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JAZZ - LATIN - VINTAGE SOUNDS - VOCALS - LOUNGE - WORLD & COCKTAILS

Bette Midler

Bathhouse Betty
Warner Bros 9 47078-2 Pop/Vocals



Bette Midler is a very talented woman who unfortunately doesn't make particularly good records. Despite having a firm grasp on the classic American songbook, good taste and a whopping sense of humor, her biggest hits have been pseudo-inspirational Disney-type ballads like *Wind Beneath My Wings*. In the name of diversity, her albums are musically all over the playing field, rarely scoring a goal. On those occasions when she does, you cheer, but you'd need to be a huge fan to be satisfied with her output of the last few years, especially in comparison to her first two albums or her live performances.

Her new album, *Bathhouse Betty*, certainly looks promising and as usual there are a few good moments but too often she's appealing to her *Wind Beneath My Wings* audience or she's in way over her head.

Right off the bat the opening number, Leonard Cohen's *Song of Bernadette*, suffers from a trite contemporary ballad arrangement. Cohen's lyrics keep things from getting overly sweet. Nothing can save the other "inspirational" ballads like *That's How Love Moves* and the blatant *Wind Beneath My Wings* remake, *My One True Friend*.

I'm Beautiful is perhaps the most troublesome track on the album. This was a minor hip-hop hit in 1993 by XXXX, a young black girl's declaration of self-worth that was surprisingly uplifting. In Midler's hands, it becomes the whine of the Jewish American Princess. She's wise to switch from a hip-hop to disco

beat, but it's hard to imagine this becoming a dancefloor hit with Midler's mugging and squeaking. Bette "rocking out" either as Janet Jackson with *Big Socks* or as a blues singer on *One Monkey Don't Stop No Show*, is not a pretty thing.

On a positive note, there are a few nice tracks that should have been the foundation for a better album. *Ukulele Lady* is pleasant but adds nothing to the definitive Hilo Hattie recording or even the oddly sweet Ethel Merman version. *Boxing* and *Laughing Matters* are unusually intelligent modern compositions with thoughtful lyrics and neo-cabaret arrangements. *I Sold My Heart to the Junkman* is short, sweet and straightforward and would be ideal on an album of standards.

In fairness to Midler, what's a diva to do? She's probably not ready to be put out to pasture and make better records on a smaller independent label, but at the same time, she's too mature, intelligent and out of touch with current trends to make contemporary pop music. She's not alone in her dilemma. Quite loudly, Barbra Streisand is making much worse music. Celine Dion and Mariah Carey might actually have good voices if they'd stop mixing their treacle songs with their bad Aretha imitations and just sing. In fact, when she asks us (and surely she will), our advice to Midler will be, "Shut up and sing."



featuring:

BETTE MIDLER
BURT BACHARACH
OTIS RUSH
LOS SUPER SEVEN
BEACH PARTY

Various Artists

The Look of Love:
The Burt Bacharach Collection
Rhino R2 75339



Music can be incredibly potent in conjuring up memories. This new retrospective of Burt Bacharach presents songs and pre-pubescent memories that haven't entered our 30-something mind for years. At the age of 10, when fancied ourselves a major songwriter waiting to be discovered. Our most important work was *Ode to Susan*, written and performed on our clarinet in tribute to a lovely classmate. It was during this time that Burt Bacharach was at his peak and we distinctly remember thinking that Bacharach had written all the best songs already, and somehow if he hadn't put those particular notes together, eventually we would have. Damn you, Burt Bacharach! Being that Bacharach was so prolific, we put our songwriting talents on the back burner and proceed to write our memoirs, *I Only Wanted Everything*. We're still "shopping" for a publisher.

The Burt Bacharach renaissance is here in full swing, thanks to the boredom of the Lounge set looking to broaden their horizons and the recent collaboration with Elvis Costello. We've heard Bacharach compared to Gershwin and Mozart recently and this makes us chuckle. He is awfully good as a pop songwriter and his productions were more often than not infectious and classy in a late 1960s manner. It's nothing short of amazing to look over the titles of this collection and think that one man wrote all these melodies. In addition to all the Dionne Warwick songs we all know, we were surprised that Bacharach also wrote *Wives and Lovers*, *(The Man Who Shot) Liberty Valence* and *Blue on Blue*. What's even more surprising is that listening to the collection as a whole, the music has an incredible feeling of melancholy.

The bulk of the three-disc collection is a wonderful time capsule of 1960s and early '70s pop at its best. It's controlled, gorgeous and completely at odds with a new generation that would change popular music, for better and for much worse, forever.

*Otis Rush*

Any Place I'm Going
House of Blues 5141613432 Blues

What happens when a classic blues singer records with the slick production values of a mainstream pop record? If it's a project like the soundtrack to the Blues Brothers, it's a mess. If it's a young buck like Robert Cray or Lucky Peterson, the results end up closer to rock than blues. When it's Otis Rush, it's surprisingly great.



Rush's latest album, *Any Place I'm Going*, hasn't left our CD player for days. Noted as a great guitar player ever since his 1956 Chess hit, *I Can't Quit You Baby*, he also possesses one of those thick, dreamy voices that could probably withstand substandard material. This album has an almost unnaturally clean sound but the arrangements are strong and never resort to the Las Vegas-sound that has marred other bluesmen trying to cross over. There's never a forced groove on the upbeat numbers, but it's really on the slower tracks, where Rush gets to show off his voice, that *Any Place I'm Going* shines. *Laughin' and Clownin'*, *Walking the Back Streets and Crying* and *Part Time Love* are all classic slow blues, introduced by the drums, followed by a guitar solo and then going into traditional blues form. With a master like Otis Rush, the result is infectious.

*Los Super Seven*

Los Super Seven
RCA AO7863-67689-2 Latin / Pop

So often we hear hype about albums that usually end up pretty dismal. We remember when songstress Basia first burst on the scene as a solo act after her run with Matt Bianco. Reviewers citing press releases described her as a wonderful combination of jazz, pop and Brazilian music. Well, she may have listened to jazz, but she was in no way a jazz singer. Many of her

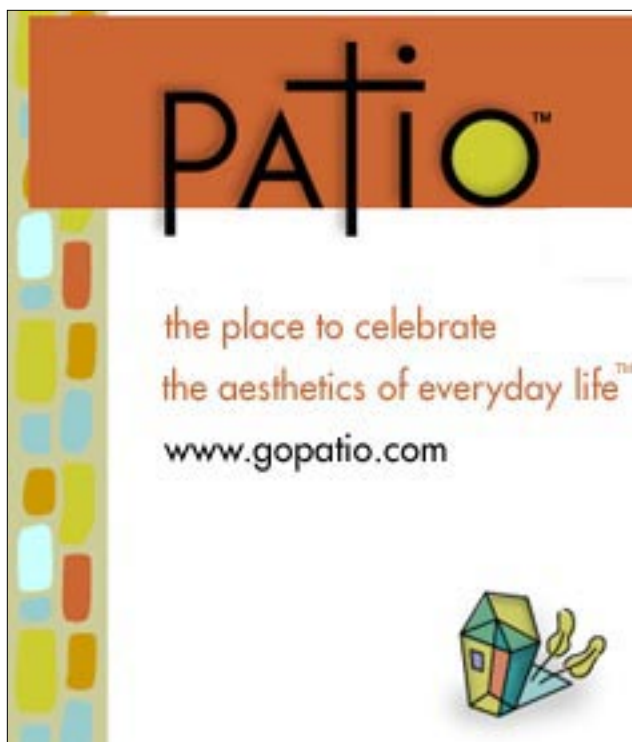
tunes featured a lot of gentle percussion, so we suppose that makes her Brazilian.

There's been a lot of hype about Los Super Seven and we were prepared for the worst. What a nice treat when the hype machine works in our favor! The album is a laid-back session featuring the best and most famous of today's Tejano musicians. We were expecting something along the lines of the late Selena or supergroup Mazz, but instead, we feel as if we were invited to a really fine Texas barbeque. The music is Tejano with cumbias, rancheras and even a touch of mariachi thrown in.



The feeling is very casual, from the guitar playing to the vocals (which might grate on listeners more accustomed to slick professionals), but it's never sloppy. The only problem we can foresee is trying find more rootsy Tejano music of this caliber. Let's hope there's a follow-up.

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Various Artists

Del-Fi Pool Party
Del-Fi DFCD 71264

Various Artists

Del-Fi Beach Party
Del-Fi DFCD 71263

Annette Funicello

Beach Party: Ultimate Collection
Marginal Records MAR071

Donna Loren

Beach Blanket Bingo: The Best of Donna Loren
Missing Records (Marginal) MISS 010

Well, as far as we're concerned, this summer was just too damn short. Too much work and mediocre weather (thank you, El Niño!) cut into our pleasure. To compensate, we've found ourselves renting videos like *Gidget* and the various *Beach Blanket* movies. We've been fanaticizing about weenie roasts with the gang on a really happening beach. And we've been listening to a lot of really horridly wonderful Beach music from the early 1960s.

It's hard to describe exactly the kind of music

we're after. It's not just surf music and it's not just pre-Beatles American pop. The music needs to work for spontaneous dancing on Muscle Beach or a pajama-clad line dance around the pool. It needs to be over the top, slightly stupid and celebrate the joys of being an American teen. The other dancers should have names like Dee Dee, Moonoggie, Go Go, Connie, Potato Bug, Boom Boom, Bunny, Animal and Candy. Clothes are of course bikinis, swim trunks or terrycloth playsuits, except in the evenings when we go to Bunny's parents' house for a big





party and we fellows twist away in tight suits and skinny ties while the gals don stunning off-the-rack Givenchy knock-offs.

The perfect CD compilation of our fantasy has yet to be

made but there are some good places to start. Maverick rock and roll label Del-Fi has two great compilations out, *Del-Fi Beach Party* and *Del-Fi Pool Party* that are almost perfect. *Pool Party* has lots of songs perfect for diving board go-go dancing, like *Watusi Bongos*, *Swim Beat* and a surprisingly good cover of *Mack the Knife*. There are a few less than bikini-worthy tracks but on the whole, you could play the CD all the way through at your next shindig. *Beach Party* has a slightly more surf attitude. A few surf-story tracks that bog down the dancing action, but there's more than enough great material to justify the purchase. What's really great about both discs is that the material is going to be unknown except to fanatics.

Rhino's *Hard Rock Café Surf* is solid as an introduction to the Surf scene but too many of the songs are available elsewhere, like *Miserlou*, *Surfin' Safari*, the theme from *Hawaii Five-O*, *Endless Summer* and *Wipe Out*. It's fine but it's almost too good. We're after Beach music rather than just Surf.

No one better represented the Beach movement than lovely Annette Funicello. A good place to start (and finish) is her *Beach Party* CD. There are lots of novelty numbers like *Luau Cha Cha Cha*, *Jamaica Ska* (with an actual ska beat!), *Wah-Watusi* and *Bikini Beach Party*, all perfect for our needs but there are quite a few love songs, making this one a good source for your own mixed tape. It must be said that Annette is really a horrible singer with no depth and that's part of the reason why we love her so.



A lot of the great Beach movies featured specialty numbers by the very pretty Donna Loren. Compared to Annette Funicello, Loren was Ella Fitzgerald. In a lot of the movies, she sounded almost like a folk singer trying to belt. On her CD compilation, *Beach Blanket Bingo: The Best of Donna Loren*, we hear that she was a very young woman trying to find her voice and she sings in an almost neurotic variety of styles, only occasionally capturing the magic on the screen. There are some great tracks (*It Only Hurts When I Cry*, *Muscle Bustle*, *Smokey Joe's*), but on the whole, this CD should be purchased when your collection is more complete.



More Beach Online:

Bright Lights Film Journal has a serious in-depth article on the whole Beach Movement in film. It's pretty interesting but for us the bottom line is we just like to see the singing and dancing.

TNT's Roughcut features a less in-depth filmography of the genre.

The Internet Movie Database features a complete list of Annette Funicello's work. Also featured are Donna Loren's five films and her Batman TV appearances.