

Girls + Guitars = Gifts

What to get your audiophile this December. **By Margaret Coble**

Editor's Pick



Persona, Queen Latifah

(Verve): I'm an old school Queen Latifah fan. I still have the cassette of *All Hail the Queen*, her 1989 debut that set the visual and contextual standard for female rappers to come. Today, Latifah is a musician, actress, author, record label head, TV spokesperson and all-around one-woman entertainment conglomerate who can compete easily with her male counterparts. This album shows how well-rounded she is, with a mixture of urban R&B, hip-hop, pop and rap. Some songs, like the clubby "Cue The Rain," will kick Lady Gaga or Pussycat Dolls off your playlist. Others, like the Pharrel Williams-produced "If He Wanna," may bore you to tears. The few points where Latifah is candid—rapping like the straight-up Jersey girl she is in "The Light" and singing about lovers being strangers and big girls not crying in "Runnin'"—make for the best songs of all. I still think Latifah is talented and unstoppable, and this CD is worth a listen, but purists should reach back to the oldies bin to find out why she rocked—er, rapped—our world 20 years ago. (*verve-musicgroup.com*) **[Diane Anderson-Minshall]**



Catie Curtis

Searching for the perfect holiday gift for your music-lovin' gal? Well, here are three recent releases from lesbian favorites Kate Reid, Catie Curtis and Sarah Bettens that are sure to score you some major points. Trust me.

I'm Just Warming Up, Kate Reid (self-released): You really can't go wrong with a gift of Kate Reid's music. She might not be as much of a lesbian household name as Sarah Bettens or Catie Curtis, but just give her a few more years and she will be. The self-described "homofolkie" from Ontario (now living in Vancouver) has recently released her second CD of hilarious and heartwarming acoustic poetry, the highlight of which is "The Only Dyke at The Open Mic." It's an Ani DiFranco-style ramble that humorously recounts an anxiety-ridden experience on stage in front of a room of straight folks in which our heroine eventually wins the crowd over. Reid's comedic word-smithing also excels on "Ex-Junkie Boyfriend" and "Emergency Dyke Project," the latter of which takes a jab at the success of Katy Perry's "I Kissed a Girl." It's not all fun and games, though, as Reid also gives voice to more serious topics, like she



Kate Reid

does on the sparse "No More Missing Daughters," a story about Vancouver's missing women. Meanwhile, cuts like "Dirty Girl" revel in sweet, sexy love. Overall, it's a well-balanced set of smart acoustic folk that's hard not to love. (*katereid.net*)

Hello, Stranger, Catie Curtis (Compass Records): One of the reigning queens of contemporary folk—who happens to be an out lesbian—finally appeases long-time fans with a stripped-down, bluegrass-leaning collection of hits and covers. As a whole, the set has a more intimate, personal-concert feel, in part due to the fingerpicking finesse of her band, an all-star grouping of Music City players. But Curtis' relaxed, gentle voice is really the biggest star, front and center amid the often-improvised acoustic instrumentation. Highlights include the title track, a fun, old school country duet with Mary Gauthier, a fiddle-filled cover of Richard Thompson's "Walking on a Wire" and a banjo-driven version of Cat Stevens' "Tuesday's Dead," along with twangier takes on several older Curtis fan favorites like "Dad's Yard" and "Passing Through." It's a feel-good, sing-a-long set that clearly establishes Curtis' place among songwriting giants and country-folk legends, and would make an excellent gift for fans new and old. (*catiecurtis.com*)

AMY MOSELEY (CURTIS), REBECCA BLISSETT (REID)

Q+A

The Plastiscines

Although barely in their 20s, The Plastiscines are already music business veterans, equally influenced by New Wave archetypes like Blondie and The B-52s and 21st-century acts like The Yeah Yeah Yeahs and The Strokes. Their first album, fittingly titled *LPI*, came out in 2007. The band's sophomore disc, *About Love*, arrived in late summer. Although they still favor high-energy punk-pop, this album finds The Plastiscines stretching musically. Katty Besnard (lead vocals), Marine Neuilly (lead guitar), Louise Basilien (bass) and Anaïs Vandevyvere (drums) may be young, but they've done their homework.

Which musicians have influenced you?

Neuilly: Ari Up from The Slits is one of our biggest influences. She created a new punk movement during the '70s with only girl musicians. We are really respectful of what they had to go through because at the time

it was hard for girl bands to be respected. Debbie Harry from Blondie is also a huge icon to us.

The word "bitch" is usually used negatively. But in your song, you seem to celebrate it.

Neuilly: I wrote this song when I was 17. We were just starting the band, and people were being critical about how we were dressed and caring about the physical aspect without even listening to our music. So I remember [being] in a really angry mood, sitting on my bed playing guitar and thinking, as a response to these people, "Yeah you're right, I'm a bitch, when I brush my teeth." After that, I felt so liberated!

Vandevyvere: I think there's a little bitch hiding in every [person], and I like it!
How did your cover of Linda Ronstadt's hit, "You're No Good," come about?

Besnard: We were thinking about doing a cover for the new album but after all the



songs we tried, none of them were working. One day, [I came to] band practice with this idea and it worked straightaway! The idea [came] more from Dee Dee Warwick's [version], actually.

What are your favorite American cities so far?

Neuilly: I love Austin. We played there for the last show of the Nylon summer tour and it was one of my best gigs! I'd love to be back to play at [the] South by Southwest festival.

Vandevyvere: I'm a big fan of Los Angeles. I'm really into Malibu, Venice Beach and Santa Monica. I [would] die to live over there, wake up every morning, go surfing and play [music] all day long.

[Dave Steinfeld]

Never Say Goodbye, Sarah Bettens (Cocoon/V2):

On a similar sort of vibe, out Belgian rock star Sarah Bettens offers up a lovely new collection featuring three new songs plus live, guitar-and-piano-accompanied favorites from her last two solo records and covers by the likes of Bonnie Raitt ("I Can't Make You Love Me") and Julie London ("Cry Me a River"). Inspired by her 2006 *From Scream to Whisper* theater tour, the set fills both a greatest hits and covers niche as well as offering a glimpse at the softer, more intimate side of Bettens' voice. With its three new cuts it is this year's must-have for fans—the jazzy "I Can Do Better Than You," the dramatic piano ballad "Slow You Down" and the anthemic love song "Win Me Over" are all winners—while the stripped-down treatments of "Go," "Scream," "Not an Addict" and "Come Over Here" add a whole new dimension to these international hits. (sarahbettens.com) ■

Look out for our exclusive interview with Sarah Bettens in a future issue

Other Licks By Margaret Coble



The Quick & Dirty
Shelley Nicole's
blakBüshe
(Red Butterfly Music)

This Brooklyn-based co-ed septet busts out with a rock-soul-electronica hybrid, sounding like a feminist version of the Brooklyn Funk Essentials. The centerpiece of their new EP is "blak Girls," a '70s-vibe soul-funk female empowerment anthem that's also an irresistible dance groove. Can't wait to hear more from them. (blakbushe.com)



My Guilty Pleasure
Sally Shapiro
(Paper Bag)

If shiny, happy dance music is your thing, then this critically acclaimed Swedish artist's sophomore album is for you. Pop-leaning and ethereal, vocalist Sally Shapiro stays true to her '80s synth-heavy Italo-disco roots. "Love in July" is a dancefloor anthem, while "Moonlight Dance" is an '80s throwback. Fun! (johanagebjorn.info/sally.html)



Turn Me Loose
Ledisi
(Verve)

The New Orleans native and Grammy Nominee funks it up even more on this fourth studio album. This 14-cut set mixes rock, blues, soul and hip-hop in a fresh, retro sound. The production level is high, but still retains a gritty feel. The ass-shakin' opener "Runnin'" and "Everything Changes" are my faves, as well as the Buddy Miles cover, "Them Changes." (ledisi.com)



Scrapbook
Ellis
(Roughneck Records)

This two-disc DVD set will make Ellis fans really happy. The first disc includes a recap of the first 10 years of the singer-songwriter's brilliant career, a live concert set and a new song, "Coming Home to You," accompanied by a fan photo slide show. The second disc is a 64-song iPod-ready compendium of Mp3s from her first five albums. (ellis-music.com)