

REVIEWS

WANT
Rufus Wainwright • Dreamworks Records

If you haven't taken a chance on Rufus Wainwright yet, I'd say this would be a good time to get busy.



To facilitate your duty, here's the skinny: He's music royalty (the spawn of folk heroes Loudon Wainwright III and Kate McGarrigle), he's a singer/songwriter/pianist, and he's openly gay—better yet, openly fruity. *Want*, which goes on sale Sept. 23, is his third album, following a self-titled 1998 release and 2001's *Poses*. (The debut was filled with smoky torch songs; the follow-up threw some catchy pop hooks into the cauldron.)

These 12 ditties came to Wainwright in "a two-month burst of creativity," according to press materials. So fruitful was his prolificacy, fans will be treated to a second volume of *Want* sometime next year.

Dripping with bizarre imagery and blunt confessions, Wainwright's moody lyrics draw from a PBS-meets-MTV mind capable of making cultural references that are equal parts highbrow (*Poses* contains a song inspired by the cult documentary *Grey Gardens*) and lowbrow (the title track on *Want* manages to name-drop John Lithgow). His words draw instant attention from the opening line: "Men reading fashion magazines...straight men," he observes. "Oh what a world we live in."

What follows is a symphonic carnival of extremes, complete with touching ballads, bouncy Gershwin-esque orchestrations and even a tuba solo. This easily could have led to the type of big-budget bombast that distances the listener from the artist, but, thankfully, the end result here is a more intimate peek at this guy's unique personality. (As "Vicious World" fades out, Wainwright is caught on mike cutely squealing, "Super!")

Some local color enters into the picture on the sedate "11:11." I'm dying to know the story behind these lines: "Woke up this morning at 11:11/Wasn't in Portland and I wasn't in heaven/Could have been either by the way I was feeling."

—Jim Radosta

EVERYONE DESERVES MUSIC
Michael Franti and Spearhead • ARTISTdirect

By staying human, civil rights activist Michael Franti and his band Spearhead drop another well-crafted and delightfully uplifting CD on the masses of thinking, feeling music lovers. *Everyone Deserves Music* is a cornucopia of styles, enlightened lyrics and beautiful melodies by one of the world's most respected and prolific musician/activists, whose songs address topics including AIDS and gay rights.



For this one, the San Francisco-based hip-hopsters build upon a number of musical styles that bubble over and become infectious. The

reggae flavor of "Pray for Grace," one of my personal favorites, gets you in the mood to dance and rejoice in the face of despair. The classic-rock feel of "We Don't Stop" and "Love Why Did You Go Away" add a funkier texture. Then there's the title track. It blossoms with forgiveness, love, truth and empowerment and musically combines soul, rock, funk, folk and bits of classical to great effect.

And, of course, there's what I like to call the Peace Movement's Anthem, "Bomb the World." Sounds like an oxymoron, but listen to the lyrics: "You can bomb the world to pieces, but you can't bomb the world to peace."

This is a soundtrack for the voiceless. It deserves a listen for protesters and nonprotesters alike—for those overwhelmed with a lack of hope and despair, for those who feel empowered or underpowered. Go ahead and pick it up. You deserve music.

—Anthony Davis

THE GROTTO
Kristin Hersh • 4AD

On "Sno Cat," the first track of Kristin Hersh's sixth solo recording, quiet is king. A finger-picked acoustic guitar, Hersh's familiar weathered voice.



Giant Sand's Howie Gelb adds a subtle bit of piano. The recording is so organic you can hear Hersh tapping the body of her guitar during the song's fadeout.

Her recording approach and dark lyrical honesty recall NYC singer/songwriter Nina Nastasia's 2003 release, *Run to Ruin*, but Nastasia owes a debt to Hersh. Because before the listening public had Nina Nastasia, or Cat Power, Hersh carved a place for dark and brave female singer/songwriters. But her ghostly acoustic presence isn't the whole story.

In the mid-1980s, an indie-rock band fronted by two women put on live sets like lightning supernovas. Making hallucinogenic pop music for an audience used to seeing XY chromosomes front and center, Throwing Muses featured Hersh's shriek front and center. Signed to the high-profile alterna-label 4AD, the Muses blazed a (sometimes psychotic) trail, clearing the way for Liz Phair and PJ Harvey to howl.

After releasing a handful of solid records, half-sister Tanya Donnelly left the band to start Belly, and Hersh started having kids. In the midst of transitional weirdness, Hersh became a solo artist, exploring quieter spaces.

In *The Grotto*, lyrics fall into place, with slight and oblique repetition. The picture forms, a winter moment, an escape from her lover: "I thank god you're comatose/as I pull back the bed clothes." Angry and difficult moments of marital anti-bliss, of life-snuffing inertia.

The original lineup of Throwing Muses hit the road last year for a final hurrah, and Hersh promises her new project, 50' Wave, will tour soon. "Harder, faster, more intense," she promises on ThrowingMusic.com. Nothing could sound more different from *The Grotto*.

What to do with the flip-flop of Kristin Hersh's sonic fancies? Pick your poison. Either way you'll be witnessing the continuing evolution of an honest artist.

—Cori Taratoot

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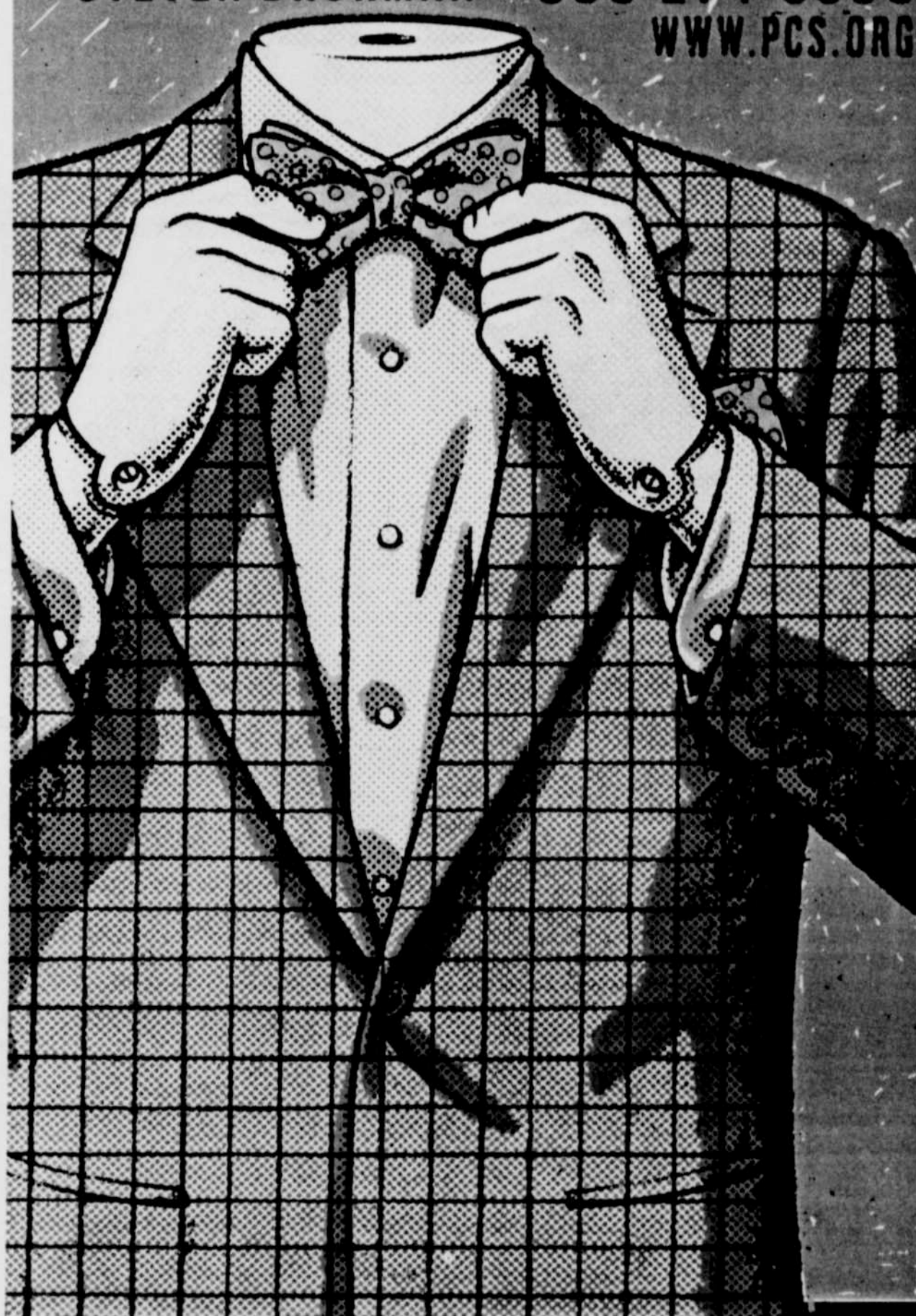
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