

MUSIC

STRANGER THAN FICTION
Ultra Naté • Strictly Rhythm Records

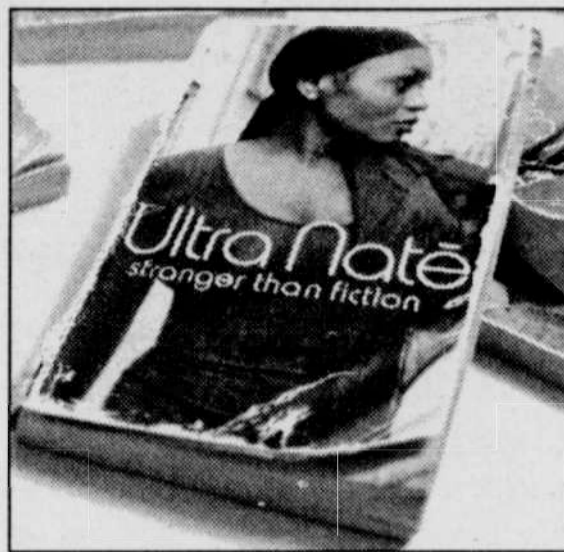
I love this album. I can't remember the last time a new disc has entered my CD player and stayed there for days, but *Stranger Than Fiction* is the rare exception.

My only previous encounter with Ultra Naté came when she pumped new life into Gordon Lightfoot's dreary "If You Could Read My Mind" along with Amber and Jocelyn Enriquez for the 1998 dud 54. Little did I know what I was in store for.

This Baltimore singer/songwriter effortlessly fuses dance grooves with alternative pop with acoustic soul. Although much of the credit has to go to the all-star roster of producers (Robert Clivilles of C+C Music Factory and N'dea Davenport of the Brand New Heavies are among them) and guest stars (Lenny Kravitz plays guitar and provides backing vocals on one track) lined up here, Naté's talent can't be denied.

Her monotonous delivery gives "I Don't Understand It" a Crystal Waters vibe. But on the next track, "Gone Like Yesterday," her voice is digitally warped, similar to the technique recently used on Cher's "Believe" and Madonna's "Nobody's Perfect."

"Get It Up (The Feeling)," which samples the Isley Brothers' "Tell Me When You Need It Again," is a rousing women's anthem. The standout track is "Desire," an infectious celebration of female fantasy.



Boogie nights

Dance divas deliver multiple floorgasms

BY JIM RADOSTA

Naté even attacks a raunchy sex song like "Breakfast for Two" with wild abandon, infusing it with G-rated joy and energy. Never before have lines like "Tonight there'll be no goodnight kisses as my front door" and "We'll be doing it till the sun comes up" seemed so innocent.

Stranger Than Fiction has its darker moments, too, but they're disguised behind bouncy rhythms and catchy beats. "Pretender" follows the aftermath of a heartbreaking relationship: "I'm dying inside, but no one will ever know, I'm wearing the saddest smile."

This is the magic tragic combination that future divas are made of. Ladies, you've been warned.

ESSENTIAL MIX
Boy George • London-Sire Records

No, this isn't yet another Culture Club greatest hits set. Obviously, you haven't been keeping up with your *Where Are They Now?* homework.

Boy George, who has become one of dance music's most respected producers and DJs, put together this nonstop 17-song mix of today's

hottest world beats. He sings on only one track, "See You Through" by Cultural Diversions.

Ever the trendsetter, he hopes to introduce the United States to what he calls "the sexiest sound around," two-step. "It's basically R & B with a bit of ragga," he says.

But is any of that infamous Boy George wit and wisdom on display here? Somewhat.

Even as a DJ, he presents a clever sequence of tunes. For example, Dark Globe's "Some Say She's Retro" follows Lee Combs' "Future Sound of Retro," and Bassdubs' "Volume 1" is positioned right before Oscar Goldman's "Thrust 2."

The remaining tracks will energize both discotheques (Kinky Roland's "Born Funky") and raves (Vzions' "Everybody Jump"). George even includes a remake—Boogie Macs' "Girl from Ipanema"—that manages to bring fresh air to a stale relic.

SOLACE
Mandalay • V2 Records

I first heard this London-based duo last year during *The Next Best Thing*, an awful movie with an awesome soundtrack. Their contribution to that collection, "This Life," also is included on this new release, which features selections from the U.K. albums *Empathy* and *Instinct*.

Mandalay—named after the stately home in



Rebecca—takes atmospheric trip-hop music to a new level. They're not as edgy and angry as the Sneaker Pimps, but they're not as dull and depressing as Dido.

Nicola Hitchcock's quivery voice is reminiscent of both Björk and Portishead's Beth Gibbons. When combined with the musical mastery of multi-instrumentalist Saul Freeman, the result is both mellow and haunting.

For those who prefer more "hop" in their trip-hop, a limited edition version of *Solace* also contains a bonus remix CD. Don't miss Victor Calderone's epic 11-minute version of "Beautiful."


WIGSTOCK: THE LEGENDARY COMPILATION OF THE LEGENDARY EVENT
Various Artists • Nervous Records

DJ Steve Travolta is the man behind the turntables on this collection of house artists who have performed at the Wigstock festival throughout its 17-year history. Perfect for us poor folks who can't afford a trip to New York City for the annual drag soiree.

Any compilation featuring CeCe Peniston ("Nobody Else") and Crystal Waters ("100% Pure Love") definitely has got the right idea. Other highlights include "Beautiful People" by Barbara Tucker and "Flawless" by The Ones Starring Jojo Americo, Nashom and Paul E. Alexander.


Unfortunately, *Wigstock* ventures into dangerous territory by including updates of dance classics that simply never should be touched: Taana Gardner covers Seduction's "Heartbeat," and Byron Stingily covers Sylvester's "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)." In each case, the strength of the original renders the inferior remake unnecessary. **J**

So he pulled out my "Jim Beam" and to his surprise, it was every bit as hard as his "Canadian Club."



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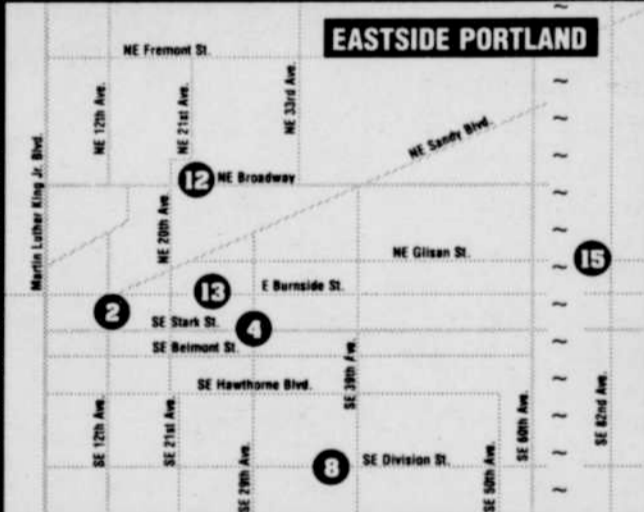

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