

Greatest Hits from Michael Jackson & Billy Joel Plus Kristian Hoffman's *Fop* Reviewed on CD

by Chris Narloch

Two of the biggest male hit-makers from the '70s and '80s have impressive new retrospectives just out, both of them excellent reminders of how vital these two singer-songwriters were when they were at their peak

Billy Joel's new CD cherry-picks the best singles from each of his solo recordings, while a new DVD from Michael Jackson offers fans the entire library of music videos produced during his career as a solo artist. Also reviewed, the latest CD from Kristian Hoffman.

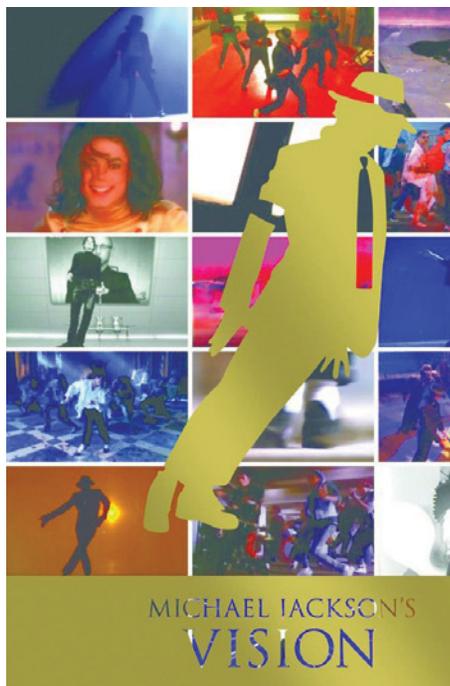
Michael Jackson Michael Jackson's Vision Epic/Legacy

It can be heartbreaking for fans of MJ to see everyone under the sun trying to cash in after his death. Personally, I will not be buying any "new" recordings from the late singer because there is no way of knowing whether they represent material that Jackson (a notorious perfectionist) would have wanted released.

This DVD collection is another story, however. I have little doubt that the superstar in Jackson would have wanted to see his entire catalog of short film music videos collected on DVD with newly restored color and remastered audio.

Michael Jackson's Vision brings together more than 40 videos, ten

of them previously unavailable on DVD, packaged as a deluxe boxed



set containing more than four-and-a-half hours of content, across three DVDs.

Some of the greatest movie directors in the business worked with Jackson on these music videos, including Martin Scorsese (*Bad*), John Landis (*Thriller*), Spike Lee (*They Don't Care About Us*), David Fincher (*Who Is It*), and John Singleton (*Remember The Time*). This is an essential collection of Jackson's brilliant, iconic videos.

Billy Joel The Hits Columbia/Legacy

We haven't heard much in the way of new music from Billy Joel lately, although he continues to



tour fairly frequently (and lucratively). Joel's last release of new music was a classical album from 2001, and he hasn't had an all-new collection of pop music since 1993's *River of Dreams*.

That's an eternity for a talented singer/songwriter such as Joel, and I hope he makes up for lost time

soon. In the meantime, we can content ourselves with yet another best-of CD that surveys his solo recordings and collects some of Joel's best.

The singer has had so many hits that they couldn't possibly fit them all on one disc - you won't find "Just The Way You Are," "Uptown Girl," or "She's Always A Woman" on *The Hits* - but what is here is notable.

I especially enjoyed hearing some of Joel's lesser-known singles again, such as "Allentown," "Pressure," and "I Go to Extremes," the last of which really shows off Joel's considerable skill on the piano and his ability to soar vocally.

Kristian Hoffman Fop Gothic Novelty Music

Back in the day, when record stores were thriving and their shelves were filled with vinyl, album cover art was just that - an

art. In the age of the CD, and especially thanks to the rise of music downloads, this art form is largely irrelevant.

So I appreciate it when an artist goes out of their way to include a clever, or original photo or other art work with their CD. Kristian Hoffman's latest release, *Fop*, has my vote as CD cover of the year for its witty depiction of a young boy proudly displaying the skirt of a long, oversized red dress he has on.

The CD itself isn't bad either. Kristian Hoffman first emerged during the late '70s as the lead singer of the New York City cult favorite the Mumps. The singer/songwriter also spearheaded the "anti-folk" movement, and he has served as music director for Ann Magnuson and Rufus Wainwright.

Fop reminds me a lot of a typical Rufus Wainwright record but with a less nasal and less affected singer. Like Wainwright, Hoffman surrounds himself with lush arrangements on *Fop*, and he writes poetic lyrics that sound almost as good when you read them as when he sings them.

One of Hoffman's most ambitious and satisfying CDs, *Fop* contains 17 tasty tracks, including the highlights "I Can't Go There With You," "Imaginary Friend," and "Hey Little Jesus."

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