

Best Music

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8. RICHARD GALLIANO

NEW YORK TRIO

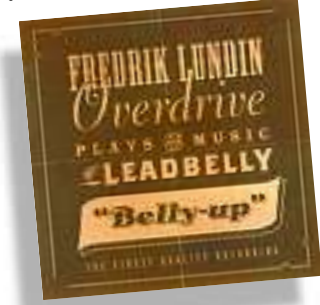
Ruby, My Dear | Dreyfus

Galliano plays accordion, and it speaks to his virtuosity and musicality that you won't be tempted into a single Lawrence Welk joke.

9. ANTHONY BROWN'S ORCHESTRA

Rhapsodies | Water Baby

Brown has already transformed the music of Ellington and Monk, and to complete the triptych he's rescored, reharmonized, and restructured Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, incorporating Asian influences and instruments and a touch of Latin flavor. Scandalous, heretical!—until you hear it.



10. FREDRIK LUNDIN OVERDRIVE

"Belly-Up": The Music of Leadbelly | Stunt

This Danish saxist leads his band in an inventive tribute to the American folk-blues icon—and doubles the ante by dedicating each arrangement, in spirit as well as in name, to an American jazz great, from Charles Mingus to Gil Evans.

David Whiteis

Given the range of subgenres and styles represented, I haven't ranked these—consider each the best of its kind that I encountered in 2005.

EUGENE "HIDEAWAY" BRIDGES

Coming Home | Armadillo

Buoyant but tasteful guitar blues, technically flawless and deeply soulful—even the most exuberant good-timey tunes sound refreshingly adult.

GOSPEL KEYBOARD TRIO

Heavenly Keys | The Sirens

Chicago keyboardists Willie Jones, Leonard Maddox, and Dwayne Mason proclaim their faith in a set of churchy hymns, up-tempo shouters, and stately spiritual songs, both solo and as a trio—it's virtuosity infused with an uplifting earnestness and joy.

BUDDY GUY

Bring 'Em In | Silvertone

Lately this Chicago blues legend has developed a distressing tendency toward overwrought performances, especially in full-band settings, but he imbues the updated 60s soul tunes here (and the occasional pop number, like Dylan's "Lay Lady Lay") with emotional depth and good taste.

HERMON HITSON

You Are Too Much for the Human Heart | Soul-Tay-Shus

A compilation showcasing this almost forgotten 60s soul singer from Atlanta. Hitson was hampered by second-rate production for most of his career, but at his best he packed an emotional wallop to rival James Brown's or Otis Redding's.

DENISE LASALLE

Wanted | Ecko

Odes to womanly prowess, both in and out of bed, from a veteran soul-blues stylist, laced with her trademark take-no-prisoners raunch and leavened with good humor.



BETTIE LAVETTE

I've Got My Own Hell to Raise | Anti-

LaVette can extract more feeling from a single phrase than most soul singers get from an entire set. You may need to lie down after this one.

AARON NEVILLE

Tell It Like It Is | Empire Musicwerks

When this angelic crooner unfurls his quavering falsetto on a ballad like this set's classic title tune, hearts melt for miles around—but he can also sharpen his voice to match the streetsy signifying on jumpy R & B numbers like "A Hard Nut to Crack" and "Space Man."

DAN PENN & SPOONER OLDHAM

Moments From This Theatre | Proper American

It takes a hell of a singer to pull off a line like "Go back home, see the old folks / They've all had heart attacks and light strokes," but blue-eyed soul brother Dan Penn is a hell of a singer. He and Spooner Oldham, who wrote and produced some of the most memorable R & B of the 60s, reprise some of their best tunes in gritty, graceful country-folk versions.

BOBBY RUSH

Night Fishin' | Deep Rush

This time Rush mixes his usual tales of backdoor shenanigans with songs like "We Had Love," a thoughtful meditation on a childhood enriched by old-fashioned family values—a welcome glimpse of the serious-minded

philosopher behind his trickster's mask.

JAMES BLOOD ULMER

Birthright | Hyena

Aided by producer Vernon Reid, Ulmer creates the feel of a barren, haunted landscape on this ferocious solo acoustic record. His adventurous playing and naked lyrics—about sex, race, and religion—both invoke and transcend the deepest roots of the blues.

Douglas Wolk

1. LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

LCD Soundsystem | DFA/Capitol

James Murphy is the best dance producer in America, and he makes a pretty great rock star too.

2. THE NEW PORNOGRAPHERS

Twin Cinema | Matador

The Canadian power-pop legion sets a new world record for hooks per unit time.

3. VARIOUS ARTISTS

One Kiss Can Lead to Another: Girl Group Sounds Lost & Found | Rhino

Five hours of magnificent 150-second epics from the 60s, packaged in a hat box. A *hat box*, people.



4. THE FALL

The Complete Peel Sessions 1978-2004 | Castle

Twenty-seven years of status reports from a marble-mouthed avant-garde poet and his riff-crazy backup bands.

5. SUFJAN STEVENS

Illinois | Asthmatic Kitty

It's not just his songs, as smart and tender as they are—it's those ravishing arrangements.

6. JUDEE SILL

Dreams Come True | Water

This hopeful anticipation of the apocalypse, recorded in 1974, would've been the singer-songwriter's third album if she'd lived to see it finished; it was finally mixed and released this year.



7. SLEATER-KINNEY

The Woods | Sub Pop

Veteran Portland trio cranks up the amps to "pulverize" and barrels off into terra incognita.

8. THE MOUNTAIN GOATS

Come, Come to the Sunset Tree | self-released

The LP-only edition of John Darnielle's taut, compassionate valediction to an abusive stepfather, with home-recorded versions of the songs on the CD.

9. SHARON JONES & THE DAP-KINGS

Naturally | Daptone

As far as this joyful funk band is concerned, it's 1971 and they're glued to the top of the R & B charts.

10. PRINCESS SUPERSTAR

My Machine | !K7

A science-fiction hip-hop opera in which motormouthed Concetta Kirschner turns all other celebrities into "duplicants" of herself.

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COURTESY OF BERTHA MCNEAL

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Music

VARIOUS ARTISTS ONE KISS CAN LEAD TO ANOTHER: GIRL GROUP SOUNDS LOST AND FOUND (RHINO)

EVIE SANDS ANY WAY THAT YOU WANT ME (REV-OLA)

Girls, Girls, Girls

And you thought “women in rock” had it rough.

By Jessica Hopper

The first time I stole a record it was because I wanted to be in a girl group. It was easy. I went to the library, picked up a copy of *25 Years of Motown*, cut out the magnetic alarm strip with a razor, slipped the five-album set into my large schoolbag with the spray-painted peace sign on it, and headed home to listen to “Reflections” by the Supremes a few dozen times in a row. I was obsessed with Diana Ross, Mary Wilson, and Florence Ballard and desperately wanted to be them all. That wasn’t the norm amongst 11-year-old Minnesota girls in 1988, but my fandom was immutable. Much as their harmonies killed me, what I really loved was their aesthetic: Mary had the better voice and bouffier hair, but Diana was my favorite because she always seemed to be wearing twice as much eyeliner. They were the most majestic representation of young womanhood I knew, so princesslike, and I bought into the dream of it completely.

The four-disc genre retrospective *One Kiss Can Lead to Another: Girl Group Sounds Lost and Found* (Rhino) is a monument to that dream: the romantic fever dream of teenage-girl narratives written by adult songwriters. In the pre-Beatles days of the early 1960s girl groups came to dominate the charts, supposedly due to the vacuum left by the overseas deployment of Elvis and the deaths of Eddie Cochran, Ritchie Valens, and Buddy Holly. Trios and quartets of high school- and college-age women, many of them black, supplanted slick-haired boys on the radio and got a chance to tell their



side of the story—sort of.

Crooning and cooing about the triumphs and travails of young love (and little else), wagging gloved fingers in time to their honey-sweet three-part *no no nos*, the girl groups proffered the inverse of the thrusty rebellion and innuendo that had been codified by men: the ultra-chaste longings of a bunch of purported virgins in satiny evening gowns.

Looking back, girl groups seem the epitome of the gender prescription of the time: that women and girls should be guileless and pure, doting and servile, never fully women unless validated by the love of a man. In song after song, the promise of romance and the redemption it brings is

strong: “Please find it in your heart / To make all my dreams come true / Let me get close to you,” sings country star Skeeter Davis on her girl-pop turn “Let Me Get Close to You.” Over a snare crack that sounds like a cannon shot and a bed of perfectly harmonized *bum-she-bum-ooo-eee-ooo-aaa*, the Chiffons’ Judy Craig booms with pride, “I have a boyfriend / Met him a week ago / He’s mine forever / Last night he told me so,” on “I Have a Boyfriend.” Then, so we don’t think she’s some good-night-kissing hussy, she adds, “Someday we’ll walk down the aisle / So in love.” Their physical desires can be safely expressed only through double entendre, and when they stray—as with “bad girl” groups

like the Shangri-Las—things end in tragedy.

The girls are never true aggressors; rather, they are t-r-u l-u-v hopefuls, keeping the heart flames alive somewhere beneath their bullet bras. For these girls there’s just one kind of boy—the One and Only—and their love, it’s Forever and Always. As for their love objects, they’re bad boys, other girls’ boys, ex-boys, and next boys, and they’re all elusive. Whether he’s a commitmentphobic cad, a cheater, an abuser, or a dude with a drag-race death wish, she wants only to make him happy—and all he can do is disappear. She can *shoop shoop shoop* all night long, but he ain’t coming back. In the end she’s left with noth-

ing but a tear-stained pillow and poetic metaphors: “All I can see on the beach / Is a piece of driftwood / And it somehow reminds me / Of the twisted memories / Left in my mind” goes the dramatic spoken interlude of the Bitter Sweets’ “What a Lonely Way to Start the Summer.”

But *One Kiss Can Lead to Another* is more than just an exhaustive tribute to broken hearts and high-tease hairdos: it’s a chronicle of how the girl-group sound impacted rock ‘n’ roll. Many of the girls came from gospel backgrounds and brought along the soul-holler and hand claps. Phil Spector’s production for the Ronettes not only created the template for the girl-group sound—forceful vocals cut with gunshot snares, pizzicato string stabs, and reverb by the metric ton—but upped the ante for other producers who sought to compete: Brian Wilson, Spector arranger Jack Nitzsche, future Bread founder David Gates, and Motown’s resident genius team Holland-Dozier-Holland. They made symphonic pop and made it loud as hell, a cavernous cavalcade of harps, timpani, and orchestra-size string sections with occasional tracks of audible sobbing. The sound is as timeless as the sentiments of lovelorn teens and still holds up decades after the genre’s final years, represented here by the Lovelites’ 1969 teen-pregnancy classic, “How Can I Tell My Mom and Dad?”

Much as the sound of pop may have changed, the subject matter—love and how to suffer it—is still intrinsic to the soul-
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Music

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baring teen balladry on the radio today, and performers still rarely write their own material. But as the liner notes to *One Kiss* are careful to point out, some of these girls were more than singers, and the girl-group boom enabled them to establish careers as songwriters: among them were Stevie Wonder collaborator Syreeta Wright, a 17-year-old Mary Wells, and Dusty Springfield's biggest influence, Evie Sands, who has two early singles included in the set.

Sands's 1970 debut album for A&M, *Any Way That You Want Me*, reissued for the first time by UK label Rev-Ola in September, picks up where the girl-group box leaves off, tiptoeing into the



post-Woodstock era. On the cover, clad in a dark brown pantsuit and tunic, she cruises a dirt road on her ten-speed, her long hair flowing, the very picture of the carefree and liberated new woman of the 70s. She's not even looking at the camera, as if to imply that she just happened to cruise into the frame in her special carefree way.

While the album consists mostly of love songs, unlike on *One Kiss* not every phrase begins with the word *baby*, and the portrayals of romance are a bit more grown-up. The man and his love are still elusive, but the girl is asking for more than hand-holding: she also wants friendship. On the album opener, "Crazy Annie," she's even the one doing the leaving.

Any Way That You Want Me sold 500,000 copies, but the bigger deal for Sands was the inclusion of "It's This I Am," which she describes in her liner notes for the reissue as a "thrill and personal milestone . . . the first time I had gotten to record and release a song I had written." The rest of the record consists of songs that had already been made hits by everyone from the Troggs to Jackie Ross, but "It's This I Am" is the most memorable moment; the song has since been covered by Beck and Beth Orton, and Belle & Sebastian are such fans that they backed Sands on two dates on her European comeback tour in 2000.

A whisper-quiet, splendor-in-psych drift of faraway strings, electric piano, and indeterminate twinkling sounds, "It's This I Am" is Sands's haunting response to the firm prescriptions set for her and every other girl singer of the era. It's a liberation anthem, and she asserts her dynamism in a rich voice, sure and melancholy: "I'm that great divide / That never was at all / That's neither large nor heavy / That's neither light or small / It always was and will be / Forever through all time / It's here and there and nowhere / Always is / It's this I am I find." She's defining who she is rather than who she is in relation to some absentee heartbreaker boy. And she is beyond definition. ■

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Books

TRIKSTA: LIFE AND DEATH AND NEW ORLEANS RAP NIK COHN (KNOPF)

The Bounce Remains the Same

Nik Cohn tried to influence New Orleans rap but all he got was this lousy nickname.

By Robert Mentzer

White, British, and pushing 60, Nik Cohn never fit in with New Orleans's rap scene, but for a brief period in the late 90s and early 00s he explored its margins as a journalist, talent scout, and manager. *Triksta*, his book about this period, is partly a memoir, partly a meditation on hip-hop, and partly an exposé of what's under the glittering surface of the music industry. But mostly it's a story about hubris: Cohn's an outsider who tried to harness and influence the scene and failed in spectacular fashion to do either.

Cohn, the author of 1968's *Awopbopalooop Alopbamboom* (often cited as the first book of rock criticism), has been obsessed with New Orleans since childhood: he writes vividly and enchantingly about

the city and its music, from his early fascination with Jelly Roll Morton to his first visit there in 1972, while on the road with the Who. Though he later moved to New York, he continued to rent a house in New Orleans for several months each year, describing the city as "the lover I could never be free of." And he knows New Orleans's hip-hop scene, which centers on bounce, a club-centric, bump-and-grind style. Cohn puts on his musicologist's hat to explain that bounce is "patterned on the call-and-response of Mardi Gras Indian chants," but another way to put it is that it's hip-hop with the formal rigidity of a square dance, with the MC commanding the crowd—bend over and touch the floor, now turn around,

now throw your hands up.

Cohn knew the music, but he didn't feel it until the 90s, after he was diagnosed with hepatitis C. Hep C's symptoms include insomnia and exhaustion, but to hear Cohn tell it the diagnosis forced him to live his life in a new, reenergized way. So he catches a parade float in New Orleans blasting a bounce track, Magnolia Shorty's "Monkey on tha Dick," and it connects. "The effect was baptismal," he writes.

Cohn's initial research leads him to Earl Mackie, a Jehovah's Witness whose label, Take Fo' Records, specializes in sex raps. (Mackie's faith prevents him from releasing records advocating violence, but he believes sex is an acceptable theme. "It beats



killing people," he says.) Cohn brokers a major-label deal for one of Mackie's artists, Choppa, and is initially granted a budget of \$250,000 from Warner Brothers to make an album. "I would select producers," he writes, "provide song ideas, hire guest artists and singers and live musicians as required,

and try to keep Choppa's nose to the grindstone." He even writes lyrics: "Bend it over, catch the wall / Wobble wobble for me."

It's not giving away a significant plot point to say that the deal eventually falls through and Choppa defects to Master P's New No Limit Records. Bounce insiders bristle at his attempts to turn a regional genre into a national success. One producer all but calls Cohn a carpetbagger, and Choppa is deaf to Cohn's talk about broader career strategies. "They love me all over," Choppa tells him. "Baton Rouge, Shreveport, Lafayette. Everywhere."

Triksta is full of interactions like this, where Cohn and the artists seem to be talking past **continued on page 28**

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