

# Bob Dylan fans: Don't think twice, it's all good

## ● ROCK

### BOB DYLAN *Together Through Life*

Columbia Records

★★★★

At 67 and his 53rd recording, Dylan is beyond righteousness, attitude, politics or anything but a bitter sense of loss, love, and humanity (or the lack thereof).



*Together Through Life* sends a blues powered shot to the gut and the heart, with a deceptively simple set of songs with a deep, disconcerting resonance.

The sound and spirit of *Life* is classic blues: life is hard and treacherous, and the only thing that'll save you (for a minute, if you're lucky) is love — although most of the time Dylan is mourning its loss. "Can't take much more, why can't we love like we did before... the door is closed forevermore, if there ever was a door," Dylan growls on *Forgetful Heart*, his voice raspy as barbed wire and deep as a well. That doesn't stop him from going for love, or lust, as on *Shake Shake Mama*, where he says that "One more time, I'm a going up heartbreak hill."

With bluesy guitar, aching steel guitar, poignantly twanging mandolin and mournful accordion, every song on *Life* (produced by Dylan under the pseudonym Jack Frost) sounds like it could have been written 60 years ago. But the music never sounds self-conscious.

Instead, Dylan has found his own profound sense of the fatalism and emotion in pre-rock 'n' roll blues, country and R&B. He adds his own bitter humor. "Everywhere you look there's more misery," he rumbles on *It's All Good*, "you know what I'm sayin, it's all good."

But even if Dylan seems to be looking at the end of life's road, there's a power in the way he stares down the pain and keeps on feeling. "All I have and all I know," he sings on the heartbreaking country waltz *Dream of You*, "is this dream of you which keeps me living on."

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## ● REGGAETON

### DON OMAR *idon*

Machete Music

★★

For all its futuristic cyber trappings, reggaeton star Don Omar's *idon* sounds like the soundtrack to



a B-movie, one with a bare pretense of a plot filled with flashy sexy club scenes and ominous street swagger. (Kind of like the recently released fourth *The Fast and The Furious* movie, in which Don Omar has three songs and a small role). Except even in a movie you'd get tired of this thudding, beeping, bleeping electro-collage, with the trappings but not the

depth or range of real electronic dance music.

Give Don Omar credit for creating an ambitious concept album and pushing *idon* online when much of the Latin music world still operates like it's 1999. It's unfortunate that more creativity couldn't have gone into the concept — of a cyber super musician-star creature romping or raging in a world of bionic babes and carping competitors (standard reggaeton style with sci-fi trappings), or the lyrics and music.

Lead single *Virtual Diva* has some clever lines about the temptations of its mechanical protagonist, who offers "the height of a kiss in a suicidal leap," as does *CO2*, which rips up duplicitous music executives. And sometimes the starker sound, like on the urgently danceable *Blue Zone*, is a refreshing contrast to reggaeton's usual muddy boom.

But *idon* mostly offers the usual clichés of sexy babes in (space age) clubs, with some stale sonic equivalents, like the generic Middle Eastern riffs in *Oasis*. Don Omar is one of the few reggaeton artists who can really sing, which he does movingly on the love's-over ballad *Ciao Bella*, but it's undermined by syrupy keyboards.

— JORDAN LEVIN  
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## ● R&B

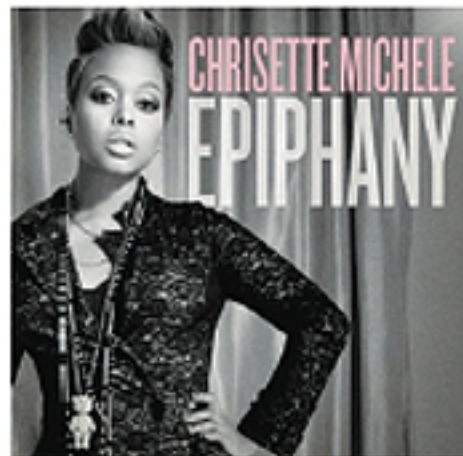
### CHRISETTE MICHELE *Epiphany*

Island/Def Jam

★★★★

Chrisette Michele deserved better production than she was getting. Although she shined recently on Nas' recent Nat King Cole tribute *Can't Forget About You* and The Roots' energetic go-go-infused *Rising Up*, her smoky jazz vocals were sometimes out of place on her 2007 debut, *I Am*.

*Epiphany* is an attempt at a new direction for Michele. Executive-produced and co-written by Def



Jam R&B labelmate Ne-Yo, the album deals with heartbreak and the full range of emotions it entails: from the initial realization on *Epiphany (I'm Leaving)*, a sassy breakup song accompanied by spacey synthesizers and robotic percussion, to *I'm Okay*. The latter is a slowly bubbling piano ballad with a crescendo that finds Michele finally finding solace over layered harp plucks and electric guitars.

Her vocals are the main attraction throughout. Michele has a dynamic range, and her sultry voice often channels jazz greats Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday. The best moments include the self-deprecating *Blame It On Me*, where she accepts responsibility despite the breakup not being her fault, and the upbeat doo-wop-influenced *Mr. Right*.

But sub-par production often detracts from her great vocals. Even with a strong opening and a stronger ending, some of *Epiphany*'s middle area, including *All I Ever Think About* and *Playin' Our Song*, are generic and unmemorable both musically and lyrically, resorting to standard adult contemporary balladry.

Regardless, Michele proves to be a unique voice in contemporary R&B. *Epiphany* further solidifies her talents and proves that soul singers don't need to cater to pop and hip-hop sensibilities to be noticed.

— ADRIAN RUHI  
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## ● JAZZ

### TONY BENNETT/BILL EVANS *The Complete Tony Bennett/Bill Evans Recordings*

Fantasy

★★★★

Although this space deals mostly with new recordings, a reissue appears every so often that cries out to be heard.

The two albums that Tony Bennett made in the mid-1970s with pianist Bill Evans is one. Fantasy added a second disc to this collection containing outtakes of the original sessions. And while that makes the set more attractive, the pairing of the two giants is more than enough to carry the day.

Bennett, who was drawn in a



pop direction earlier in his career, gets drawn back by Evans to a deeper jazz expression.

The settings are very simple and serve both men's talents. Evans is a terrific accompanist, creating wonderfully light and dark passages that stand on their own or set off the soloist in handsome relief.

Bennett finds himself in these tunes, from *Young and Foolish* to *You Must Believe in Spring*, and he unrolls them with suppleness and conviction.

The newly released outtakes show the two men experimenting with the same tunes, changing the tempo or striking different emphases, such as the mournful climax of *You Don't Know What Love Is*. It's cool to hear them stretching.

— KARL STARK  
The Philadelphia Inquirer