

MUSIC

Right on (sound)track

Background noise takes center stage

BY JIM RADOSTA

KISSING JESSICA STEIN
Various Artists • Verve/Combustion

Sure, this soundtrack is several months old, but the one-year anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks makes it more timely than ever. Like most New York-based romantic comedies (*Annie Hall* and *Serendipity* come to mind), *Jessica* was not only a love story between two people but an ode to the Big Apple itself.

The soundtrack conveys this message most effectively with Ella Fitzgerald's 1956 song "Manhattan." Its hetero lyrics—"The great big city's a wondrous toy just made for a girl and boy"—might seem inappropriate for a same-sex relationship but actually suit the story's bi-flexible attitude.

The rest of the album is filled with similar vintage nostalgia: Blossom Dearie's "Put on a Happy Face," Billie Holiday's "What a Little Moonlight Can Do" and Ernestine Anderson's "There Will Never Be Another You," to name a few. Some modern recordings sneak in there, too, the best being "Gee Baby, Ain't I Good to You" by Matt Rollings with Lyle Lovett.

EBAN & CHARLEY
Stephin Merritt • Merge

I was looking forward to seeing the Magnetic Fields live during the summer of 2001 at the ill-fated Wotapalava festival—a sort of

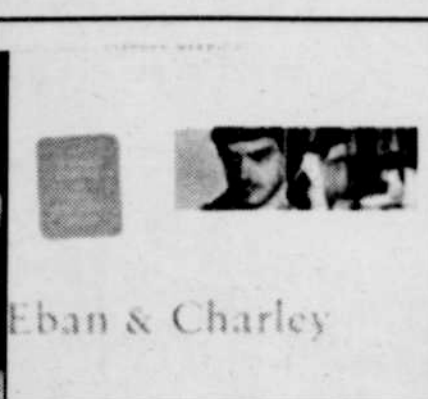
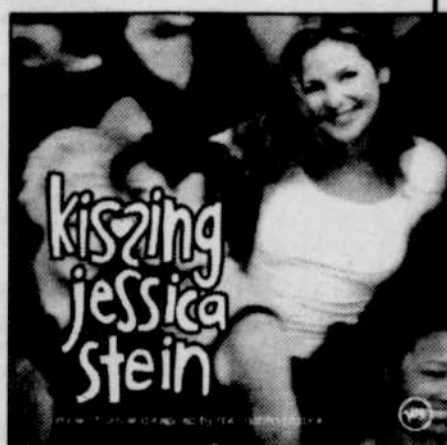
"Lollapalooza for queers" that was canceled after Sinéad O'Connor reconsidered her newfound lesbianism. Alas, it wasn't meant to be.

My only previous experience with the band was a poorly recorded mix tape a friend made for me. Still, their catchy yet droll songs—my favorites were "The Luckiest Guy on the Lower East Side" and "Sweet-Lovin' Man"—quickly grew on me.

On the soundtrack to *Eban & Charley*, an Oregon-based film about a 29-year-old man who falls for a teen-age boy, Magnetic Fields frontman Stephin Merritt flexes his creativity considerably. The gay musician experiments throughout with funky sound effects—zippers zipping, crickets chirping, ball bearings bouncing—to create an innocent, childlike ambience.

The adorable acoustic ditties "This Little Ukulele" and "Tiny Flying Player Pianos" use simple instruments to convey complex emotions. Merritt rounds out the album with somber instrumental versions of the traditional Christmas carols "O Tannenbaum" and "Greensleeves."

Unfortunately, few of the tracks clock in at more than two minutes long, so the album doesn't feel fully realized. It serves as an adequate collection of snippets from a film but misses the mark as a stand-alone album.



STRICTLY BALLROOM
Various Artists • Columbia

Before *Moulin Rouge* and *Romeo + Juliet*, Baz Luhrmann dazzled us with this 1992 comedy about a pair who broke all the rules of ballroom dancing. And, like its follow-ups, the soundtrack—newly remastered with three bonus tracks—is a solid effort on its own merits.

One-hit wonder John Paul Young kicks things off with an updated version of his charming 1978 song "Love Is in the Air." Doris Day continues the good vibes with "Perhaps Perhaps Perhaps (Quizas Quizas Quizas)."

The bulk of the album is devoted to a festive score by Oscar-nominated composer David Hirschfelder & the Bogo Pogo Orchestra, including an ethereal arrangement of "Tequila/Sinful Samba (Medley)." However, I could've done without the hokey remake of Cyndi Lauper's "Time After Time" by Mark Williams & Tara Morice.

QUEER AS FOLK: THE SECOND SEASON
Various Artists • RCA Victor

The *Queer as Folk* phenomenon seems unstoppable. The sexy Showtime hit, based on the shorter U.K. series, already has

released its second dance music CD and, surprisingly, hasn't run out of steam yet.

Normally I can't stand unnecessary cover versions of far superior classics. (Case in point: that new remake of Bryan Adams' "Heaven" by DJ Sammy & Yanou featuring Do. Then again, the original sucked, too.) But I must give soul legend Etta James credit for her clever take on the Rolling Stones' "Miss You," a smart addition to this compilation.

The standout track is the Chemical Brothers' "Star Guitar (Pete Heller's Expanded Mix)," a dreamy roller coaster ride of rhythm. Other highlights include "Sneaky One" by Satoshi Tomiie featuring Deanna, "Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger (Pete Heller's Stylus Remix)" by Daft Punk and "Caught Up (Guido Osario Vocal Mix)" by DJ Disciple featuring Mia Cox. **JR**

As far as News Editor JIM RADOSTA is concerned, no soundtrack is complete without James Brown's "I Got You (I Feel Good)." He can be reached at jim@justout.com.

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