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MUSIC

Who's that girl?

Annie Lennox bares her soul
after 20 years of exposure

BY JIM RADOSTA

first fell for Annie Lennox as a confused preteen in 1983, intrigued by her gender-bending look in the video for Eurythmics' "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)."

Aided by the blasé imported androgyny of Boy George, the Scotswoman forced middle Americans to collectively reach for their heads and do some serious scratching. More than a few minds opened up in the process.

Lennox kept pushing buttons on MTV with her dual roles in "Who's That Girl?": a sultry blond lounge singer and a brooding Elvis look-alike who, through the now-primitive magic of the split screen, kissed each other at the end of the video. Oh, behave!

Then there was "Sisters Are Doin' It for Themselves," Lennox's girl-power anthem performed with Aretha Franklin. And remember the video for "I Need a Man," in which she doubled the drag by dressing like a transvestite?

Although I've been a devoted Annie fanatic for 20 years, I always felt a certain distance from her as a person, primarily because she wisely opted to forego the Tabloid Diva route by revealing little in interviews. All I knew was she had two kids and two ex-husbands, a Krishna named Radha Raman (reportedly the inspiration for "Missionary Man") and *Spice World*

film producer Uri Fruchtmann.

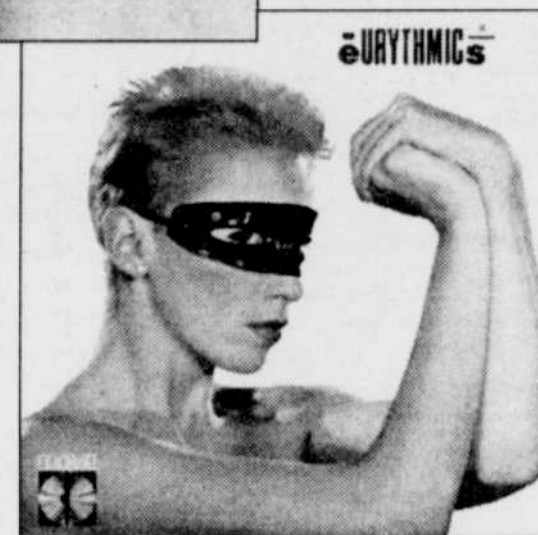
On *Bare*—her third solo album, following 1992's brilliant *Diva* and 1995's disappointing *Medusa*, a covers collection—she finally lets it all hang out. It's the quintessential breakup album, lending a thoughtful voice to universal feelings of despair and depression.

It's also a career pinnacle, filled with show-stopping performances that easily transition from groovy ("Pavement Cracks") to solemn ("The Saddest Song I've Got") to lush ("Honestly," a masterpiece of layered vocals). As an artist and a divorcee, Lennox (still stunning at 48) proves she isn't just surviving, she's thriving.

She wrote every song on the album, sharing intimate insecurities with raw lyrics like these from the contradictory "Wonderful": "Idiot me, stupid fool. How could you be so uncool? To fall in love with someone who doesn't really care for you." Then check out the bouncy "Bitter Pill": "How the hell am I gonna find happiness and peace of mind when I'm losin' all the time. Yea...I'm bitter."



Annie Lennox then and now: Her self-portrait graces the cover of *Bare*, an unmasked reference to 1984's *Touch*



Annie, are you OK?

Fortunately, Lennox keeps *Bare* from sounding like a \$17.99 suicide note by maintaining a hopeful demeanor throughout. She expresses her gratitude for "A Thousand Beautiful Things" and forcefully declares, albeit unconvincingly, her independence on "Erased." **J**

REVIEWS

ACOUSTIC VALENTINE
Catie Curtis • Rykodisc

A brief explanation of music that resonates in your chest is difficult to pen. The genre is folk, pop, alternative. The lyric is sweet, the guitar is solid, the vocal is melodic, and the accompaniment is tight. Lesbian songwriter Catie Curtis sets sail with the new retrospective album *Acoustic Valentine*, featuring her previously unreleased and self-proclaimed gay anthem "Honest World."

After the release of her indie discs *From Years to Hours* and *Truth from Lies*, Curtis was spotted by EMI/Guardian, which rereleased the latter while assembling her namesake album, *Catie Curtis*, which would assist in future endeavors—television exposure on both *Dawson's Creek* and *Chicago Hope*, various radio spots, occasional stops with Lilith Fair.

Transitions in both her label and life circumstances gave birth to the stunning *A Crash Course in Roses*, and after a brief but important tour with Dar Williams, her collaborative nature took the reins with the release and international band-touring of *My Shirt Looks Good on You*.

Curtis' co-producer (and harmony vocalist, guitarist, bouzouki player) on *Acoustic Valentine*, John Jennings, suffered a serious car accident last summer, and this is his first project since then. The pair recorded and mixed the album in five days at his Virginia studio. With a soothing chronology of girl-loves-girl heart, *Acoustic Valentine* is a celebration of Curtis' sound thus far, and as usual, everyone is invited.

—Marie Fleischmann

BLACK CHERRY
Goldfrapp • Mute

The wait since September 2000 is finally over: Goldfrapp's laid-back *Felt Mountain* has got a new, spunkier and lustier sib-

ling, *Black Cherry*. This one takes a sharp turn, away from the eerie, cinematic wonder-scape and into the heart of an illicit, electric city.

Gone is the serenity of the strings and in come the raunchy synths and stern robotic sounds. British artists Alison Goldfrapp and Will Gregory's new road is unequivocally meant to be dirty and provocative, as demonstrated in the CD cover and inside pictures of lesbian pinup girl Alison intertwined and mixed up with wolves and parts thereof. Weird.

This is continued by the tone of lyrics like those in "Twist": "Put your dirty angel face between my legs and knicker lace" and "Strict Machine: 'I'm in love with a strict machine when u send me a pulse feel a wave of new love through me.'"

Yet in the midst of all this ample explicitness, Goldfrapp still manage to maintain their characteristic foggy context and narcotic dream state. A strong undercurrent of sensuous hypnotic beats, whirling sounds and intervals of slower alien rustling, grip tight and have the strength to engulf and carry even the most resistant deep into their decadent world.

The jury's still out on whether either of these two are queer or not, but the music suggests some ample bending—body and soul.

—Els Debbau

MOVEMENT
The Gossip • Kill Rock Stars

The Gossip are on the move. *Mojo*, *Spin* and the rest of the male-dominated glossy alt-rock mags are drooling over Ms. Beth Ditto and her bawdy, blues-injected punk-

rock trio. Salivate on, brothers. The band's third album, *Movement*, is a fat bitch-slap of a record—11 tunes excavated from Big Mama Thornton's grave.

The gay press has loved The Gossip since Day One: an Olympia address, a queer-positive message, a supernova of a lead singer. The kids eat it up, too. Now, every show is a fleshy dance party. Imagine! Every fat chick is the star of her own Super-8 movie.

The only bummer of *Movement*? It muffles the beast unleashed live. The manifesto issued from your speakers is energetically censored, no doubt evidence of the lo-fi ethic (and budget). Listening to *Movement* delivers only part of The Gossip's message.

You can't dance to the first track, "Nite," but you can sure as hell hear Ditto's agony as she sings, "It seems like lonely is a friend of mine." Her kinesthetic delivery turns a bad breakup into a redemptive celebration.

The rest of the album drops like caffeine bombs, one speedy sucker punch to the gut after another. There are more winners than losers: "Jason's Basement" ("I get by with the people I know, get by with the people I know"), "Don't (Make Waves)" ("It's like I got a hole in my pocket"), "All My Days," "No, No, No." Ditto manages to use the personal to propel upward, onto a platform of equality, freedom of expression and gender exploration.

In the same month that *On Our Backs* prints a cover spread of Ditto and her drag-king lover trading blow jobs, alt-rock stalwart *Pitchfork* shouts, "The Gossip Launch Extensive World Tour" from its home page (www.pitchfork-media.com). Take some comfort in knowing that a band like this can affect more people than those who are just like them.

—Cori Taratoot **J**

