

Focus on intensity

Dr. Tantalus and Nurse Consuelo bop through the past, present and future

BY DR. TANTALUS

A lavender colored disk is the perfect setting for Dusty Springfield's new single, "In Private," produced by those ubiquitous Pet Shop Boys. Now if only Dusty would confess that she has been walking on the wild side all these years.

Music

Old timers may remember Dusty's seminal album, *Dusty in Memphis*, released the year that Richard Nixon was sworn into his first term as President, 1969. Dim memories of that album's biggest hit, *Son of a Preacher Man*, may obscure a decade of hit making before that time, and a few since. But it wasn't until the Boys pushed her back into the limelight with "What Have I Done to Deserve This?" a couple of dance trends ago that Dusty gained some exposure with anyone under the age of thirty.

Those who choose to go directly to *Memphis* will discover an album of delicate cover versions, including those of a pre-Tapestry Carole King and a then-unknown Randy Newman. Before that album Dusty had been whiter than white, cranking out hit after hit, not a few of which were simple belters. On *Memphis* she got a little soul, some good backup and more vocal restraint. The album's smoldering sensuality is one result of that potent combination.

In Private does not recall those halcyon days for Dusty, but the song is slickly produced, pretty, and easy to listen to. It conjures up memories of a time when Dusty was more than a timepiece to be taken off the mantle and dusted off every now and again.

Less delicate but containing that same old fashioned intensity is *Hup*, performed by the group that the Doctor has not heard anyone talking about, The Wonder Stuff.

Hup thrashes and bashes its way through a variety of pop styles: Beatles-esque background voices, straight-ahead pop, country FM, and serious rockers all compete for attention while dense lyrics provide an uncertain and kaleidoscopic view of rugged emotional landscape.

Examples of The Wonder Stuff's lay-it-on-the-line style include *Radio Ass Kiss*, which bites the hand that feeds the band when it deplores the cost of having their music played by local DJs. Then, *Big Oak Trees* screams at life's balance of power deficit (*Me, acorn man! Them, big oak trees*); *Cartoon Boyfriend* asks the essential question of an abusive lover: "When you gonna rub yourself out?"

It's not a walk in the park for The Wonder Stuff on *Hup* and that's precisely the reason that this album grabs your attention and holds it for longer than you might imagine.

On the other side of the artistic universe, projecting its own intensity, is Oregon Ballet Theatre. (If they spell it "re" rather than "er" it probably justifies a few extra dollars at the box office.) January 26 and 27 saw the kickoff of OBT's six week tour with an encore presentation of past favorites, including "In

the Presence of Things Past," OBT's collaboration with Portland Gay Men's Chorus.

In many ways the acoustics of Civic Auditorium are more favorable to the Chorus than those of the Intermediate Theater (Note to City Council: Instead of raising taxes, how about changing the spelling of the theater to "re.")

The Chorus sounded rich and full, and not just because Steve Fullmer sounded just as doggone good as ever. (Steve, Nurse Consuelo just adores you. Now go on, get outta here!) In contrast the higher tenor notes, if there were any, were lost by the time they reached Row W.

OBT's production was both forceful and first-rate throughout the evening. "Rhapsody in Blue" featured two grand pianos playing Gershwin against a starry blue backdrop. (Shades of the L. A. Olympics opening ceremony!) "Crayola" demonstrated choreographer Dennis Spaight's playful yet precise style in the evenings' most original performance by foregoing music altogether. "Lark Ascending" used the music of Ralph Vaughn Williams to create a sensuous piece which culminated when the lark floated on top of the hands of her fellow dancers, the light focusing in such a way as to make her appear airborne.

Hip-Hop of a different variety is the subject of *Hip-Hop Heritage Vol. I*, a roots of rap record recently released. With lots to please/its just a start and just a tease/it takes you back to where it began/there's something here for every fan. But fortunately, the rhymes on *Hip-Hop Heritage* are much better than that, from Spoonie Gee to Whodini to Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five. Recorded around the beginning of the 80s these tunes are a good tribute to pop music's freshest format.

Intensity is also the key to success for Janet Jackson's *Rhythm Nation*, but since this album has sold more than 5 million copies you probably know that by now. Let's face it: Janet's voice is in the same league with Paula Abdul's when it comes to talent, and her dancing, while good, cannot compare to that of the former L. A. Laker girl. And the inevitable comparison with brother Michael doesn't serve her well either. (Janet's appearance on the American Music Awards was lip-synched for days. Michael's past appearances have been live, particularly a riveting performance of "Man in the Mirror.")

However, by concentrating on rhythm instead Janet has avoided her weaknesses and focused on her strengths. That's why the plethora of dance mixes coming from this album are the songs worth owning. From the group currently available ("Miss You Much," "Escapade" and "Rhythm Nation") the Doctor recommends the House Nation Mix as the best of the lot.

With all this focus on intensity this month the Doctor can hardly ignore the upcoming PGMC choral concert with Diane Schuur. Given Schuur's past performances, both live and recorded, this ought to be the season's highlight performance. See you there.

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