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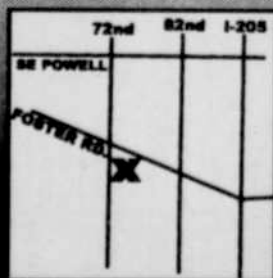
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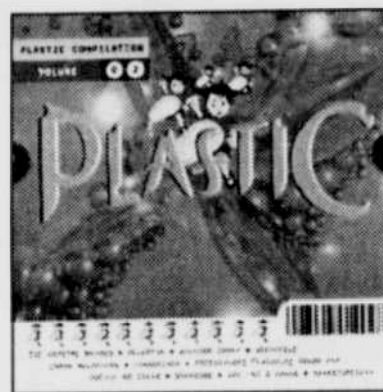
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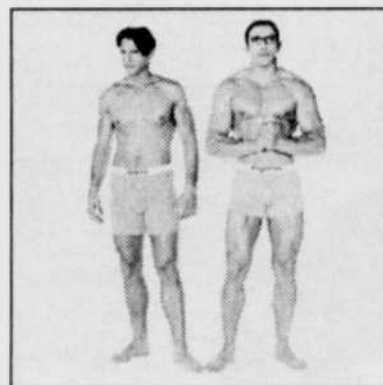
PLASTIC COMPILATION, VOL. 2
Various artists • Nettwerk Productions

Welcome to 1999, time for some new spins. The second gathering of *Plastic* innovators—brain-baby of George Maniatis—features some of the biggest names in electronic music, as well as up-and-comers.

Vol. 2 improves on the first compilation released in 1997, which included Meat Beat Manifesto, Underworld and Garbage, by bringing listeners 11 fresh remixes by the likes of Crystal Method, William Orbit and Autour de Lucie.

The Chemical Brothers arrive to remix Spiritualized's "I Think I'm in Love"; Beth Orton's vocals add an ethereal dimension to Orbit's "Water from a Vine Leaf"; and Sarah MacLachlan shows up twice: on Delirium's "Silence" (which she also co-wrote) and on her own "Sweet Surrender." Wildchild's "Renegade Master" and Cornershop's "Brimful of Asha"—both chart-toppers—add a funky vibe.

This sophomore collection feels more like liquid than plastic, with remixes straight from angels with dirty faces. (OK, there's no Tricky, but they've got Spooky.) Make a resolution to expand your mind. Go now. Get hypnotized.



PLAGIARISM
Sparks • Oglia Records

This greatest hits-like collection is the Sparks' 18th (yes, that's 10 plus eight) album, the product of more than 25 years together making music you've probably never heard. They can be described as an Erasure-Queen hybrid with healthy doses of classical training and burlesque insanity. Although they nearly bypassed the mainstream, this dynamic duo remains true to their avant-garde calling.

Sparks is comprised of brothers Ron and Russell Mael, a Mutt-and-Jeff pair sporting falsettos, who defy easy classification or stereotype.

Of the 19 tracks, the few duets with other groups—Erasure and Faith No More—are the strongest. Erasure's Andy Bell breathes new life into "Amateur Hour," while the late, great FNM join the musical chaos of "This Town Ain't Big Enough for Both of Us" and "Something for the Girl with Everything." I admit, were I not a fan of both Erasure and FNM, the album as a whole would seem far duller.

The two Sparks creations I found most pleasing were "Beat the Clock" and "When Do I Get to Sing 'My Way'"—both soaring,

upbeat numbers. If you have a taste for the outrageous, Sparks may be the best band you've never heard of.

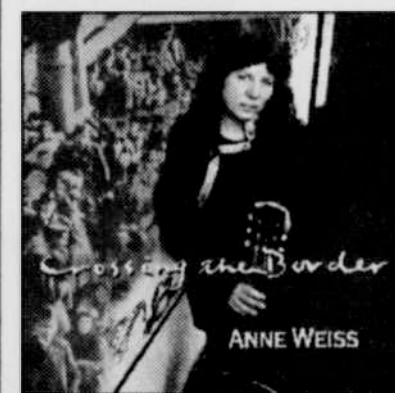


BIG, BIG WORLD
Emilia • Rodeo Records

Emilia blasts back to the recent past with her debut, *Big, Big World*—a mid-'80s-style bunch of shallow, tarty pop songs that make Mariah \$\$\$Carey\$\$\$ sound like P.J. Harvey. This 20-year-old Swedish sensation scored an international hit with the title track and is being touted as the next big Euro-thing. Just a coincidence: All the songs were co-written (under the pseudonym Yogi) by Lars Anderson, who boasts ABBA-member parentage.

But a famous connection does not a good record make. Not even a decent one. This yawn-fest showcases Emilia's limited range, both vocally and emotionally. Emilia harnesses the tonal frailty of Janet Jackson and the naiveté of Debbie Gibson to deliver substanceless, formulaic pop tunes à la Ace of Base. Her world consists of boyfriends, balloons and butterflies. I am thankful for one thing—it's brief. Just 40 minutes of drivel and puppy love babble.

Perhaps realizing the lack of depth contained within this effort, Emilia threw two remixes on the tail end that are slightly jazzy and less structured. Nevertheless, the overall sound is boring. For someone who claims to be a "big, big girl," Emilia sounds more like a sheltered child.



CROSSING THE BORDER
Anne Weiss • Likapika Music/ASCAP

Folk music, like alcohol, can have lethal consequences when too much is ingested. In this instance, I've had too much of the ramblings of Anne Weiss, who, in her own right, is a talented musician. But I have no patience for lilting sweetness.

Granted, Portlander Weiss creates a full-length lullaby with her warm, soft—albeit bleak—vocals and gentle melodies. This is sit-by-the-window-on-a-rainy-day music, reflective of its melancholy, socially conscious storyteller.

For example, on "Mountain," Weiss refers to the trouble in South Africa, and she dedicates this, her second album, to Ngawang Choephel, a teacher, performance artist and video documentarian who is serving 18 years in a Chinese prison for making a film of traditional Tibetan music and dance.

For information regarding Tibetan prisoners of conscience, contact the International Campaign for Tibet at (202) 785-1515; www.savetibet.org; or Amnesty International, 322 Eighth Ave., New York, NY 10001.