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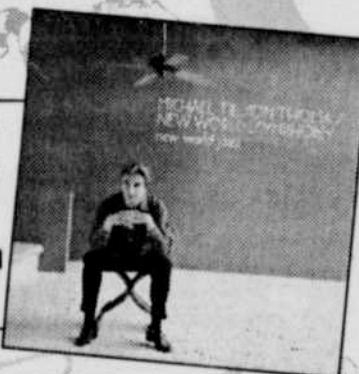
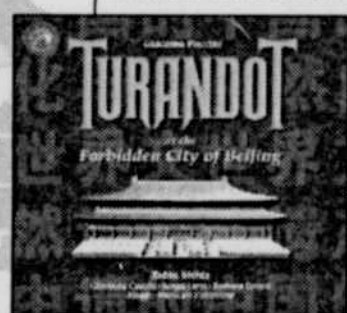
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MUSIC

A TRIBUTE TO LADY DAY
Lenanne Sylvester • Crown Point Productions

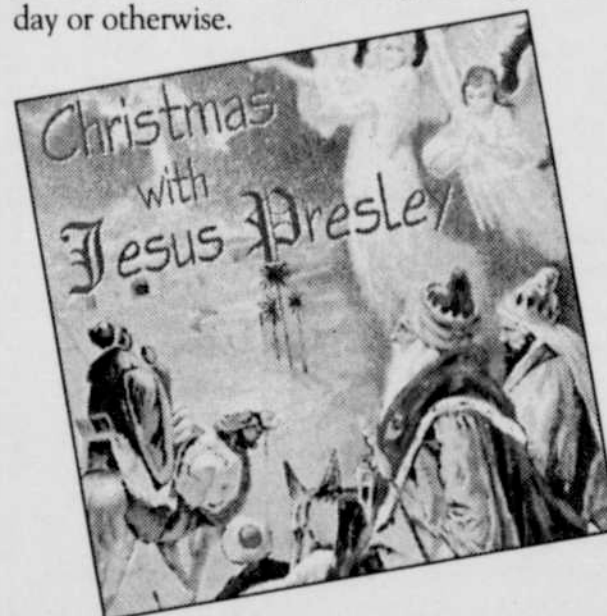
What better way to spend the holidays than with the Lady herself? Native Portlander Lenanne Sylvester rejuvenates 15 of Billie Holiday's classic grooves with charisma and an enticing vocal presence. She does not seek to emulate the legend or outdo her contemporary and Billie sound-alike Erykah Badu,

but rather clears the stage and lets her own voice ring true.

And what a voice it is, floating like water on "Fine and Mellow," long-ing wistfully on

"Solitude." Working with bassist Joe Seifers, drummer Carlton Jackson, Grammy-nominee Janice Scroggins on piano, and an impressive horn section, Sylvester produced a wonderfully cohesive, jazzy album.

However, it is Sylvester's voice, characterized by her apparent sincerity and earnestness, that holds this compilation together. Even standards such as "All of Me" and "God Bless the Child" sound brand new. This jubilant album is worthy of any social gathering, holiday or otherwise.

CHRISTMAS WITH JESUS PRESLEY
Jesus Presley • JPX Records

A name like Jesus Presley inspires endless sacrilegious opportunities and polyester fantasies, creating a potential forum for this Portland-based band to mock the consumerism and fakeness that define the so-called Christian holiday. Christmas with Jesus Presley, however, practically begins with a sermon and offers more or less traditional renditions of 13 Christmas favorites, now on heavy muzak rotation at your local department store.

Standouts include several jazzy instrumentals, a fun version of "God Rest Ye Swingin' Gentlemen," and "Gloria" embellished with Van Morrison's classic riff from his 1960s tune of the same name. Otherwise, I could hear the same thing on Perry Como's holiday albums. Only "O Come All Ye Faithful" dangles close to cynicism, with vocals sounding like they were recorded from a car dealership's paging system.

I quote Chuck D when he rapped: "Elvis was a hero to some but he don't mean shit to me." Same goes for this Presley. How's that for sacrilege?

HUMMING

Duncan Sheik • Atlantic Records

See Duncan pose in *Vogue*. See Duncan model Gucci in *Details*. See Duncan plug his album on *Beverly Hills 90210*. Ah, the lengths a modern pop star will go to sell out.

The question

remains:

What about the music?

The string arrangements on *Humming* are commendable, but nothing on Sheik's sophomore

release is as catchy as his 1996 *Billboard* hit "Barely Breathing." Blondie would've ripped this guy to shreds, he's so dull, with lyrics like "It's gonna sound like I'm agreeing / With the most ultra-boring ideas / Of pop psychological western gurus / Who haven't gotten lucky in years."

With all the media aggrandizing of Mr. Sheik, the album could have been titled *Hummer*. Bottom line: Don't believe the hype unless you like albums so monotonous they induce sleep.

BELIEVE

Cher • Warner Bros. Records

Cher, the 50-something Über-diva, returns with a dance album full of feel-good rhythms and lovelorn lyrics, with just enough variety to keep one listening. Whether backed up by gospel singers on "The Power," singing in French on the Spanish-influenced "Dove L'Amore," or alternating with a computerized voice on "Believe," she packs a strong vocal punch.

She even waxed nostalgic and dusted off her '80s megahit "We All Sleep Alone," layering it with disco tracks à la the remix of Madonna's "Don't Cry for Me Argentina." But for all her lamenting, Cher comes across as somewhat unbelievable, singing lines like, "I've been standing out in the rain / I've been calling your name."

Not having written any of the songs herself, she might have at least found a more creative lyricist. But divas will be divas, and where Cher appears, as on this album, there's an element of intrigue and a dash of frivolity to be found. Chastity should be proud.

