



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

## Natalie Cole

### Snowfall on the Sahara

ELEKTRA RECORDS 62401-2 POP

In our teens, a lot of our spare time was spent helping the United Farm Workers' boycott of table grapes and Gallo wines. We'd stand outside of large supermarket chains with our flyers and thank shoppers for their support as they entered through the automatic doors. We also were involved in a lot of bad "street theatre" and the occasional demonstration (*Boycott lettuce! / Boycott grapes! / Boycott the wine that Gallo makes!*). In a time when the seeds of political correctness were just being born, we pronounced Gallo as GUY-YO, as Mexicans would, despite Gallo's Italian origins and we pretended to enjoy the folk music and traditional union songs played at our rallies and get-togethers.

One of these get-togethers was a planning meeting at our house. Always a potluck, our only real responsibility was a clean house and supply the correct music. We carefully laid out our records of Pete Seeger, the Weavers, a compilation of famous union songs (*You can't hurt Me / I'm stickin' with the Union...*) and *Gracias a la Vida* by Mercedes Sosa. Well, the meeting was a roaring success and the jug-wine was being passed around so we thought we'd break tradition and put on Natalie Cole's very popular **Inseparable** album. It was a huge hit and by the time *This Will Be* came on (last song, first side, if we're not mistaken) the whole room was dancing and shaking. We ended up helping the UFW for several more years and from this point on, we were in charge of the music.

Natalie Cole has a fine voice that occasionally hits notes of reckless abandon in a manner similar to



Aretha Franklin or Chaka Khan. We just love this big out-of-control sound, especially when it's used judiciously and inspired by the music. Cole's voice isn't as big as Franklin's or Khan's but when she's singing the right song, the effect is great. Unfortunately Natalie Cole has some difficulty in choosing material and it's quite hard for an admirer of her voice to remain faithful to her career. We gave up years ago but our interest was piqued when she recorded her tribute to Daddy Nat, **Unforgettable**. Much more satisfying was her follow-up **Take a Look**. Her shining hour should have been this new release, **Snowfall on the Sahara**, but let's just say there's a snowball's chance in the Sahara that we'd ever play this album for a Farmworkers' meeting, or for much else for that matter.

In order to show off her eclecticism, the songs chosen are from all over the map. There are several 1970s numbers that really didn't need to be re-done

(Leon Russell's *A Song for You* and Bob Dylan's *Gotta Serve Somebody*) or are inferior to the originals (Judy Collins' *Since You've Asked* and Bette Midler's *Stay With Me*). The contemporary ballads are forgettable. After several listenings (we really did try with this one, folks), they all end up a generic blob. Her one acknowledgement to a more adult-oriented fan base is *Everyday I Have the Blues*. This was a big hit for Count Basie and vocalist Joe Williams. Later in their Basie tribute *Sing a Song of Basie*, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross did a very clever (and quite famous) version where the singers sing Jon Hendricks' lyrics to the orchestration. Cole sings the Lambert, Hendricks & Ross version, note for note, yet Hendricks' lyrics are uncredited.

Despite this disc, we still think Natalie Cole has great potential and we will continue to follow her career. We'd like to give her a brief spank for being so naughty and then march right back into the recording studio where she can record material worthy of her legacy and talent.

☹ ☹

### *Mongo Santamaria*



#### Skin On Skin

RHINO R2 75689 LATIN

No one would dispute Mongo Santamaria's importance in the development of Afro-Cuban music but it's hard to get a handle on what his style would be. As *Skin On Skin*, a fine new compilation from Rhino Records proves, Santamaria was musically all over the map.

Because of licensing restrictions, there are large gaps in his career on this disc, but the liner notes thoughtfully point you in the right direction should you need a more complete view. We respect Santamaria a lot but this compilation (and the several

other albums we own by him) never set us on fire the way other leaders can. Rather than go the Boogaloo or straight Salsa route, Santamaria chose Funk and Jazz. We like it but we don't love it.

Highlights for us are *Barandanga*, *Guaguanco Mania*, *Cinderella* and of course his seminal *Afro Blue*.

☹ ☹ ☹ ☹

### *War*

#### Grooves & Messages: The Greatest Hits

AVENUE RECORDS R2 75903 POP

We recently found an inexpensive copy of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young's *Déjà Vu*. We played it once, had the appropriate nostalgic journey and promptly filed it away, most likely never to be heard again.

To be frank, we expected the same fate with this new compilation of WAR, but to our surprise, we keep coming back for more. WAR, you will remember, had hits with songs like *Spill the Wine*, *Slippin' into Darkness* and *Cisco Kid*. There were bongoes, traces of reggae and salsa and there was soul mixed in with the rock. Our favorite has always been *Low Rider* and there are few better tunes to accompany a late-night cruise.

In the early 1970s, the music was naïve, fun and slightly political. As the decade petered out, so did the band. One of the last tracks here is *You Got the Power*. Not being familiar with it, we assumed it was another political anthem. Oops! It's a disco track and "You've Got the Power" refers to "the power to turn me on!"

All in all, this compilation is great fun, especially if you were in junior high school when the originals were recorded.

The bonus CD of contemporary remixes is useless.

☹ ☹ ☹

*Aretha Franklin*

**Amazing Grace: The Complete Recordings**

RHINO / ATLANTIC R2 75627 SOUL / GOSPEL



If you are wisely an Aretha fan, you don't need MisterLUCKY to tell you how swell an album **Amazing Grace** is. You may wonder why it's been re-released again on CD and why you should own this new version.

The original **Amazing Grace** was edited to fit on two long-playing records. Sequences were changed and some of the music was cut. Even more surprising to discover is that the original version of Clara Ward's *How I Got Over*, the highlight of the album for many of us, was actually re-recorded and isn't live at all. **Amazing Grace: The Complete Recordings** follows the two-evening Gospel event from start to finish (with one irrelevant switch). It's an inspiring recording and listening to the whole thing through in one sitting is the way to go.

For those of us who love the original *How I Got Over*, not caring if it's live or not, it's still available on the Aretha Rhino box and as of this writing, the Lp version of **Amazing Grace** is still in print.

One disturbing fact about the event is that it was filmed. Our list of cultural crimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century now includes Roz Russell playing Mama Rose in **Gypsy**, the recordings that could have been by Martha Raye, and now the fact that a film of Aretha singing Gospel in her prime is collecting dust somewhere.

Amen.



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