

# RETURN OF THE INVISIBLE WOMAN

KATE BUSH HAS BEEN MISSING FROM THE AIRWAVES FOR 12 YEARS, AND THE POP WORLD HAS BEEN A TERRIBLY BORING PLACE IN HER ABSENCE

**SHE TOOK A** pinch of keyhole, added eye of Braille and hem of anorak and poof, she had vanished. Invisible. Disappeared from public eye.

'Twas twelve years on in late Autumn 2005 when EMI's headquarters in London beefed up their security and summoned a select group of journalists under a veil of secrecy. Was the Microsoft of the music world preparing for the worst after the London Underground bombings? As the critics swore to silence they were revealed, not the latest Al Qaeda masterplan for mass destruction, but Kate Bush's new double album *Aerial*.

The event could not have been more explosive – in the month to follow after cryptic packages reached reviewers' hands and the first sign of Bush hit the radio waves after 12 years of self-imposed exile in the form of the ravishing single *King Of The Mountain*, the music world was abuzz with excitement, the press scrambled for stories and her loyal cult following offered flowers and incense to the Gods in thanks. And that crazy fellow in John Mendelssohn's novel *Waiting For Kate Bush* finally agreed to climb off the ledge and head for HMV.

*King Of The Mountain* entered the charts at No 4, while the album, released shortly after, entered the charts at No 3 and reached platinum in the UK just four weeks after release. After much trepidation from fans and critics about how Bush would fare after a decade of absence, the biggest question on everyone's lips was answered by *Aerial*'s phenomenal reception around the world.

More than just hype, Bush has crafted an album of sublime beauty, revealing one of

England's most imaginative songwriters in a more mature and pensive mood than when she first burst onto the charts as a 17-year old discovery singing her weird songs and dancing her weird dances, carving a niche for herself that would not be filled till this day. Tori Amos and many others who walked in her footsteps tried, but Bush was an original and the world waited patiently as, after a string of fantastical albums, her output petered out until the 90s, which yielded just one. After 1993's *The Red Shoes* it seemed she had finally moved on like so many other sensations of the New Wave era.

Fans weaned on Bush's unique and inimitable brand of folk-inspired 'pop', for want of a better word, were left hanging. In the meantime, rarities were traded on the Internet, a novel was written about her disappearance, and speculations abounded on her disappearance, from mental breakdowns to artistic decline and anything that the British press could conjure up.

In reality, Bush just took a working holiday to look after her newborn son and to lead a normal life, unconcerned about what the music business would think because, as she tells a German paper, 'I have never seen myself as part of it.'

For despite her image, Bush saw herself as an ordinary person simply making music that she 'hoped people would enjoy listening to'.

'Has it really been 12 years already? Is this how it was for Rip Van Winkle? I think my music and I have changed a lot, and when I was making the first album, which at the time was my greatest goal, I never imagined that a box set of my works would be out ... and I would still be making albums. That's a nice feeling,' she said in 1990 during the release of her retrospective box-set *This Woman's Work*, and uncannily the same sentiment could apply today. ■

Thanks to EMI Singapore for *Aerial* review materials and main photo.

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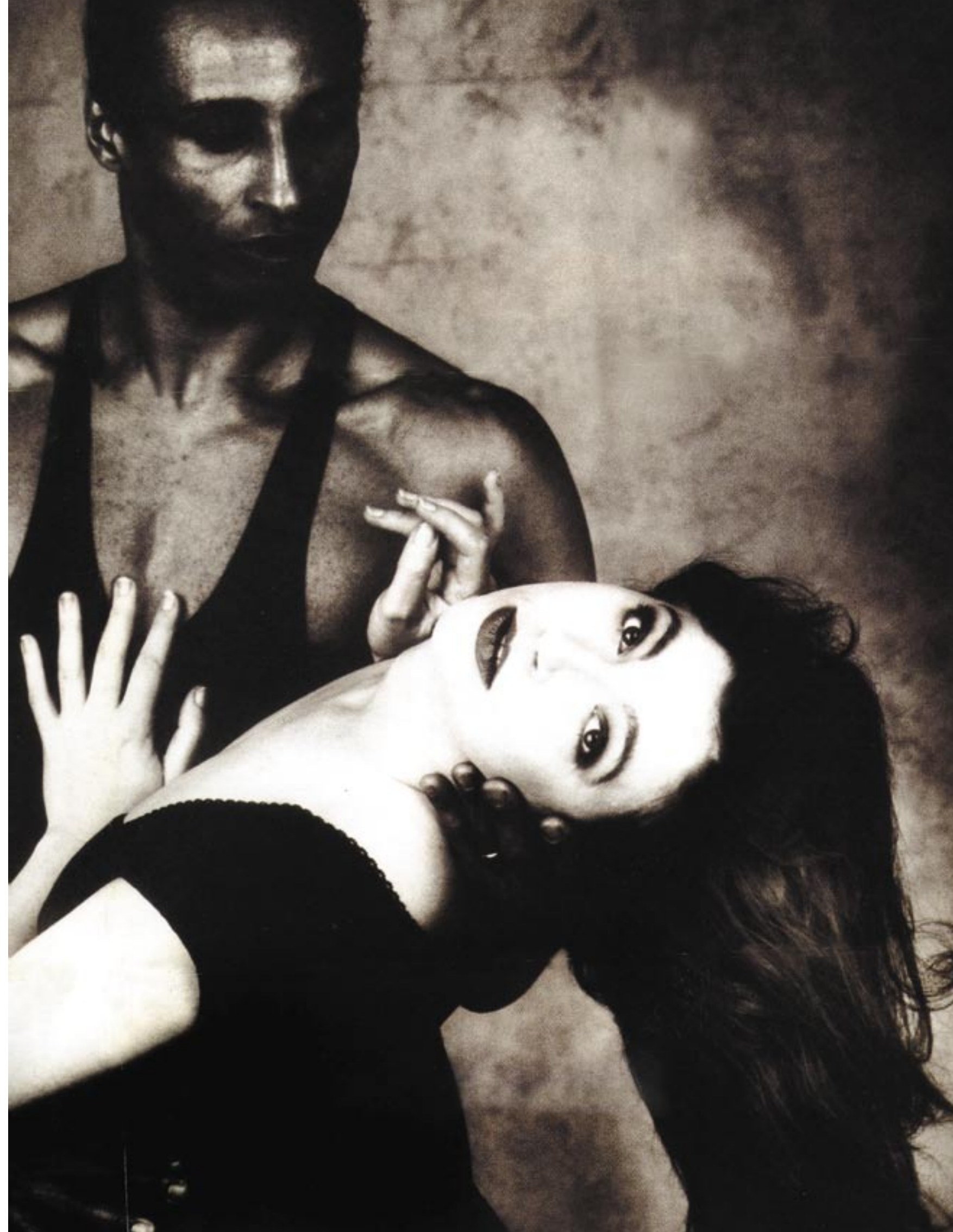


## AERIAL (2005) EMI

'Be kind to my mistakes, because I am not,' Bush once wrote. Mistakes, in her case, are rare. And *Aerial* is one of those rare moments in an artistic career where everything falls perfectly into place, and even mistakes, as she herself sings in one of the tracks *An Architect's Dream*, may be the best she has ever made.

Critics will nitpick at her lyrics, offbeat as she is wont to be and even more after her extended hiatus – who sings the decimal places of 'Pi' or mundane things like washing machine in pop songs, they cry. So 'shooby doo lang lang' and 'shake your bon bon' is fine, but 'slooshy slooshy' is not. And it is alright for Michael Jackson to sing about his pet chimp but not for Kate to sing about her son Bertie. After complaining that Kate had hidden the birth of her child from the prying pens of pressdom, they now complain that his footprints are all over her new album and rubbish his drawing on the cover of the *King of the Mountain* single. The English paparazzi are strange creatures indeed. Perhaps she had them in mind when she sang "they're coming for me through the trees, help me someone please!" in 1985's *Hounds of Love*.

Nitpick as they have, it is undeniable that this double album is a triumph, a phenomenal achievement with the structural freedom of a David Sylvian album and the impressionistic minimalism of Melbourne artpop cult band Not Drowning, Waving. One of her most Pink Floyd albums ever, *Aerial* is bold and confident in its refusal to pander to passing fads and changing tastes. If at first it does not sound as if a decade had passed since *The Red Shoes*, the change is subtle but indeed significant. The laid-back, understated atmosphere of both sides of *Aerial*





fool the listener into thinking that Bush has mellowed out and gone soft, but it is far from the case. Listening below the delicate shades of colour that dot the music like an impressionistic painting or a Delian song-cycle finds her as audacious and incisive as ever.

Through the deliberately mundane lyrics of the lonely housewife *Mrs Bartolozzi* she explores the character's sexual longing and eventual despair, while in the 40-minute suite *A Sky Of Honey* she breaks into birdsong in *Aerial Tal* and later on uninhibited laughter which towards the end mutates into something altogether more sinister. In *Sunset*, a flamenco ignites out of the pastoral mood, and in *How To Be Invisible*, she sings an anthem to the underdogs of society in a hypnotic witch's brew consisting of eye of Braille, hem of anorak, stem of wallflower, hair of doormat.'

It is clear that in 12 years and in between domestic chores, Kate has lost none of her edge and ingenuity. The first CD *A Sea Of Honey* is a set of introspective songs that open with *King Of The Mountain*, the only real 'pop' song in this release, a tongue-in-cheek look at Elvismania with its dark throbbing quasi reggae and an equally campy video to go with it. From then on, the new Kate firmly established herself with her new language, from the hint of electronica in the mathematical *Pi* to the chug of Dire Straits guitars in *How To Be*

*Invisible* and the playfully medieval garb of *Bertie*, each adding a pattern to the quilt, closing with an expansive piano-voice elegy to her late mother in *A Coral Room*.

The next disc *A Sky Of Honey* is a concept cycle of nine songs that weave together a number of themes from birdsong, a painter's journey to the changing moods and colours of day and night, creating a tapestry of unparalleled beauty and depth and alluding to a rich palette of insights. Sounds and words are employed like splashes of colour, snatches of melody swirl and unfold over time with an unhurried ease of an artist not concerned with the concept of pop song, building slowly from the quiet piano opening of *Prelude* to the final Floydian pulse of *Aerial*. 'We're going to be laughing about this' she sings at the start to the coo of doves, and as the ebb and flow of *A Sky Of Honey* builds into that final ecstatic surge she discovers 'all the birds are laughing' and joins in, euphorically at first, then defiantly. And so it seems after all the hullabaloo of her return to the limelight, Kate has the last laugh after all.

**MEMORABLE LYRIC** I watched them going round and round, my blouse wrapping itself around your trousers. (*Mrs Bartolozzi*)

**WACKIEST TRACK** *Aerial Tal*

**NOTABLE KATE NOISES** slooshy slooshy slooshy slooshy

## THE KATE INSIDE

TWO DECADES OF GROUNDBREAKING POP AND THEN SOME

### THE KICK INSIDE (1978)

She burst forth as the ghost of Cathy in leotards, tapping at Heathcliff's window in her perennial classic and only No 1 hit *Wuthering Heights*. The world of pop has never been the same since as she, at the tender age of 17, showed she was already on the brink of maturity while those in their 50s were still singing soppy love ballads like teenagers. *Moving* and *Saxophone Song* are especially timeless.

The follow-up single *The Man With The Child In His Eyes* set the standard for her piano-voice ballads that will mark milestones in her career, while weird songs like *James And His Cold Gun* and *Them Heavy People* give EMI early warning signals that she will never be the pop starlet they hope she would be.

Instead, she will spend the next quarter of a decade providing relief and antidote to the likes of Michael Bolton and Celine Dion like the Florence Nightingale of commercial music. *Kick* is a little dated today even in Kate's own words, but it is still a hoot.

**MEMORABLE LYRIC** You crush the lily in my soul. (*Moving*)

**WACKIEST TRACK** *James And His Cold Gun*

**NOTABLE KATE NOISES** a-heeyah!

### LIONHEART (1978)

Following hot on the heels of the success of her debut, and winning some artistic freedom from the frowning A&R execs in EMI, *Lionheart* sees Kate spreading her creative wings barely a year into the business. Treasures like *Wow* and *In Search Of Peter Pan* push the boundaries of her craft and explore new sounds and harmonies.

The raciness of *The Kick Inside*, which touched on 'haram' topics like menstruation, homosexuality and childbirth, continue in *Symphony In Blue* ("the more I think about sex the better it gets, here we have a purpose in life, it's good for the blood circulation," she croons with tongue firmly in cheek) and *Kashka From Baghdad* where she sings of two men in love, while her weird side comes to full bloom in the gothic camp of *Hammer Horror* and the Oktoberfest humour of *Coffee Homeground*. Very wacky and wonderful.

**MEMORABLE LYRIC** When the actor reaches his death you know it's not for real, he just holds his breath.

**WACKIEST TRACK** *Coffee Homeground*

**NOTABLE KATE NOISES** Wow wow wow wow  
wowwwwwwwwooh

### NEVER FOR EVER (1980)

A year on and she emerges from her cocoon a full-blown siren of pop, a witty and often droll storyteller who takes on a variety of characters from the scheming wife disguised as temptress in *Babooshka* to the vengeful widow with the gun in *Wedding List*. And while most teen idols of our time are singing "hit me baby one more time," Kate prefers to sing about how "chips of plutonium are twinkling in every lung" in her anti-nuclear *Breathing*. Did I say she was just 19?

**MEMORABLE LYRIC** Outside gets inside through her skin. (*Breathing*)

**WACKIEST TRACK** *Violin*

**NOTABLE KATE NOISES** Out-in-out-in-out-in...

### THE DREAMING (1982)

Barely 21 and privileged with full control of her artistic direction, this album blows away every preconception that she had built over the past three albums, and where listeners were amazed by *Wuthering Heights* and seduced by *Babooshka* they were now running for cover with *The Dreaming*.

Her growing following of dedicated fans however proclaim this one of her greatest album ever, and indeed with the wonderful and the bizarre sounds that she invites into this tour de force, from the didgeridoo hum of Rolf Harris (remember *Tie Me Kangaroo Down Sport* on RTM in the 70s?) to the earthy sounds of Irish pipes and fiddles in *Night Of The Swallow* and the Arabic drum-talk of *Get Out Of My House*, *The Dreaming* is a feast of fabulous and freaky songs.

The title track released as a single announces that Kate has grown up, and the weird hoots and animal sounds spinning around Kate's faux Aussie accent and tribal chants telling the tale of Aboriginal annihilation signals that things will never be the same again. High spots include *Houdini* and *Night Of The Swallow*, while the hyper defiant *Get Out Of My House* spawns an entire generation of kick-ass angry-girl artists like Alanis Morissette and Tori Amos.

**MEMORABLE LYRIC** With a kiss I'd passed the key, and feel your tongue teasing and receiving. (*Houdini*)

**WACKIEST TRACK** *The Dreaming*

**NOTABLE KATE NOISES** Hee haw, hee haw

### HOUNDS OF LOVE (1985)

Seven years on and Kate reaches the heights of her creative genius in what is unanimously declared her best album. *Running Up The Hill* introduces a Kate fully grown up and aware of the pitfalls of love and life, but literature still plays a huge part in her inspiration as *Cloudbursting* and the concept suite *The Ninth Wave* shows.

The latter marks the fruition of her Irish collaboration, and in *Jig Of Life* her efforts detonate into an ecstatic brew of tribal folk, poetry and vintage Kate. From choral interludes to a haze of sound samples *The Ninth Wave* tells the harrowing psychological state of a girl at the brink of drowning.

**MEMORABLE LYRIC** You want my reply? What was the question? (*The Big Sky*)

**WACKIEST TRACK** *Waking The Witch*

**NOTABLE KATE NOISES** Yeah yo, yeah yo

### SENSUAL WORLD (1989)

A maturing Bush continues to plumb the depths of her art. If *Hounds* and *Dreaming* were Bush's Irish albums, this is steeped in the more gothic sounds of her Trio Bulgarka collaborations. The thick, spicy harmonies of the Eastern European vocal troupe lend the album a distinctively ageless, oaky flavour.

'You see, I'm all grown up now,' she confesses in *The Fog*, and the vintage sound of *Sensual World* shows it. The Bulgarian voices add mystery to her ode to computer geekery in *Deeper Understanding*, inducting the high priestess of pop into the IT age.

The title track *Sensual World*, *Reaching Out* and *Never Be Mine* show her delicious subtlety, while the rapturous lunacy of *Rocket's Tail* shows that Kate has lost none of her astonishing eccentricity. *This Woman's Work*, her contribution to the soundtrack of *She's Having A Baby* is a classic piano ballad that becomes an unofficial hit.

**MEMORABLE LYRIC** This woman's work is hard on the man, now his part is over (*This Woman's Work*)

**WACKIEST TRACK** *Rocket's Tail*

**NOTABLE KATE NOISES** Mmmmmh, yes!

### THE RED SHOES (1993)

As her creative juices take longer and longer to brew, this oddity hardly created a ripple outside the circle of loyal Kate fans. Even some diehards found *The Red Shoes*, loosely inspired by the film, a disappointment. Fortunately the Trio Bulgarka continue to add special spice to some of the best songs like *Song Of Solomon* and the Prince collaboration *Why Should I Love You*, while at least two classic Kate masterpieces *Moments Of Pleasure* and *You're The One* make this hard to dismiss. Meanwhile fans buckle down for the long winter as the mother Goddess retreats from her temple of high art in one of the longest working holidays in history.

**MEMORABLE LYRIC** He meets us at the lift, like Douglas Fairbanks waving his walking stick (*Moments of Pleasure*)

**WACKIEST TRACK** *Rubberband Girl*

**NOTABLE KATE NOISES** Rub-a-dub-a-dub

