

Labors of love

Songs from and for the heart by the Eurythmics,
George Michael and Bryan Ferry

B Y D R T A N T A L U S

By the time February rolls around you do not need Dr. Tantalus to tell you that the holidays are officially over. The resolutions have been made and broken, last year's bills have arrived, the state of the nation has been

Music

explored, and the monsoons have begun in earnest.

It is time once again to explore the territory that lies between our heads and our hips — no matter that we often confuse our heart with those other portions of our anatomy. This month the Eurythmics, George Michael, and Bryan Ferry help us map out these uncharted areas.

The Eurythmics have been working this territory for some time now. They have focused on the myriad of emotions that we lump together under the general rubric of love more than any other subject. Love has been "a stranger in an open car" and the traditional "ball and chain." They have sung about Orwell's "Sexcrime" and noted that these days "Sisters are doin' it for themselves." Their most recent release, *Savage*, finds them plowing familiar ground.

Once again the Eurythmics find the terrain of love to be tough sledding. In songs like "Do you want to break-up?" and "You have placed a chill in my heart" singer Annie Lennox describes how her relationship appears to be falling apart. "Love is a temple / Love is a shrine / Buy some love at the five and dime," she sings as her love walks away.

Later all the stops are pulled as the Eurythmics wail into the dance-your-heart-out stomp, "I Need a Man." But this is quickly followed by a remorseful "Put the blame on me" and "I need you," in which Lennox asks her lover to "pin me down just for one frozen moment." After this roller-coaster ride the album concludes with "Brand New Day" and the thought that although she must now walk alone "I won't be sad / But I won't be destroyed."

The Eurythmics do a credible job of describing the complexities of modern love, although their lyrics are occasionally a bit obscure. Moreover, their sound, produced by writer Dave Stewart, is uniformly clean and precise. The compact disc, however, creates a sound that at times seems a bit compressed and almost flat. While some songs are simply musically routine, the album has enough mature emotional and musical moments to warrant a positive recommendation.

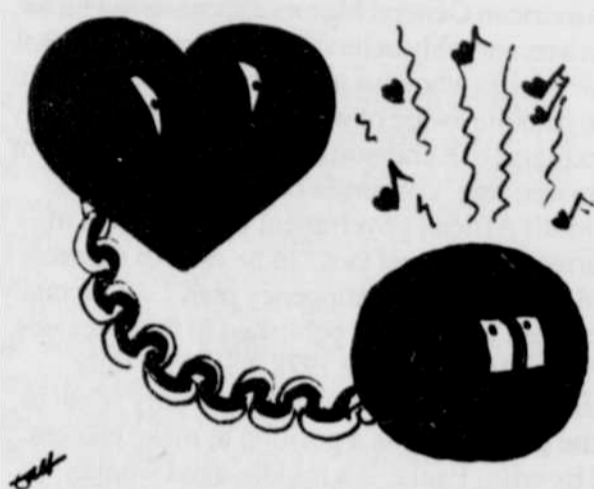
The stand-out cut, "Shame," deserves special mention. In this masterpiece, the Eurythmics contrast the concept of "All you need is love" with the cheap substitutes that mass culture produces. The first stanza conveys this thought to perfection: "Now there's a lifestyle / With painted lips / Now there's a lifestyle / Everybody wants it / But it don't exist / And I said shame."

George Michael, formerly of Wham!, also has chosen this theme for his first solo effort, *Faith*. The title song kicks off the album with the thought that it is better for Michael to wait for his true love than to give his heart away to the first one (man?/woman?) who walks through his door. This theme is followed up by "Father Figure," "I Want Your Sex" (the monogamy mix, of course) and "One more try."

The sound throughout is well produced and slick — with both the good and bad implications that such a term implies. Although the sound is smooth and sure, and Michael's vocals are better than ever, there generally is a lack of soul throughout the recording. We know you mean well, George, but once in a while you need to let us know how much you care. The most success-

ful vocal occurs on "I Want Your Sex," but the rest of the album needs more gut feeling and less precociousness.

More satisfying throughout is Bryan Ferry's latest album, *Bête Noire*. Again, Ferry strives to explore the different facets of love, but with a Caribbean beat. As fans well know, and others should learn, Bryan Ferry has been performing, writing and singing terrific songs for the past two decades. As a founder of Roxy Music, he helped create the "glam-rock" movement of the early '70s that heavily influenced every rock star who has ever worn silk, lace, satin and glitter.



As part of Roxy Music, Ferry had an avalanche of British and European hits in those early days, although only "Love is a Drug" became extraordinarily successful in the U.S. Later, Roxy Music re-formed without Brian Eno and released such albums of smoothness and sophistication as *Flesh and Blood* and *Avalon*. In these later albums Ferry's preoccupation with love and romance as well as his distinctive vocal style made him the quintessential crooner of the rock era.

This trend continued on Ferry's first solo effort in 1985, *Boys and Girls*. The titles of the songs alone convey Ferry's subject: "Sensation," "Slave to Love," "Windswept" and "Don't Stop the Dance." Now Ferry has provided us with a worthy follow-up in which he again reviews the state of modern romance.

Each song on *Bête Noire* focuses on mood and movement. Lyrics do not so much tell a story as paint a narrative picture with broad brush strokes of vivid images. "Limbo," the opening cut, provides a good example of this effort: "Voodoo warning / is calling / down in limbo / moonlight lush life / bears strange fruit / down in limbo."

The music, with its distinctive Latin or Caribbean beat, provides a successful backdrop to the word images cast upon the page and gives the listener a sense of place and time without being heavy-handed or blunt. Ferry also utilizes wonderful backup singers to further enhance the mood. Sometimes this results in Ferry's voice becoming buried in the overall mix, but the result is so soulful that there is no reason to complain.

On an album as strong as this, it seems unfair to pick out any particular songs, but "Day for Night" and "The Name of the Game" stand out from among the crowd. It is this latter song that summarizes what all these artists are trying to say: "When you know the name of the game / you can never play enough / And the way you love is the same / you can never give enough."

In an era where love seems more elusive and difficult than ever, these records demonstrate a faith that love is worth the effort, though our attempts may not always be successful. If Ferry, Michael and the Eurythmics find the road rough, should we find it any easier? Although these records may not provide answers, at least we can discover that everyone appears to be asking the same questions. That realization alone may be just what we need to see us through St. Valentine's Day.

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