

Fefe Dobson

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Some Not So Stupid Love Songs

by: Matt Cibula

When our editor saw the cover to this disc, with this attractive young black woman all tarted up, he assumed she was an R&B cutie. But I have a grade-school-age daughter, so I knew better. I knew Fefe Dobson was a Canadian punk-pop princess who could belt out rockstuff better than any old Avril, and I knew I had a new favorite disc for cranking in the car.

Fefe doesn't mess around. The very first song is the very best song; if "Stupid Little Love Song" was released as a single, it would blow this narrow little world wide open with its tight slashing crunching goodness. Not only is it fast and hard and funky like a Thierry Henry penalty kick, but it's funny too: our protagonist is feeling a little outmatched by her boyfriend's super-accomplished family, and doesn't know how to deal: "You're on the road to Harvard Law / I'm on the bus to Arkansas". His mother's a Senator, his dad's got his own talk show, he's a big jocky handsome guy, and all she has for him is...pause... "Just a stupid little love song!" and they all spazz out with the guitars again. I'm not saying it's prime Clash or anything, but the way Dobson yells "Put 'em up!" in the breaks is pretty inspiring.

Mostly what she does is what Avril does: pop songs with an edge that helps the listener feel like they're really going through something. "Revolution Song" is a good old-fashioned power ballad about fighting some unspecified battle, all lush and creamy with harmonies and 1970s guitar lines; "Give It Up" is hair-metal indie-funk girl-rock that sounds like Winger and Liz Phair at the same time, always a great idea; big single "Take Me Away" could fit right in on any Classic Rawk Hits station, an immediate member of the club. There are a lot of guitar sounds here, and they go well with Dobson's strong but not screechy voice.

She writes all the songs here, together with some dude named Jay "Mentalcase" Levine of something called Lefthook Productions (Levine also produces, together with fellow Lefthooker/songwriter James Bryan McCollum)—I'm assuming the lyrics are Dobson's and all the musical textures are Levine's, because that's the way it always works. Having made that assumption, I want to say that I really like Fefe Dobson as a lyricist, especially as a young woman. She's not flashy or "clever," but she's solid and she connects. "Bye Bye Boyfriend" is snotty but forgiving, a nice trick if you can pull it off; "We Went for a Ride" is full of that adolescent bubble-gum sadness that has driven all weepy teenage songs forever: "I'll be praying for a red light / To extend this precious night / Cause we both know where I'm going / And we know it isn't right". Mysterious! Alluring! Sexy!

The strongest, if not the best, writing here is in "Unforgiven," an angry screed against Dobson's absentee father. It

crosses
the line sometimes into sentimentality, but it still
carries a
kick to it. Funner: "Rock It Till You Drop It," which will
capture
your heart within a half a second of you hearing OMG a
guest
rap by TONE LOC!!! No, I'm not kidding. And yes, it's
awesome to hear him again.

Listen, this isn't the second coming, but it's really
solid and
tough. Me and my daughter can sing it together in the
car,
and I love that she has a few good take-no-prisoner
girl-punk
songwriter role models like Fefe Dobson and Avril
Lavigne
(the new stuff is really good, honest). But why do they
all
have to be Canadian? One of those things I'll never
know...

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