

Dick Tracy
Original Soundtrack
Madonna
I'm Breathless

The release of this summer's blockbuster has been accompanied by not one, not two, but *three* soundtracks. One of them — which contains the score composed by Danny "I'll write the music for any movie that moves" Elfman — has yet to be released. But a new album by Madonna and a multi-artist compilation are already here. Surprisingly, the group effort is more consistent and enjoyable.

Ever since *Saturday Night Fever*, record companies have thrown a bunch of songs together in an attempt to cash in on a potential hit movie. The resulting hodgepodge is rarely a commercial success and almost never satisfying to listen to. (Thrown *Footloose* onto your turntable lately? I didn't think so.)

These albums only work when the music is linked in some way, such as on the classic soundtrack *The Harder They Come*, which introduced a whole generation to reggae. The most recent positive example was *Something Wild*, a vaguely conceptual work whose cutting-edge artists somehow belonged together.

It works again on *Dick Tracy*, this time because most of the tracks are performed in the mold of popular music created during the '30s. Most of the songs also bear the imprint of producer Andy Paley: He co-wrote all but two songs and his White Heat Swing Orchestra (a nice nod to James Cagney) provides most of the music.

The result is an eminently listenable album. It kicks off with a marvelous collaboration between k.d. lang and Take 6 called "Ridin' The Rails." lang slides into this ode to travelling tramps ("Hoboing is my game/ And B & O's my middle name") with ease. The whoo-whooping back-up vocals are charming and it passes so quickly that you almost don't notice how intricate and graceful it is.

Similar pleasures abound. Jerry Lee Lewis shambles through "It Was The Whiskey Talkin' (Not Me)," Brenda Lee rips up the stomper "You're In The Doghouse Now" and Darlene Love has a blast with "Mr. Fix-It." Like all the songs performed here, these three are too well-crafted and witty to be considered merely pastiche.

Even the songs featuring the rather limited vocals of Andy Paley and Tommy Page make sense. In the '30s, faceless male crooners with thin voices were the rule rather than the exception, so they sound right at home.

The only track that doesn't work is Ice-T's "Dick Tracy." A rap could never sound '30s enough to fit in with the album's con-

cept. And the lyrics are too simple-minded to allow Ice-T's personality to shine through.

But there are highlights aplenty. "Looking Glass Sea" is a campy treasure from Erasure, and "Slow Rollin' Mama" is a very obvious double-entendre in which LaVern Baker searches for a big, long rollin' pin for her red hot oven. They help make *Dick Tracy* an unexpected delight.

Madonna's album is also appealing, though less successful. Like *Dick Tracy*, she tries to recreate the mood of the '30s. But her biggest task was tackling the three songs contributed by Stephen Sondheim, one of the giants of Broadway musicals. By and large, she does an admirable job.

"Sooner Or Later," a ballad in which Breathless Mahoney asserts that she always gets her man, would probably come alive under a more accomplished vocalist. Still, Madonna handles it well.

But she's really in her milieu with "More," an upbeat ode to greed that features typically amusing wordplay from Sondheim like, "You've got to stock the cupboard/ Remember Mother Hubbard." It's a show-stopping number perfectly suited to Madonna's public persona and her vocal range, and she makes the most of it.

Finally, there's "What Can You Lose," a plaintive duet with Mandy Patinkin. Madonna is outclassed, but she escapes with her dignity. That's no small feat, for Patinkin is one of the most talented singers in theater today.

The rest of the songs follow in a similarly swinging mood. A trio of tunes near the middle are some of the best she's recorded. "Hanky Panky" is a hilarious paean to some casual S & M in which she sings, persuasively, "Hanky panky/ Nothing like a good spanky." "I'm Going Bananas" is a ditsy song in the tradition of Carmen Miranda. And "Cry Baby" harks back to Betty Boop, who Madonna emulated previously on *A Very Special Christmas*.

But it's downhill from there. Several tracks are passable, but undistinguished, and "Something To Remember" has a positively ungainly chorus. "Now I'm Following You" is interesting mostly because it features Warren Beatty on vocals. (Did he learn *nothing* from *Ishtar*?) And whatever appeal "Vogue" may have, it is jarringly out of place here.

To be fair, Madonna's voice has improved mightily since her debut album. And she produces the whole affair with style and assurance. If she can match the playfulness on display here with the lyrical maturity evident on her last album, Madonna may yet create the masterpiece she seems capable of.

BY MICHAEL GILTZ