

SLIP ONE OF THESE ON YOUR BONER, BABY

Safe Vinyl and Then Some

8/16/88

It's time for pop culture to start eroticizing rubbers. I've been hoping that Tiffany would pen a hit titled "I Love My Condoms" and been waiting for TV ads featuring Michael Jackson. I can see it: The dude tears out of his house, chains jangling, as his mother shouts after him, "Aren't you forgetting something?" Michael wheels back with sheepish relief to retrieve his rubbers and then gospel-choruses with Mom, "Condoms—don't leave home without them."

Cruise Control has taken a shaky stab at the problem with its dance 12-inch "No Condoms—No Sex." The slogan is a bit too redolent of Nancy Reagan for my taste, but *Billboard* labeled it a "public-service announcement with a danceable groove" and placed it under Pick Hits. We're talking timely. **Book of Love** takes a more subtle approach on its current single, "Pretty Boys and Pretty Girls" (Sire), whispering "safe sex" behind the chorus as if it were subliminal propaganda.

I confess I had been hoping for something a bit more boisterous, say Billy Idol cooing, "Slip one of these on your boner, baby/And slam that whiplash out of my smile." One of the problems is that clunky word *condom*. The garment of the '80s, the hip accessory of the here and now, it deserves a better handle. Gay singer-songwriter **Charlie Murphy** recently took the problem in hand and came up with the ebullient musical command, "Put on that love glove, baby/Don't be shy." His tune is a celebration and an invitation rather than a cautionary lecture. It's a love-glove love song.

Murphy is peddling the song and four other recent tunes to major labels, so it may be a while before it hits club land. He'd like to hear Prince cover the sucker, and so would I. In the meantime, \$10 will bring you a T-shirt inscribed "Love Glove Don't Be Shy," and for another \$9, a cassette of his band's *Rumors of the Big Wave*'s live show from 1986. (Send your checks to Out Frount Music, P.O. Box 12188, Seattle, WA 98102.)

Release of **Allen Ginsberg**'s LP *Lion for Real* (Great Jones/Island) with downtowners like **Arto Lindsay** and **Bill Frizzel** accompanying, produced by **Hal Wilner** (Marianne Faithful's last), has been temporarily delayed. Still, the record will definitely feature his S-M celebration "C'mon Jack," with Ginsberg joyously wailing, "Spank me! Fuck me! Spank me! Fuck me!" Poetry—I love it.

I don't know who is liable to cover that tune, but I'd love to see **Romanovsky and Phillips** give it a shot. The Sonny and Cher of the gay cabaret circuit have a new disc out, their third, entitled *Emotional Rollercoaster* (Fresh Fruit). In the wake of declarations that their union is now merely musical, the two are due to set out on a nationwide tour this fall. Catch them. (To order the LP or cassette, send \$9 to Fresh Fruit Records, Box 4418, Berkeley, CA 94704.)

Relentless press coverage has already singled out 24-year-old

Tracy Chapman as a voice to be reckoned with, but as a dear dyke pal remarked, "You don't see many folks pointing out that her tune

'For a Lover' is a near-perfect lesbian love song." On her debut LP, *Tracy Chapman* (Elektra), the lady occasionally gets beached on stark polemics, and echoes of Armatrading sometimes drown out her voice, but at her best (as when she did "Fast Car" at

Freedomfest), Chapman cradles a spooky, compassionate authority that disarms all doubts.

I wish I could say the same for lesbian with a lariat **K. D. Lang**. For her second LP, *Shadowland* (Sire), the native Canadian tore down to Nashville and disinterred Owen Bradley (who produced Patsy Cline's classics) to cut a disc of country chestnuts. The two also recruited a bevy of beauties from the Grand Ole Opry's living waxworks (Brenda Lee, Kitty Wells, and Loretta Lynn) to join K.D. on the LP's closing track, "Honkytonk Angel's Medley." The cut proves to be a creepy contrivance, though, reeking forlornly of formaldehyde.

K.D. has the looks and the pipes, but *Shadowland* sounds like a calculated catalog of gestures lifted from legends—trendy traditionalism justified by vacant virtuosity. This disc earns her my vote as

the Terrence Trent D'Arby of country music.

To hear a lady deliver the goods and not the trappings, pick up *Live at the Opry* (MCA), which exhumes **Patsy Cline**'s live radio broadcasts from 1956 to 1962 and a set of awesome performances that leave others' cover versions (and even some of *her* studio renditions) looking dangerously pale.

For a contemporary treasure, seek out *Bent by Nature* (Bar None) by the Austin quartet **Glass Eye**; the group works riveting backwoods harmonies against sprung, stop-and-go rhythms on tales of the heart raging against helplessness. Kind of like the Au Pairs meet the Violent Femmes, only prettier. Start with the last two cuts on Side 1 and carry on.

Camper Van Beethoven lives up to the big hype on its first major label release, *Our Beloved Revolutionary Sweetheart* (Virgin). The

wiggy, neofolkie "eclectazoids" (who once sang sweetly that they wanted to "take the skinheads bowling") open this LP, sounding like Creedence Clearwater on mesacaine, vowing to "give some cowboys some acid/And stay in motels." The cracked children of Santa Cruz haven't just said no. Don't you.

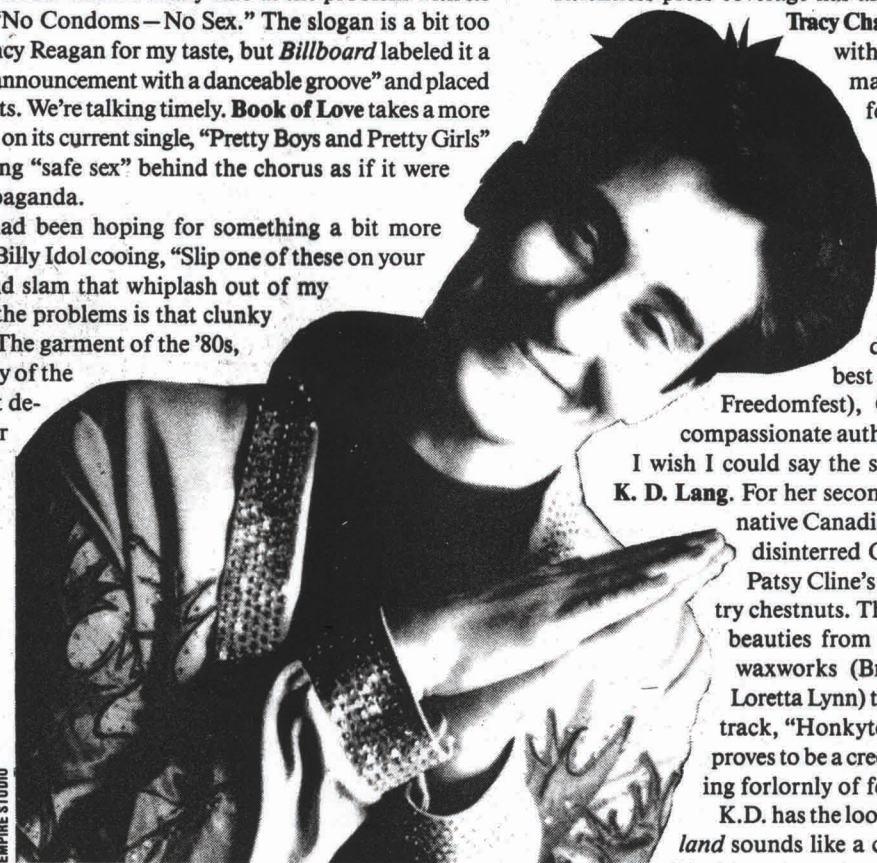
The boys who call their shows "pornography in motion" proffer the follow-up to their *To Elvis in Hell* disc. It's called *Hits of Acid* (Boner Records). They're called **Bomb**, and they're sweet, smart, and scary—as boggling as the Butthole Surfers but more dangerously ingratiating. The children of Stephen King and David Lynch come to party.

There is a damn spooky subtext in David Diebold's book *Tribal Rites* (Tunespeak), an affectionate yearbook for San Francisco's independent-disco scene, circa 1981, when it peaked with the work of producers **Bill Motley** (Boystown Gang) and **Patrick Cowley** (Megatron Man, Sylvester)—both of whom subsequently died of AIDS. While the women's music movement boasts the success stories of both Olivia and Redwood Records, San Francisco's Hi-NRG scene emerges from this determinedly tame paste-up of quotes from participants as a scene riddled with venality, drug abuse, mediocrity, and incompetence. But it is an underbelly that, although implied, Diebold doesn't explore. He sees the gay disco as a church; this era is its golden age.

A lack of biographies or discographies disqualifies the volume as a useful reference, but it is a work of real affection, and those who think of the Black and White Ball at the Trocadero as their Woodstock will likely treasure the tome. (Tempted? Send \$15 to T.S. Productions, 584 Castro, Suite 115, San Francisco, CA 94114.)

It is painful to have to report that the book's one living legend, the mighty **Sylvester**, has been stricken with the plague. He courageously confirmed the fact at this year's San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade, joining the people with AIDS contingent in his wheelchair with no fanfare, only a modest press release. His management reports that Sylvester has been convalescing and hopes to reenter the studio soon. Syl has long soared soulfully, bringing joy and inspiration, sassy pride, and liberation to countless unsuspecting fans. Here's wishing him the best of health and spirits. Readers can send the hero a great big kiss, care of Borzoi Music, 222 Duncan St., San Francisco, CA 94131. Let them rain down like gratitude.

—Adam Block



K. D. Lang: trendy traditionalism