

MUSIC



**ETERNALLY HARD**  
Bitch and Animal • Righteous Babe Records

Some art is, well, let's just say it...bad. People have been up in arms about the distinction between "good" art and "bad" art since the beginning of civilization, saying quality is merely relative. ("Some people like bad art!" they say.) One critic has no place telling the public what is good and what is bad.

Well, I'm here to tell you: This just happens to be my place. My astronomically minuscule place in the universe, my tiny bulletin board of personal opinion. And in this tiny place, I regretfully tell you: People, quality is not relative. Some art is bad for a reason.

Bitch and Animal, a seemingly radical duo, create music that is hard to listen to without cringing. Now, ironically, this is the kind of group that generally would take that as a compliment. However, I don't cringe at what they perceive to be their totally unprecedented raunchiness (Omgod the first song on the album is called "Best Cock on the Block"! Unprecedented!) or their wannabe blunt names ("Bitch"? Please! Meredith Brooks already reclaimed that one) or their white-girl rapping style or their drug references (see "Ganja").

What really hits my inner-cringe core is the utter lack of artistic subtlety in their lyrics and music. If they lay it all out on the table for us, do we really want to question what's underneath? For example, on "Boy Girl

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# Bitching and bluffing

Eternally Hard eternally annoying; Dougher fierce and sensitive; Black needs voice lessons

Wonder" the duo sing, "Why is it so lonely/in between boy and a girl/they're so glued down in this world/and what it means" and on the chorus, "I'm trans-all-of-that-gender/I'm a bender."

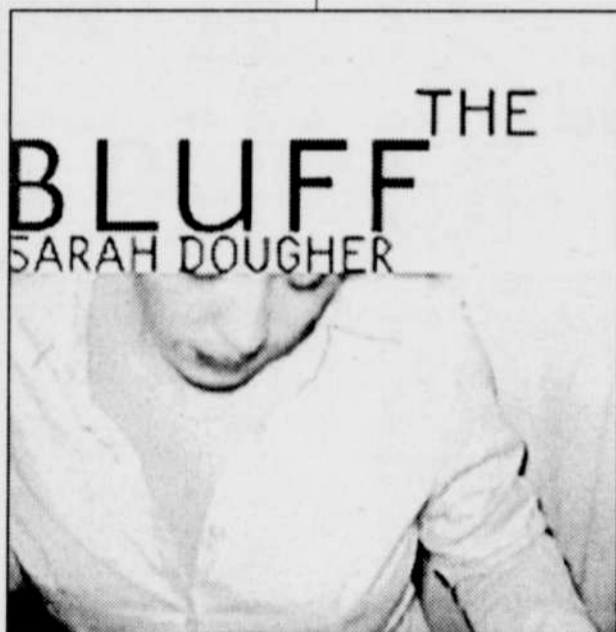
What if Melissa Etheridge referred to herself as a lesbian in the chorus of her songs à la "Come to my window/I'm a les-all-of-that-bian"? We would tire of the blatancy, we'd beg for the poetry. In my humble opinion, it's much hotter for k.d. lang to be a lesbian singing country songs than a country singer singing about being a lesbian.

Besides all that, Bitch and Animal's second CD sounds like the score to a bad '70s movie. Oh yeah, and their fashion reminds of the movie *Mystery Men* (not a good thing). Oh yeah, and....

Did anyone mention something about the artistic subtlety of writing music reviews?

—Katy Davidson

**THE BLUFF**  
Sarah Dougher • Mr. Lady Records



Who is the lowly reporter/musician who's asked to review the new album of a musical peer!

Just one month ago, I found myself in a GMC Safari minivan, scuttling down the coast of California with Sarah Dougher and her bandmate Jon Nikki, on our way to a joint gig in Santa Barbara. She was doing a short tour in support of *The Bluff*; I was along for the ride and the prospect of a good show.

Usually if a fellow musician asks my opinion of her album, I'm happy to give honest feedback, padded with a little mandatory reassurance that "it's good!" and "I really like it!" When asked to review for publication, however, I'm faced with the new challenge of presenting a moderately unbiased, accurate representation of the recording (see *Bitch and Animal* above).

At times I wish I were a robot.

Fortunately, the truth is, *The Bluff* is good! And I really like it!

The album—like her last record, *The Walls Ablaze*—is jangly, melodic, lyrically interesting, well recorded, fierce and sensitive. "Must Believe" is a skiffle-style ditty, "Wide Eyed" is jumpy and melodically infectious, the title track features a beautiful meandering guitar line. "My Kingdom" was recorded using an acoustic guitar instead of her usual electric, and it adds a welcome diversity of sound to the record, as do the drum machine beats on "System Works."

Lyricaly, Dougher writes primarily about relationships: confusing relationships, struggling relationships, overcoming heartache. (One woman in the audience at her Santa Barbara show said that her friend just was getting over a relationship and that *The Bluff* was helping her cope.)

Even if I were a robot, spitting out sterile album reviews, I hardly could overlook that Dougher's sound is constantly improving. With each new album, a catchier melody, a new instrument added, a more poignant lyric.

—KD

**REMEMBERED FACES/PRIVATE PLACES**  
Ben Black • Origin Records

The kind of jazz singers who grab me are ones who really own the music they perform—Patricia Barber and Dianne Reeves come to mind.

Maybe Seattleite Ben Black's voice is an acquired taste, but for my ears, it's just too high and thin—nasal at times, hoarse at others. He sounds best on quiet ballads when the lack of power in his voice is less evident. The first cut, a Sondheim tune called "I Remember," fits that groove well.

Black is gay, and many of the album's



songs can be interpreted with a homo spin. He has a talent for creating medleys that convey an updated message, such as in "Younger Than Springtime" from *South Pacific*: "Gayer than laughter are you/sweeter than music are you" and then "Gayer than laughter am I/angel and lover/heaven and earth am I with you."

It also includes "Dites-Moi" with the almost poignant interpretation of the line "Dites moi pourquoi la vie est gaie" (Tell me why life is gay). This set is rounded out with "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught," originally written about racism, but in this context, the meaning can be extended to a request for tolerance of all people.

The backup musicians on *Remembered Faces* are excellent and provide most of the jazz flavor. Although many of the songs are foreign and obscure, it often feels more like a set of standards.

The album is well mixed enough so the stronger musicians don't overwhelm Black's delicate voice. For a so-called jazz disc, however, the players are given precious few chances to solo, perhaps to emphasize Black's only role of singer.

Black sounds better on some of the foreign tunes, and when he harmonizes with himself, as he does on the haunting "Chinar Es," it bulks up his voice nicely.

My hunch is he comes off better live; his striking good looks and intense gaze might enhance his repertoire, especially the torchy love songs. If you find yourself in Seattle, keep a lookout for him.

—Oriana Green

KATY DAVIDSON is a writer, musician, dreamer and bicyclist who splits her time between Portland and San Francisco.

ORIANA GREEN is a really picky Portland writer.

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