Teeth" will reveal a more mature DiFranco. Her lyrics are as poetic as ever, and she has grown musically, successfully blending in folk, lots of saxophone, a touch of rap and even a banjo to create the funky sounds.

On one cut, she invites her audience to the "Freakshow," where she sings about being on the road in the form of a circus show. Another song tells us of her joy while she watches families, friends and partners greet their loved ones as they get off the plane in "The Gate."

DiFranco takes a serious note in "Hello Birmingham" as she passionately sings about racism and a bullet that killed a doctor who performed abortions in New York. The CD ends with "I Know This Bar," which is reminiscent of the track "Pulse" from her "Little Plastic Castles" recording. "I Know This Bar" is a quiet ballad that brings the CD full circle.

Although she uses her signature folk guitar playing on "To the Teeth," DiFranco introduces a



Courtesy photos

(above) Ani DiFranco's 'To the Teeth' is perhaps her best CD to date. (left) Longtime rocker David Bowie shows that he hasn't lost his touch on 'Hours.'

host of new styles including guest musicians Maceo Parker, Irvin Mayfield and even The Artist.

It's hard to go wrong with a DiFranco CD, and "To the Teeth" is no exception.

By Yael Menahem

Hours ★★★★★
David Bowie

"Hours" is the 23rd studio album release from David Bowie, one of pop music's most innovative and ever-changing icons over the past thirty years.

After spending the past five years experimenting with industrial, electronic and dance music, Bowie returns to full vocal form, producing an album of timeless songs that hold their own with the best of his back catalog.

The album opens with its weakest track, "Thursday's Child," with Bowie crooning about lost days and redemption through love. The single is awash in synthesizers, Holly Palmer's vocals and strings.

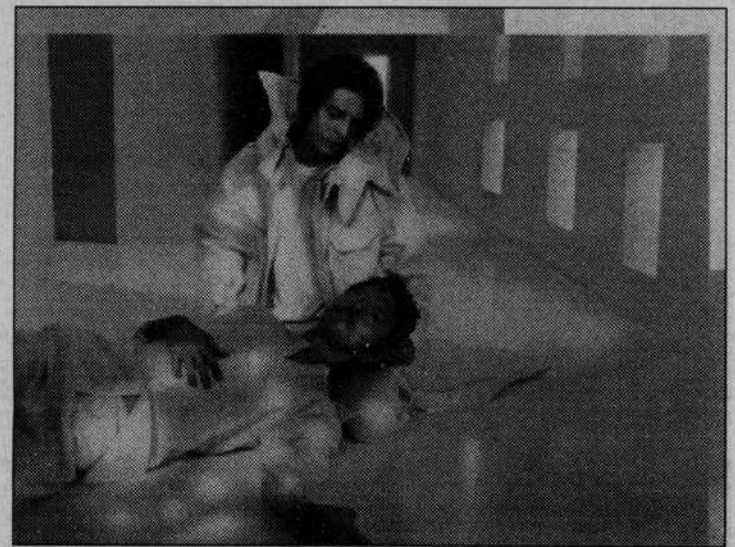
Although the song has found a comfortable home on the VH-1 charts, it's definitely not one for all the young dudes.

The album only gets better from there, however. "Something in the Air" is full of raw emotion and powerful guitar work, while "Survive" is a remorseful ballad that is currently working its way to the top of the UK charts.

Other highlights on the album include "Seven" — Bowie's best single in almost 20 years — which is dripping in rich, 12-string, acoustic guitars and riveting vocals. "The Pretty Things are Going to Hell" is a rocker, even from the mouth of a 53-year-old, and puts most modern rock tracks to shame.

The album closes out with "Brilliant Adventure," an instrumental track that would not be out of place on Bowie's 1977 "Heroes" album, and "The Dreamers," which captures his legendary status as the great visionary of Martian rock.

Since his commercial heyday



in the 1980s, fans of Bowie saw a continual drop off in both musical quality and album sales that lasted up through the early 1990s.

Over the past seven years, however, Bowie's music has been on a steady incline. He was in top form with the eclectic, industrial opus of his 1995 CD "1. Outside" and a 1997 release, the testos-

terone-driven "Earthling" album.

"Hours" is not the ideal album to introduce yourself to the world of Bowie, but it's a solid work that has something for almost every Bowie fan and plenty of high-quality, new material for those new to his music.

By Eric Pfeiffer

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