

Entertainment

Good Lord! It's Donovan

ON THE RECORD
by Roger Crombie

WAL-MART, the gigantic chain of department stores, sells approximately ten percent of all music CDs and cassettes sold in the United States of America. The chain has always taken an aggressive approach to the content of the music it sells, but has recently intensified its oversight.

Where once the company simply refused to sell any products whose visual or sonic imagery it found objectionable, it has now established a censorship department to advise musicians of changes needed to allow an album to be sold at the store.

The company publishes no guidelines on what may or may not be acceptable. Last year, it turned down a Kenny G Christmas album because the saxophonist had depicted his newborn son naked on the album's cover.

"What's this long-haired guy doing with a half-naked baby?" asked a Wal-Mart executive. Mr. G's people were finally able to

persuade Wal-Mart to sell the CD as was. The chain sold half a million of 5.6 million sold in toto.

Other performers have been less lucky. Wal-Mart simply banned the sale of Sheryl Crow's latest album (because of an unfavourable reference to the company), and has mandated lyrical and cover art changes on any number of other performers.

Wal-Mart adds a tiny sticker saying "Edited" to the bar code of CDs on which it demands changes. "That's free-market enterprise at work," says Wal-Mart's director of public relations, defending his company's right to do whatever it pleases in the name of profit.

He is, of course, correct. Wal-Mart is within a few months of becoming the largest retailer of recorded music in America. In a free market, sellers are free to act as they please.

Intelligent consumers are free to find Wal-Mart's censorship activities loathsome and shop elsewhere. In many parts of rural America, however, CDs are only available at Wal-Mart, which is also an aspect of the free market at work, its effective monopoly allowing Wal-Mart to become

America's arbiter of taste.

Brave new world? Shudder.

Anyway, I digress. A review follows of a new CD by a local, Troy Donovan, who has lived for a few years in Shelbyville, Tennessee.

Having just returned from spending a few days in Charlotte, North Carolina, not a million miles from Tennessee, I have a few short, non-musical comments to get off my chest.

Charlotte is a great town for shopping. It has a Wal-Mart, but also some very fine CD outlets which do not censor other peoples' artistic expressions. Like many of the more than 500 conurbations which dot the United States, however, Charlotte thrives on a simple principle: with unlimited space, don't just spread, sprawl.

The practice of growing outwards until you meet another city developing towards you at roughly the same speed is fantastically wasteful, but the cardinal characteristic of the United States remains its appalling level of waste.

This late in the game, as the world finally acknowledges that its resources are limited, the booming US continues to take the low environmental road, consuming far more energy per capita than any other nation in the

world.

It struck me that with all the best will in the world, the entire savings effected by Bermuda's annual recycling programme probably wouldn't equal the environmental damage caused by what Americans throw out of their car windows in an afternoon.

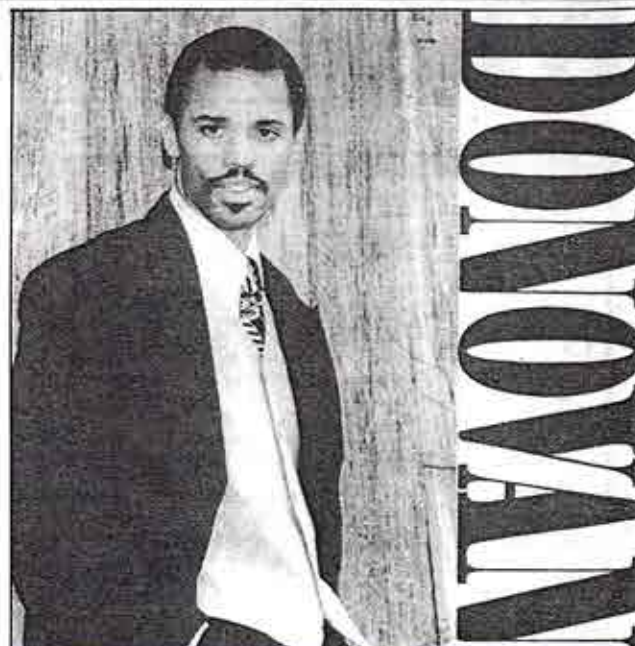
The epidemic of waste is even more clearly in evidence the further south one proceeds from North Carolina, and adds a certain gall to President Clinton's triumphalist message to the Europeans to behave like Americans do in order to get ahead.

Watching passengers drift through Charlotte airport early in the morning, stopping in every store to consume unnecessary junk, a thought struck me: to experience the American Dream, like any dream, you have to be asleep.

Donovan Donovan (Charity Records)

A GOSPEL CD which opens with the words of the Lord's Prayer set to a new musical interpretation sets itself the highest imaginable standard. There may not be a better-known or more revered passage in the English language.

Bermuda's Troy Donovan brings that level of confidence to this debut CD and carries it throughout, producing in co-ordination with his



brother, photographer Ras Mykkal Simons, a more than creditable effort.

None of the other nine tracks quite matches the intensity Donovan brings to the Lord's Prayer, but the CD is a first-class showcase for a powerful voice which never loses control. Donovan's vision comes shining through, even as his voice switches from dramatically soaring above the accompaniment to a more delicate register.

For the most part, the tunes are gentle-paced, the punch contained in the message rather than the overall sound.

Without knowing much about the Christian music market, I suspect that Donovan's hopes of using this album as a springboard will lead him in the right general direction — and that next time out, he'll be even more commanding.

*** and 1/2. Standout Track: *The Lord's Prayer*.