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Music wrap-up 2008

Divas and icons were out in force this year by David Stout . Q-Notes staff

2008

Well, here we are — another year, another year-end recap. These are the albums I loved or just felt compelled to re-visit that were issued by gay and allied artists in 2008.

Madonna - "Hard Candy" (Warner Bros): The Material Mom's 11th studio album is an interesting combination of the fizzy dance-pop of her 1983 debut and the urban luster of 1994's "Bedtime Stories."

Unfortunately, it never quite matches the best of either, lacking the coquettish charm of the former and the musical sophistication of the latter. Producers Timbaland, Justin Timberlake, Pharrell Williams and Nate "Danja" Hills provide Madonna with a stable of propulsive beats that she rides like an Escalade. The drawback with "Hard Candy" is that it lives up to its name: a sweet confection that pleases while it lasts, but melts away leaving you with nothing to show for the experience.



Bob Mould - "District Line" (Anti-): The openly-gay virtuoso behind seminal post-punk outfit Hüsker Dü as well as '90s alt-rock band Sugar returned in 2008 with "District Line," a fab mix of power chords, melodic accessibility and sharp lyricwriting. My favorites among the album's 10 tracks are "Shelter Me," a great rock song driven by House music beats and synth stabs, and "Who Needs To Dream," a man-chases-man power-pop tune with a great hook.

Solange - "Sol-Angel And The Hadley St. Dreams" (Geffen): Solange spectacularly emerges from big sis Beyoncé's shadow with this soulful, near-concept album about a young woman coming into her own. The production is old school R&B laced with

modern electronic flourishes by super knob-turners Mark Ronson, The Neptunes and Soulshock & Karlin, along with sonic innovators like Thievery Corporation and Jack Slash (from *Plantlife*).

Matt Alber - "Hide Nothing" (Silver Label/Tommy Boy): Alber, a former member of the Grammy-winning a capella ensemble Chanticleer, offers up a lovely, dreamlike

song cycle about out of the closet love in its various forms and stages. "Field-trip Buddy" recalls that first grade school crush while "The End Of The World" is an unflinching look at a crumbling rela-

tionship. "Hide Nothing" is a gorgeous work of art.

Little Jackie - "The Stoop" (S-Curve): Little Jackie is not a solo artist but the duo of 30-year-old singer/lyricist Imani Coppola (best known for her minor '97 solo hit, "Legend Of A Cowgirl") and DJ/programmer Andy Pallin, who's still in his early 20s. Their unlikely collaboration yielded this finger-snapping debut that's chock full of Motown and Stax inspired soundscapes over which Coppola waxes poetic, witty, bitchy and confessional. If "The Stoop" is any indication, it's going to be fun watching Little Jackie grow up.

Hercules And Love Affair - Self-titled (Mute): Disco and Classic House collide on this acclaimed debut. Working with a trio of vocalists that includes openly gay Antony Hegarty of Antony and the Johnsons,



Hercules' driving creative force Andrew Butler sculpts 10 outstanding cuts on this genre exercise that spans from Disco workouts to Frankie Knuckles'-inspired Chicago House jams with multiple stops in between..

The Presets - "Apocalypse" (Modular): The sophomore album from Australia's The Presets is a molten eruption of 80s inspired Electro and Industrial. Concussive robotic drums, hollowed-out voices, bruised harmonies and the energy of complete abandon propel the 11-track project to the edge of orgiastic chaos. Queer-friendly beatmasters Julian Hamilton (keyboards and vocals) and Kim Moyes (drums) have created the soundtrack to the sex club in your head. It's a place where every dark corner is occupied by a hungry stranger and each propulsive thrust is punctuated by the kickdrum.

Cyndi Lauper - "Bring Ya To The Brink" (Epic): Girls just wanna have fun — on the dancefloor. Lauper has enjoyed tremendous success with her remixed singles the last few years, but this is the first time she's ever recorded a full album of dance material. The new direction — from an artist who is known for constantly trying new things — paid



Paperboy" (Outsider Music): After co-writing and producing three of the best cuts on Cyndi Lauper's 2008 dance opus (including lead single "Same Ol' Story"), producer/remixer Richard Morel, who is openly gay, turned his attention to completing this two-disc set. "Disc 1" is moody and introspective; "11 new songs about the things that bring you down," Morel explains. "Disc 0" (get it, disco?) is eight remixes of disc one tracks.

Duffy - "Rockferry" (Mercury): Following the retro path blazed by Amy Winehouse's "Back To Black," this 23-year-old Welsh singer-songwriter released her own impressive throwback album in 2008. Listening to "Rockferry" was like discovering lost tunes by Burt Bacharach, Carole King and Ellie Greenwich. Duffy's singing maintained the illusion with its heavy influences from '60s

soul and the classic girl groups. Album highlights include the swirling-strings title cut, wrenching break-up ode "Warwick Ave.," and go-go boot scoot "Mercy."

Donna Summer - "Crayons" (Burgundy): In 2008 the Dance Music Hall of Fame inductee and five-time Grammy winner (who has sold

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dividends. Lead single "Same Ol' Story" and follow-up track "Into The Nightlife" both reached the top of the *Billboard* Club Play chart.

Morel - "The Death Of The

an estimated 130 million records worldwide) came back strong with this eclectic 12-track set. The album, co-written by Summer and a handful of collaborators, produced the dance-see *Wrap* on 22



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