EUGENE "HIDEAWAY" BRIDGES
Coming Home (Armadillo)
Boisterous but tasteful guitar
blues, technically flawless and
deply soulful—even the most
exuberant good-time tunes
sound refreshingly adult.

GOSPEL KEYBOARD TRIO
Heavenly Keys (The Saints)
Chicago keyboardist Willie
Jones, Leonard Maddos, and
Dwayne Mason proclaim their
faith in a set of churchy hymns,
up-tempo shouters, and stately
spiritual songs, both solo and as
a trio—it's virtuosity infused
with an uplifting earnestness
and joy.

BUDDY GUY
Bring 'Em In (Silverline)
Lately this Chicago blues leg-
dend has developed a distinc-
ting tendency toward over-
whrought performances, es-
pecially in full-band settings,
but he imbues the updated
60s soul tunes here (and the
occasional pop number, like
Dylan's "Lay Lady Lay")
with emotional depth and
good taste.

HERMON HITSON
You Are Too Much for the Human
Heart (Blue Note)
A compilation showcasing this
almost forgotten 60s soul singer
from Atlanta. Hitson was ham-
pered by second-rate production
in a hat box. A
terrible mask.

DENISE LASALLE
Wanted (Ecko)
Odes to womanly prowess, both
ail, a hell of a singer to pull
off a line like "Go back home,
see the old folks / T hey've all
had heart attacks and light
storms," but blue-eyed soul
brother Dan Penn is a hell of
a singer. He and Spooner
Oldham, who wrote and pro-
duced three of the 60s hits
here (and the occasional pop
number), like "A Hard Nut to Crack"
and "Space Man." The Canadian
drummer/native/lead-"stroke,"
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Girls, Girls, Girls

And you thought “women in rock” had it rough.

By Jessica Hopper

The four-disc genre retrospective One Kiss Can Lead to Another: Girl Group Sounds Lost and Found (Rhino) is a monument to that dream: the romantic fever dream of teenage-girl narratives written by adult songwriters. In the pre-Beatles days of the early 1960s girl groups came to dominate the charts, supposedly due to the deaths of Eddie Cochran, Ritchie Valens, and Buddy Holly. Trios and quartets of high school- and college-age women, many of them black, supplantied slick-haired boys on the radio and got a chance to tell their side of the story—sort of. Crooning and cooing about the triumphs and travails of young love (and little else), wagging gloved fingers in time to their honey-sweet three-part no no no, the girl groups proffered the inverse of the thrusty rebel lion and innuendo that had been codified by men: the ultra-chaste longings of a bunch of purported virgins in satiny evening gowns.

Looking back, girl groups seem the epitome of the gender pre scription of the time: that women and girls should be guileless and pure, dutting and servile, never fully women unless validated by the love of a man. In song after song, the promise of romance and the redemption it brings is strong: “Please find it in your heart / To make all my dreams come true / Let me get close to you,” sings country star Skeeter Davis on her girl-pop tour “Let Me Get Close to You.” Over a snare crack that sounds like a cannon shot and a bed of perfect ly harmonized ‘baah-bah-bah-oo-oo-oo-oo’,” the Chiffons’ Judy Davis on her girl-pop tour “Let Me Get Close to You.” Over a snare crack that sounds like a cannon shot and a bed of perfect ly harmonized ‘baah-bah-bah-oo-oo-oo-oo’,” the Chiffons’ Judy Craig hooms with pride, “I have a boyfriend / Met him a week ago / It’s Forever and Always.” As for their love objects, they’re bad boys, other girls’ boys, ex-boys, and next boys, and they’re all elusive. Whether he’s a commitment phobic cad, a cheater, an abuser, or a dude with a drag race death wish, she wants only to make him happy—and all he can do is disappear. She can shoo shoo shoo almost all night long, but he ain’t coming back. In the end she’s left with nothing but a tear-stained pillow and poetic metaphors: “All I can see on the beach / Is a piece of driftwood / And it somehow reminds me / Of the twisted memories / Left in my mind” goes the dramatic spoken verse of the Bitter Sweets’ “What a Lonely Way to Start the Summer.”

But One Kiss Can Lead to Another is more than just an exhaustive tribute to broken hearts and high-tease hairdos: it’s a chronicle of how the girl-group sound impacted rock ’n’ roll. Many of the girls came from gospel backgrounds and brought along the soul-soller and hand claps. Phil Spector’s production for the Ronettes not only created the template for the girl-group sound—forceful vocals cut with gunshot snares, pizzicato string stabs, and reverby the metric ton—but upped the ante for other producers who sought to compete: Brian Wilson, Spector arranger Jack Nitzsche, future Bread founder David Gates, and Motown’s resident genius team Holland-Douzier-Holland. They made symphonic pop and made it loud as hell, a cavernous cav alade of harps, timpani, and orchestra-size string sections with occasional tracks of auditi ve sobbing. The sound is as timeless as the sentiments of lovelorn teens and still holds up decades after the genre’s final years, represented here by the Lovelites’ 1969 teen-pregnancy classic, “How Can I Tell My Mom and Dad?”

Music

Girls, Girls, Girls

And you thought “women in rock” had it rough.

By Jessica Hopper

The first time I stole a record was because I wanted to be in a girl group. It was easy. I went to the library, picked up a copy of 25 Years of Motown, cut out the magnetic alarm strip with a razor, slipped the five-album set into my large schoolbag with the spray-painted peace sign on it, and headed home to listen to “Reflections” by the Supremes a few dozen times in a row. I was obsessed with Diana Ross, Mary Wilson, and Florence Ballard and desperately wanted to be them all. That wasn’t the norm amongst 11-year-old Minnesota girls in 1988, but my fandom was immutable. Much as their harmonies killed me, what I really loved was their aesthetic: Wilson, and Florence Ballard, and Mary had the better voice and harmonies killed me, what I really loved was their aesthetic: much eyeliner. They were the most majestic representation of teenage narratives written in song after song, the promise of romance and the redemption it brings is strong: “Please find it in your heart / To make all my dreams come true / Let me get close to you,” sings country star Skeeter Davis on her girl-pop tour “Let Me Get Close to You.” Over a snare crack that sounds like a cannon shot and a bed of perfect ly harmonized ‘baah-bah-bah-oo-oo-oo-oo’,” the Chiffons’ Judy Craig hooms with pride, “I have a boyfriend / Met him a week ago / It’s Forever and Always.” As for their love objects, they’re bad boys, other girls’ boys, ex-boys, and next boys, and they’re all elusive. Whether he’s a commitment phobic cad, a cheater, an abuser, or a dude with a drag race death wish, she wants only to make him happy—and all he can do is disappear. She can shoo shoo shoo almost all night long, but he ain’t coming back. In the end she’s left with nothing but a tear-stained pillow and poetic metaphors: “All I can see on the beach / Is a piece of driftwood / And it somehow reminds me / Of the twisted memories / Left in my mind” goes the dramatic spoken verse of the Bitter Sweets’ “What a Lonely Way to Start the Summer.”

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Much as the sound of pop may have changed, the subject matter—love and how to suffer it—is still intrinsic to the soul—continued on page 26
Music

baring teen balladry on the radio today, and performers still rarely write their own material. But as the liner notes to One Kiss are careful to point out, some of these girls were more than singers, and the girl-group boom enabled them to establish careers as songwriters: among them were Stevie Wonder collaborator Syreeta Wright, a 17-year-old Mary Wells, and Dusty Springfield's biggest influence, Evie Sands, who has two early singles included in the set.

Sands's 1970 debut album for A&M, Any Way That You Want Me, reissued for the first time by UK label Rev-Ola in September, picks up where the girl-group box leaves off, tiptoeing into the post-Woodstock era. On the cover, clad in a dark brown pantsuit and tunic, she cruises a dirt road on her ten-speed, her long hair flowing, the very picture of the carefree and liberated new woman of the 70s. She's not even looking at the camera, as if to imply that she just happened to cruise into the frame in her special carefree way.

While the album consists mostly of love songs, unlike on One Kiss not every phrase begins with the word baby, and the portrayals of romance are a bit more grown-up. The man and his love are still elusive, but the girl is asking for more than hand-holding: she also wants friendship. On the album opener, "Crazy Annie," she's even the one doing the leaving.

Any Way That You Want Me sold 500,000 copies, but the bigger deal for Sands was the inclusion of "It's This I Am," which she describes in her liner notes for the reissue as a "thrill and personal milestone ... the first time I had gotten to record and release a song I had written." The rest of the record consists of songs that had already been made hits by everyone from the Troggs to Jackie Ross, but "It's This I Am" is the most memorable moment; the song has since been covered by Beck and Beth Orton, and Belle & Sebastian are such fans that they backed Sands on two dates on her European comeback tour in 2000.

A whisper-quiet, splendor-in-psych drift of faraway strings, electric piano, and indeterminate twinkling sounds, "It's This I Am" is Sands's haunting response to the firm prescriptions set for her and every other girl singer of the era. It's a liberation anthem, and she asserts her dynamism in a rich voice, sure and melancholy: "I'm that great divide / That never was at all / That's neither large nor heavy / That's neither light or small / It always was and will be / Forever through all time / It's here and there and nowhere / Always is / This is I am I find." She's defining who she is rather than who she is in relation to some absentee heartbreaker boy. And she is beyond definition.

continued from page 25
The Bounce Remains the Same

Nik Cohn tried to influence New Orleans rap but all he got was this lousy nickname.

By Robert Mentzer

White, British, and pushing 60, Nik Cohn never fit in with New Orleans’s rap scene, but for a brief period in the late 90s and early 00s he explored its margins as a journalist, talent scout, and manager. Triksta, his book about this period, is partly a memoir, partly a meditation on hip-hop, and partly an expose of what’s under the glittering surface of the music industry. But mostly it’s a story about hubris: Cohn’s an outsider who tried to harness and influence the scene and failed in spectacular fashion to do either.

Cohn, the author of 1968’s Ayopbopaloobop Alopbamboom (often cited as the first book of rock criticism), has been obsessed with New Orleans since childhood: he writes vividly and enchantingly about the city and its music, from his early fascination with Jelly Roll Morton to his first visit there in 1972, while on the road with the Who. Though he later moved to New York, he continued to rent a house in New Orleans for several months each year, describing the city as “the lover I could never be free of.” And he knows New Orleans’s hip-hop scene, which centers on bounce, a club-centric, bump-and-grind style. Cohn puts on his musicologist’s hat to explain that bounce is “patterned on the call-and-response of Mardi Gras Indian chants,” but another way to put it is that it’s hip-hop with the formal rigidity of a square dance, with the MC commanding the crowd—bend over and touch the floor, now turn around, now throw your hands up.

Cohn knew the music, but he didn’t feel it until the 90s, after he was diagnosed with hepatitis C. Hep C’s symptoms include insomnia and exhaustion, but to hear Cohn tell it the diagnosis forced him to live his life in a new, reenergized way. So he catches a parade float in New Orleans blasting a bounce track, Magnolia Shorty’s “Monkey on tha Dick,” and it connects. “The effect was baptismal,” he writes.

Cohn’s initial research leads him to Earl Mackie, a Jehovah’s Witness whose label, Take Fo’ Records, specializes in sex raps. (Mackie’s faith prevents him from releasing records advocating violence, but he believes sex is an acceptable theme. “It beats killing people,” he says.) Cohn brokers a major-label deal for one of Mackie’s artists, Choppa, and is initially granted a budget of $250,000 from Warner Brothers to make an album. “I would select producers,” he writes, “provide song ideas, hire guest artists and singers and live musicians as required, and try to keep Choppa’s nose to the grindstone.” He even writes lyrics: “Bend it over, catch the wall / Wobble wobble for me.”

It’s not giving away a significant plot point to say that the deal eventually falls through and Choppa defects to Master P’s New No Limit Records. Bounce insiders bristle at his attempts to turn a regional genre into a national success. One producer all but calls Cohn a carpetbagger, and Choppa is deaf to Cohn’s talk about broader career strategies. “They love me all over,” Choppa tells him. “Baton Rouge, Shreveport, Lafayette. Everywhere.”

Triksta is full of interactions like this, where Cohn and the artists seem to be talking past each other.