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CD REVIEWS

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in all, no classic, but great music nonetheless. Consonant will perform at John Henry's on Sept. 23.

The latest from Michael Franti and Spearhead, "Everybody Deserves Music," could take a cue from Conley's lyrical sense. The album is well-produced — not that great production is a novelty — providing a nice mix of danceable Latin, reggae, rap and funk beats. The problem lies almost entirely with the lyrics, which call for social change, peace, love and unity using all the profound wisdom of a bumper sticker.

"You can bomb the world to pieces, but you can't bomb it to peace," is about as subtle as it gets here. The whole album reeks of the worst sort of sappy Quincy Jones-produced "We Are the World" idealism. These kind of lyrics belong plastered to the back of a Volvo, not in music. Most songwriters today would be embarrassed to speak such saccharine nonsense, as this kind of naive, idealistic quality died with John Lennon. "Give Peace a Chance," anyone? Franti and the gang will be appearing at the McDonald Theatre on Sept. 25.

If you want great music done right, My Morning Jacket's major-label debut, "It Still Moves," would be a good place to start. The album is full of standard rock formats filtered through echo, distortion and other studio trickery, and it combines such unlikely elements as country, indie rock, soul and 1950s R&B. The band takes this garbage heap of influences and uses it to create a sonic landscape radically different from anything else being done in music today.

It's amazing that this was recorded in a homemade studio in the upper floor of a barn. The vocals are laden with so much reverb that they often sound like they're echoing off canyon walls, and the arrangements have the expansiveness of a great jam band. Many songs drone on transcendently for a few minutes longer than most bands would have allowed, turning what would have been an interesting pop song into a trance-like jam. My Morning Jacket manages to evoke the same ethereal Americana sound as the Cowboy Junkies while sounding completely distinct. The closest approximation I can come up with to what they sound like is the early Meat Puppets, but even that is a stretch. Refreshing.

Something else that's refreshing: The latest from reggae-great Burning Spear. One of the last reggae legends to come out of the 1970s who is still performing today, it's amazing that Spear is still so consistently good, never mind his prolific output. His new album, "Freeman," is nothing new stylistically, but it does deliver the great classic-roots reggae style that he helped pioneer. While no new sonic territory is mapped out, the old territory is so well-refined that listening to it should be like returning home for reggae fans.

Lyricaly, Spear sticks to simple statements that allow room for a simple philosophy. Stay happy, love others, love yourself, keep it simple. There are no grand pronouncements, no condescending attitudes and no self-righteousness. Just clean simplicity. That's what it should be about anyway.

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