

Confessions of a Boy Toy

First time I saw a "boy toy" belt buckle? Must've been back in 1983. **Madonna** was wearing it, and I *wanted* one. What a "rad" logo to sport! If she had the notion, I figured I had the nerve too. Problem was, I could never find one.

This was before I'd heard of Madonna "wannabes"—let alone males of the species. My buddy Bobo adorned his leather jacket with crosses and Catholic jewelry and bleached his hair. Critic Barry Walters went for the platinum-halo-with-black-roots look. My pal Mark confided, "At 16, in the afternoons back in Memphis with my first lover, I'd put 'Burnin' Up' on the stereo, grab a bottle of poppers, and disco-dance around the living room in my underwear, feeling like I was the most fabulous trouble in Tennessee."

Madonna has been more than a pop goddess, more than the first star since Bette Midler to give fag hags a good name; Madonna has been—and still is—an inspirational role model for gay men.

Inventing and reinventing herself, Madonna the singer emerged from New York's "boho-homo" downtown club scene, playing temptress, slut, *and* star with a canny courage that ultimately awed even seasoned drag queens. Critics who *were* quick to dismiss her as a bimbo boy toy or a mindless material girl would find that they'd been oblivious to her irreverent chic.

The successive Madonnas—the back-street siren, the Marilyn, the Marlene—weren't bloodless, though. Madonna inhabited her impersonations with wit and brass, implying to her fans that they too could reinvent themselves. Gay men, like the little girls, could taste her triumphs while they danced to her seamless celebrations.

Her ascent has been troubled with tabloid headlines, disastrous movies, and a ruptured marriage. Three years after her last studio LP, *True Blue*, Madonna has released the follow-up, *Like a Prayer* (Sire). Staking a claim on her past to secure her future, Madonna has turned autobiographical with an LP that reclaims the self she never left behind.

On the cover, her naughty navel is crowned with a sunburst cross, framed by a flamboyant rosary above her unbuttoned 50ls. The prodigal reaches back to her Catholic roots—but not in penance. She greets passion and pathos with tough celebrations. She's out to reclaim the Church's promise of universal love and compassion and to redeem some rugged memories.

The LP opens with "Like a Prayer." The clash of downtown guitars yields to Baptist celebration: prayer as the act of ultimate intimacy, by turns carnal and communal. Madonna also makes the song a plea for racial justice musically, with a black gospel choir that literally sends the song soaring. The video is also intriguing;

there, an unjustly arrested black man reappears as a saint, whose statue comes to life and kisses the prone singer in her dream. The saint is Martin De Porres, Catholicism's patron of interracial harmony.

It's a pretty rich brew for a pop goddess to be proffering, particularly when she has been paid a bundle to push Pepsi. But that didn't stop Madonna on an LP rich with unexpected turns.

She offers a song to her late mother, another to her abusive father (and to God), and a subversively sweetly sung portrait of her failed marriage. There is a spooky, long-distance duet with Prince; one dance anthem written with Stephen ("Into the Groove") Bray, "Explain Yourself," which shines; and another, "Keep It Together," that La Toya Jackson ought to funk up.

The LP's outstanding dud, "Spanish Eyes" (a piece of barrio bathos that sounds like TV-movie twaddle), is the lyric farthest from Madonna's own experience. The final cut, "Act of Contrition," is a deconstruction of the LP's first cut and ends with an abrasive Sandra Bernhard-style gag.

The sarcastic LP closer is also an announcement that, with all her polish and candor, Madonna

is still the rebel brat, poised to sketch on the blackboard a nun with tits as soon as the teacher turns her back (an image that actually adorns the sleeve of the import single). She's still a bad-girl believer; an ACT UP, anti-AIDS ally; and an inspiration to us all.

On the eve of the LP's release, Madonna joined an AIDS "dance-a-thon" in Los Angeles, matching moves with the PWA who was her first dance teacher. Inside every copy of her new LP, like a prayer, rests a pale-blue page headlined "The Facts About AIDS," which notes, "People with AIDS—regardless of their sexual orientation—deserve compassion and support, not violence and bigotry." Amen.

That is a lesson apparently lost on Geffen Records' bad-boy cash cow **Guns N' Roses**. Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) had invited the band to headline a benefit at Radio City Music Hall on June 8, but when GMHC got around to listening to the tune "One in a Million" (on the *G N' R Lies* LP), they found this inspirational lyric: "Immigrants and faggots/They make no sense to me/ They come to our country/And think they'll do as they please/Like start some speculation/Or spread some fucking disease/They all talk so many ways/It's all Greek to me."

The offer to headline was rescinded. GMHC has been looking for a replacement; they have mentioned Bon Jovi, George Michael, Whitney Houston, and Talking Heads—and at the top of their wish-list column: Madonna. Hope she can make it. Like the answer to a prayer.

—Adam Block



Madonna: inspirational role model for gay men

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