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Barbra Streisand's Duet With Gay Son Is Highlight Of New Album

By Chris Azzopardi

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Barbra Streisand, 'Partners'

Joined by a plethora of esteemed men on "Partners," Barbra Streisand duets with one in particular who stands out above the rest: her gay son, Jason Gould. The two share Irving Berlin's 1932 ballad "How Deep is the Ocean," a good fit for a gay-son-and-mom moment (the two initially premiered the song in 2012 in Philly). It's something truly special as their voices build in unison to a soaring climax. That innate dynamic doesn't mean that the rest of her boys don't bring it. Babyface lays down his creamy-as-caramel voice on "Evergreen," making literal on the "one love that is shared by two" declaration; "New York State of Mind" with Billy Joel is spine-tingly (cute, too, as Babs ends the song by inviting Billy for a slice of NYC pizza); and when Josh Groban joins Streisand for "Somewhere," it's a match made in vocal heaven. You also can't go wrong with Michael Buble's velvety croon on "It Had to Be You," a winsome rendition so warm and fuzzy - and with a nice personal touch - you'll wanna grab someone by the hand and dance in the streets. That romantic sentiment extends to "Love Me Tender," where Babs resurrects Elvis Presley. Their virtual twosome is indicative of the overarching problem with "Partners": It's stuck in the past. (Its only departure, an unexpected duet with Blake Shelton, is as awkward as you're imagining it to be right now). Instead of Lionel Richie, John Legend, Stevie Wonder and Andrea Bocelli, how about shaking it up, Babs? Give us a little grit (try Steven Tyler). More old meets new (Justin Timberlake or Bruno Mars, perhaps?) Because as it stands, "Partners," though obviously an impeccable vocal showcase, is too predictable to be anything more than redundant schmaltz. *Grade: C+*

Banks, 'Goddess'

"Goddess," the larger-than-life title of Jillian Banks' debut album, isn't much of an understatement. Anyone who's been following the 26-year-old's steady rise to stardom since she released two EPs last year knows she's destined to take that throne. Long before dropping this trance-y throng of brooding feels - sentiments draped atop a goth fusion of fuzz, keyboard punches and pulsating bass (think James Blake meets Feist) - everyone had their eye on this mysterious Los Angeles wunderkind. And for good reason. "Goddess" is a slow burner - but once it clicks, it consumes. Creeping up on you, "The Waiting Game" builds on a murmured vocal loop with a whirling synthesis of drone-y sounds. Just as you're caught up in its hypnotic reverb, it ends abruptly. All of its air sucked out, you're left as breathless as its coda. "Brain" is folk music from the future. Sexy and soulful, and with a shadowy aura that eventually owns every piece of your being, it inspires a fugue state. With inklings of Lauryn Hill and Erykah Badu present in Banks' celestial, R&B-inspired singing, the album's urban edge incites sophisticated simplicity and a lingering evocativeness. "Beggin for Thread," for instance, is an example of how you do dark for the masses (in the age of Lorde, the song should already be a big hit). And with it, it's clear Banks won't have to do much begging. If you're not already praising this "Goddess," you will be. *Grade: B+*

Also Out



Spoon, 'They Want My Soul'

For the last 20 years, the fellas of Austin band Spoon have turned rock inside out. They're at it again with their genre-busting eighth outing. A conduit for their hooky strums, offbeat quirks and spirited meanders, "They Want My Soul" harnesses the classic sensibility of the Stones and AC/DC, meandering with its own set of impulses and a no-rules mentality. "I Just Don't Understand" jangles with guitar, eventually breaking into piano-bar mode, and "Outlier" dances around with an exhilarating spirit. "They Want My Soul" is newly released but already sounds like a classic.

FKA Twigs, 'LP1'

Don't let FKA Twigs intimidate you. Pioneering R&B's future with her progressive full-length debut, the English innovator turns the genre on its head with techie effects from the next generation. If that makes Twigs sound intense, it's because she is. Listen to "Lights On" and try not to wander into space along with it. An anomaly set on an ambitious vision, using glitch, grime and her galaxy-reaching falsetto to work up a sexed-up fantasia, "LP1" tests the outer limits in a way that forces you to stick around.

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