

Audiophile

by David Stout

Scissor Sisters are a cut above

On their self-titled 2004 debut, **Scissor Sisters'** melding of glam rock and disco was so cocksure and bursting with *joie de vivre* that loving the album was easier than a cheerleader on prom night. There was simply no way to deny the strutting charm of tracks like "Take Your Mama," "Laura," "Filthy/Gorgeous" and "Comfortably Numb," a haunting Pink Floyd ballad re-invented as a Studio 54 stomper.

Now, fast-forward two years to the release of "Ta-Dah" (Universal/Motown), the Sister's sophomore set. The artistic growth of the band's five members (lead vocalist Jake Shears, multi-instrumentalist Babydaddy, guitarist Del Marquis — all of whom are gay — backing vocalist Ana Matronic and drummer Paddy Boom) is evident. On the whole, the new songs are better written, better played and better sung.

So how come the album feels like an ever so slight letdown? Mainly because the pressure shows on "Ta-Dah." The conscious effort to meet expectations is palpable; you can sense everyone trying.

To be fair, though, if the first record didn't absolutely course with spontaneity, "Ta-Dah" would seem polished (like a great Steely Dan album) rather than labored. And there's plenty here to love, to be sure. Lead single "I Don't Feel Like Dancin'" opens the 12-track set with gusto — and closes the pop circle of life: Elton John, one of the Scissor Sisters' chief musical inspirations, lays down a cracking piano line on the tune.

Other standout cuts on the album include jangle-pop "She's My Man," "Land of a Thousand Words," which recalls "Double Fantasy"-era John Lennon, grrrl power anthem "Kissing You Off" (lead vocals by Ms. Matronic), shake-your-booty disco ball "Paul McCartney" and New Wave crackerjack "The Other Side."

Judged on its merits, "Ta-Dah" really is a fine pop album. And now that the sophomore jinx and the pressure of following up a sensation are out of the way, I can't wait to see where Scissor Sisters cut and run from here.



Speaking of Elton

John: Not content to simply inspire great albums by acts like Scissor Sisters, John has just released a solid collection of his own. "The Captain & The Kid"

(Interscope) is the much belated sequel to his '75 opus "Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy," the first album ever to debut at the top of the "Billboard" album chart (at a time when the chart's methodology made it nearly impossible).

Where "Fantastic" is an autobiographical look at the struggles John (the Captain) and his lyricist Bernie Taupin (the Brown Dirt Cowboy) faced in the early years of their musical careers in London, "The Captain & The Kid" picks up from when they arrived in L.A. three decades ago and charts their ups and downs to present day.

"I find the whole album to be so touching and beautiful for me because I've lived it," John says. "I lived it with Bernie and we've come through it. We've gone over the bridge and here we are at the other side."

In celebration of their longstanding partnership, on "The Captain & The Kid" both John and Taupin are featured on an Elton John album cover for the first time.

Rock & roll high school. Meet the Class of Fall 2006:

Justin Timberlake: Class president. ("FutureSex/LoveSounds" is one hit single after another. Voted Most Likely To Succeed.)

Beyoncé: Head cheerleader. (She's hot and she rules the school, but *gawd* she can get annoying. Try listening to all of "B'day" in one sitting to understand.)

John Mayer: Valedictorian. (Excellent "Continuum" solidifies his reputation as The Brain. Not in the nerdy way, though.)

Janet Jackson: Homeroom hottie. (She got left back a couple years ago — the lethal combo of Nipplegate and "Damita Jo" — so now she has the experience of a "20 Y.O." and the body to go with it.)

Fergie: Color guard leader. ("The Duchess" sits atop the lame-ladies pyramid, but she'll never be a cheerleader — her heart's true desire — no matter what she does.)

Clay Aiken: Drama club president. (Even though he can come up with "A Thousand



Different Ways" to explain why he doesn't have a girlfriend, everybody knows the deal.)

Sound bites: Perpetually baked, openly gay pop star **George Michael** took time out from his first European tour in more than a decade to announce a one-off show with Wham! co-founder Andrew Ridgeley. The '80s superduo are reportedly aiming for a Christmas extravaganza at Wembley Arena... "The Evolution of **Robin Thicke**" is out now on Interscope Records and it's an R&B beauty. The blue-eyed soul singer (and son of "Growing Pains" star Alan Thicke) co-wrote and co-produced the entire album. Don't let this one slip by — Thicke's evolution is a soul revelation. ▀

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