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# Kala

## M.I.A.

It's “tricky” second album time for vocalist and producer Mathangi Arulpragasam, otherwise known as M.I.A. Sent away from war-torn Sri Lanka to live in South



London, she attended St Martin's College of Art and Design, befriending Justine Frischmann from Elastica and then touring with the band while filming a video documentary. Arulpragasam was then introduced to drum machines by the support act, Peaches. If you hadn't heard, her first album *Arular* (named after her father) took 2005 by storm with its whirlwind of grime, dancehall, garage and bhangra influences.



New album *Kala* (named after her mother but also the Sanskrit word for 'time' and the Hindu god of death) further cements M.I.A. as a force to be reckoned with as a writer, vocalist and producer. Vocally she's a mix of streetwise MC, chanting tribal goddess and little girl sing-song popstrel.

Think Lady Sovereign in a fight with Lily Allen while Kate Nash referees -- but with blood, guts, guns and cherry-picked bits of genres mixed up together to make something quite different from any other pop record you'll hear this year. The original plan was to make most of the album alongside bigshot US producer Timbaland, but due to visa issues M.I.A. ended up skipping off around the world instead, soaking up whatever she came across and readjusting it to fit into her own style.

'Bamboo Banga' opens the album with a hypnotic chant in a London twang. In an extended verse we learn a bit about M.I.A.'s travels while making the record, covering Somalia, Angola, India, Sri Lanka and Burma. A strong Indian-influenced melodic hook winds its way through the infectious choruses and sound effects resembling motorbikes and barking dogs accompany the lyrics. As she says, "M.I.A. is coming back with power power". 'Bird Flu' is a frantic tune, containing rousing tribal beats pushing through it and crazed little girl voices chattering and chanting in the background as M.I.A. pulls together her experiences of East and West, "Live in trees, chew on bee, watch *Lost* on cable".

'Boyz' is intense and atmospheric, with background ambience coming from what sounds like recordings of excited crowds at a football match, accompanied by cheers and whistling. Over the top M.I.A. gets political on this track, with her "How many no money boyz are crazy / How many boys are raw? / How many no money boyz are rowdy/ How many start a war?" lyrics placing the majority of the blame squarely at the feet of the 'boyz'.

It's a serious matter but she doesn't get bogged down in it, still managing to deliver an insanely catchy pop song with an infectious "na na na na" hook. 'Jimmy' has a big Bollywood hook and a house beat with soft, yearning lyrics and the sexiest, smokiest vocal performance so far.

'Hussel' is one of the album's highlights and features rapper Afrikan Boy on guest vocals. It's another wakeup call to the privileged West, as he and M.I.A. demonstrate the contrast between their two lives. While M.I.A. has her "bootleg CD, colour TV or a DVD", Afrikan Boy is "on the motorway, selling selling sugar water and Pepe". As he states from the off, "You think it's tough now, come to Africa." Sonically 'Hussel' opens and closes with a snippet of authentic tribal drums and vocals enhanced by a patchwork of African drum patterns and typical garage synth sounds between - it's pretty magical.

'Paper Planes' is a superb pastiche of an R&B flavoured, earnest pop ballad, with skulls and bones replacing hearts and flowers. The chorus is chilling; a happy choir of voices sing out as gun shots and cash registers spell out the main chorus line - "All I wanna do is [bang bang bang bang] and [cash register rings] take your money". Album closer 'Come Around' is a bit of a disappointment - it sounds more like bog standard R&B than anything else on the record - though it still retains some of M.I.A.'s character. Timbaland's baritone slots in perfectly, and there's obviously a tongue-in-cheek element to the line "Baby girl / You and me need to go to yo' teepee". Others however, like "Timbaland you're the motherfucking man" snap me out of the spell M.I.A.'s done so well to weave with the rest of the album, putting me into the world of arrogant, gun totin' gangster rappers and their hos - not the place I want to

be.

*Kala* is a brilliant slice of multi-cultural pop that will make you swelter and swoon, rile you up and get you shimmying about on the dance floor. Danger, it may also make you THINK...



***Track Listing:***

1. Bamboo Banga
2. BirdFlu
3. Boyz
4. Jimmy
5. Hussel
6. Mango Pickle Down River
7. 20 Dollar
8. World Town
9. The Turn
10. XR2
11. Paper Planes
12. Come Around

***Try this if you like:*** Ms Dynamite, Peaches, Lady Sovereign, Lily Allen.

*Laura Kidd*

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