

CD Review:

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by Nancy Manocherian

It's years now I've had a vinyl copy of *Civilization & Its Discontents* (not Freud's version), but sadly no turntable or incentive to pursue a path to such an antique on which to play the LP. So when I was asked to write about the newly minted (or re-released) CD, I was eager to listen to the celebrated recording written and composed by my colleague and collaborator, **Michael Sahl**, and my friend, **Eric Salzman**. Given the full disclosure contained in that last sentence, I won't pretend I can be entirely objective about this work; I am, I think, spiritually tied to their politics and humor, something so deeply ingrained that I feel it must stem from our common Eastern European roots. Jewish humor is a fact, but I also believe there is universal truth in all things tribal, no less from these two composers with a gift for commentary, political and otherwise.

After reading the CD jacket and all the accolades, I wondered, how could I possibly add something that hasn't already been said? I then listened from the opening line -- "Boys and girls come out to play, the moon shines as bright as day--" I thought (despite knowing better), I was in for some kind of torturous version of Freud's famous book. Suddenly -- maybe 40 seconds in -- the music took a turn for the better. I'd been had...I found myself curiously transported. Of course, I reminded myself, this is Michael and Eric.

From the rhyming lyrics -- hilarious and unexpected, to the voices -- operatic without cloying drama, to the music -- melodic yet edgy and modern, I was drawn into the spell of cliché turned on its head, bopping along to the various twists and turns of the rhythm and sound. The character of the music is as unique as its creators. I am sure this was a radical piece at the time of its first release, but it still holds up as a post-*Rent* musical dramatization of the time in which it was conceived.

"If it feels good, do it," was the anthem of my generation. This glorious refrain speaks volumes about the 70's as well as sums up Freud's ideas about repression of instinct and its consequences on the individual. In fact, *Civilization & Its Discontents* is like *Rent* before *Rent* was *Rent* and out-Bohemes *La Bohème* in the same way; by contemporizing the human struggle for freedom. The title, *Civilization & Its Discontents* may have been plagiarized, but the content came from the astute powers of observation and creation of the two brilliant, zany guys who conjured it.

Listening to it on a CD gives it new life as fresh and timeless as any modern classic."