

Madonna - Hard Candy (2008)

Written by bluelover

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01 Candy shop 02 4 minutes 03 Give it to me 04 Heartbeat 05 Miles away 06 She's not me 07 Incredible 08 Beat goes on (feat Kanye West) 09 Dance Tonight 10 Spanish Lesson 11 Devil Wouldn't Recognize You 12 Voices 13 Ring My Bell Backing Vocals – Justin Timberlake (tracks: 5, 9, 11, 12) Drums – Timbaland (tracks: 2, 9, 11) Featuring – Justin Timberlake (tracks: 2, 13, 14), Timbaland (tracks: 2, 13, 14) Guitar – Dan Warner (tracks: 5, 9, 12) Keyboards [Additional] – Hannon Lane (tracks: 5, 11, 12)

"I know I can do it better", boasts Madonna on She's Not Me, a gigantic disco ball of a Chic-esque tune. It's a piercing shot at any young pretenders, past, present and future, who think they've what it takes to take on the Queen of Pop in her fiftieth year, and one that reverberates across her eleventh album.

Laying herself at the mercy of producers savvy enough to churn out hits in their sleep, Madonna has put her reputation on the line for Hard Candy, but it's a calculated risk, and although she could have done it better, it's still a mighty record.

In essence, the album is not the hip hop tribute many had feared, but an urban extension of 2005's Confessions On A Dancefloor. The disco still rules supreme (just listen to the funk-overload of Dance 2Nite) and the dancefloor remains Madonna's sexual playground. Yet, with Timbaland, Justin Timberlake, Nate 'Danja' Hills and Pharrell Williams at the helm, the RnB edge is added. Williams' breathy punctuation and tinny percussion spill over from the album's opener Candy Shop and Timbaland's distorted bass beats make for wonderfully messy melodies, particularly on the superb climax, 12 Voices – Madonna's most haunting sound since Frozen.

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The argument that this tried and tested production work could be a template for any artist (Madonna only has co-writing credits) is a tad churlish. She adds that inimitable zing of excitement that the likes of Nelly Furtado don't possess and the record is not without its personal moments. Take the genuinely good, genuinely felt Miles Away; an electro missive concerning her relationship with husband Guy Ritchie ("I guess we're at our best when we're miles away"). Besides, many milestones of Madonna's epic career – Holiday, Get Into The Groove, Ray Of Light and Music - are marked throughout.

Undeniably, it's the work with Timbaland and co. that really sells Hard Candy. Madonna and Timberlake's vocal hook on 4 Minutes is worth the download fee alone and the album's penultimate track, Devil Wouldn't Recognise You, is the next best thing after Timberlake's What Goes Around...

Meanwhile, Williams isn't as dependable. Tracks like the awkward Spanish Lesson and the badly paced Incredible, where the frenetic finish isn't worth the four minute wait, represent more fool's gold than the real deal. In contrast, Give It 2 Me, where children's TV meets trance and techno, is a wholesome sugar rush.

Easy to chew, Hard Candy is everything you'd hope for from a Madonna album; excitement, adventure and progress. Something tells me it just might sell... ---Tom Young, bbc.co.uk

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