

Sex, Politics, Gazpacho

Barbara Golden's
Greatest Hits
Burning Books

BY KYLE GANN

Barbara Golden is a San Francisco radio personality, a

songwriter, a famous party-thrower, cook, electronic composer, poet, leader of the WIGband trio, and habitu  of the Mills College-centered West Coast circle involving Paul Dresher, Robert Ashley, and other new-music names. I didn't know any of this, though, when I received in the mail a little wire-bound book called *Barbara Golden's Greatest Hits Vol. 1*. Opening it, I found recipes—"Mum's Chicken Liver Pat ," "Very Easy Gazpacho," "Coquilles Barb"—interlaced with musical notations. I'd never gotten a cookbook for review before, my own culinary artistry limited as it is to a tongue-searing chili recipe handed down by my uncle, a salty character who used to manage America's oldest still-running hamburger stand—but that's another story. I tossed *Golden's Greatest* into my briefcase and didn't notice until later, in a third look-through, that it contained

a CD in the back.

No wonder I had trouble reaching the end of the book: Golden is a wild woman, a political commentator, a dreamer, a mom, a slut, and hard to get a handle on. The song titles alone would give Jesse Helms the apoplexy he so richly deserves—"Boner Boys," "Clit Envy," "Tampon Rag"—and the lyrics

aren't totally devoid of references to same-sex fellatio involving the pope. But

Golden is also an electronic conceptualist in a kind of mellow, Bay Area style; she careens from the grossest raunchiness to poetic austerity as if from one access band to the next. The disc will draw laughs for its sardonic ode to Ollie North and songs like "Trashy Girls":

*Clothes with tons of cleavage
Whips and acting rough
Doing it with married men
That's the trashy stuff.*

Don't play the whole disc at parties, though, for other pieces are gentle and inverted.

Thing is, there's no line in Golden's head between innovation and frivolity, art and life. One of her best effects is a song called "Lap Pool," in which the long and abstract-seeming electronic introduction turns out to be a rippling, quasi-underwater variation of the subsequent song, a ditty about wanting a swimming pool. She has a way with word rhythms—clit-clit-clit-

clit-envy, envy, envy, envy—that undercuts sense and focuses on sound. The most affecting works are two long, intensely erotic speech pieces, *My Pleasure* (with text by the amazing librettist Melody Sumner Carnahan) and *Pink Pleasure*. "Once it's in, I know how to keep him there for hours," Golden murmurs as electronic voices echo her, or as percussion and trombone improvise around a long melody. "When I have spent myself, I let him take care of his needs any way he wishes . . . but quickly. I am tiring of him. . . ."

We get precious little erotica in new music, hardly anything that would test the censorship barriers other arts have tripped over, and Golden's version comes from a brazenly confident but politically incorrect feminism. Some of the cabaret songs only bear one listening, others need several to absorb. One hopes the recipes will prove more consistent. But that's what's really fascinating about Golden, her intact complexity: you have to take her altogether, self-indulgent poems, scalloped potatoes, vacation photos, and stunning synthesizer essays. She has filters on her oscillators, but, refreshingly, none on her personality. ♦

Boner Boys

Habanera

OH Bo - ner boys are boys we love Their
minds are small but their bo-ners are a - bove de reg'lar size what bliss what joy we're
talk in' 'bout de big bo - ner boy.

Take that, Mr. Helms.

BURNING BOOKS

For years the composer I've most expected to break out of the new-music ghetto is William Duckworth. His largest works, Schumann-like strings of elegantly interconnected fragments like *The Time-Curve Preludes* and *Southern Harmony*,

e represent a luxurious next step past minimalism. While Duckworth's music enchants everyone I play

it for, he gets little support from big institutions. Now, though, he's immersed in an ambitious, multiyear project called *Cathedral*, for chorus, soloists, ensembles, and interactive electronics. The work centers around five mystic moments in human history: the building of the Great Pyramid, the groundbreaking for Chartres Cathedral, the founding of the Ghost Dance religion, the first atomic bomb detonation, and the creation of the World Wide Web. Premieres of the first sections are scheduled for early 1997, and the work's sheer scale may finally shove Duckworth through the classical establishment's glass ceiling. —K.G.

DAVID SANCHEZ

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