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SURFING THE WAVES OF POPULAR CULTURE
BY MICHAEL GILTZ & FRIENDS

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Surfing Through New CDs

Caught up with a lot of music, thanks to driving to Pennsylvania and back. Here's a look at what I've been listening to:

Tom Russell -- Love & Fear *** 1/2

Classic singer-songwriter rock n roll from a veteran performer I'd never heard of. It reminds me a lot of John Hiatt's "Bring The Family" -- that sound of a grizzled artist hitting the sweet spot and delivering a warm, career-defining album after years in the trenches. "The Sound of One Heart Breaking," "The Pugilist at 59" and the giddy "Stealing Electricity" (the song he performed on Letterman that caught my ear) -- this is mature, adult, terrific music.

The Streets -- The Hardest Way To Make An Easy Living ***

Albums about the miseries of being famous are generally tiresome and at first blush this is a let-down from his masterful second album. But still a unique, clever rapper.

Ann Nesby -- In The Spirit ** 1/2

She's the aunt of "American Idol" contestant Paris and the woman Randy Jackson raved about as being "one of the best singers in the known world." Her latest solo CD is filled with classic tunes ranging from gospel favorites to Bill Withers' "Grandma's Hands." Unfortunately, the music and backing vocals aren't up to her standards -- they're at best serviceable. But her singing is terrific, up to the ferocious final note she delivers on the closing song "There's Something About That Name." Maybe she shouldn't co-produce next time.

The Boy Least Likely To -- The Best Party Ever ** 1/2

Twee music from a British band who uses all sorts of odd kiddie instruments (toy pianos, a recorder, a cheap xylophone) that create a rather beguiling air. But most of the tunes aren't up to the standards of

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