

To be or not to be

Exploring "correctness" in the music industry

BY DR. TANTALUS

To be or not to be PC (politically correct)? Now that's the question. While the answer won't be found in this month's column it might still be profitable to explore this issue.

No matter how you slice it, Dr. Tantalus often ends up being politically incorrect. Whether it's criticizing some of Portland's most cherished gay musical institutions or trashing readers' favorite artists, it's unlikely that Dr. T. will be on the "right" side of every issue. However, this month's selection of artists and albums makes one wonder what PC means these days, anyway.

Music

Take Michelle Shocked (please!). Now here's a nice folk-type singer who croons about justice and injustice and who appears to be on the, ahem, correct side of some of life's most important issues. Dr. Tantalus hoped to be able to review her recent performance in Washington Park, but inquiries as to the availability of

"comp" tickets—free passes typically provided to publications to ensure reviews—were rejected. *Just Out* was informed that only a limited number of such passes were available and none were reserved for its use.

Given the review of her performance the following day in the *Oregonian* it's likely that such passes were available to that venerable journal that so routinely supports the type of issues that Shocked espouses. (Newcomers to town may read in heavy sarcasm here.) Too bad Michelle doesn't have enough tickets to go toward alternative publications. It's not that there were not enough seats available—a reported crowd of 800 attended at the same venue where 1,400 saw Gladys Knight two nights later.

It seems churlish to complain about not receiving free passes when the general public cannot obtain them. No doubt it's politically incorrect to do so. But you know, so is providing tickets to publications that don't give a damn about your causes.

Holly Near is another performer who has spent a good portion of her career advocating a variety of liberal causes, such as human rights in El Salvador, opposition to the oppression of AIDS victims and support of a woman's rights to choose. She was named one of the women of the year 1985 by *Ms. Magazine*. As far back as 1971 Ms. Near accompanied Donald Sutherland and Jane Fonda in a show for GLS

opposing the war in Viet Nam.

Hard to believe that this long-time activist also has a slew of acting credits on her resume, including appearances on such television shows as "The Mod Squad," "Partridge Family," "Room 222," and "All in the Family." Given her loyal following, Dr. Tantalus is certain that her many fans will enjoy her latest release, "Singer in the Storm." Recorded live, Near returned to the studio to add backing vocals, additional rhythm and harmony to produce a sound that has the best of both live and studio settings.

Having said all that, the album doesn't seem particularly compelling, despite being filled with politically correct songs. "Singing for our Lives" is a nice gay anthem, but hardly compelling. Perhaps the overwhelming earnestness of the album is a turn-off. Whatever. If you like Holly Near—you'll like this album. It would be Oh! so politically correct for Dr. Tantalus to like it, too, but it's just not in the cards.

Unlike Holly Near and unlike Michelle Shocked, Prince is about as politically incorrect as you get (excepting Rudolf Hess, Dan Quayle and perhaps Howard the Duck). His Royal Badness often seems confused—and that's being kind—about relationships and just how he's supposed to treat his mate. Women are sometimes portrayed as—gasp—sexual objects (this is news?) while Prince reserves the majority of sexual strutting to himself. His Majestic Lewdness probably doesn't know who won the last election and probably doesn't care.

Nevertheless, Prince's latest recording effort is a gem. *Graffiti Bridge*, the soundtrack to the

movie of the same name, is chock full of great rock, funk and soul. Whether or not the movie is terrific is irrelevant and besides, that is for some other columnist to worry about, providing it is politically correct to do so.

Standouts on the new release include "New Power Generation," (whose primary interests are "making love and music"), "Round and Round," and the new single, "Thieves in the Temple." The Time has re-formed for this movie as well and *Graffiti Bridge* shows that Morris Day, Jimmy Jam Terry Lewis and the others are back in fine form with the funky-up "Release It" and the sixties sounding "Shake!" Prince also manages to include such superstar guest artists as George Clinton and Mavis Staples, who burns up the place with the hot-sounding "Melody Cool."

So give Prince a zero for his thoughts, but plunk down your bucks for the new record, because you'll be hearing it a lot.

For those who insist on pure thoughts with their music The Flirtations are an obvious choice. This a cappella group is comprised of five gay gentlemen, including Michael Callen, who adds his super falsetto to the sound, and contributes his boyfriend, Richard Dworkin, as producer. Their blend is terrific, their humor contagious and their gender bending first-class. Album highlights include their theme, "The Flirt Song," "Housework" (in which they search for a practical boyfriend), and "Everything Possible." It would be nice to get these guys to perform in Rose City, so keep your fingers crossed.



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