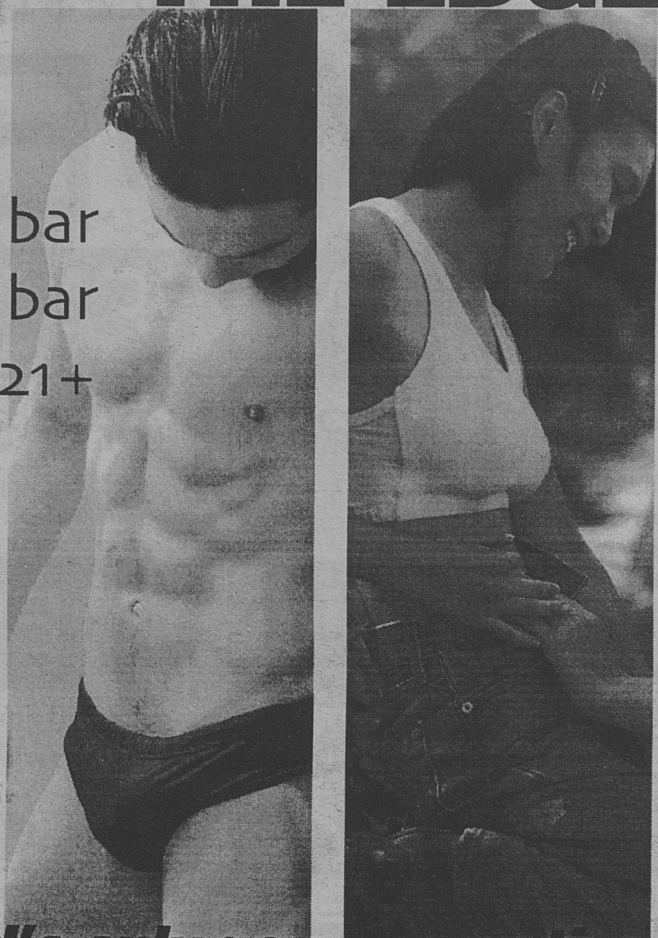


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**"All I Want For Christmas... is Two Great CD's"**

REVIEWED BY DEAN PRATT

**music**

I recently obtained two CDs that I believe should be under every gay (and straight) Christmas tree this year, with the exception of Barbra Streisand's "Higher Ground."

Vermont singer/songwriter Noel recently released her first CD entitled "It's Just A Phase." The 10-track CD (with two uncut versions of the title song and "Shimmer") is upbeat and dancey. Noel has a very strong, melodic, and sensitive voice that add emotions and strength to each song.

Of all the songs on the CD, I loved the title song, "Love Song" and "The Me That I Know." The title song is upbeat and inspirational without being preachy or self indulgent. "Love Song" is a beautiful ballad that tells of two people in love. It's a song that every walk of life can relate to especially the line "All I can give you is me."

The other ballad, "The Me That I Know", tells of a relationship that didn't work (we are know what that is like!) and moving on. The two lyrics that stand out and is the basis of the song are "I can't love you unless I love myself" and "How could I give up the me that I know." Beautiful lyrics!

And to quote from the title song "You'll be amazed at what I do", Noel is defi-

nately an up and comer and should go very far in the music industry.

[For more information on this CD, visit her web site at <http://homepages.together.net/~iris/homepage.htm> or write to: Irisi Productions Unlimited, PO Box 4252, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819-4252.]

The second CD that everyone should own is from the LA-based group, Men Out Loud. With just a couple of original songs and many covers, these four hot guys are some of the best harmonic individuals I've heard in a long time. Taking such popular hits as "Express Yourself", "More Than A Woman To Me", and "Somewhere" (from "West Side Story"), these songs are sung with power, energy, and makes you beg for more. And by singing these songs, they take on a whole new meaning ("Making me feel like a queen on a throne")!

A mix of rock, doo-wop, and ballads, these "yummy to look at and they sound good, too" guys are taking the gay music industry to new heights.

[To obtain a copy of their CD, visit their website at [www.1bc.com/menoutloud](http://www.1bc.com/menoutloud).]

Don't miss out on these two great CD's! You'll be very sorry if you do!!

**Chin Ho! stays local despite success**

*continued from page fourteen*

"comment" caused a dee-jay at the station to label the band's members as "bad boys." The dee-jay also allegedly refused to play any "Chin Ho!" music despite the request of several listeners.

Regardless, the lack of air-play has not hurt the band, as "Chin Ho!" has received several major label recording offers, but all have been declined. According to Andrew, "I just haven't felt that it (the deal) was right. There was a time when I felt the band wasn't ready. That was when Billboard Magazine called us 'one of the most gratifying musical discoveries we've made of late.' I got contacted by everyone and I got cocky. I didn't return calls to the labels that I didn't like. But this was five years ago... when we were doing it in the woods for ourselves."

Another more feasible reason for Smith's refusal to sign with a major label is his lack of interest in leaving Vermont. "I don't think bands should have to leave Burlington to have success. I will travel as much as necessary, but I want to be based in Burlington. We are definitely in the process of working out a deal, but it is not my goal to give up my art to a major corporation. I don't want to give... someone else complete control of my career."

Surprisingly, in all of these contract negotiations, Andrew Smith's sexual orientation has not posed a major obstacle even though he has been openly gay since youth. The realization of being attracted to men first arrived at age six but, "I had a 'I will fuck anything philosophy' until I was eighteen," stated Smith. Coming to the realization of being gay was easy, and the "coming out" process was only a little more difficult. "I've been out since I was in college. I 'came out' to my parents when I had a horrible break-up about ten years ago. I had told my sister years before, but she had asked I not tell our parents.... (My mom) said she had always known, but just never asked." His sexual preference is reinforced through songs such as "Dance of Hers," "Closet Case" and the brand new "I Wish I was a Girl," yet according to Andrew, "A lot of people just don't know that I'm gay." Perhaps this is a result of his lack of flamboyance or compliance to the typical gay stereotype. Nevertheless, "I think it (being gay) is pretty obvious in my music... but still at the shows there are always a bunch of women staring up at me awestruck. I guess I do (want to get the point across that I am gay)."

The arrival of success on a local level has Andrew Smith moving into the future with a self-confidence and strength that has only developed in recent years. Gone is the drunk Madonna impersonator in a lemon-chiffon gown; the place now occupied by one of Burlington's most talented, outspoken and caring musicians. The time for Andrew Smith and "Chin Ho!" is now, just as it is for the gay rights' movement. Ready or not, world, here they come.

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