

MUSIC



**Estelle**  
*Shine*  
(EMI)

Four years ago, when Estelle released the jaw-dropping single *1980*, her future seemed bright. But record company politics and an uneven debut album meant she soon disappeared from view – until now. *American Boy*, the track that's sat atop the UK singles chart for the past month, is an early contender for single of the year: it's a perfect duet between Estelle and Kanye West. There are an abundance of samples on *Shine*, but all are used expertly – 'No Substitute Love' cleverly pinches the verses from George Michael's *Faith*, and 'No More Rain' is a summery Barry White-sampling jam. A spectacular comeback.

– NICK BOND



**Various**  
*One Love Sound Machine*  
(SONY BMG)

One Love has firmly established itself as being one of the leading house nights Australia has to offer. Now onto their eighth compilation, *One Love Sound Machine* features the likes of Sydney's Matt Nugent, Italy's Crookers and the return of Melbourne's own Grant Smillie, better known as one half of TV Rock). Spread over three CDs, you get the usual Midnight, Three AM and Backroom sets featuring tracks from Mobin Master, Mighty Dub Katz, Murk, Paul Van Duk, Underworld, Bumblebeez, Armand Van Helden and The Chemical Brothers.

– LAWRENCE AKERS



**The Kooks**  
*Konk*  
(EMI)

The Kooks join Franz Ferdinand and Kaiser Chiefs as part of a new breed of UK bands unafraid to bridge the gap between pop and indie. Best known on these shores for their 2006 hit 'Naïve', they supply more of the same jaunty, radio-friendly rock on *Konk*. The album is named after the Ray Davies-owned studio the band recorded it in, and there are echoes of Davies' work with the Kinks in many of the tracks here – try 'Mr Maker' or the sprightly album opener 'See the Sun' for a hit of feelgood Britrock.

– NICK BOND

CINEMA

**Len's Love Story**  
**Writer and director**

Sonia Whiteman  
**Stars** Damon Herriman, Mia Wasikowska, Kerry Walker

The St Kilda Film Festival celebrates its 25th anniversary this year and has 100 of Australia's best short films to showcase.

*Len's Love Story*, written and directed by Sonia Whiteman and fresh from the Clermont-Ferrand and Tribeca Short Film Festivals, is one offering. The film is about a young autistic man whose existence is structured by



the notes his mother has written in his diary and left in strategic positions around the house.

But Len's mother died a couple of months ago, and the notes run out. The last note she left for Len says, 'Today you will

find the love of your life,' and the events of this day mark a turning point for Len.

– KATHRYN GOLDIE

The Palace George Cinema  
Session 1, May 7, 9pm  
Details:  
www.stkildafilmfestival.com.au

PERFORMANCE

Behind the royal mask



**Un ballo in maschera (A Masked Ball)**

**Music** Giuseppe Verdi  
**Libretto** Antonio Somma  
**Conductor** Andrea Licata  
**Director** John Cox  
**Cast** Julian Gavin, Nicole Youl, Amelia Farrugia, Milijana Nikolic, Geoffrey Harris, Michael Lewis, Richard Alexander, Jud Arthur, Jin Tea Kim

by DAREN POPE

An assassination plot, a randy King, a desperate housewife and a mad fortune-teller; any wonder Giuseppe Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera (A Masked Ball)* captures the imagination of opera lovers.

The story takes off in the lead-up to a courtly masked ball. Sweden's King Gustav III has the hots for Amelia, the wife of his secretary Anckarstroem. Ignoring more pressing concerns of a murder plot, he seeks to consummate his lust and pursues an only slightly reluctant Amelia. When Anckarstroem finds out about wife's infidelity of the heart (no bodice ripping here), he aligns himself with the assassins.

Based on Eugene Scribe's play, *Gustav III* (1833), Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera* ruffled the feathers of Italian government censors of the day concerned about the political

ramifications of slugging off a Swedish monarch. Consequently the story was changed with the character of the King recast as Riccardo, Governor of Boston. This Opera Australia production reinstates the original royal setting and with it all the delicious melodrama of European aristocracy in crisis.

Actually, King Gustav III (1746-1792) was rumoured to be homosexual but such a radical rethink of the story is way outside the brief of Opera Australia. Regardless, there is much to enjoy in this generous staging. Both Julian Gavin and Nicole Youl give fine vocal performances of the King and his lady love. Milijana Nikolic is a stand out as the blind fortune teller, Ulrica – she even comes with her own fireworks and a mechanised throne that wouldn't be out of place as a Luna Park ride. Michael Lewis revels in his role as the wronged husband and both Richard Alexander and Jud Arthur are effectively menacing as would-be-assassins (in particular, Arthur's rich bass baritone is stunning).

Last but certainly not least, Amelia Farrugia gives a buoyantly comic performance of Oscar the Kings page – just when you thought gender bending was the sole domain of the drag kings. Let's hear it for grand old opera.

Until May 10, State Theatre, Arts Centre  
Details: www.opera-australia.org.au

Picture by Jeff Busby

MUSIC

Noonan remixed - vocals reign supreme

**Second Skin**

Katie Noonan  
**Remixed by John Course and Mr Timothy**

By DAREN POPE

Some years back I was dragged kicking and screaming to an in-store promotional appearance for Queensland band George. The gig included a selection of songs performed live from their *Unity* Album. Front and centre was Katie Noonan. It was quite

an afternoon. A hundred or so George devotees, most under the age of 20, sat cross-legged in front of the small stage. Mums and dads and curious passers-by stood at the back. Noonan launched into her first song, 'Still Real', and a hush fell across the busy bookshop. By the end of the song, the crowd of bystanders had doubled, such is the allure of Noonan's pristine vocals. Needless to say, I've been a Katie convert every since.

The singer's solo album, *Skin*, was released late last year to much acclaim. The funk friendly single, 'Time to Begin' has been a regular fixture on JOY 94.9



and served as the entrée to the remixed album, *Second Skin*. The names behind the beats, John Course and Mr Timothy, are well known on the gay dance scene through Ministry of Sound releases – Timothy in particular has cut through with mixes of Inaya Day's *The One* and *Nasty Girl*.

The danger in taking already fabulous recordings and rephrasing them around new beats is of falling into the *Hooked on Disco* approach. The kitsch *Hooked on* series in the '70s upped the tempo and recast already proven hits to a rather monotonous disco beat. It all became a bit

of joke for serious music types, especially when *Hooked on the Classics* came out. These *Second Skin* mixes are strongest when Noonan's jazz-styled vocals are star – a fact that both Course and Timothy rightfully acknowledge.

For the most part *Second Skin* serves as a dance frame to the songs which already have a life all their own. No doubt dance purists will be pissed off, but then so will Noonan's die-hard fans. Regardless, a mighty fine listen. [A]

Available now  
www.kati Noonan.com