

Missing clothes detract from true ability



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If there's one thing music fans have seen more and more of lately, it's skin — especially from female artists. Britney Spears seems to be the one it all started with; her good-girl act must have waned in interest to drooling males, who probably wanted her to forgo her lucrative singing career and become a porn star.

Well, maybe Spears wasn't the first one; Janet Jackson started as a reserved rhythm-and-blues singer in the '80s, but by the '90s, she was posing topless on her album covers, and even naked, while covering herself with a pillow.

Now, I know what some guys are thinking by now: "Hey, you loser, if they wanna let us see, let 'em show it off!"

OK, image is important in music in some cases, such as David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust. And who would recognize the B-52s without Kate Pierson's beehive or a similarly big hairdo? But when artists do something as uncreative as wearing skimpy outfits or none at all, it's almost like they're whoring themselves out to the masses, specifically the male masses.

So what's the point in having Playboy? Rolling Stone's Nov. 14 cover is close enough. Christina Aguilera is minimally covering herself with a guitar, which I doubt she knows how to play, while she's wearing nothing but a pair of stockings and whatever body jewelry she has.

And she reveals to us her 11 piercings, one of which is in a place she says most girls wouldn't have the guts to get pierced. Two of her piercings are still in unknown locations.

Wait — she tells of piercings in places where metal shouldn't even go, and she's still got two more somewhere else? Well, Ms. Aguilera, I'm glad you do in fact have some modesty, even if it is too little and too late.

The biggest shocker, definitely more than Aguilera's getting "Dirrty," is LeAnn Rimes' appearance in the latest issue of Blender. Blender is the music magazine by Maxim, the magazine for males everywhere who like their soft-core porn to be intelligent and funny.

On the cover, Rimes is wearing jeans and chaps and nothing else. She's standing with her arms across her chest and her back mostly facing the camera. I guess she's 20 now and she can do what she wants, but it's hard to believe the naive country girl from the mid-'90s is showing off her pink bra and more (or less, when speaking in terms of clothing).

With the number of girls covering their chests in Maxim, it bears a striking resemblance to a 1999 "Saturday Night Live" parody commercial for "Holding Your Own Boobs Magazine." Janet Jackson even got someone else to hold hers for her in a picture used for the "Janet" album cover and a Rolling Stone cover.

Maxim has gotten Shakira to pose, but she was dressed relatively modestly during her photo shoot. Still, in the interview accompanying the pictures, the "Underneath Your Clothes" singer talked about her satisfaction with her own gluteus maximus and said, "You have to do everything you can to make your butt stand out." It always comes down to sex appeal.

But I am thankful for artists such as Vanessa Carlton and Norah Jones — the mainstream female artists who still have enough integrity to let their music speak for itself instead of letting their exposed bodies scream for attention. Thank goodness for them, although they might be an endangered species.

Tomlinson is a third-year print journalism student. His column appears Wednesdays in The Mix.

THE YEAR IN MUSIC: 1999

Underrated band produces eclectic debut album



"THE BETA BAND"
The Beta Band

BY JUSTIN BAJAN
THE GAMECOCK

Besides the bagpipes, there was never any reason to associate Scotland with music — but

then the Beta Band formed.

The Beta Band is composed of John Maclean on turntables, samples and piano; Steve Mason on guitar, vocals and percussion; Robin Jones playing drums, piano and tape loops; and Richard Greentree on bass and percussion. The quartet met in London five years ago and have been together ever since.

On its self-titled debut album, the band manages to cross-pollinate the sounds of reggae, hip-hop, folk and acoustic rock into one cohesive amalgam, rather than into a confused heap of music.

The album opens with the playful "The Beta Band Rap." The song starts like a cheesy theme song for a children's show, with whistles and barbershop-

quartet "la-las." Then it moves into an equally trite rap song and finishes with a romping '50s-rock-sounding section.

On the jovial "Round the Bend," Mason neglects rhyme and meter and sounds almost improvisational as he utters lyrics such as, "I listened to The Beach Boys just a minute ago; 'Wild Honey'/It's not the best album, but its still pretty good/They've got some funny little love songs on there."

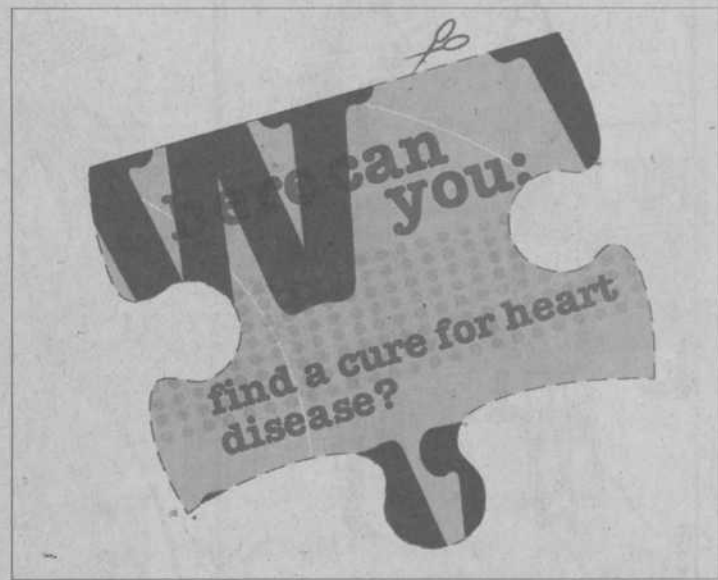
The production sounds equally improvisational, with random beat boxing, whistling, a basic hip-hop drum track, conga samples, live drums and turntable scratches on "Dance O'er the Border." "The Hard One" starts with a somber piano-and-bass ar-

range, then breaks down with Mason singing lines from Bonnie Tyler's "Total Eclipse of the Heart."

The Beta Band gradually gained attention and is even mentioned in the movie "High

Fidelity." It toured with Radiohead and continues to pop up in magazines as one of the most talented and underrated bands.

Comments on this story? E-mail gamecockmixeditor@hotmail.com



Jazzy piano stars on Ben Folds Five CD



"THE UNAUTHORIZED BIOGRAPHY OF REINHOLD MESSNER"
Ben Folds Five

BY CHARLES TOMLINSON
THE GAMECOCK

On "Whatever and Ever Amen," Ben Folds Five showed it knew how to make the piano rock. But the band put the piano back in a traditional role in jazzy songs and ballads on its final album, "The Unauthorized

Biography of Reinhold Messner."

Instead of giving the keys a fortissimo pounding, Folds danced across the ivories. While on older albums, a wild-eyed song, such as "Song for the Dumped," was the norm, the band sewed "Reinhold Messner" together with delicate compositions, more like "Brick" or "Selfless, Cold and Composed."

"Don't Change Your Plans," a single, was packaged and ready for the radio — had it been released in the heyday of jazz-rock bands such as Blood, Sweat and Tears. The jazzy tune's bridge even features a flugelhorn solo straight out of a Chicago song.

Darren Jessee's resounding bass drum propels "Mess," a morose song in which Folds, as the narrator, laments the deplorable situation he brought

upon himself. And Jessee penned "Magic," in which he sparingly plays timpani, each note landing in the perfect place.

Although the band brought the piano to a lower dynamic, it also experimented with kooky synthesizers on "Your Redneck Past" and elegant electric piano on "Jane." And Folds shows he didn't forget how to rock when he pulses the chords of "Army."

Folds and company end the album with "Lullabye," in which a grown-up recalls a childhood flight with his uncle and James Earl Jones. Even though Ben Folds Five populated the album with sad ballads, it didn't forget to keep a balance with songs that were simply fun.

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