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Hard Candy

Madonna



The notion that older women should dress demurely and keep quiet is ridiculous and incredibly outdated, and it's important for artists like Madonna to refuse to do so. Unfortunately her 11th studio album, *Hard Candy*, plays it so safe that I almost can't believe the notably controversial artiste was involved in its creation. When the most provocative thing about Madonna is her choice of leotard there's something very wrong in the world - any hard hitting comments on politics, world view or anything important at all are eschewed in favour of throwaway and at times bizarre lyrics focusing on sex, love and dancing.



In a major shift from her ten preceding albums Madonna's hired in the big guns. The majority of the production credits go to The Neptunes with five other tracks shared by Timbaland, Justin Timberlake and Danja. Good producers they may all be, but their styles are set and Madonna fits in to them rather than the other way round. Inexplicably, hip hop poster boys Kanye West and Pharrell pop up rapping and singing over her on a variety of tracks - this combined with the been-there-done-that production smacks of a desperate attempt to pull in the all-star team to shift units.

In sound and situation 'Hard Candy' is uncannily similar to Britney's latest, *Blackout*, so much so that it seems Madonna's trying to keep up with the younger stars rather than setting the trend as she has consistently done in the past. Despite her (supposedly) strong, independent woman image the amount of men involved raises questions, but wouldn't be an issue if they weren't all so clearly out for themselves. The melody in '4 Minutes', co-produced by and featuring Justin Timberlake, is so blatantly not of Madonna's creation that it could sit easily on one of his own albums and makes it sound more like she's backing him than him backing her. Why is the Queen Of Pop reduced to second fiddle on her own album?

Inspid tunes like 'Give It 2 Me' and 'Dance 2night', apart from their lame use of the number 2 to sound cool, make it easier to notice the good songs when they eventually come along. 'Miles Away' is by far the most genuine sounding song on the album, both lyrically and performance wise. The simple sing-song melody borrows heavily from Gwen Stefani's 'The Real Thing' but the autobiographical lyrics, while unlikely to elicit great sympathy in the listener (aww, poor pop star), are delivered so sweetly the effect is melancholy and moving. What Guy Ritchie must think when he hears "You always have the biggest heart when we're 6000 miles apart" is anyone's guess, but then the reality of marriage to a global pop phenomenon is something the majority of us will never have to deal with. Elsewhere 'She's Not Me' is an attempt at the confident big-yourself-up tune so popular in this genre but just sounds bitter, Madonna's descriptions of her beautiful young love rival making her sound crabby and jealous rather than strong and sure of herself.

Gems of potential crop up here and there. 'Voices' is absolutely sumptuous in places, layers of deadpan vocals creating a haunting effect, but the lyrics leave quite a lot to be desired. 'Heartbeat' is immensely frustrating, its gorgeous chorus melody ruined by tired lyrics and far too much male huffing and puffing, the whole thing topped off with a positively cringeworthy rap. I can't believe no-one told Madonna that repeating the line "see my booty get down like that" would make anyone look pretty stupid. Shame on her people, shame.

Shame, generally.

Madonna *Hard Candy* track listing

1. Candy Store
2. 4 Minutes
3. Give It 2 Me

4. Heartbeat
5. Miles Away
6. She's Not Me
7. Incredible
8. Beat Goes On
9. Dance Tonight
10. Spanish Lesson
11. Devil
12. Voices

Try Madonna *Hard Candy* if you like: Britney Spears, Justin Timberlake, Timbaland, Pharrell

Review by Laura Kidd

