

**New Releases**

**Seal**  
**"Human Being"**  
 Warner Bros.  
 Grade: C+

The twisted, midnight blue-colored Seal on the cover of his new album, "Human Being" appears frozen and confused — much like a listener once he has played it.

His latest album gets off to a promising start. For the first six songs, Seal stretches his musical range to include elements of funk, soul, R&B and, of course, a little techno. And while he may be borrowing from a few more refined artists, it is refreshing to see that he does not confine himself to one beat.

On top of that, Seal makes no attempt to make another ballad song such as his biggest hit, "Kiss From a Rose." While the track may have been a wonderful ballad, it also had a "Clockwork Orange"-like association effect on the listener, conjuring up images of the movie "Batman Forever" whenever the song appeared.

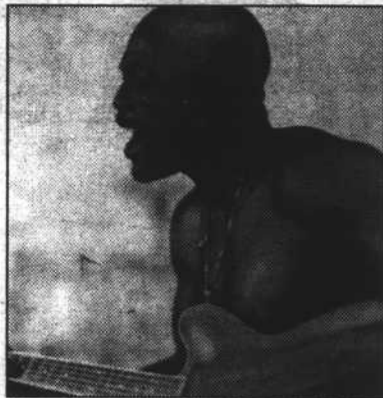
Unfortunately, Seal regresses to making slow, pensive ballads on the second half of the album. With the exception of the last song, the second half is a drawn-out drone.

Critics have clubbed Seal for being a product of super-producer Trevor Horn and nothing more. Horn has been responsible for incorporating soul and jazz arrangements in albums by Simple Minds, Boyzone and Paul McCartney. However, Seal's vocals grow more distinct with each album released. And when he's messing with different musical elements, his vocals can be downright arresting.

The themes of "Human Being" are fairly weighty in Seal terms. Failed

relationships, the inability to communicate with one another and racism are all covered. Unfortunately, neither the music nor the vocals is engaging enough to make the listener care.

"If you take away my pain you take away my chance to grow/Here, take the blade, my love, and drive it through my heart," are typical lyrics on this album. And as a public service gesture, Seal makes sure his most impor-



COURTESY PHOTO

tant lyrics are boldfaced and three times larger than the others in the liner notes.

Seal's earnestness fades slightly in this album. In his lyrics, he still comes off as a humbled, spirituality-seeking crooner, but he breaks the title of his album up to achieve a greater effect. "Hu Manbe In G," is the perceived title. It's a nice trick, but it comes off as slightly less annoying than the title, "Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness."

With all the releases in the past few weeks, "Human Being" probably will get lost in the bunch. Perhaps if Seal could have spent more time in the studio expanding on the experiments that

worked on the first half of the album, he could have made an album that would have stayed in listeners' ears for more than a few weeks.

Instead, "Human Being" seems destined for background music in a bookstore. You can almost smell the latte and cheap stick incense in this album.

— Sean McCarthy

**Garth Brooks**  
**"Double Live"**  
 Capitol Nashville  
 Grade: A

It'd be somewhere around the middle of the show when Garth Brooks' voice would blend with thousands as he leaned up against the drummer's pod while playing an acoustic version of "Unanswered Prayers."

With an awed expression on his face, he'd smile and say, "Yeah. Way cool."

Then the crowd would take over. For more than eight years, Brooks has relied on this pattern of crowd-oriented music and theatrical stage action for his enduring success as a live artist. Now he has released his "Double Live" album, which includes 22 previously recorded songs and three new songs that capture on disc his famous live experience.

It's everything you'd expect from a Brooks concert — minus the endless running around and reckless banter — pumped into two compact discs and more than 100 minutes.

There's Brooks yelling "God bless Chris Ledoux" in the middle of "Much Too Young (To Feel This Damn Old)." Fiddle player Jimmy Mattingly plays his extended intro for "The Fever."

**New Barnes & Noble 'super-store' features music, cafe**

BY JEFF RANDALL  
 Staff writer

Advocates of Lincoln as a booming metropolis found a new reason to cheer Wednesday as they pointed south to the soon-to-be South Pointe Mall and the opening of the newest Barnes & Noble Booksellers at 2910 Pine Lake Road.

The new store is Lincoln's second Barnes & Noble.

The bookstore occupies 26,000 square feet and employs 65 people. More than 175,000 books adorn its shelves, and more than two-thirds of those books were selected by Barnes & Noble, Inc. to reflect local tastes and interests, according to Mary Lilja, a publicist for the company.

"A lot of chain stores tend to be a somewhat bland and faceless entity," Lilja said. "But Barnes & Noble has dedicated itself to community-driven stores, not cookie-cutter institutions."

Much like all other Barnes & Noble stores, the newest one features a 28,000-title music department and a bistro-style café, which serves Starbucks coffees and light foods.

Although at first glance it would appear that a "super-store" of this ilk could give a black eye to some local shops, area booksellers are taking the new Barnes & Noble opening in stride.

"We really didn't notice any change in business when the first (Barnes & Noble) opened, so we don't foresee any radical change this time around," said Scott Wendt, co-owner of Bluestem Books, 712 O St.

Bluestem, like most other locally owned bookstores, sells only used books. And, Wendt said, the new and used book markets are quite different.

"I think we carry a different stock," he said. "People who want what Barnes & Noble have to offer will go there, and people who want what we offer will come here."

"I don't think we overlap enough to consider it competition."

Barbara Chesnut, owner of the Book Rack, 6940 Van Dorn St., agreed and added that she saw the

arrival of the new Barnes & Noble as more of a boon than a hindrance to her business.

"It does me good, because people will have more books to bring in," Chesnut said.

She said the influx of new books into the community would only improve her business and her inventory, which she builds through customer trades.

"I think (Barnes & Noble and used bookstores) complement each other," Chesnut said. "We don't really compete."

Barnes & Noble bookstore celebrated its opening Tuesday night with a guest vocalist, pianist and refreshments for patrons. The official grand opening was Wednesday.

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There's the acoustic version of "To Make You Feel My Love," and of course, an eight minute, 56-second version of "Friends in Low Places."

It's all there — with the exception of any screw-ups. Brooks never sings off-key, and Mattingly never breaks a string because each song is taken from a compilation of different shows — most of which were recorded during his recent world tour.

So yeah, Brooks kind of cheats a little bit, but you still get a really live feel and great sound quality compared to many live albums.

He shows a lot more freedom with his vocals than he does on his previous albums, stretching notes out and bending others. His musicians are also given more improvisational freedom throughout each song.

Brooks chats just a little bit in the middle of some songs, and you get to hear the crowd sing on a handful of ballads. Most importantly, the world can finally see that no one — not even Brooks' guitar players — can pick the previously recorded intro to "The Thunder Rolls." How it appears on the album "No Fences" remains a mystery.

The new songs on the album include "Wild As The Wind," a duet with Trisha Yearwood, "Tearin' It Up (And Burnin' It Down)," an up-tempo song written-in-part by Brooks, and "It's Your Song."

It'd be somewhere around the end of the show when Brooks would lean up against the drum pod, pull his hat down over his face and sing the final seven words of "Friends in Low Places."

His band would slowly bring the song to a close as Brooks would cross his arms across his chest.

Just as he structures his live show, "Friends in Low Places" wraps up the double-disc set, leaving room for only one more track. His favorite song "The Dance," generally finishes his live show, and it ends the album as well.

Although you can't cram the complete Garth Brooks concert experience into a CD, "Double Live" is about as close as you can get. There's no encores or swinging on hanging ladder ropes, but there's a feel to old songs that you won't hear anywhere else.

Way cool.

— David Wilson

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