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## Treasures of the past

Regardless of the paucity of great albums released in 1987, the Doctor announces the winners of the first Doctor Tantalus Elektra Awards.

BY DR. TANTALUS

Not all years are created equal. Reporters have had a field day during the past 12 months covering the likes of winsome Jim Bakker, outrageous Olliemania, Gorby fever, Irangate and George "I-am-not-a-wimp" Bush. Nor were women left out as America got



## Music

All three come together in "U Got the Look" — one of the year's best songs.

All in all, the man is a genius — a twisted genius, perhaps, but hey, that's all the more reason to buy his albums.

its *bimbeaux redux*: Fawn Hall and Donna Rice. Runners-up in this closely contested race were Tammy Faye Bakker, who lost points for trying so darn hard, and Jessica Hahn, who must feel terrible that Jim left her for Tammy.

The record business, by way of contrast, has not produced an exciting year. Sure, records are selling like mad and compact discs are raking in obscene profits, but this has never been news. The Doctor was tired of Sean and Madonna before they grew tired of each other. The Who announced a comeback tour to prolonged yawns. Even Mozart had the bad taste to die 196 years ago, thus preventing an evocative yet sensitive exploration of his life and work in this column by way of obituary. Michael Jackson has yet to give us the whole story on how he became the black Ethel Merman.

Instead, it was a year to catch up on 1986 favorites that slipped through the cracks: Anita Baker's *Rapture*, Steve Winwood's *Back in the High Life* and Robert Cray's *Strong Persuader* were frequently heard as soul took center stage. Even Peter Gabriel's great 1986 album *So* had soul in mind.

Having noted the relative paucity of great albums this year, we can now progress to the winners of the first Doctor Tantalus Elektra Awards for superior aural achievement during 1987.

1. *The Joshua Tree* (U2): Rock-and-roll does not produce albums more apocalyptic than this one. Between Bono's wailing and The Edge's playing, U2 creates a sound that suggests the creation of the cosmos. Of all the songs written recently about Nicaragua, only "Bullet the Blue Sky" captures the grand thread of horror that links the United States with death in Central America. In any year this would have been a good record. In 1987 it became a great record as few groups had the vision and the talent to keep pace.

2. *Sign o' the Times* (Prince): Stranger, badder and better than ever, the irrepressible Prince steams on, with Sheila E. on drums and friends such as The Bangles sitting in just for fun. The result is a melange of material from the man who has put sex into records like it never was there before. The Doctor admits that he gets a little obscene from time to time, but minute-for-minute Prince packs more lust into the average record groove than anyone since Ray Charles sang "What'd I Say."

What seems to have escaped this student of sexual poses is why Prince feels compelled to record some of these songs falsetto or through a synthesizer, or both. And why list the lead vocalist as "Camille" when we all know it's Prince in his falsetto disguise. And this man dares call himself a heterosexual? In "I Was Your Girlfriend" Prince takes the place of his girl to see how the roles are played in reverse, although from every indication Prince seems to need no instruction.

In between the mind games you can listen to Prince's outstanding guitar playing, his nod toward pure funk and his love of a good hook.

3. *Substance* (New Order): Frankly, it's unfair to allow a greatest-hits record to compete against new products (and let's face it, many new records are the aural equivalent of dog food), but who said life was fair? First, you generally get the extended dance versions of these songs. Second, on the CD you get all the flip sides of these same great hits. Who could ask for anything more?

The Doctor is aware that *Substance* constitutes merely "dance music" to some, and that you will not find any great singers lurking behind these tunes. Instead, you will simply find the most sophisticated sound around — it's perfect whether you are conducting that emergency open-heart surgery after a night of Thunderbird or simply vacuuming the rug where Junior decided to bake chocolate-chip cookies for the first time. But like some medicines, it is best left alone during meals when your blood is heading toward your stomach and not your feet.

4. *Tunnel of Love* (Bruce Springsteen): We all know that Bruce gets hyped to death, but underneath it all he is still one of the greatest rockers of our era. It is hard to believe that it has been twelve-and-a-half years since he simultaneously appeared on the covers of *Newsweek* and *Time*, because the songs he releases today are as good as the ones that made him famous.

*Tunnel of Love* is not the album of pop singles that catapulted *Born in the U.S.A.* into the stratosphere, but that appears to be Springsteen's point. Although he could release an album of "fast" tunes, he prefers to hold back, to make his points with a modicum of subtlety and to draw the listener slowly into the musical world he has created. The highlight here is the title track, which ends not with the usual platitude, but with the admonition that love sometimes requires one to "learn to live with what you can't rise above." For his refusal to accept easy answers and for his sheer integrity, Bruce Springsteen cannot be left off this year's list.

Honorable mentions this year include 10,000 Maniacs' *In Our Tribe* and the Pretenders' *Get Close*. The Doctor begs off on the recent Bo Deans album simply because Christmas got way out of control this year and there has not been an opportunity to adequately reflect upon it.

This year's dance singles are fairly predictable. At the top of the list towers New Order's "True Faith," followed closely by Madonna's "Open Your Heart," George Michael's "I Want Your Sex" and the Fine Young Cannibals' "Ever Fallen In Love." Extensive lobbying efforts have been made on behalf of New Order's "Bizarre Love Triangle," but the proffered gratuity was insufficient.

The only problem with reflecting on your operations from the previous year is that later you are bound to remember a rubber glove that you left in the patient. So, if your favorite album has been left out, perhaps The Doctor will discover it next year.