

## Joan Armatrading - What's Inside (1995)

Written by bluesever

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1. *In Your Eyes* 2. *Everyday Boy* 3. *Merchant Of Love* 4. *Shapes And Sizes* 5. *Back On The Road* 6. *Lost The Love* 7. *Songs* 8. *Would You Like To Dance* 9. *Recommend My Love* 10. *Beyond The Blue* 11. *Can't Stop Loving You* 12. *Shape Of A Pony* 13. *Trouble*  
Joan Armatrading - E-Bow, Guitar, Vocals Alex Acuña - Percussion Boz Burrell - Penny Whistle Todd Cochran - Keyboards B.J. Cole - Slide Guitar Terry Evans - Vocals (Background) Hojah Farah - Accordion, Guitar Willie Green, Jr. - Vocals (Background) Darryl Jones - Bass Manu Katché - Drums Kronos Quartet - Strings Tony Levin - Bass London Metropolitan Orchestra The Memphis Horns Andrew Brown - Director Greg Phillinganes - Keyboards Perry Robinson - Keyboards Benmont Tench - Keyboards Ray Taff Williams - Vocals (Background)

Joan Armatrading has long been one of the finest singers in Anglo-American pop. The Caribbean-born, British-based vocalist has a rich, low alto which she uses to stretch and twist phrases, loading them with new implications in the style of her hero Van Morrison. Armatrading, who wrote, arranged and coproduced (with David Tickle) the album, has surrounded herself with top musicians formerly associated with the Rolling Stones, Tom Petty, Eric Clapton, Sting, Peter Gabriel, Joni Mitchell, and Al Green. She more than holds her own, not only as a singer but also as the lead guitarist. She sings the first verse of "Merchant of Love," for example, with the deflating, sad sigh of someone who has heard too many lies from too many lovers.

---Geoffrey Himes, Amazon.com

Joan Armatrading's abandonment of A&M Records after two decades makes sense when you consider that the long-time independent has been swallowed by PolyGram. What doesn't make sense is where she went, the virtually moribund RCA, which managed to release this label

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debut as though it were a state secret. The album itself is an interesting mixture of the styles Armatrading has employed at various times in her career, from the spare, intimate approach associated with her "Love And Affection" phase to the pop-rock of "Me Myself I." (The coulda-been-a-hit is "Can't Stop Loving You.") Many of the tracks are augmented by strings courtesy of the London Metropolitan Orchestra, though the Kronos Quartet checks in for one track. Romance is the subject, as usual, and, as usual, it is treated in sometimes quirky ways, such as in "Shapes And Sizes," which advises that you express your love while you can because "Obituary columns are full of love." Hmm. This is an album for the cult, which is appropriate, since they're the only ones liable to know of its existence. ---William Ruhlmann, AllMusic Review

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