

ANNOUNCING ENTERTAINMENT COPY

Mariah Carey – “Memoirs of an Imperfect Angel”

Album Review

Hello, welcome to the Hollywood Reporter Minutes. I'm your host(name).....

Who says being a pop diva is easy? There is the constant pressure to look great and sound all-conquering while staving off a legion of younger sisters nipping at your stiletto heels. Which brings us to Mariah Carey, she of the 175 million worldwide record sales and the multitude of comebacks.

On her 12th studio album, “Memoirs of an Imperfect Angel,” Carey doesn't resort to vocal histrionics or production gimmickry. Instead, she plays it low-key, and ends up with her best album since the '90s heyday.

Carey focuses on introspective ballads. Her voice has lost range off the top, but she's learned how to inhabit a song rather than simply knock it around like a rag doll with her rocket-propelled trills. Rather than farm out songs to a series of producers, she primarily sticks with the songwriting/production team of Tricky Stewart and the Dream, who frame her voice in subtle, low-key arrangements.

Her voice is frequently multi-tracked to create the illusion that she's dueting with herself, with counterpoint melody lines. The effect is nothing new in R- and-B; Marvin Gaye turned this studio technique into an art form on his 1971 masterpiece “What's Going On.” But the old-school soul connection is appropriate: This is Carey building on slow-jam R-and-B and adult-themed ballads to create a loose song cycle about love lost and regained.

A cover of Foreigner's “I Want to Know What Love Is” is an appropriate closer. After an album in which the distance between pillow talk and recrimination, seduction and betrayal is painfully thin, it's a potentially potent gospel plea. Unfortunately, it resorts to the soft-to-loud-to-louder formula that has ruined many a power ballad in this “American Idol” era. Perhaps this was Carey's opportunity to prove that she can still climb those Everest-like octaves. Fortunately, the restraint she brings to much of the rest proves she's maturing into more than just a vocal acrobat.

That's Hollywood Reporter for this time....see you, next time. Good night.