

REVIEW: THE WASHINGTON SISTERS
UNDERSTATED

Do you have the end-of-the semester blues? Here's a cure: two lesbian identicaltwins from Washington DC singing "pop, a capella funk, jazz swing, gospel, contemporary folk and reggae." The Washington Sisters have put together a well-balanced, up-beat album, Understated, that's unquestionably fun listening.

My favorite songs on the album are "Amma" and "Sweet Inspiration." "Amma" is a giddy love song that just makes me smile. The Washington Sisters sing of that helplessly happy feeling of being in love: "I feel like a child - oh my!/ I feel playful and wild - oh my!" The sisters have very similar voices, and in this song they blend their voices with a light pop sound for a beautiful effect. (Incidentally, this is the song that the tape player in the music library chose to chew up. Grrrr.)

"Sweet Inspiration" has a rhythmic a capella bass with a sexy voice on top describing the comfort of a lover. This song features my favourite line on the album: "There just ain't no telling/ What a satisfied woman might do."

Understated's greatest strength is the resilient spirituality that winds through many of the songs. Many African religions teach that the dead remain on the earth to protect and guide living humans. All people who are alive or have ever lived form a community through the earth. This belief is beautifully explained in "Breaths" which was first recorded by Sweet Honey in the Rock. The song says "Listen more often to things than to beings/ Tis the ancestors' breath/ when the fire voice is heard/ tis the ancestors' breath/ in the voice of the water." The Sisters explore this further in an original song "Find the Spirit": "Find the spirit on a mountainside/ Find the spirit in a rushing tide."

I think the album's greatest weakness are the songs that are explicitly political - "Say no!" and "How do you feel?" These lyrics don't say anything original: "Apartheid is/ the sanctioned, institutionalized/ discrimination on the basis of race" and "Back home in Amerika/ The Navajo and the Hopi/r Are trying to work out their differences." Uh huh. "How do you feel?" involves "How do you feel about [insert verb here]/ For freedom, I feel fine." This is repeated ten times. It gets a little old.

Despite it's weak spots, this is an excellent album. All of the songs demonstrate a good understanding of the plethora of styles used. Even songs with sub-standard lyrics have beautiful musical parts. For example, "How do you feel" has an amazing Bobby McFerron-like a capella bass line.

Understated was produced by Theresa Trull on Iceberg Records. It features an impressive array of musicians including Linda Tillery and Teresa Trull. The Washington Sisters made their first night-stage festival appearance at NEWMR in 1985. They perform regularly around Washington DC, frequently with the incomparable Jesse X. Look for them on the festival circuit again this year.

--Pippa Holloway

Sandra Washington & Sharon Washington



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**KILLER CONVICTED IN
ANTI-LESBIAN SHOOTING**

Stephen Roy Carr has been found guilty of first degree murder in a shooting that killed Rebecca Wight and critically wounded her lover, Claudia Brenner. He has been sentenced to life imprisonment without parole.

On May 13, the Carr fired upon the two women at their secluded Appalachian

trail campsite. In preliminary hearings, Carr's attorney claimed that Brenner and Wight had provoked the attack with their sexual behavior. The judge ruled such arguments to be inadmissible.

Wight, 29, was shot in the back and the head and died at the campsite. Brenner, 32, who was critically wounded, got help after walking nearly four miles to a road.