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Hi guys-

Here's the Madonna CD review. Give me Sakis anyday. Hope yr all ok, talk soon, P

Madonna: *Hard Candy* CD Review
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The dust has settled at OAKA stadium. Madonna has left the building and Athens is left breathless in the afterglow of her savage, tsunami-esque wake. Everything from the Kleig lights, to stage extensions, to video projection screens were mega-size huge in proportion and the presentation of her live material was consumately professional and dazzling to the degree of viewer-apoplexy.

Madonna, for the past 25 years or so, has produced dependable, occasionally surprising pop-radio nuggets that helped create a big part of the sound track and aural social landscape of the last and current generation. Her contribution to the development of modern dance-oriented, club-mix pop is undeniable.

However, her new album, *Hard Candy*, contains no surprises, groovy controversial social timebombs, fringe creativity, or even greatly memorable tracks. Although the CD is, of course, expertly produced and recorded, it lacks the zingy, fizzy, in-your-face, tabasco-element of nearly all her previous work. The album is full of predictable, vanilla-flavored rhythms which lack excitement and inspiration. The first two singles released from the record were, unfortunately, instantly forgettable. "Four Minutes" was a piece of well-intended but flat synth-pop that Justin Timberlake could not breathe an atom of life into. Current R&B phenom producer Timbaland appears to have been stretched thin to work magic on this track but fell short of the mark. Similarly on "Give it to Me" young producer William Pharell really seems to be putting everthing he's got in his system to give the song momentum and sustained listener appeal, but it eventually just becomes amorphous background sound.

Madonna's voice on this album is a few notches higher than on her previous several releases. The cut "Spanish Lesson" sounds like something from the early *Like a Virgin* sessions, while "Dance Tonight" could have easily been produced in the late 80s during the *True Blue* period. However "Candy Shop" is a campy delight and has the most ear-catching fun of any song on the album. The metaphoric double-entendre, "I'll be your one stop candy shop" is so giddily heavy-handed it will keep the drag-queen, karaoke-bar, Madonna-imitators busy for years.

Critics and fans of Madonna often speak of her ability to recreate herself and her talent for morphing into different styles of musical output. I tend to disagree with this idea. Although she is a fine singer, dancer and performer, the fact of the matter is that the first Madonna record, released in 1982, sounds a lot like the current 2008 version of Madonna on *Hard Candy*. Out of her dozens of full length CDs, club-mix extended play records and singles, she's always played solid, radio-friendly dance-pop. Occasionally she'll release something out of left field like the Lenny Kravitz penned "Justify my Love," Don McLean's "American Pie," or something geninely touching like the single "Frozen," but that's it; that's her game. What she does do *very* well is change the background of the performing stage and platform for her material. Her live shows are eye-popping in their presentation and the previous *Blonde Ambition*, *Music*, and *True Blue* tours bore no resemblance to her current stage show. All tours were successful and spectacularly creative efforts which left audiences gasping in appreciation of her work.

If Madonna had a musical epicenter from which to work, then it would be possible for her to put different spins and styles into her work while still having a foothold on what made her popular in the first place. The Rolling Stones have the blues as their musical epicenter. Ergo, they can make a glam-blues disc like *Goat's Head Soup* or *It's Only Rock 'n' Roll*; or a reggae-flavored album like *Black and Blue* or even a psychedelic blues record like *Her Satanic*

Majesty's Request. Madonna doesn't have that option because her only foundations are loose interpretations of various dance-music rhythms. All she can do, and she does it well, is to change the clothing in which the dance tracks are presented.

However, if you like Madonna in general, you will like this record. At this point in her career she's a global institution. We've been bombarded with her telegenic image and songs for so many years that she's an extended part of our everyday lives. People now attend her show and purchase the CDs as much to hear the new stuff and to simply spend some time with her. *Hard Candy* isn't classic Madonna, but it's not a bad record. Compared to the output of the current batch of pop divas on the scene, she's still queen of the slag heap. No doubt about it.