POP CD REVIEW

Sinead O’Connor
H O W A B O U T I B E M E (A N D Y O U B E Y O U)?

You might have heard: In the past few months, Sinead O’Connor, the owner of one indelible Prince cover and two decades’ worth of tabloid baggage, got married, separated and reunited with her husband, and often appeared on the verge of a very public breakdown, all documented in a steady stream of scandalous tweets. Add to that one breathtakingly good, incredibly awkward new album. “How About I Be Me (And You Be You)?”

Sinead O’Connor’s ninth full-length and probably her best since her 1990 breakthrough, “I Do Not Want What I Haven’t Got,” is a wide-ranging folk album that as open as a wound. It’s a big, brave, brazen release that does its job: It drapes a bare skeleton of music — Celtic-inspired mid-tempo ballads, mostly — over the singer’s confessional compositions. It’s painful to listen to, and beautiful.

O’Connor knows neither self-censorship nor the virtues of allegory, so “I Had a Baby” is pretty much a song about how she had a baby with a guy she barely knew, and the baby looks kind of mean like his absent father, and she wishes things weren’t so nuts, but what can she do? “I was crazy,” she half-whispers, in her Kate-Bush-meets-Marilyn voice. “It was always crazy.” “How About” contains a handful of great Going to the Chapel tracks, including the exuberant opener, “4th and Vine,” in which O’Connor sings about putting on eyeliner and a dress as if she were discussing visiting a distant planet.

But to know O’Connor’s history is to expect disaster around every corner, and every giddy bridal ballad has its solemn counterpart: The disc concludes with the too-long “V.I.P.,” an almost a cappella scald about the dangers of materialism (don’t think your Manoles will get you into heaven, O’Connor warns, because Jesus is not having it). It almost, but not quite, ruins the mood.

— Allison Stewart

THE WINNER OF THE INKER

2 Winner of the genuine livestock-altering tool: You know it’s going to be a bad hotel when it accepts frequent-passenger miles from Greyhound. (“Bird Waring, Larchmont, N.Y.”)

3 You know it’s going to be a bad hotel when there’s a “do not disturb” sign on the front desk. (“Matt Monitto, Elon, N.C.”)

4 You know your kid’s going to have a bad day at school when the bully’s mom texts you to ask if your son will be there today or should she pack a lunch. (“Ward Kay, Vienna, Va.”)

TOURING THE INKERS

TUSCAN WHOLE MILK, 1 QUART, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

A Arrowhead: “What’s yummy about this is the ingredient list: It’s real — whole milk only.” (Alasdair Campbell, Austin, a First Offender)

B Owner of one discarded tabloid baggage, decades’ worth of junk mail, and filth on my toilet seat: “I can’t get over how clean the sheets are. Also, I agree with the instructions: ‘This side out Mon-Wed-Fri.’” (David Chase)

C The reviews must not be unfair to the manufacturer and seller. Do NOT post the reviews directly to Amazon until we post the results online March 23 — if we see them there before then, we’ll disqualify them. While the ones on Amazon often run several hundred words, we’re looking for much shorter reviews; 75 words would be lengthy for us. Search on Amazon.com with the exact words below to find the product to “review.”

“Morton Iodized Salt 26 oz”

“Clipper-mate pocket comb 5” all fine teeth”

“Revlon compact emery boards”

“Morton Iodized Salt 26 oz”

G Lives in Philadelphia, writes about the dangers of materialism (don’t think your Manoles will get you into heaven, O’Connor warns, because Jesus is not having it). It almost, but not quite, ruins the mood.

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Sinead O’Connor turns confessional in this full-length release.

THE NINTH ALBUM: Sinead O’Connor turns confessional in this full-length release.

JOHN SCHULLES/GETTY IMAGES FOR RECA GROUP

THIS WEEK’S CONTEST

Week 960: Raving reviews

“... Sip gently, slowly, or one is in danger of not only missing the subtleties of the milk’s texture and its terroir... Tuscan is best drunk young — I recommend pairing with freshly baked macadamia nut scones. Milk Expectorator gives this one a 92.”

The paean above to a jug of Tuscan-brand whole milk, by Philip Tone, is an excerpt from one of more than 1,300 joke reviews of this particular product on Amazon.com, which lets just about any store advertise on its Web pages. (See the whole thing at amzn.to/lnvmilk.) And there are similarly hilarious “reviews” for many other everyday products. This week: Send us a creative “review” for any of the items below that are listed on Amazon. The reviews must not be unfair to the manufacturer and seller. Do NOT post the reviews directly to Amazon until we post the results online March 23 — if we see them there before then, we’ll disqualify them. While the ones on Amazon often run several hundred words, we’re looking for much shorter reviews; 75 words would be lengthy for us. Search on Amazon.com with the exact words below to find the product to “review.”

“World’s best dish cloths”

“Revol compact emery boards”

“Morton Iodized Salt 26 oz”

“Clipper-mate pocket comb 5” all fine teeth”

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives an excellent pair of owl-vomit bouluses, donated by prize-donator extraordinary Cheryl Davis. Owls swallow their prey without chewing it up (having no teeth) and so they spit out big balls of stuff from which you can extract all kinds of mouse and bird parts. Doing that is exactly like discovering diamonds in the ground.

Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational T-shirt or your choice of a coveted Style Invitational T-shirt or your choice of a coveted Style Invitational T-shirt or your choice of a coveted Style Invitational T-shirt or a loser magnet. Honorables mentions get a lust-ed for Loser Mug. First Offenders get a tree-shaped air “freshener” (FirStink for their first ink). E-mail entries to stylinginvitational at yahoo dot com, or fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, March 5; results published March 25 (March 23 online). No more than 25 entries per entrant per week. Include “Week 960” in your e-mail subject line or it may be ignored as spam. Include your real name, postal address and phone number with your entry. See contest rules and guidelines at washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational. The revised title for next week is by Brad Alexander; the subhead for this week’s honorable mentions is by Tom Witte. Join the Style Invitational Devotees on Facebook at on.fb.me/styleinvitational.