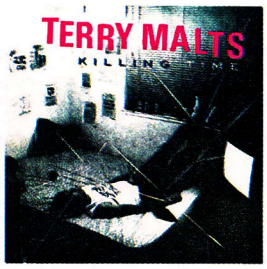


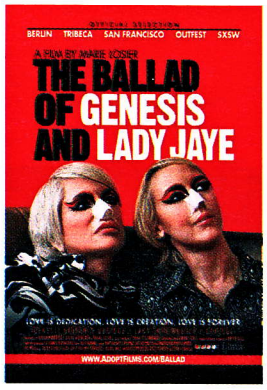
ALBUM

TERRY MALTS: *KILLING TIME*

(Slumberland Records)

Over the past 25 years, "noise pop" has evolved beyond the original idea of guitar-heavy, melody-based music. Even so, it's nice to see that the initial concept—which has been harvested by San Francisco's own Noise Pop Festival—is still very much alive in the form of Terry Malts. On its debut LP, *Killing Time*, the Bay Area trio slathers cathartic, speaker-shattering feedback over thumping punk drumbeats and melodic vocal hooks. At the same time, lead singer Phil Benson delivers surprisingly literate, complex lyrics. On "Where Is the Weekend?" he perfectly captures the soul-sucking misery of the working underclass, while on "No Sir, I'm Not a Christian" he details the upside to existentialism. Several numbers encapsulate the euphoria of drunken twenty-something angst, with "Tumble Down" depicting it most vividly ("Up on the hill / I held your hand / So drunk we couldn't stand / Making our way in the moonlight / Wondering what death would be like"). Throughout *Killing Time*, Terry Malts makes a stirring case for noise pop's continuing relevance, decades after the genre's, and the festival's, inception. **A-**

DAN STRACHOTA



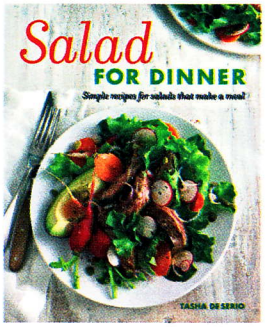
FILM

THE BALLAD OF GENESIS AND LADY JAYE

(Adopt Films)

One charming feature of Marie Losier's latest documentary, in local theaters this month, is its total failure of exposition. If *The Ballad of Genesis and Lady Jaye* seems randomly beamed in from outer space, that just goes to show its commitment to the material. For the sake of easier access, here's some background: Once upon a time, the onetime San Franciscan Genesis P-Orridge, frontman of proto-industrial noise outfit Throbbing Gristle, fell in love with a pretty young dominatrix called Lady Jaye. Their partnership was a charmed accumulation of poignant whimsy and unbridled creativity; eventually, maybe inevitably, it involved an ultimate consummation, the "Creating the Pandrogyne" project, in which the soul mates underwent plastic surgery to more closely resemble each other. When Lady Jaye died in 2007, or "dropped her body," as Genesis nicely puts it, hearts were broken but the spell was not. Appropriately enough, Losier's crazy quilt of home-movie and performance footage (including a mesmerizing 1981 Kezar Pavilion show) seems giddily undomesticated. Reveling unapologetically in the self-exploratory artfulness of bohemian East Village chic, this is simply one sincere and affecting answer to the question of how to really live and love like an artist. **A-**

JONATHAN KIEFER



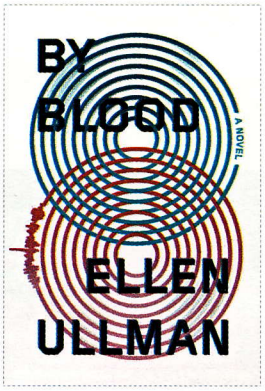
BOOK

TASHA DESERIO: *SALAD FOR DINNER*

(Taunton Press)

Tasha DeSerio has some serious salad bona fides. The Berkeley cooking instructor, caterer, and writer not only cooked at Chez Panisse, she contributed to the restaurant's books *Chez Panisse Fruit* and *Chez Panisse Café Cookbook*, as well as Alice Waters' *In the Green Kitchen*. In her recent cookbook, she makes a case for putting salad at the center of the plate. The main-course dishes are organized by genre: leafy, vegetable and fruit, grain, pasta and bread, and legumes. About two-thirds are vegetarian, with suggestions for meat additions in the margins for flexitarians and omnivores. Throughout, DeSerio weaves in helpful tips—subtle improvements like soaking sliced shallots in ice water to tame their gas-inducing compounds, or bruising basil leaves before adding them to a vinaigrette to release more flavor. The downside of such a strong focus on the Mediterranean is that the recipes begin to feel repetitive (arugula and frisée show up a lot). And the proportions are sometimes off, as with a salad of raw brussels sprouts that supposedly serves 4 to 6 but made enough for 8 to 10. Leftovers are no great sin, but the book works better as a collection of smart ideas than as hard-and-fast recipes. **B**

EMILY KAISER THELIN



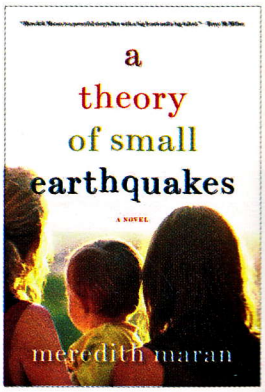
BOOK

ELLEN ULLMAN: *BY BLOOD*

(Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

In programmer-novelist Ellen Ullman's dense, digressive novel of 1970s San Francisco, a lonely, neurotic, unnamed professor, on leave while under investigation for an unspecified sexual scandal, moves into a downtown office to nurse his wounds. Next door, a German-born psychologist treats a young lesbian (also unnamed) who's unhappy in love but unhappier still with her mysterious origins: She's adopted and doesn't know who her birth parents are. The professor overhears his neighbor's conversations with her and soon fixates on her struggle to the point of tracking down her birth mother—a journey that takes him deep into Holocaust territory. The story is packed with compelling topics, such as adoption practices in Europe after World War II, desperate survival schemes in and out of concentration camps, and the plight of troubled Holocaust survivors living out their remaining days in Israel, but Ullman's efforts to fuse them into a coherent narrative don't quite work. Her energy never flags as she explores the looming riddle of identity and what it means to belong—asking passionately, "Where exactly are we wanted?"—but the result feels lumpy and implausible. **B**

JOAN FRANK



BOOK

MEREDITH MARAN: *A THEORY OF SMALL EARTHQUAKES*

(Soft Skull Press)

In her somber first novel, Oakland author and essayist Meredith Maran hits every possible stereotype on the subjects of feminism, liberalism, and lesbianism. Alison is a friendless Oberlin student in 1983 when she falls for the attentive and charismatic Zoe, who steers her to Berkeley after graduation. There they create a life together that spans two decades and has them reacting to the major political events of the West Coast exactly as lefty lesbians should: protesting against nuclear testing, advocating for AIDS victims. But the couple's applecart is upset when Zoe decides it's time to get Alison inseminated and begin their family. The problem is that Alison isn't as excited about the project and even ends up sleeping with Mark, her editor at *Mother Jones* (of course), just days after an insemination. She gets pregnant, but who is the father: Mark or the sperm donor? Unfortunately, Maran falls down on the job even harder right when her story gets the most complicated. She explains in wearying detail both Zoe's and Alison's motivations, leaving aside entirely the issue of Mark's role in the matter. Worse, she never even answers the $60,000 question, so the novel ends with a cliff-hanger, depriving readers of any meaningful payoff for their slog through all those years of herstory. **C**

STEPHANIE LOSEE