

Am I Not Your Girl?
Sinéad O'Connor
(Capitol)

Amused to Death
Roger Waters
(Sony)

Bone Machine
Tom Waits
(Island)

I Was Warned
Robert Cray
(Polygram)



ROGER WATERS

AMUSED TO DEATH

by KIRBY FERGUSON

After *I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got* and her heart-rending version of Elton John's "Sacrifice," I was expecting a religious experience from Sinéad O'Connor's new album. However, *Am I Not Your Girl?* (5) turned out to be one of those albums where you skip from track to track saying to yourself, "It can't all be like this." For those of you who don't already know, Sinéad's new album is, yes, a collection of swing covers.

First of all, at this point in my life I don't like jazz. I grew up on rock 'n' roll; it's in my heart. I can stand jazz as a pleasant, evocative wall paper, which is how I see *Am I Not Your Girl*. Incorporating jazz into your vision is one thing, but a complete stylistic about face is schizophrenic behaviour. As an artistic move, the album is puzzling, if not pointless, if not self-indulgent. I also question Sinéad's participation in creating this album. For a woman who wrote, produced and arranged her *debut*, she barely seems involved in the making of *Am I Not Your Girl*. By the by, "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" gave me serious déjà vu. Turns out it was the recurring melody in *Hannah and Her Sisters*. Trivia? I'm full of it.

Am I Not Your Girl? is an incredibly depressing album because I had considered Sinéad *the best*, a second coming of Van Morrison, but here she chooses Frank Sinatra over Van. Unfortunately, Sinéad O'Connor might not be able to distinguish between following her heart

and following some base compulsion to shock and alienate her fans.

But if Sinéad wants that Pompous Rock Star title she's gonna have to beat the bag a long time before she can step in the ring with the all-time champ: ex-Pink Floyd dictator, Roger Waters. His latest, *Amused to Death* (1), a stomach-turning, bloated, mock-opera à la *The Wall*, is a fiasco of epic proportions. The thing that kept Floyd from being completely unbearable was the band's performance, but *Amused* even fails on that level. Waters hires super-hack Jeff Beck to fill David Gilmour's shoes, but his string bending sounds cold and calculated. This is ponderous, bathetic, aural cinema (shudder). And when Roger tries a ballad with "Too Much Rope" you'd better make sure the dog's out, while lyrically, this is just more of Water's cynical, sledgehammer social commentary. But this is *art*, goddammit, and Roger's gonna smuck you upside the head with it until you believe him. Somebody make this guy listen to "Woolly Bully" until his ears bleed.

The pick of this very odd last couple of weeks has to be Tom Waits' *Bone Machine* (7), his first album since 1987's *Franks* (sic) *Wild Years*. A traditional set of Waits' herky-jerky ditties from the junkyard, hung-over ballads and weird r&b, it's his extraordinary songwriting facility that keeps it all from degenerating into annoying abrasiveness, while his beat-influenced lyrics feature many witty turns of phrase ("I'd love to go drowning") and oddly affecting images ("And the earth died screaming/While I lay

dreaming of you"). There's filler here -- atmospheric numbers like "The Ocean Doesn't Want Me" and "Murder in the Red Barn" -- but Waits', er, tenderness and, uh, way with melody will keep you digging through the grotesquely deformed

"...a fiasco of epic proportions."

surfaces to get to the compelling substance of *Bone Machine* (I don't know what the hell I'm talking about). Ultimately it's all too strange to really take to heart, but in an age of vacuous slickness, *Bone Machine* is beautifully ugly.

Unlike Tom Waits, an American original Robert Cray ain't, but immensely talented he certainly is. Cray's last release, the Stax-ish *Midnight Stroll*, contained some of his roughest singing yet and his best material since his 1986 breakthrough, *Strong Persuader*. *I Was Warned* (7) is exactly what you'd expect -- warm, soulful and sweet, yet utterly retro. As usual, it's a superbly performed bit of nostalgia, but someone with these kind of chops should push himself a bit more.

Still Waiting

Supposedly new albums were to be released last week by Peter Gabriel, Prince and Extreme, but I haven't seen 'em. Anyway, expect *Us*, *Symbols* and *Three Sides to Every Story* from those respective artists in weeks, days or probably now. Also expect newbies from REM, Public Enemy and Talking Heads.

For a listen to any of the above albums, tune in to CIMN, 104.5 FM cable or 700 AM on campus.