



Just in time for Valentines' Day, John Waters serves up the musically romantic goods.

MUSIC REVIEW: *A DATE WITH JOHN WATERS*

Bill Sherman January 30, 2007 29 Views

To start, any CD anthology that has the wherewithal to include both Clarence "Frogman" Henry's "Ain't Got No Home" and Edith Massey's cover version of "Big Girls Don't Cry" automatically has me goin' into it with good feelings. The former's a rollicking masterwork of New Orleans gender-bending goofiness, while the latter track is never-to-be-scrubbed from your memory once you've heard it (no matter how much you may *wish* it might be).

Blending the rhythmic underpinning from Eddie Cochran's "Something Else" to a chirpy girl chorus and Massey's infamously mush-mouthed vocals, it's a danceable musical travesty of the highest sort. (I first heard "Big Girls" on the out-of-print Rhino Brothers' anthology *World's Worst Records*, where it more than held its own against the likes of Ogden Edsl's "Kinko the Clown" and the Legendary Stardust Cowboy's "Paralyzed.") Leave it to John Waters, of course, to cull these two indelible nuggets of pop history into one swell collection.

A Val-Day follow-up to Water's recently reissued X-mas collection, *A Date with John Waters* (New Line) follows the format of that, set with a mix-tapey blend of camp, out-there novelty numbers, undeservedly obscure r & b tracks and tracks whose inclusion are dictated as much by their personal significance to Waters as anything else. Thus, we get to hear the first 45 that a young Waters ever shoplifted, which turns out to be Patience and Prudence's sweet-if-slightly-disturbing 1956 pop hit, "Tonight You Belong to Me." In addition to Massey's track, Waters also doles out a cut from a second member of his movie troupe, Mink Stole, who surprisingly and effectively stakes out Peggy Lee smoky jazz diva territory with "Sometimes I Wish I Had A Gun." Pretty cool, but every time I play it, I still have visions of Stole holding up that sign in *Hairspray* accusing one of the teens on the dance floor of wearing "Falsies!"

At least we're spared the kitschy holiday sentimentality that cropped up once too often on *A John Waters Christmas*. This time, one of the recurrent themes appears to be violence (even if its presence is primarily contextual – as in Ike & Tina's classic "All I Can Do Is Cry"). In the one track guaranteed to get that Parental Advisory sticker slapped on the CD's jewel case, Elton Motello's "Jet Boy Jet Girl" uses the same backing track as Plastic Bertrand's pop-punk classic, "Ça Plane Pour Moi" (Which came first? I've read conflicting stories on that one.) for a psycho killer ("The sight of blood is such a high!") paean to fellatio. Back in the 70's, when I hung out regularly at a campus record co-op, we used to play Motello's single daily just to see who it drove out of the store.

All is not gay sex (though Waters *does* include Josie Cotton's classic girl group lament, "Johnny, Are You Queer?") and domestic battery, however. He also includes Eileen Barton's grin-enducing platter of feeder fluff "If I Knew You Were Comin' I'd Have Baked A Cake" and Ray Charles' inarguably magnificent original recording of "(Night Time Is) The Right Time." I was a trace surprised to note John Prine and Iris Dement's "In Spite of Ourselves" on the disc – folk music on a John Waters collection? – 'til I remembered that the song's white trash lyrics could've stood as the credo for Iggy Pop's character in *Cry-Baby*. Still, the track can't help sounding a bit off in a way that Earl Grant's vocals in the theme song to *Imitation of Life* (a strong visual influence on Waters' *Polyester*) don't.

Still, any set which helps to pull the great Mildred Bailey out of Big Band Cable Music Channel Limbo deserves a big thumb's up – even if Waters has to support her inclusion on the disc by reassuring us in his liner notes that the plus-sized singer was a prototypal fag hag. I'm eager for more, John. Maybe a disc called *John Waters' Dance Party* – released this summer to pony on the *Hairspray* movie musical, perhaps – which included all the dance cuts left off the original movie soundtrack CD? I know *I'm dyin'* to hear "The Dirty Boogie" again.