



**CD**  
**WILL BERNARD:**  
**PARTY HATS**  
(Palmetto Records)

Acid jazz rose to prominence in the early '90s, with Bay Area acts like the Broun Fellinis, Slide Five, and the Hieroglyphics Ensemble updating traditional jazz with funky rhythms and hip-hop attitude. Berkeley native Will Bernard played guitar for Hieroglyphics, and even after the movement lost the national spotlight, he continued composing with the Will Bernard Trio, Motherbug, and Grammy-nominated T.J. Kirk while also collaborating with the Coup and the Grey-boy Allstars. On Bernard's latest disc, he seems to be trying to find some middle ground between his funky roots and the contemporary jazz scene, in the process coming up with a style that might appeal to both young urban professionals and Deadheads. Most of *Party Hats* is pretty chill. Yes, there are smooth guitar riffs, growling horns, and slinky rhythms, and the players do occasionally evince a bit of heat (especially Will Blades in his organ work on "Folding Green"), but mainly they seem to be playing for the background more than the dance floor. If this is party music, someone might want to slip some tequila into the punch. **C+**

**DAN STRACHOTA**



**BOOK**  
**LIZA DALBY:** *EAST WIND MELTS THE ICE*  
(University of California Press)

Structured like an ancient Chinese almanac, Liza Dalby's fourth book (following her nonfiction *Geisha* and *Kimono* and a novel, *The Tale of Murasaki*) divides the year into 72 periods of five days each. Each section features a short essay inspired by the natural world she observes in Berkeley, where she lives, and Sonoma. Clearly a fiend for multiculturalism, Dalby models the essays on a Japanese literary form called *zuihitsu*; the conceit is that the brush (that is, the writing implement, of whatever kind) has a mind of its own. When Dalby truly allows her thoughts to wander, these *zuihitsu* make for quietly compelling reading. For example, the entry for the end of March, "Thunder sings," opens with an exploration of the traditional Japanese celebration of cherry blossom season, moves into musings on the late-March whale migration up the California coast, and finally touches on the social unacceptability of eating horsemeat. Trained as an anthropologist, Dalby sometimes trips herself up by overexplaining and overcontextualizing her work. But gardeners and armchair naturalists in Northern California and beyond should find much to love in this exacting and poetic journey through the seasons. **B+**

**CLAIRE DEDERER**



**CD**  
**JOE GOLDMARK:**  
**SEDUCING THE '60S**  
(Lo-Ball Records)

Ever since the advent of pedal steel guitar back in the 1930s, its wavering, weeping tones have been generally synonymous with country music. But over the past 25 years, no one has tried harder to reposition the unwieldy instrument than Joe Goldmark. Having played with everyone from blues master Taj Mahal to pop music innovator David Byrne to punk-pop group Mr. T Experience, Goldmark (who co-owns the San Francisco branch of Amoeba Music) continues to broaden the instrument's horizons. On his sixth solo album, he reworks 13 of his favorite '60s tunes. The record uncovers hidden facets of its songs, finding the twangy underbelly of the Beatles' "Because" and the soulful swing of Neil Young's "Helpless." While some credit should go to his guest vocalists—the Bay Area's singer-songwriter Bart Davenport, former punk rocker Gary Claxton, and brassy chanteuse Brandi Shearer, the next Norah Jones—Goldmark and fellow pedaler John McFee do most of the heavy lifting. They've concocted more tasty licks than you'd get in a barrel of Tootsie Roll Pops. In short, they'll probably seduce you, too. **A-**

**DAN STRACHOTA**



**BOOK**  
**W.S. DI PIERO:**  
**CHINESE APPLES**  
(Knopf)

San Francisco poet W.S. Di Piero is split between his fascination with the present and his obsession with the past. He's far from alone, but in few of us does the conflict glow like neon. His mind-spinning tumble of words settles on the page in poems that are street-savvy and high-brow, edgy and traditional—and more than occasionally violent. "I need a looser world and words for it," he writes in "Stanzas," the poem that might be his anthem. "Take away whatever you want, / but deliver me to derangements / of sweet, ordered, derelict words." A native of the Italian enclaves of Philadelphia, Di Piero has been at Stanford University for a quarter-century, but academia hasn't tamed his splashy, erudite style, which has a low-key cult following. These "new and selected poems" are from seven of his eight volumes of work. Detractors may be put off by the occasionally perplexing syntax and some real "huh?" moments. (Try untangling the opening lines of "The Fruits of the Sea" or any of "A Blue and Mighty Expanse.") At his worst, he creates poems that sound like rough drafts. But at his dizzying best, he renders broad strokes on a big canvas—refreshing in an era of emotional minimalism, of spiritual bread and water. **B**

**CYNTHIA HAVEN**



**CD**  
**VARIOUS ARTISTS:**  
**HYPHY HITZ**  
(TVT)

So far, the only rap artist to score mainstream success with hyphy—a wild rap style that takes its name from combining *hyper* with *fly*—has been Vallejo's E-40, and he'd been rapping since the hyphy kids were in diapers. So calling this compilation *Hyphy Hitz* is akin to saying there's real produce in Froot Loops. That said, many of these tunes have been mainstays on Bay Area radio stations like KMEL-FM for the last couple years. This comp is just a way to position the style alongside the Deep South's crunk genre as a national phenomenon. Of course, the rest of the country might not be ready for hyphy, with its oft-repeated choruses, minimalist clanging percussion, and '80s-style synthesizer hooks. As party music goes, it's incessantly catchy, with tracks like the late Mac Dre's "Get Stupid (remix)" providing undeniable hooks and goofy personality. And if you're unsure about hyphy's staying power, check out D.B.'Z's "Stewy," which has little boys calling out its chorus, pointing the way for the next generation of gouda chasers. (Um, cheese means cash.) **A-**

**DAN STRACHOTA**