

The Musical World

"Red Hot & Blue" Review

by Michael Warner

"Red Hot & Blue" is one of the latest charity-oriented compilation albums to reach music stores. Billed as "a tribute to Cole Porter to benefit AIDS research and relief," it contains modern renditions of 21 Porter tunes performed by an eclectic array of today's pop stars, running the gamut from rock to country to rap to international. It's a notable effort which in most cases successfully couples classical popular music with contemporary popular musicians.

As a fundraiser for AIDS, this modern interpretation of Cole Porter's music is an appropriate choice. A closeted homosexual, Porter's "voice" first started to be heard in the late-1920's, a time when America was struggling to cast off the repressive remnants of the Victorian era. Porter's wit and cynicism helped to debunk the mores of the time. His simple yet sophisticated lyrics speak of love and romance (often-times of the forbidden sort) and of heart-ache and pain. His songs speak on a very

personal and emotional level without seeming saccharine or banal. Considering this nation's apathy and its leaders' lack of responsiveness to the AIDS crisis, lines like "use your mentality, wake up to reality" carry a doubly important message.

The album opens with a very modern rap rendition of "I've Got You Under My Skin," in which Neneh Cherry rewrites the lyrics to deal directly with drug abuse and AIDS. For the most part the emphasis then shifts back to Porter's lyrics. The Neville Brothers on "In the Still of the Night," Sinéad O'Connor's tentative "You Do Something to Me," k.d.lang's "So in Love," and Annie Lennox's haunting "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye" are expressive and emotionally intense songs. Jody Watley's performance of "After You, Who?" and Aztec Camera's rendition of "Do I Love You" are also touchingly beautiful.

Along the way there are also some very contemporary sounding and creative renditions of "Night and Day" by U2, "Too Darn Hot" by Erasure, as well as The Fine Young

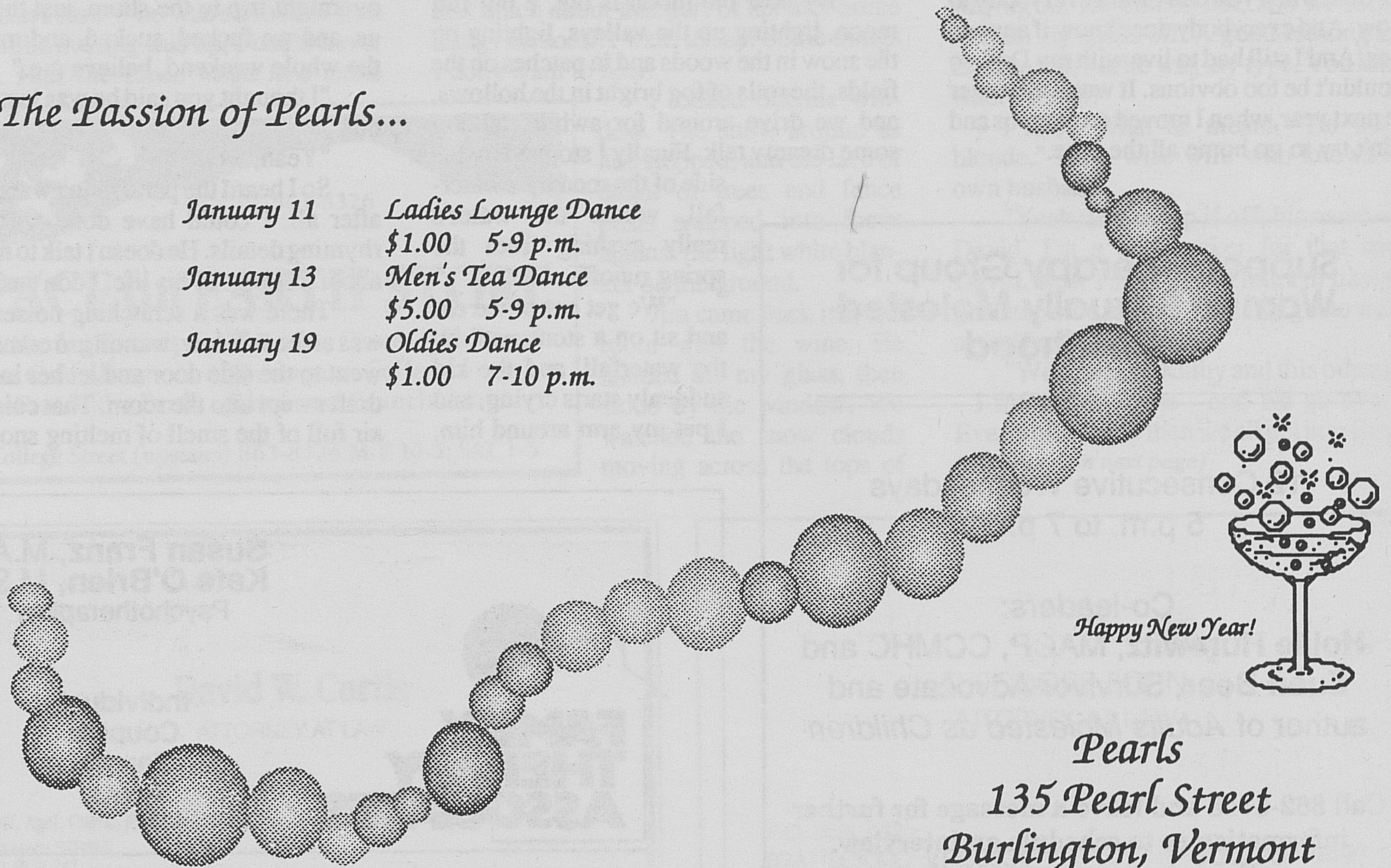
Cannibals on "Love for Sale" and Jimmy Somerville's "From This Moment On." On the lighter side there are touches of humor to be found in Iggy Pop and Debbie Harry's reinterpretation of "Well Did You Evah?," "Miss Otis Regrets/Just One of Those Things" by Kirsty MacColl and the Pogues and David Byrne's "Don't Fence Me In."

As with any praiseworthy project, all is not perfect. Salif Keita's vocals and The Jungle Brothers' rap do not do justice to the pieces they perform. Tom Waits' destruction of "It's All Right With Me" leaves one wondering whether he really had to work at sounding like that! Even these are not total failures as the music behind the vocals is worth listening to.

"Red Hot & Blue" is an all-star production. While it's a tribute to Cole Porter's genius, it's also a good value in entertainment. Whether a fan of more classic popular music or the most up-to-date pop fanatic, there's sure to be something on this recording to please. It's good music for a good cause – a sure-fire combination.

The Passion of Pearls...

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Happy New Year!

Pearls
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