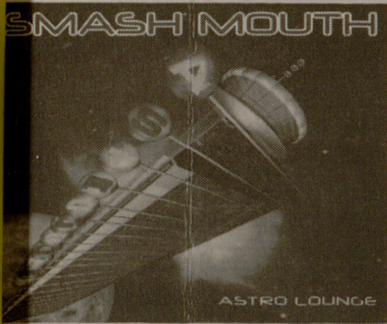


AGGIELIFE

Volume Control



Smash Mouth
Astro Lounge
Interscope Records



Cibo Matto
Stereotype A
CD Courtesy
of Warner Bros. Music



Various Artists
Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me Soundtrack
CD Courtesy
of Maverick Records



DJ Rap
Learning Curve
Higher Ground/Columbia
Records



Harry Connick Jr.
Come By Me
Sony Music



Vonda Shepard
by 7:30
Jacket Records

On their sophomore release, *Astro Lounge*, Smash Mouth proves that its first hit "Walking on the Sun" was no fluke. Relying on themes of problems within society and personal struggles, the band has made a very appealing alternative/pop album.

Its first single from the new release, "All Star," is a catchy little ditty that will keep listeners' heads bobbing and have them singing along with the chorus, "Hey now, you're an all star/Get your game on, go play".

However, "All Star" is only one of the many offerings that will get listeners to smile and think at the same time.

Some of the other songs that leave a mark are "Stoned," "Satellite" and "Come On Come On." There is also a re-release of its hit "Can't Get Enough Of You Baby" from the *Can't Hardly Wait* Soundtrack.

If not for the bouncy rhythms and catchy melodies, one might think that *Astro Lounge* was a direct shot at "the man," with all the attention that Smash Mouth pays to overcoming oppression and fighting the system. But after all is said and done, the prevailing sentiment is that these guys just want to party and have a good time. (Grade: B+)

— Mike Maddux

One should not believe everything in the papers. Every trendy 30-something with a comb-over and a ponytail is jumping on the international music bandwagon faster than European and Latin acts can gyrate their hips. Cibo Matto, then, should be a success out of the box. It isn't.

Judging from its first major-label release, this album should have sounded much better. Apparently, the idea of two little girls from the Orient trying to capture the American music scene in its entirety on every single song was too much for record execs to resist.

The end result is on the Spacehog side of mediocre. Each song combines queen bee rap, female solidarity vibes and Everclear-ish harmony into a decidedly terrible whole. The entire record is so Japan-pop generic it could substitute for a Sega Genesis game soundtrack.

It is sad that two cuties from the Far East with a boatload of talent and a cultural view so different from the average Orange-Julius snarking American can be reduced to producing a work so full of the stereotype that Cibo Matto sounds off against in their latest release. Welcome to the American music biz, girls. (Grade: C)

— Stephen Wells

It would be easy to give the new *Austin Powers* soundtrack some statement like, "It's smashing baby," or "It's groovy" but the truth is it really isn't.

The soundtrack is packed with ho-hum covers of '60s songs that never really needed to be covered in the first place. While covers of songs such as "American Woman" and "Word Up" may be fun to hear once, they become tedious quickly.

Melanie G (a.k.a. Scary Spice) does a cover of "Word Up" that makes listeners scream for the days when it was a bad Cherry Coke jingle and not the latest victim of Spiceman.

The album does, however, have a limited number of saving graces. A skewering of Will Smith's schmaltzy "Just the Two of Us" by Mike Myers playing Dr. Evil is roll-on-the-floor hilarious. "From the moment I heard Frau say I had a clone/I knew I'd be safe because I'd never be alone."

Contributions from Big Blue Missile (with Scott Weiland) and Madonna (with Ray of Light producer William Orbit) produce some high points, but the album reminds us exactly why velvet suits and go-go dancers became extinct. (Grade: C-)

— Aaron Meier

On her American debut, *Learning Curve*, England's DJ Rap shows that the world of dance and electronica is not only for the boys.

She forms tracks that are hard-edged and gritty while mixing in elements of jungle, drum and bass and electronic pop.

The best aspect of the album is that DJ Rap adds her own brand of originality by infusing catchy hooks while still keeping the beats large and thumping. It is not an easy task to perform, but when it works the results are amazing.

On cuts like "Bad Girl" and "You Get Around," she demonstrates her belief in the power of women without alienating the opposite sex — not the simplest task in the world.

The best track on the album has to be "Good To Be Alive," which was also featured on the *Go Soundtrack*.

Learning Curve is a very ambitious album and shows that fusion of musical styles can be a beautiful thing.

DJ Rap definitely proves with this release that she can go toe-to-toe with any of her male counterparts. (Grade: B+)

— Mike Maddux

If you started listening to Harry Connick Jr. because of his reputation as one of the most promising big band leaders of the 20th century and were baffled by his entrance into the funk and doo wop scene, then you will be pleasantly surprised at his return to what he does best.

Connick's latest offering *Come By Me* is reminiscent of his earlier works *Blue Light Red Light* and *We Are In Love*. The album is a refreshing balance of new works and classic standards that showcases his talents both as a composer and musician. Connick uses both a 16-piece big band and a full symphony orchestra to demonstrate his mix of compositional savvy and equally impressive charm, as well as his Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra influenced croon.

Songs like the title track and "Easy For You To Say" demonstrate his knack for writing timeless pieces that would thrive in any era. His renditions of classics like "Danny Boy" and "There's No Business Like Show Business" would make even Count Basie proud.

Connick is a true musician in an era of wannabes who wouldn't know a melody if it jumped up and bit them. When he is on, he can really take the listener back to the golden ages of swing and big band. (Grade: A)

— Mike Maddux

On her latest album, Shepard takes a break from her usual Monday-night gig on TV's "Ally McBeal." The result is a satisfying departure from the covers she delivers on the hit series.

Hints of Shepard's powerful talents were heard on the soundtrack to "Ally McBeal," but by 7:30 explores her easy flowing alto.

The album's opening track clears away any idea that Shepard's talent is limited to cover tunes on a baby grand. Left to her own devices, the album is a quiet journey into the heart of a woman with plenty to say.

The album's lyrics are at times uninspired, but Shepard's voice can mask the most trite line.

The album's strongest track, "Baby, Don't You Break My Heart Slow," a tear-evoking duet with Indigo Girl Emily Saliers, showcases Shepard's full range of singing, piano playing and songwriting ability. The inspiring lyrics and powerful piano build up to an emotive crescendo.

The majority of the album is ideal rainy day music that is quiet, yet powerful.

However, Shepard doesn't really divest herself of the "Ally McBeal" stereotype, which will plague her long after the show has run its course. (Grade: B)

— Aaron Meier

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