

REVIEW--DEIDRE MCCALLA:
WITH A LITTLE LUCK

There's a lot about Deidre McCalla that I really like. Her second album, "With a Little Luck," is not one of them. Well, there's nothing really bad on this album, but it lacks the amazing music and lyrics that I have come to expect from Deidre McCalla. Her first album, "Don't Doubt It," was great and she is wonderful as a live performer. Face it, Lesbians are better than most people, so I expect consistent genius.

The music is what really messes up this album for me. Almost every song sounds the same, only faster or slower. Each has vocals, bass, drums, guitar and keyboard. Together the four instruments, with an occasional violin, create a plastic pop sound with a heavy bass beat and a lot of harmony that echoes throughout the album. Where are the contrasting sounds that marked her first album? It doesn't help that nearly all the backup players are men. We all know there are plenty of great female musicians around who can do this. (Violin here is done by some chap named Darol Anger. Where is the great Novi Novagog?) I don't care who these guys are, if Olivia Records is going to be "the voice in celebration of women" they can make sure that women are getting jobs playing on their albums.

Vocals are another story entirely. McCalla has a great voice. It's deep, flexible, smooth, and sounds really comforting. Backup vocals are by Durham-native Teresa Trull (who also produced the album), Linda Tillery and Annie Stocking. They all do an excellent job.

The lyrics on this album are variable. The opening song "All Day Always" is a good affirmation of revolutionary energy. The anthemic chorus says, "All day always/ We celebrate/ Each day always/ All day all night," while the body of the song celebrates unity and diversity: "Widen the circle we must be sure/ there's room for every one," and "Give thanks to the ground beneath us/ Honor the water from which all life begins."

"The Cat Song" is fun the first few times, but the chorus of "meow-eow-eowing" started to irritate me. The song is about a war between the singer and her lover's cats. The line "[he] throws a temper tantrum/ when he's not fed/ and gets to acting funny/ when we're in bed" probably strikes true for many of us. "Mamma's Little Baby Girl" is a good idea--reminiscing about Mom's strength and comfort through our childhood--but it feels like

something's missing. Maybe it lacks a little passion.

Sometimes the lyrics sound really perceptive at first but cease to make sense or cease to be interesting in the larger context. For example, "Too Few and Far Between" says, "The sacrifice offered by each generation/ Are those who will rise up and answer the call./ Change happens slowly and our revolution/ Still questions the price of each warrior who falls." Sounds neat, right? Alas, the context is really vague. Something about good things only happening occasionally, but that's life. I'm still trying to figure out where the price of the warrior fits into this.

The good news about Deidre McCalla is that she's wonderful when you see her live. And she's coming to Eno River Unitarian Church on April 15 (call CGLA for time and ticket info). She leaves all those backup musicians at home and travels only with her guitar. She's really funny on stage and a great actress (she studied theater at Vassar). McCalla should be congratulated for her heavy emphasis on touring--she told Hot Wire that she tries to do 100 shows a year--and her determination to win an audience in our community.

--Pippa Holloway



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