

7/14/2006

New releases explore ambit of emotions

“The True False Identity” (DMZ/Columbia Records) — T Bone Burnett

Producer, sideman and — for the first time in 14 years — singer-songwriter T-Bone Burnett returns armed with razor-sharp lyrics and tough, taut guitar tones on “The True False Identity.”

It’s a very subterranean sound Burnett gets on this record,

which features stellar players like Dennis Crouch on upright bass, Jim Keltner on drums and Marc Ribot on electric and acoustic guitars.

Brooding, sinister and funky, like an after-hours jam session in the back room of some late ’50s dive, it’s the perfect setting for Burnett’s acid-tongue commentary on “The Art of the State,” as he titles one half of the collection, but also works on the more reflective “Poems of the Evening” set.

Burnett, a Christian who has produced and-or played on records by fellow believers Bob Dylan and Bruce Cockburn, pulls no punches as he breaks ranks with the conservative right.

On “Blinded by the Darkness,” he raps: “Do we want to inject the concept of sin into the Constitution?/Is this really

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SOUND ADVICE



“Life Less Ordinary” (Verve/GRP) — Mindi Abair

If ever an album was aptly named, it’s this one by the up-and-coming saxophonist.

“Life Less Ordinary” shows Abair in fine form. It’s already been to the top of the Billboard Contemporary Jazz Album charts, helped by the smooth jazz hit single “True Love.”

Her engaging sax playing, whether on alto or soprano, is prominent throughout the CD. But Abair’s got vocal chops as well, which she displays on the tropically flavored “Ordinary Love” and her cover of Rickie Lee Jones’ “It Must Be Love.”

The Berklee graduate and her musical collaborator, Mathew Hager, wrote most of the songs on the album, and were aided by a group of talented studio musicians. Also lending a hand on “It Must Be Love” are her Berklee classmate, Lalah Hathaway, on background vocals and Keb’ Mo on dobro.

Abair’s smooth jazz is accessible, and could easily fit on any soundtrack.

A sound such as this, blending pop and jazz, gives the genre much-needed crossover appeal to those who might have found it previously inapproachable.

On “Life Less Ordinary,” Abair has found a way to create pleasurable, hooky jazz that doesn’t slip into being Kenny G-style muzak.

— DALE MCGARRIGLE