

1D ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



Janet Jackson
Damita Jo
Various producers
Virgin Records

★★★★★



Janet Jackson's eighth studio release proves she is a model of consistency as well as change. She doesn't deliver bad recordings but will update her sound when needed.

That's what makes "Damita Jo" such a satisfying record. Sure, there's nothing new or groundbreaking about this release, but it contains what we've come expect from Ms. Jackson. There are likable love songs of the slow and mid-tempo ilk and a few tenacious grooves that show Janet isn't ready to hang up her dancing shoes.

Jackson is ready to explore other producers. Jimmy "Jam" Harris and Terry Lewis are still running things, but with help. White-hot Kanye West contributes the exuberant "Strawberry Bounce" and the beat-driven "My Baby." Dallas Austin and Bagg also contribute songs.

For those who like to groove, "All Nite (Don't Stop)" is the place to start. The layered, pulsating rhythm is infectious. Uber producers Jam & Lewis craft this song into a club anthem that begs for a remix. Nearly as lethal is "R&B Junkie," which samples Evelyn King's "I'm In Love." It's as savvy a dance song as "All Nite," but aimed at ol' school audiences.

So why did Janet pick an ol' school ballad for the CD's lead single? Maybe she wanted a change of pace. "I Want You" - on which she drops her sex kitten falsetto for something a bit more earthy - is a good song, but not quite single material.

But there is so much else that is single material. "Damita Jo" should be hanging around the Top 10 for most of the summer and deep into the fall. This may not have the impact of "Rhythm Nation" or "Janet," but it's in the ballpark.

Ratings

- Classic; ★★★★★
- Excellent; ★★★★★
- Good ★★★★★
- Fair ★★★★★
- Why? ★★★★★
- No stars - A mess ★

R&B duo balance musical and personal lives together

It's always a family affair

By Cheris F. Hodges
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Not since Ashford and Simpson has a husband and wife duo made such sweet music. But that's what Hidden Beach recording artists Kindred the Family Soul, do. Husband Fatin, and wife Aja, are the neo-soul "It" couple. They burst on the scene with their hit single "Far Away From Here," bring both the male and female energy to the R&B scene that is dominated by racy songs focusing on sex, but Kindred focus is love.

The response, according to Aja, has been overwhelmingly positive. "We reach a wide range of people, from age 10 to 60," she said before a performance last Sunday at Tonic, an Uptown nightclub.

Tonic was filled with men and women waiting to hear the group perform songs from their disc. The crowd was a mixed bag of college students, poets and investment bankers. And as the duo sang, Fatin beckoned the crowd closer. "We're all family here," he said as the crowd moved closer to the singers. When the duo broke out into their hit single, "Far Away From Here," the crowd exploded, singing word for word with Kindred.

Their debut album, "Surrender to Love," has received critical acclaim and Fatin said it is because their songs celebrate the common man. "This has exceeded our expectations," he said about the success of album. "Real life is full of positives and negatives and we try to identify the good things in life."

Kindred received a Soul Train Music Award nomination for best R&B album by a duo or group, but lost out to urban boy band B2K. Aja joked before the performance that the award show gave her a reason to buy a ridiculously priced pair of shoes.

Please see COUPLE/2D



Fatin and Aja blend the musical and marital as Kindred and the Family Soul. The duo was nominated for a Soul Train Award for best R&B album by a duo or group.

Troubled pop duo may be on reality TV



Bobby Brown is pitching a reality program on life with wife Whitney Houston.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA - Whitney Houston and Bobby Brown have had a tumultuous few months, with Brown in and out of jail and Houston checking herself into a rehabilitation program.

But it's their reality, and Brown wants to bring that reality to television.

Brown's production company, B2 Entertainment, has been following the couple around Atlanta in hopes of selling a show about Brown's life to a network.

"As I understand it, the reality show is about Bobby Brown. If she can help her husband in any way, she of course will do so, but it's about Bobby," Houston's publicist, Nancy Seltzer, told The Associated Press on Friday.

Houston joined Brown, their daughter, Bobbi Kristina, 10, and the family dog for dinner Monday at the Palm Restaurant in Atlanta's Buckhead district. Houston was accompanied by a representative of her rehab facility, said Mark Trigg, Houston's Atlanta attorney.

They dined on a 6-pound lobster, 24-ounce porterhouse steak and several plates of Clams Oreganato, waiter Jimmy Logan said. Bobbi Kristina had her own lobster and the pooch snacked on steak tartare.

The next night, at Prime in Atlanta, Houston sang "Happy Birthday" to a fellow diner, as a five-person production crew caught the action, manager Mark Pinsky said.

Houston, who is in an inpatient rehab program, is allowed approved authorized outings, Seltzer said. While taking her daughter to school on one of those outings, Houston received a speeding ticket Tuesday in suburban Gwinnett County for driving 68 mph in a 45 mph zone, Gwinnett police Cpl. Dan Huggins said.

"She's working on getting well, she's working on herself," Seltzer said.

Producers may be old school, but they're teaching hits



Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis.

By Jeff Baenen
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MINNEAPOLIS - Ever the sports fanatic, Jimmy Jam draws a comparison to the

sporting world when he talks about his two-decade-long music collaboration with Terry Lewis.

Jam notes that Hall of Fame coach Joe Gibbs is back

with the Washington Redskins and that 70-year-old coach Hubie Brown has turned around the Memphis Grizzlies.

"All of the sudden people realize, well, wait a minute, they have knowledge and experience that really can't be taught. You have to live it. And we've lived a lot of musical lives," Jam says.

Jam and Lewis are executive producers of Janet Jackson's new CD, "Damita Jo." It's the latest installment in a partnership with Jackson going back to her 1986 breakthrough album "Control" that netted Jam and Lewis their first and - despite numerous

nominations since then - only Grammy as producers of the year.

Jam and Lewis also had a hand in Usher's new album, "Confessions," which sold about 1.1 million copies in less than a week and jumped to the top of the charts, as well as Usher's last album, 2001's "8701," which sold more than 3 million copies.

As Jam, 44, points out, he and his 47-year-old partner are old school but also current. Their producing credits stretch back to the S.O.S. Band, Gladys Knight and Alexander O'Neal and up to Mariah Carey, Boyz II Men and new artist Heather

Headley.

"I do feel we are elder statesmen, I absolutely do," says Jam, who generally speaks for the pair (Lewis declined an interview request). "And I don't think that's a bad thing. I think that experience is something that can't be taught."

On "Damita Jo," Jam and Lewis took an executive producer role. Besides tracks produced by Jam, Lewis and Jackson, there are others produced by Dallas Austin (TLC, Madonna), Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds and Kanye West (Jay-Z).

The goal, Jam says, was not to compromise Jackson's

sound.

"We made sure that the record sounded like Janet," he says.

Jam calls Jackson "the ultimate muse." Her 18-year working relationship with Jam and Lewis has resulted in big-selling albums such as "Control" and "Rhythm Nation 1814" and a string of hit singles.

"We love each other. We get along great," Jam says. "The fun that we've had making the records has always shown through on the records."

Singer Patti LaBelle says she likes working with Jam. Please see OLD SCHOOL/3D