

Female artists' releases deserve acclaim

BY ANDREW SHAW

The mid-'90s brought us the glorification of many ideas that never lasted: homoerotic chic, unbound angst and powerful, introspective women.

The women of the music scene in 2000 have to sell their bodies and keep the intelligent thoughts tightly locked inside their minds or face the chopping block. Three queens of mid-'90s rock, Jill Sobule, Tracy Bonham and Poe, have released albums in 2000, which have been drastically and lamentably overlooked.

Jill Sobule's career has been spotted and, perhaps, defined by rejection. Having been signed and dropped by two major labels, Sobule finds her new home at Beyond Music. Her 1995 self-titled release featured the tongue-in-cheek bit "I Kissed A Girl." Her playful folk-based rock was popu-

lar for a short time before falling into obscurity.

Sobule's 2000 release, "Pink Pearl," renews faith in artists who won't sacrifice their personal sound for another chance to climb the pop charts. The first track, "Rainy Day Parade," surrounds Sobule with her favorite composition: lounge-style acoustic guitar, sunny vocals and a generally peppy sound.

An outstanding track on "Pink Pearl" pokes fun at the entertainment industry that rejects her. "Heroes" points out the faults of many famous people in history: "Pablo Picasso cruel to his wives. My favorite poets took their own lives." The lyrics seem bitter, but the music counters the idea, clipping along on the frisky theme, which is maintained throughout the album.

Sobule's music is infectiously joyful and intelligently childlike,

an idea that has been lost in today's music. She approaches rock with a refreshing view, a weathered past that has turned into an ear-to-ear smile. She discusses friends, family and the purest moments of happiness on "Pink Pearl," and it's time that an artist stands strong for the positive and downplays the negativity of life.

Whereas Sobule continues to be jovial, Tracy Bonham found temporary popularity in 1996 through the exploitation of unfettered agony.

Raised in Eugene, Ore., Bonham started playing violin at age nine under the guidance of her music-teacher mother. Ever since, she has been combating the shackles of classical music.

From "The Burdens of Being Upright," Bonham's debut album, the single "Mother Mother" crashed into the charts, echoing the anger expressed in the male-dominated grunge scene. On "Down Here," Bonham's latest release, she continues to exude frustration through her voice, violin and guitar.

The new album showcases her talents on the violin and dispels all stereotypes that the instrument must be heard in a classical setting. "Cold Day in Hell" combines eerie intervals on the violin with distorted bass and erratic drums in a sporadic fury. No other artist comes close to creating such an awe-inspiring cloth from the polar threads of classical roots and hard rock.

The single "Freed" begins with a complacently bowed violin and an equally soothing vocal timbre, which explode into a liberated yet controlled conflagration of sound. The musical qualities of "Freed" mirror Bonham's career.

Her debut album was her first jump into the record industry and allowed her to experience the

MUSIC REVIEW

Jill Sobule

Title: "Pink Pearl"

Label: Beyond Music 2000

★★★ of 5 stars

rock potential of her instrument, though she had to fight for legitimacy in the industry.

Because of complications with her label, Bonham was forced out of the studio for nearly a year. When she finally stepped back into the studio, she felt liberated from the label's bonds, as well as from the confines of the critical eyes of the industry and public and was allowed to make music without having to legitimize herself the whole way. She is free from being held down, and "Down Here" is a celebration of that journey.

Poe's latest release, "Haunted," guides the listener through a journey as well, but one of the mind and spirit.

Five years ago, Poe released "Hello," her debut album, which was introduced to alternative radio with the singles "Angry Johnny" and "Trigger Happy Jack." The music produced on "Hello" was obviously rock, but contained a macabre spiritual element which alluded to larger concepts.

"Haunted" was grown from one such concept and is one of the greatest musical undertakings of the past decade. After finding recordings of her late father's voice, Poe became obsessed with listening and coming to terms with her upbringing and his untimely death. The album is a continuous dream sequence, held together with ethereal

MUSIC REVIEW

Tracy Bonham

Title: "Down Here"

Label: Island/ Def Jam Records 2000

★★★ of 5 stars

segues containing samples of her father's voice and a dialogue between the two of them.

"Haunted" shakes listeners to their souls and uncovering the mysteries of this album becomes an obsession. Poe commands various genres from the Latin-touched "Spanish Doll," the driving rock of "Walk the Walk," the laid-back "5&1/2 Minute Hallway" and the demurely honest "If You Were Here."

The journey is traveled by all who experience "Haunted." The confinement and liberation, the fear and conquering of spirits become an expedition through listening.

Recorded and manipulated completely on Poe's computer, "Haunted" is one of the most finely crafted albums of recent history. It is distressing to know that this musical masterpiece will be overlooked because of the industry's fear to take a chance on a truly thought-provoking and poignant theme. It's a lot easier to hype up Ricky Martin or Madonna, but the benefits of experiencing "Haunted" could change how people approach and experience loss, discovery and fear.

It is a shame that all three of these virtuosos, masters of their genre, were abandoned by a music industry obsessed with temporary distraction and instant gratification of animal desires.

We should all be offended that the mind-numbing sludge of Britney Spears and Eminem is force-fed by the media, and the intellectual and inspiring music of Sobule, Bonham and Poe's is not offered to an audience that can truly be changed through the experience of active listening.

UNL theater has century of success

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"The '40s and '50s were about building up the department, but the '60s and '70s were more creative," Overton said. "It was very technical. We concentrated on improving dialects, diction, staging, lights, sound and design."

Always a perfectionist, Williams trained his students in all levels of theater, demanding nothing less than their personal best.

For effect, Williams, a known perfectionist, would throw a chair or smash a watch during rehearsals.

"He would tell them it was a family heirloom, but he had a full drawer of these smashed watches," Overton said, laughing. "The students were quite distressed over it."

Overton said one of the last times she and Williams talked was "quite puzzling," as he walked through Temple, asking Overton "to take care of business."

As Overton arrived to see a performance a few days later, she saw Williams in his office window as he dramatically bowed and tipped his hat to her. That night in 1971, Williams died of a stroke.

"After Dallas' death, I went into his office, and his desk was cleared except for about 80 little square notes asking me to take care of this and that."

Symbolizing the excellence of university theater, golden statues called "The Dallas" are given to students every year, making the perfectionist himself proud.

Since the 1970s, the theatre department has drastically revised curriculum, and the theater underwent a massive renovation project in 1979.

"It was totally gutted," Hagemeyer said. "It was just a shell. All that was left was the attic and the Howell stage. Now, it looks more institutional, but I think part of its character is gone now."

But UNL theater has yet to see legacies like Alice and Dallas.

In this age of brief university-level jobs, the department stands on its own today, totting 103 undergraduates and 16 graduate students this year - a far cry from its humble beginnings in 1900.

Despite a rich history spanning an entire century, the university theatre arts department embraces its future with the expansion of the Temple building and the creation of classes geared toward new media such as film-making, CD-ROMs and Web design, Hagemeyer said.

"We want to offer new avenues for training students," she said. "We can change with technology with computer-aided classes."

Despite being the oldest theater in Lincoln, the Howell Theatre lobby recently received a facelift with new lights, railings, carpet and a fresh coat of paint, replacing the 1970s earthy tones of orange, green and brown with cool blues and grays.

Also, the Howell Theatre offers comfortable, new seats and has improved wheelchair access, Hagemeyer said.

Despite all the changes to the building, the staff and the myriad of faces that has graced the stages inside Temple, the philosophy certainly has not changed. The show must go on.

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