POZ Picks

February 1, 1999 By Kevin O'Leary

PICK OF THE LITTER

Ladies & Gentlemen: The Best of George Michael
George Michael
Epic Records

Plenty of pop songs result from heartbreaking affairs with men. Not until this release, however, have they been sung so beautifully by another—very out—man. These intensely personal cuts from George Michael's *Older*, the album written in the wake of a lover's death from AIDS, include two haunting ballads of loss ("Jesus to a Child" and "You Have Been Loved") and "Spinning the Wheel," an angry "come home" plea to a new lover who has "a thing for danger." The double-CD set also includes a new single, "Outside," an irreverent response to Michael's 1998 lewdness arrest with sassy lyrics and an over-the-top disco-toilet video that would do Sex Panic! proud.

—Shana Naomi Krochmal

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC

After weeks of plotting, you've finally lured that special valentine into your love den. *Mazel tov!* Just in case you need a little night music to seal the deal:

If you haven't had the HIV talk yet, put on jazz impresario **Andy Bey**'s new *Shades of Bey* (Evidence Music). Like a good, stiff drink, Bey, HIV positive, has a gift for putting things in perspective. Start the evening with "Like a Lover," and by the time you get to his rendition of the late Billy Strayhorn's "The Last Light of Evening (Blood Count)," you'll be swapping adherence tips and smooching up a storm.

Has your honey got a safety pin hanging from her ear? Well, then, let **Diamanda Galas**, she of the kickass HIV operas, set the mood. *Maledictions and Prayer* (Asphodel/Mute Records), a live collection of standards, is her latest offering to combat AIDS complacency. The songs, polished before PWAs doing time in a New York City VA hospital, all spring from the night season—"Gloomy Sunday" and "My World Is Empty Without You" are highs. If you had trouble with Galas' screeching take-no-prisoners delivery in the past, give her another go. She's the real deal.

Don’t skip **Bette Midler**’s remake of Patti LaBelle’s “I Sold My Heart to the Junkman” on her album of cover songs, *Bathhouse Betty* (Warner Bros. Records). While listening to the divine one, you and Cupid can reminisce about Saturdays in steam rooms and bandannas in back pockets. Not that she’s strictly for the older crowd. If you missed Midler at the Continental Baths, this Bette’s for you.

—Kevin O’Leary

FILM

Surviving Friendly Fire
Directed by Todd Nelson
Frameline Films

Remember when Mickey and Judy said, “Hey, kids! Let’s do a show”? The teens in Todd Nelson’s hourlong documentary, *Surviving Friendly Fire*, share that spirit. The difference is, they’re homeless and gay—occupants of a shelter run by the LA Gay and Lesbian Center.

There are 1.4 million runaway kids on America’s streets; at least a third are gay, lesbian or bi, and an uncounted number have HIV. Nelson’s camera tracked five and caught flashes of others as they worked with theater director Norma Bowles on a piece—drawn from personal experience—that ran in the 1993 LA Arts Festival. The teens acted out their own lives as well as those of their peers, replaying the scenes of parental abuse, violence or rejection that drove them into the streets, where they found new terrors, including HIV. In spite of it all, the theater they created was full of fun, songs and the sheer Mickey-and-Judy zest of role-playing.

Documenting rehearsals, performances, interviews and dressing-room shenanigans, Nelson shoots these wary but eager kids straight into your heart. Chilling intertitles (“one of every three runaways is forced into prostitution to survive”) and narration by Sir Ian McKellan at his loftiest ward off any easy slide into sentimentality. For a sobering finale, a round of follow-up interviews reveals that some kids don’t survive. But Nelson’s film will. It’s working its way around the festival circuit and—brace yourself for school-board fights—high school libraries have requested it.

—Michael Feingold

READ THIS

Tainted Love

Donna Minkowitz is reborn—and reviled—by the Christian right

by Pat Califia

With *Ferocious Romance* (Free Press), lesbian journalist Donna Minkowitz has written an infuriating, insightful and hilarious book that compares her undercover investigation of several right-wing Christian groups with her involvement in ACT UP, paganism and the S/M community. In lieu of the usual harping against the enemy so common in the alternative press, Minkowitz gives us sharp portraits of conservative Christians who believe homosexuality is not part of God's plan for us. Who wouldn't be moved by the confused, ordinary guys at a Promise Keepers rally who mistake Minkowitz for a teenage boy or the mad duo of girls who do makeovers for Christian ladies so they can better carry out their ministries? What we all have in common, Minkowitz believes, is a search for ecstasy (either in God or a forbidden sexuality) and a desire to be reborn in communities where we will receive unconditional love and support.

When it comes to portraying sex radicals, Minkowitz's compassion falters, as she seems to be covertly seeking an exorcism of her personal id-ridden demons—butchness and sadism. And about three-fourths of the way through the book, like the narc who becomes a dope addict, her journalistic boundaries get fuzzy. Minkowitz may chide sadomasochists for believing that a whipping has no inherent meaning, but she seems unable to recognize that common desire for transformation and familial love is not enough to redeem people who bomb abortion clinics and believe AIDS is God's just punishment. Nevertheless, she leads us through a spiritual quest without being trite or jumping on somebody else's train to salvation, and that's a difficult feat. Despite its shortcomings, this is a thought-provoking book that deserves a wide readership among activists and right-wingers alike.

Excerpt:

Bobby Ace gulps some liquid courage and starts asking me eager, curious questions about my book. When I say that it's about the intimate relationship between the evangelical movement and the gay movement, Bobby has his own things to tell me about that relationship. "You should include a third group in your book, the ex-gay movement. 'Cause they're evangelical and they're gay. That's what I came out of, too, and probably why I'm here to speak the news to you today. And there are all kinds of Biblical reasons and causes why I had those impulses in me. The Bible says, 'The sins of the father shall be visited on the son, even unto the third and fourth generation.' My dad's dad was a wife-beater and an abuser, and me, I was working at Men's Fitness, a magazine with a pretty gay audience. My granddad took my father out to the barn and fondled him and showed him how to have sex with a cow."

I'm still trying to accept the fact that Bobby has just come out to me—about several different things at once. But he goes on coming out endlessly, in an uninterrupted stream: "Around the time that I came out, a man came up to me and said, 'You have been deceived, and you shall deceive.' Then it happened to me again, the same stupid words—in church, the text was, 'You have been deceived, and you shall deceive.' I couldn't handle it. I really wanted my sin. I cried because I wanted my sin. My best friend and I agreed to come out of the lifestyle at the same time, 'cause we figured the gays would hate us and the evangelicals would hate us, but if we had one friend to walk through life with, it would be okay."

His fear of being hated by everyone is rather poignant to me. They're hard, those desperate days when you worry about not even having "one friend to walk through life with" once people find out what you're really like. Bobby'd had a hard time finding love. And he lived in the extra vapid Hollywood/Chelsea gay male party scene I personally have always identified as a type of hell. "At Men's Fitness, there were a lot of beautiful models, and a lot of drugs. I was a coke addict. I'd been in the lifestyle five years, and I was suicidal. I could not find happiness. I could not find a lasting relationship."

But Bobby was given several signs from God that he could change. "My dad went back to the Lord, and he quit smoking. The fact that he was able to quit smoking shamed me a little. It made me think, if he can do this, I should be able to quit the lifestyle. They say that if you draw closer to God, God will draw closer to you." Two weeks after he prayed for a change, "a loud thought came to me. 'Call Focus on the Family! Call Focus!' I thought, if it's the Lord, maybe there'll be a job."

There was: Bobby is now the designer for a Focus magazine for teen boys. (Focus had no idea he was gay when they hired him. Every month, there are enormous phallic symbols on the cover.)

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