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

It's a new year, a new movie and another new recording from America's favorite chanteuse, the irrepressible Madonna. Using her appearance in Warren Beatty's new film, *Dick Tracy*, to launch a sonic assault on the nation's collective inner ear, Madonna has gambled that her devoted fans will buy her latest release despite an abrupt change of style.

Those fans who hanker to hear this Marilyn look-a-like sing dance music should be forewarned about this change of pace before buying *I'm Breathless*. Don't hold



• Music

your breath. Only the popular single "Vogue" invokes the memory of Madonna's past work in style, rhythm and content. The remaining tunes, including three by musical stage songmeister Stephen Sondheim, tip their hat to a more mainstream and serious musical tradition.

Far be it from Dr. Tantalus to give this recording the American kiss of death by calling it "art." But it is true that Madonna is attempting to expand her musical repertoire by seeking out songs of more substance than she typically approaches. Unfortunately, her thin voice does not always live up to the quality of the songs she has chosen to sing.

Madonna has hedged her bets in releasing this new material upon unsuspecting fans in several ways. First, she included an obvious dance song, "Vogue," with this material although it is not consistent with the other songs on the album. Obviously, it was necessary to ensure that at least one hit would attract buyers. Second, this stylistic departure coincides with the release of an album affiliated with a movie that is expected to be one of the summer's blockbusters, thus attempting to enhance sales through this felicitous association.

Despite these obvious concessions to commercial considerations, *I'm Breathless* deserves some credit, too. As a capitalist who is aware of the market for her product, Madonna has taken the first major artistic and commercial risk of her career which might actually diminish sales. There are some tunes on *I'm Breathless* that are enjoyable and fun, particularly those written by the star and her frequent co-writer, Patrick Leonard, such as "He's a Man," "Hanky Panky" and "Cry Baby."

Worth particular mention is "Hanky Panky," which has received the most press attention because of the reference to spanking, which the song promotes as a healthy lark, romp and whomp. Perhaps Dr. Tantalus has become a little jaded, but (yawn) this really isn't very titillating unless you have been asleep for the past fifteen years. Regardless of this shocked attitude that some are feigning, the song is bouncy, fun and provides a perfect vehicle for the display of attitude with which Madonna excels.

The other interesting aspect of this song is the way in which some writers have teasingly implied that Madonna's song is a reflection of her personal preferences. When mystery writers concoct tales of death and adventure no one assumes that their private lives reflect their writing. Yet let a pop star utter a word that is even slightly risqué and the world assumes that her own life is in the line.

Back in Portland, Nurse Consuelo and Dr. Tantalus were treated to a fine performance by Sinead O'Connor at the Schnitzer Concert

Hall on June 7. Appearing in a stark black outfit, O'Connor performed many of the songs found on her latest release *I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got*, as well as several songs from her prior recording, *The Lion and the Cobra*. All told the concert was a short 70 minutes, which is a minimal amount of time for the high ticket prices (\$20) currently being charged for even the nose-bleed seats in the upper balcony.

Perhaps more astounding than O'Connor's performance was the audience response to her presence. Every raised arm, leg or note brought shrieks, howls and screams from the mostly teenage crowd that acted like it was seeing the Beatles reunited. Even such a simple matter as a change in musical dynamics caused outbursts from the highly-charged audience. Encouraged, rowdies managed to pepper even soft songs with shouts. One gentleman (and we use the term loosely) even begged Sinead to allow him to have her baby.

Such is the price of fame these days, although O'Connor handled these distractions with professionalism and aplomb. Her songs combined moments of intense anguish with ones of complete intimacy and vulnerability. Never was this more evident than during the evening's highlight, "The Last Day of our Acquaintance," which was dedicated to the ladies in the concert hall. Beginning at almost a whisper, she began to describe the ending of a relationship. As the song progressed she began to increase the intensity until the band joined her and she began to spit out the lyrics. It was a riveting performance and showcased all of her many talents.

The contrast between Madonna and O'Connor is something to consider given their divergent strategies—Joni Mitchell referred to it as the "star-maker machinery." O'Connor's efforts all come from her own life and experiences. She lays out her ragged emotions with each piece she performs. Madonna's approach is more thoughtful, in the sense that it is planned in advance, the way emotions can never be.

Because she does not write her own songs (although she may contribute the lyrics) Madonna is always dependent on others for her musical ride. After nearly ten years of massive success, Madonna searches for new vehicles to carry her stardom. In the meantime, O'Connor is content to let her own life provide the background for her songs.

We shall hear more from both of these performers. Whether Madonna continues in her arty style will depend, no doubt, on how well this album succeeds commercially. We're betting that next year she'll be back to dance music. O'Connor's quirky success is something that seems sustainable now, but how many times have rock and rollers been only as good as their most recent recording? If the market's taste changes, the way it did abruptly in the seventies for the first flock of singer-songwriters, then what is the path to success? The audience, as usual, will let us know.