

NOW HEAR THIS

A weekly trip through the new-release aisle of your local music store

July 1, 2000

SINEAD O'CONNOR

Faith and Courage (Atlantic Records)

The temptation to read too much into Sinéad O'Connor's latest album, "Faith and Courage," is irresistible.

In light of her apparent coming out as a lesbian, the album crystallizes as a feminist manifesto — what else to make of "No Man's Woman"? How else to read her gender-neutral tales of longing and regret? What else to hear in her repeated references to "The Goddess"?

But to put too much weight on the sexual politics of this militant Irish popster is to do an injustice to an album that has the makings of a classic. Miss O'Connor's voice never has been in finer form, and her songs have an electrifying — and electronic — dreaminess that is highlighted by the Celtic touches that creep into her music.

Miss O'Connor also has assembled a classic team. Dave Stewart of Eurythmics fame contributes guitar and produces on many tracks, while the legendary Jah Wobble of Public Image Ltd. brings his hypnotic bass work to the album. She even rounds up Wyclef Jean of the Fugees and space-rock legend Brian Eno to produce a track each.

Despite the potent messages, the album is a sharp departure from Miss O'Connor's angry and trident past. It shows the thirty-something rebel finally at peace with herself. She proclaims her confidence in her new identity in every song, writes a poignant letter home in "Daddy I'm Fine" and closes the album with a percussive version of the traditional prayer Kyrie Eleison."

If nothing else, the ethereal and chilling "Hold Back the Night" and the soaring Eno-produced track "Emma's Song" alone are worth the price of the album. — Sean Scully

DEFTONES

White Pony (Maverick Records)

The Deftones, a Sacramento, Calif.-based quintet, has become something of an icon in the rap-influenced heavy-metal movement that hijacked the airwaves in the late 1990s. They are just about a perfect example of the genre — brutal, slamming lyrics spit out with an angry growl by a tough-guy front man over crashing guitars.

But let's be clear: Unless you are of the generation that understands the phrase "Limp Bizkit is da bomb," you will find the Deftones' new disc, "White Pony," an excruciating experience.

To be sure, the Deftones are far smarter than the dim bulbs of Limp Bizkit, but the band's third album has all the numbing pleasure of slamming your head against the wall. The cryptic and pretentiously arty lyrics are disturbing — involving, in part, drugs, kidnapping, deviant sex and lots of blood.

If you think "I'll steal a carcass for you / then feed off the virus / cause you're my girl" is pure poetry, run right out and grab this album. — S.S.

SUNNY DAY REAL ESTATE

The Rising Tide

(Time Bomb Recordings)

Despite its distinctly British sound, Sunny Day Real Estate is from Seattle. Its members are, in fact, among the last surviving refugees of the once-thriving Seattle music scene. Like others of its ilk, Sunny Day Real Estate specializes in murky, confessional songs set to swirling, dense pop melodies.

Its members were so enmeshed in the Seattle scene that they first appeared on the legendary Sub Pop label, and when they broke up in 1995, two joined the Foo Fighters, Dave Grohl's project after the implosion of Nirvana.

Sunny Day Real Estate is back with a new album on a new label. Unfortunately, the band still is doing pretty much the same thing. The swirling, morose and Soundgarden-inflected songs show no sign of growth and could have come from pretty much any Seattle-area bar band in 1992.

"The Rising Tide" is, therefore, best left for Seattle-sound completists and those who think the Foo Fighters are a bit too modern.

Sunny Day Real Estate will play the 9:30 Club in Northwest on July 9. — S.S.

DEATHRAY

Self-titled (Capricorn Records)

Deathray's debut album is a terrific pop gem.

The California band, a spinoff of Cake, specializes in catchy and clever British-style pop.

The band's first album opens with a sharp little lyric that sets the manic tone, "My lunatic friends have tied me down."

The album spirals along at a crazy pace through 13 tracks in slightly more than 30 minutes. Only one track is longer than three minutes, and most edge perilously close to two minutes. What the songs are about is entirely beside the point. Deathray just wants to take us on a breathless rock 'n' roll ride. — S.S.