



Legends of the fall

New albums celebrate recording favorites

by Floyd Sklover

In the recording industry, longevity can be both a blessing and a curse. As a singer's career builds decade by decade, we thrill as his or her artistry matures. Then, almost inevitably, we wince as he or she begins to lose the luster we thrilled over in the first place. Of course, not every singer's power diminishes. Some, including Barbara Cook and Bruce Springsteen, sound as delicious now as they ever did—different, yet still delicious. Others, while the vocal sound may suffer, bring expressiveness to their work that may not have been evident before.

Guilty Pleasures

Barbara Streisand • Sony

The release of a Barbra Streisand CD is a major event in the recording industry. With 49 gold albums, she has sold more records than even the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Only Elvis Presley exceeds her.

Of all her releases, 1980's *Guilty*, a collaboration with Barry Gibb of the Bee Gees, achieved the greatest success, selling more than 20 million units and spawning several smash hit singles, including the title song and "Woman in Love." To celebrate its 25th anniversary, Streisand and Gibb went back into the studio for *Guilty Pleasures*, her 61st album.

As a huge Streisand fan, I'm disappointed to report that the results are bland. The diva is still in amazingly fine voice, but the material doesn't challenge her vocally. Her crystalline sound is kept to a fairly limited range, and there are none of the soaring moments that used to make Streisand so thrilling to listen to.

All of the songs have been written by Gibb, a fine tunesmith with a distinct Bee Gees sound. But the lyrics are oblique to the point of incomprehensibility; they're like the poetry in *The New Yorker* set to music. Take, for example, the push me-pull you quality to the following from "Come Tomorrow": "You know

the soul finds its own evolution/And this is the only love I feel/And I tell you, I'm keeping up the strength, I gotta try/'Cause you ain't getting past this heart of mine."

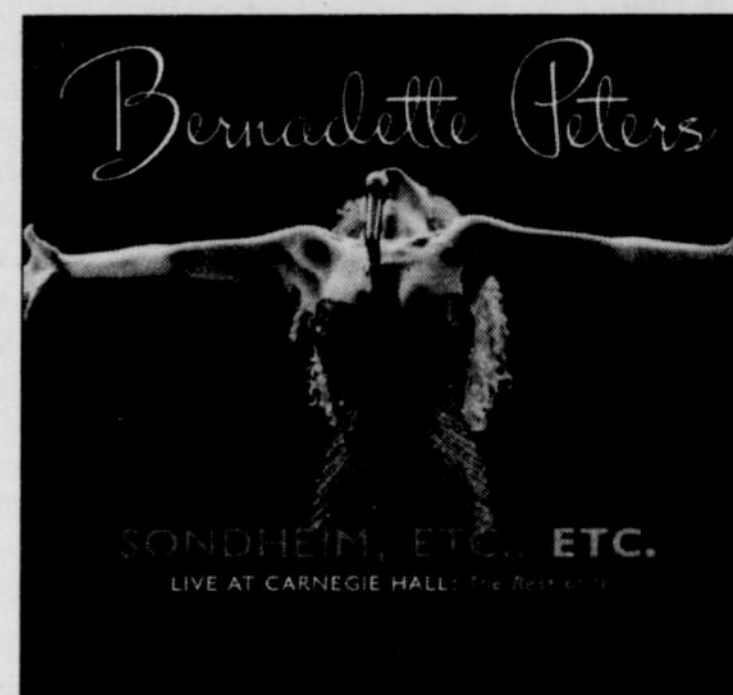
Gibb's lyrics try to be sophisticated and not too obvious about his themes, but they send mixed messages. As a result, the songs feel remote and simply blend into the background.

Sondheim, Etc., Etc.— Live at Carnegie Hall: The Rest of It

Bernadette Peters • Angel Records

Musical theater is best when the transfer of energy from the stage to the audience is palpable. And few performers radiate the intensity of energy that Bernadette Peters does. She has made a career on the stage by wearing her emotions proudly on her sleeve. And whether you love her or hate her (and I admit to both through the years), you have to admire someone whose career has spanned more than five decades. (She debuted in *The Most Happy Fella* in 1959.)

Peters' latest CD was taped during a 1996 benefit concert for the Gay Men's Health Center in New York, the country's oldest AIDS service organization. (It was founded in 1982 by author/activist Larry Kramer, among others.) To a sold-out crowd at Carnegie Hall, Peters sang a selection of show tunes including



"Broadway Baby," "You Could Drive a Person Crazy," "Being Alive" and "Move On." Unfortunately, none of those is on this album.

You see, Angel Records released the best moments, including those above, shortly after the concert in 1997. *Sondheim, Etc., Etc.—Live at Carnegie Hall: The Rest of It* contains, according to the liner notes, "all the music and dialogue that was not on the initial release," and therein lies the problem. When you pull out the greatest hits and the powerful moments, what's left is the detritus, the secondary numbers and the filler material.

Peters' voice is strong, but aging. She sounds a bit scratchy and screechy, and she hits far more sour notes than there should be. Still, she's a beloved icon

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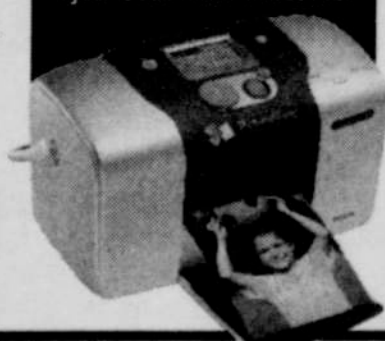
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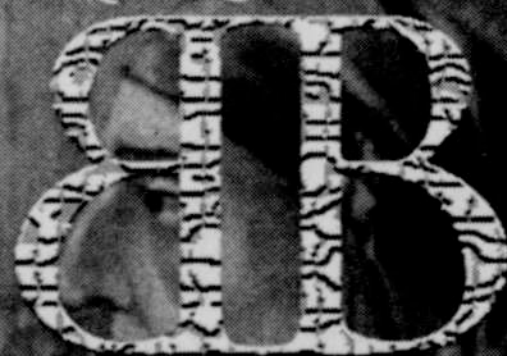
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