

## *Erasure's music is as crisp as the photos of yuppies on the CD booklet.*

BY ADAM BLOCK



Erasure originally planned its current LP to be made up entirely of covers of ABBA tunes. No joke. Gay hero and vocalist Andy Bell and synth whiz Vince Clarke both love those Swedes' pop confections, and Bell savored the gender

subversion of singing lyrics written for women.

The massed voices of Erasure's record company and management convinced the two to come up with a less risky, more commercial disc of originals. That album is *Chorus* (Sire), Erasure's seductive and subtly subversive solution.

Clarke stripped down the music; Bell toned down the falsetto vocals. Both pruned back the lush foliage of their 1989 album *Wild*. Here Clarke crafts catchy Tinkertoy structures that Bell's vocals prowl with warmth and finesse. The music is as crisp and glossy as the photos of white yuppies at work and play that illustrate the CD booklet. But the lyrics hint at dangers and doubts lurking beneath those shiny surfaces. Bell bedecks a troubled heart and mind in impeccably streamlined technopop drag and works the ironies.

The ebullient title cut harbors premonitions of ecological disaster. "Joan" sweetly scalpels the very power-generation life-style the music seems designed to accessorize. The deceptively buoyant "Turns the Love to Anger" spotlights the dangers of ideological intolerance. "Perfect Stranger" confronts cheating on a lover and fears of domestication. The closing cut, "Home," is a haunting meditation on death and desire.

Many listeners may miss the misgivings cached in this canny pop. It's possible that Erasure even wants the disc to be taken at something close to its face value and hopes the CDs will be scarfed up by well-heeled folk who identify with the Moronesque zombies in those photoillu-

trations on the album package. If that's the case, then maybe Erasure can finally get on with that ABBA tribute disc.

### QUICK TIPS

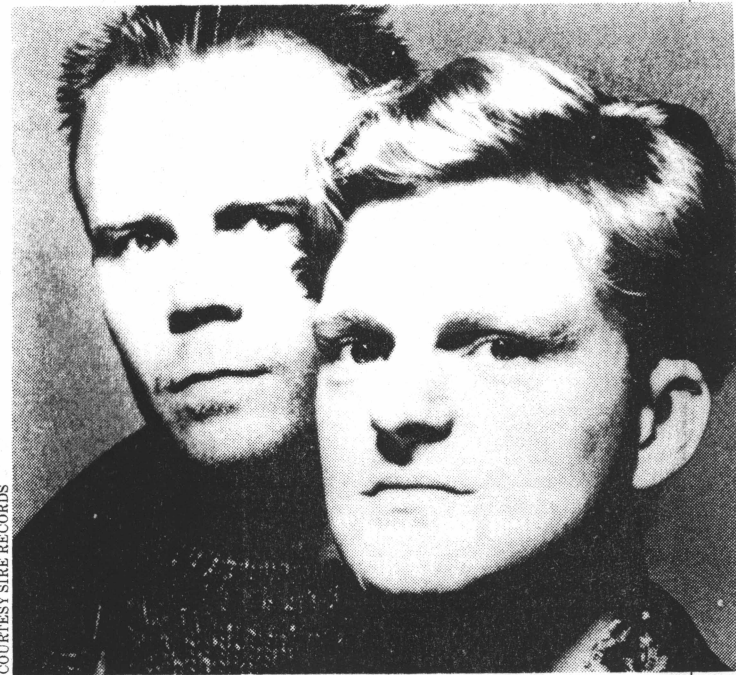
Last year diva Diana Ross returned to her original label, Motown, hired producer Nile Rodgers, and brought forth a dud. Spurred by either midlife panic or a misguided attempt to be contemporary, Grandma Ross appeared on the cover of *Working Overtime* in carefully ripped jeans and managed to look mostly ridiculous.

Now Ross has dusted off her *Mahogany* gowns and supper-club stylings for *The Force Behind the Power* (Motown). Longtime Linda Ronstadt producer Peter Asher and Lionel Richie cohort James Carmichael divvy up the cuts, providing more class than character. The results are certainly lush if rarely lively.

Standout songs include "Battlefield," with its '60s Motown sound, and a cover of Stevie Wonder's 1972 lament "Blame It on the Sun." Both outshine the current bathetic single "When You Tell Me You Love Me" and the remarkably clunky title cut written and produced by Wonder. Still, those who prefer the regal Ross to the renegade should be pleased.

Guns N' Roses may be the chart-reigning saviors of hard rock, but I always thought Peter Dinklage got it right in dubbing the group "a Benny Hill version of a hard-rock band." For an alternative to Guns N' Roses' regular bouts of ham-fisted posturing and squeal-like-a-stuck-pig tantrums of sexist bile on *Use Your Illusion, I and II*, check out Nirvana, Guns N' Roses' label mates on Geffen Records, on *Nevermind*.

Singer Kurt Cobain raises a voice of



**Erasure's Vince Clarke (left) and Andy Bell**  
*Hints of danger and doubt lie beneath the surfaces of their new album.*

cracked yearning and wounded grace against the trio's roar and thunder: Think Michael Stipe meets Hüsker Dü. Check out the closing ballad, "Something in the Way," then the delicious rocker "Lounge Act" and the air-ripping opener, "Smells Like Teen Spirit." Then catch Nirvana on national tour this fall, with Sister Double Happiness opening.

Garth Brooks is the reigning crown prince of country, having nudged Metallica out of the top spot on the *Billboard* 200 Top Albums the first week his new LP rolled out. But don't let Brooks's country thunder distract your attention from the release of *Kentucky Bluebird* (RCA)—a posthumous disc from Keith Whitley.

Raised on Hank Williams, George Jones, and Lefty Frizzell—and a deserving heir to his heroes—Whitley died young of a shot liver in 1989, just before he could claim his place in the neotraditional country pantheon. Last year RCA released a much-welcomed *Greatest Hits* disc, but this career-spanning follow-up unearths unreleased gems as touching and telling as those in Barbra Streisand's current audio hope chest, *Just for the Record*. ▼