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Holiday Gift Guide

THE MICHAEL FEINSTEIN ANTHOLOGY
Michael Feinstein • Elektra/Rhino



The Michael Feinstein Anthology is a musical theater queen's wet dream: a two-disc collection of 35 of the noted gay cabaret singer and pianist's favorite and most requested songs, plus eight previously unreleased recordings.

Feinstein sings like he's the secret love child of Johnny Mathis and Rosemary Clooney, the sweetness of his tremulous vibrato balanced with the slyness of intelligent phrasing. The collection offers standards such as "S'wonderful" and "Love Is Here to Stay," novelties like "The Ugly Bug Ball" and "Rhode Island Is Famous for You" as well as obscure gems "I Never Felt Better" (a charming duet with composer Hugh Martin) and "Violin" (a dazzling show-stopper with Liza Minnelli).

Feinstein's enthusiasm for the material shines through; even when he sings a sad song he can't mask his sheer love of singing. The anthology also boasts an informative 50-page booklet in which he reflects on his commitment to this music.

—Marc Acito

LET IT RAIN
Tracy Chapman • Elektra/Asylum



Tracy Chapman's sixth studio album moves the four-time Grammy win-

ner's previous idealistic viewpoints into a more down-to-earth approach. With tracks running the gamut from upbeat and hopeful to sad and almost depressing, she once again proves to be a prolific songwriter.

"You're the One" was selected as the first single release for good reason. It cooks along with beautiful, clever lyrics and rhymes. The eerie and mysterious "In the Dark" follows, mesmerizing the listener directly into "Almost," a song that builds up hope for love and happiness, then brings you back to the prospect that you may never get what you need. "Say Hallelujah" is one of the album's best, with rhythm-pounding bass rooted in gospel blues.

The timbre of Chapman's voice has always been rare and addictive, and on *Let It Rain* she explores new textures of vocal depth, solidly evidenced in the work's last song, "Goodbye." Each and every cut on this album is a special elixir, spirit medicine for the soul.

—Juli Roxx

SEX & MAYHEM: PART ONE
Donald Currie • Self-released



In the tradition of racy camp storytellers like Rae Bourbon and Dwight Fiske comes Donald Currie. *Sex & Mayhem* (available at www.cdbaby.com) is a witty spoken-

word stroll through his coming out in the mid-1960s, subsequent coming-of-age and then just plain coming.

Currie's verbal gymnastics work the raw material of a queer life into vividly exaggerated and often funny stories, punctuated with festive music and sexy groans. He takes us from "the first Big Bang of puberty" through the sultry chaos of San Francisco gay life "chock-a-block with the hubbub of rutting buddies contorting themselves into rococo convolutions" and further into True Love. Along the way he sketches a memorable cast of characters: hunky teachers, drama queens, various "big old fags" and, most captivating, Currie himself.

—Gary Morris

THE KINSEY SICKS: SICKS IN THE CITY
The Kinsey Sicks • Self-released



Tranny a cappella isn't exactly a household term, but the Kinsey Sicks could make it so, at least in more stylish households. This fabulous group known as "America's Favorite Dragapella Beautyshop Quartet" consists of Trixie, Winnie, Rachel and Trampolina. *Sicks in the City* showcases both their sharp satirical sense and considerable harmonizing talents. These queens can sing!

The CD features queer-inflected sendups of classic tunes (being gay, they're sadly "Locked Out of the Chapel of Love") and hilariously dead-on originals ("Cruise People Uglier Than You"). Topics include the evils

of President Bush, the joys of Ikea (to the tune of *West Side Story's* "Maria"), even *The Poseidon Adventure*. The vocalese is so good here that it's possible to appreciate the music alone, but queers and sensible straights will enjoy the lyrical brilliance, too. Live performances of more than half the 18 tunes add to the fun.

—GM

DANCING QUEENS
Various Artists • Medalist



Are the "queens" in the title of this 26-track, two-CD set the singers (Gloria Gaynor, RuPaul, Judy Garland, Boy George) or the fans of diva music—the boyz and girlz gyrating on the dance floor or listening with a tear in the eye on a lonely Saturday night?

No matter. A tasty melange of disco anthems (the inescapable "I Will Survive" and "I Love the Nightlife"), '80s dance tunes ("Karma Chameleon") and nostalgia ("Somewhere Over the Rainbow"), there's something here for queens of all sexes and moods.

There are surprises, too: Lesley Gore's Top 40 dyke manifesto "You Don't Own Me," Eartha Kitt's hyperdramatic "Where Is My Man" (when she says, "I work my fingers to the bone," you can practically see the fingers and the bone) and Cyndi Lauper's still-thrilling riot grl classic "Girls Just Want to Have Fun." So does this CD!

—GM

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