

Raitt Finds Her Career's 'Silver Lining'

By JENISE HUDSON
Staff Writer

More than 30 years after releasing her first album, it seems that Bonnie Raitt still can't get enough of those down-home blues.

After a four-year hiatus, the eight-time Grammy Award winner has finally returned to the studio and recorded her newest album, *Silver Lining*.



Bonnie Raitt
Silver Lining
★★★★☆

With an army of writers and a star-studded band (including former Beach Boys drummer Ricky Fataar and bassist James "Hutch" Hutchinson from the Neville Brothers) in tow, Raitt and company make clear their hopes to turn *Silver Lining* into another best-selling album.

Despite its attempts, the Raitt camp has failed to produce a musically sound album with real selling power.

It's not for lack of any quality song writing that *Silver Lining* ends up falling short. Raitt churns out the lyrics and horn

arrangements for "Gnawin' On It," a catchy trek back to the grass roots of rhythm and blues.

As Raitt belts the song's lyrics in the husky alto that has characterized her style, listeners are reminded of dimly lit nightclubs and crowded juke joints from back in the day.

And the jam session doesn't end there. A baritone sax loosely grooves down the chorus of the track "Monkey Business." With a series of foot-tapping riffs, the saxophone mimics Raitt's voice as she and singer and keyboardist Jon Cleary belt the bluesy lyrics, "Someone's up to monkey business/Someone just ain't acting right/Someone's up to monkey business/Paying monkey wi'cho mind."

But Raitt fans might have to search for the metallic layer in the singer's title track, "Silver Lining." Annoyingly slow



and lacking much of a beat, the song brings Raitt's grass roots soul-fest to an unwelcome halt.

"Help Me Lord" is an equally regrettable track. As Raitt stumbles along each verse in an unconvincing Caribbean accent, the disjointed feel of the song is further offset by a band of monotone backup singers. While the track is likely to grow on listeners over time, the growth that occurs is more comparable to a fungal manifestation than something desirable.

Raitt manages to re-throne herself with the album's final track, "Wounded Heart." A smooth ballad on the struggles of lost love, the track is reminiscent of Raitt's Grammy Award-winning song, "Can't Make You Love Me."

Inevitably though, nostalgia loses out to the bittersweet reality that *Silver Lining* isn't what might be expected. The album is ultimately injured by its lack of consistency, and there's no denying that *Silver Lining* won't go platinum anytime soon.

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Westfeldt Emerges as New Lesbian Heroine, Spokeswoman For Cosmopolitan Dating

The dime-store independent film "Kissing Jessica Stein" makes a blatant move on heterosexual assumptions.

By AARON FREEMAN
Staff Writer

In the same throbbing vein of "Chasing Amy" and TV's "Will and Grace," "Kissing Jessica Stein" smears the already blurred line between hetero and homo. Writing team Jennifer Westfeldt and Heather Juergensen, who also star in the film, explore the feasibility and success of homosexuality as an "option" other than an inborn trait.



"Kissing Jessica Stein"
★★★★☆

Single, intellectual (and hot) Jessica Stein (Westfeldt) works as a copy editor at the New York Chronicle. And her personality fits her job - she is a meticulous, critical and conservative perfectionist. Likewise, her heterosexual dating life consists of finding the faults in

her comically faulty suitors, who are, as Stein complains, either "not funny or not smart, or not funny and not smart." Not since "Annie Hall" have the love lives of cosmopolitan intellectuals been so artfully and comically tackled.

But Woody Allen and Diane Keaton this film is not.

Stein happens upon a "female seeking female" ad in The Village Voice that includes a quote from the poet Rilke. A phone call leads to Helen Cooper (Juergensen), a well-sexed art gallery director who's becoming "bi-curious," shall we say, even though her venture into lesbianism is more of an experiment than an act of true self or lonely desperation.

A relationship begins and Stein predictably approaches sex and love with her typical organization, which includes manuals, pamphlets and a day-by-day timeline, all the while savagely teasing Cooper with her slow sexual progression and systematic libido.

Eventually, Stein does open up and both are happier together than with any previous man. Months pass and the issues of lesbian love versus female friendship are caught on celluloid. Jessica, who remains conservative and private, is forced to grapple with friends and family members who constantly beg to know, "Who's the guy?" Tovah Feldshuh has several warm moments as Jessica's Jewish mother,

and Scott Cohen compliments Westfeldt well as her present boss and former lover.

As could be gathered from the film's scant publicity, "Kissing Jessica Stein" is a dime-store indie film. But a lack of financial backing means fewer studio restrictions, giving filmmakers the ability to create delicate, solemn moments as well as sincere, smart comedy. The innovative camera work employed by director Charles Herman-Wurmfeld also illustrates the benefits of indie auteurism. He adds more emotion to over-the-shoulder dialogue shots by often using hand-held cameras (see "Traffic") and captures engaging, personal visuals of New York only possible without a large crew in tow.

Technique aside, the heart of the film lies in the questions that eventually surface. Can a straight person choose to be gay and be happy? Can someone truly be bisexual? Can two gay people "just be friends" after a breakup?

The film raises these questions and doesn't necessarily answer them but leaves the viewer pondering them while walking up the aisle. Nevertheless, it provides a refreshing, comedic and contemporary look at homosexuality and relationships that is long overdue.

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