

MUSIC

Finding the queer in country

Tribute albums spark new interest in down-home divas

BY CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN

If you get excited at the wide-open prospect of the rich, presumably heterosexual-dominated body of 20th century popular culture being proved readily available to queer reinterpretation, then *Remembering Patsy Cline* and *Just Because I'm a Woman: Songs of Dolly Parton* will definitely pique your curiosity.

These tributes honoring the legendary country music stars are a veritable Gay Straight Alliance of women artists, and the spectrum, though heavy on the delicate introspection (no PJ Harveys or Courtney Loves here), is broad enough; anything that finds common ground between Amy Grant and k.d. lang, as *Remembering Patsy Cline* does, intrigues.

Both Cline and Parton wrote songs that, for all their depth and resonance, are simple, effortless and so human that anyone who's ever had an emotion can find empathy in them. More queer-specifically, Parton enjoys a huge gay following and has been dogged for as long as anyone can remember by speculations that she, ahem, enjoys the company of women.

Cline, too, has a history with the gays; she's a long-standing drag idol whose sophisticated emotional phrasings sparked a torch-song flame in the heart of a young k.d. lang, who recruited Cline producer Owen Bradley for her 1988 album *Shadowland*.

The Cline album is the less interesting of the two; the country diva's songs are deserving of veneration, but many of the arrangements are so safe, they merely serve as static monuments. Too



many of the artists seem to be whispering to themselves as they tiptoe through a Cline museum, and too many of the songs are perfect copies wherein the singer seems unconcerned with finding the emotion for herself: Natalie Cole, Rebecca Lynn Howard and Martina McBride all offer note-perfect renditions that lack inspiration.

There are a few exceptions: lang's smoky "Leaving on Your Mind" conveys the song's understated devastation, Michelle Branch does a surprisingly convincing "Strange," and Patty Griffin's "Faded Love" gets that heartbroken yet determined Cline flavor just right.

The Parton disc has more to offer, both in its song selection and strength of vision. *Remembering Patsy Cline* contains exactly the same track listing as Cline's original *Greatest Hits* album, but the artists on *Just Because I'm a Woman* have dug up gems from all over Parton's huge, decades-spanning catalog.

The ultrapopular Norah Jones (who also appears on the Cline disc) does a sparse, lovely "The Grass Is Blue," Me'Shell N'Degeocello serves up an almost menacingly low-pitched "Two Doors Down," and Sinead

O'Connor's fiery "Dagger Through the Heart" explores American country music's fiddle-heavy Celtic roots.

Melissa Etheridge has the unenviable task of reclaiming "I Will Always Love You," and though her trip-hop-tinged take is a vast improvement over Whitney Houston's schmaltzy version, it still lacks the innate plaintiveness that can be heard on Parton's 1974 recording.

If it's the function of tributes to re-engage longtime fans of musicians by filtering their beloved compositions through new voices, the reverse, particularly in the case of *Just Because I'm a Woman*, is also true. If you haven't heard the classic Parton or Cline recordings that inspired these versions, you'll be left eager to seek them out.

Franz Ferdinand enjoys a sexy gender mix-and-match



PHOTO BY JOE DILLWORTH

Queen of Scots

Franz Ferdinand is a bandwagon worth jumping

They're huge, they're hyped, they're...queer? The Scottish band Franz Ferdinand—a music-press juggernaut in the United Kingdom who recently finished a U.S. tour that caused mass hipster hysteria—consists of four rather fetching young men in vintage clothes who thoroughly transcend their cute but conventional indie-rock image on their eponymous debut album.

Franz Ferdinand is brash, fresh, accomplished and heavily laden with the kind of catchiness that only comes from pure pop inspiration. The sound harkens back to the great post-punk hybrids of Blondie (especially on "Darts of Pleasure" and "Take Me Out") and New Order; it's danceable without being effete, artistic without being pretentious and "rocks" without being macho. Marrying delicate, bittersweet melodies and polyrhythmic stops and starts, the lads freely stretch the limits of what can be done with a four-piece guitar band.

They also play a game of sexual mix-and-match that puts them in league with classic U.K. gender-hoppers like The Smiths and Suede. Midway through the album (on "Cheating on You"), singer Alex Kapranos is intoning "goodbye girl" and three songs later ("Michael") he's growling and panting for a male object of desire to leave his "stubble on my sticky lips."

—CM

eatingout eatingout eatingout eatingout eatingout eatingout eatingout eatingout



squeez

Specializing in fresh squeezed cocktails

lounging bass laid back beats every wed
thurs fri & sat nights down tempo style

1403 se belmont 503-239-5144 open @ 5pm

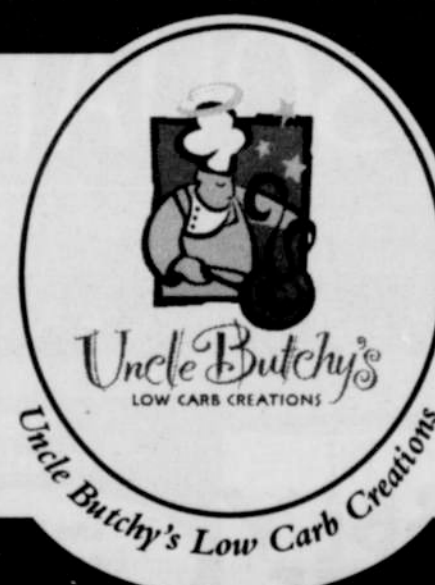


regional italian dinners
Open 7 nights

Sunday-Thursday 5:30-9:00pm 1230 nw hoyt | portland
Friday-Saturday 5:30-10:00pm 503-241-8800
www.fratellucucina.com

Great Food

Just Happens to be low carb!



Portland's original low carb restaurant

Complete menus are available at www.unclebutchys.com

3728 NE Sandy Blvd. • 503-288-5955

NORTHWEST AND CONTINENTAL CUISINE

Wilf's

LUNCH • DINNER
JAZZ

CABARET EVERY TUESDAY
LIVE JAZZ THURS-SAT

NW 6TH & IRVING • UNION STATION • 503-223-0070
WWW.WILFS.CITYSEARCH.COM

castagna

dinner castagna wednesday..saturday
café castagna 7 nights a week
503.231.7373
1752 se hawthorne, portland

table

7 nights a week.
Fri. and Sat. late.
Call for reservations.

NE 28th & Davis
503-238-3777