

Christina Aguilera – Lotus (2012)

Written by bluelover

Saturday, 17 November 2012 16:46 - Last Updated Monday, 19 September 2016 15:29

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01 – Lotus Intro 02 – Army Of Me 03 – Red Hot Kinda Love 04 – Make The World Move (feat. CeeLo Green) 05 – Your Body 06 – Let There Be Love 07 – Sing For Me 08 – Blank Page 09 – Cease Fire 10 – Around The World 11 – Circles 12 – Best Of Me 13 – Just A Fool (feat. Blake Shelton) 14 – Light Up The Sky 15 – Empty Words 16 – Shut Up 17 – Your Body (Martin Garrix Remix)

Stars like Christina Aguilera aren't supposed to fall. The status of multi-platinum A-lister comes with an in-built positive feedback mechanism. Success, at this level, tends to maintain. A team ensures your singles sound like hits while fans buy into a star and are reluctant to disinvest because that implies their own taste wasn't trustworthy to begin with. Nevertheless, Aguilera took a big knock with her last album, *Bionic* (2010). It probably sold around half a million copies worldwide (a big flop, in pop money). Blogs still rage about whether *Bionic* was too brave, featuring as it did collaborations with riot grrl veterans Le Tigre, or whether the record company dropped the ball. It was the tipping point for an annus horribilis. Aguilera got divorced, released a flop film, *Burlesque*, over-sang the Star-Spangled Banner at the 2011 Super Bowl, was arrested for being drunk in public, and acquired hips.

In pop terms, all this now makes the 31-year-old mother of one a Survivor, and that, in turn, allows her to dip freely into the righteousness narrative of older female stars who've been divorced, abused or addicted. Tenacity and rebirth are themes telegraphed hard on *Lotus*. Nothing to do with the luxury sports car – apparently the lotus is an "unbreakable flower that withstands any harsh weather conditions... and remains beautiful and strong". This is wiffle of the highest order. But one of the pleasures of Aguilera is that she can use polysyllables, even when talking the rot that fills women's mags. Her ex (we presume) is the target on at least a couple of tracks, which serve up divorce two ways, devilled and fried. Uptempo thumper *Army of Me* shares emotional territory with the Björk song of the same name and Aguilera's old hit, *Fighter*. Aguilera may be in pieces but all those bits have Uzis. *Circles* enjoins some dude to swivel on her middle finger. The sing-song verse is redolent of Rihanna but you can forgive a lot

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when there's a line as zingy as "Why you always tryna be up in my mixture?/ Cos I'm freaky fly fresh/ And you just bitter."

Elsewhere Aguilera tries hard to soothe the horses. Most of the uptempo tracks follow production trends closely and then drop an ecstatic Aguilerean ululation on top. You can see straight through them but they work. There's more Rihanna-copping, for instance, on Around the World, a come-hither tune that also quotes from Aguilera and co's cover of Lady Marmalade (Aguilera, Lil' Kim, Mýa, Pink), from a time when she could put no stiletto wrong.

Aguilera's stock is not at rock bottom. She is a judge on the successful US version of The Voice. She guested on Maroon 5's inescapable hit Moves Like Jagger; TV co-stars like Cee-Lo Green are on board here too, for tracks such as Make the World Move. The only risks are taken on the introductory bagatelle, where multiple, chorusing Aguileras coo and bass booms. She's pulled in writers such as Max Martin (Britney Spears) for insurance on tracks like the first single Your Body (but, ironically, it didn't chart particularly well). The album's midpoint rave banger, Let There Be Love, is about as formulaic as club pop gets. But it resonates effectively, like much else here; every throb and ooh in the right place.--Kitty Empire, guardian.co.uk

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