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PLAYLIST

A Pop Folkie, Soul Chanteuses, Postpunkers and Party Animals



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Corinne Bailey Rae, from Leeds, England, sings rhythm and blues with an airy voice and jazzy touches.

By JON PARELES
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Julieta Venegas

Readers' Opinions

Forum: Popular Music

Her romances may be flawed, but Juliet Venegas doesn't get all angsty about it on her album "Limón y Sal"

(Norte/SonyBMG). Her voice is blithe and

open, a little like Sheryl Crow's, and whether she's enjoying someone's company or saying a definite goodbye, she sounds as if she'll smile through it. Although Ms. Venegas sings in Spanish — she was born in Tijuana, Mexico — most of her music is folk-pop that could have come out of California, where she has also lived. Under the strummed acoustic guitar, there are some Caribbean and Mexican touches: reggae and reggaeton beats, Ms. Venegas's own button accordion. Each song lilts its tuneful way toward pop delight.

The Futureheads

The old new wave gets a touch of emo on the Futureheads' second album, "News and Tributes" (Star Time/Vagrant), and it's not a bad idea at all. Underservedly eclipsed by bands like Franz Ferdinand, Bloc Party and lately the Arctic Monkeys in Britain's postpunk revival, the Futureheads respond by tightening up even further. Angular meshed-guitar verses jump into blaring pop choruses, a stratagem learned from XTC. And in a three-song stretch — "Fallout," "Skip to the End" and "Burnt" — the Futureheads analyze romantic trauma as tautly as they build guitar parts.

Corinne Bailey Rae

"I wonder why it is I don't argue like this with anyone but you," Corinne Bailey Rae sings. It's one of the little barbs that sharpen the love songs on her self-titled debut album (Capitol). Ms. Rae has an airy voice with a jazzy quaver; she's the delayed English answer to Erykah Badu, with a streak of Minnie Riperton in the phantom high-harmony choruses.

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Ms. Rae wrote or collaborated on all the songs, and while obvious influences are strewn throughout the album — Marvin Gaye, the [Beatles](#), Alicia Keys, [Mariah Carey](#), Bill Withers, Stevie Wonder — Ms. Rae's melodies and voice are so graceful she usually gets away with it.

The Morning 40 Federation

Getting drunk, stoned and dirty is a way of life in the songs of the Morning 40 Federation, which has a fanatical following in its hometown, New Orleans. The songs on its fourth album, "Ticonderoga" (M80), are lean and low-slung. Guitar and horns pile onto bluesy, brawny riffs in unison, while Josh Cohen cackles about debauched, reprehensible behavior and delicacies like "Dumpster Juice." That song and the album title — "Ticonderoga" means "the place where waters meet" — are as close as the Morning 40 Federation comes to hinting at Hurricane Katrina's impact; hedonism comes first. As crudely funny as it is musically tight, the Morning 40 Federation could rule frat parties from coast to coast.

India.Arie

India.Arie's dedication to virtue, self-realization and positive thinking has its laudable side. But it can be wearing as she lends her gorgeous voice to self-help bromides and oddly grandiose professions of humility. "If [Nelson Mandela](#) can forgive his oppressors, surely I can forgive you for your passion," she sings in "Wings of Forgiveness," on her new album, "Testimony Vol. 1: Life and Relationship" (Motown), which also includes her latest repudiation of fashion: "I Am Not My Hair." But for one song she sounds more like a lover than a lecturer: "Good Mourning," a breathy postdivorce bossa nova that wonders, "Good morning, independence, or is it loneliness?"

Salif Keita

The great Malian singer Salif Keita found ideal backup on his 2002 album "Moffou": acoustic instruments in arrangements that filtered all Mr. Keita had learned in his long international career through patterns of West African counterpoint. The guitars are still acoustic on the sequel, "M'Bemba" (Decca). The title means "ancestor," and the music is no less cosmopolitan. The fingerpicked intricacies of the guitars are wrapped around 4/4 dance beats in "Yambo" and "Kamoukie," while the dancehall toaster Buju Banton shows up with some English words in "Ladji." Non-Malian instruments like the Caribbean cuatro and Hawaiian ukulele slip into the arrangements. Even the austere, traditionalist "Moriba" uses a *vielle*, a medieval European fiddle. But Mr. Keita's voice leaps out of every song with tender urgency: imploring, soothing, persuading, declaiming, confiding. It's a shame the album doesn't translate the lyrics to tell listeners what makes him so impassioned.

One of the musicians at the core of "M'Bemba" is Kante Manfila, the guitarist who hired Mr. Keita in the 1970's to sing with Les Ambassadeurs. They made an album in 1980 that has just been released as "The Lost Album" (Syllart/Cantos). Through a lo-fi haze, it shows Mr. Keita and Mr. Manfila already experimenting, most successfully in "Wara," a merger of six-beat Malian rhythms and guitar picking with Cuban conjunto horns and a woozy electric organ. The song is an Afro-Cuban mirage.

AFI

AFI's song "Miss Murder" is about suicide as vanity: "Can I make beauty stay if I take my life?" But the video clip (which also includes "Prelude 12/21") is something else entirely. With towering [Leni Riefenstahl](#) angles and a Helmut Newton fashion sense, the clip (available at most major music Web sites) presents AFI's asymmetrically coiffed lead singer, Davey Havok, as a fascist demagogue being assassinated by a coolly elegant femme fatale, with the help of some black rabbits. Sure, stardom is one big decadent death trip, but it keeps a lot of hairdressers gainfully employed.

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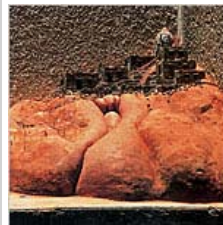
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