

Ingrid Michaelson 'Human Again' Record Review



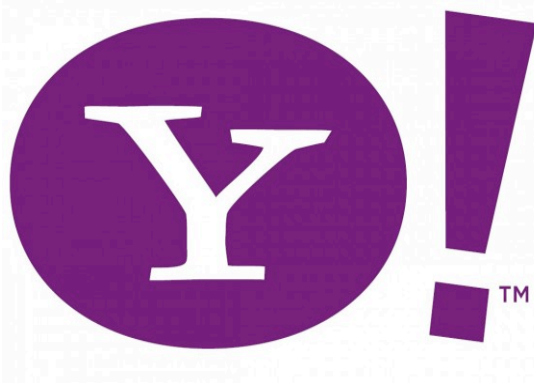
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Jan 28, 2012 "Share your voice on Yahoo! websites. [Start Here.](#)"



1/26/12: New York, NY

Ingrid Michaelson is an interesting chick.



Of course I say that with the most hallowed reverence. As anyone who has ever [read my pieces](#) on this uber-talented singer, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist will tell you, I love the work she does. However I've had a problem with her first couple of records; they've always left me feeling kind of moody and apathetic.

But it was that terrestrial apathy which was what was so appealing about her work too. Songs like "Masochist," "Die Alone," and "The Hat" on "Girls

and Boys" were replaced by talented and tender versions of classics like "Can't Help Falling in Love" and "Over the Rainbow" but still the meal felt incomplete. At the end of the record "Be OK" was an acoustic version of the opening title track which led you to believe that the singer was anything but. That was then; this is now. The new Ingrid Michaelson record, aptly titled "Human Again" covers a wide swath of terrestrial emotions; catapulting the listener up into the trees, back in time, and with heavy heart but it's always hopeful. I think that was what was missing from Ingrid Michaelson records past. Hope. A hope which is alive and electric and very present on this newest record.

Diving right into the tracks on this record, Ingrid gets things going with a rapid fire opening track called "Fire." This song reminded me of Kate Bush and a song like "The Big Sky." Even though a lyric like "I'm walking into the fire with you" is a familiar one for Ingrid; the hook immediately afterwards, "...and I love it" shows a bold new leap that the recently humanized singer is making.

"This is War" reminded me of a cross between Depeche Mode and Gloria Estefan-South-Beach type musical sound. The clincher for this one though was Ingrid's distinct vocal line which illumed her standing-on-a-rock-in-the-middle-of-the-ocean loneliness (a sound perhaps best recalled in her own "Starting Now").

The third song "Do it Now" has a real spunky and fun line "...don't waste a minute on the darkness and the pity sitting in your mind and do it right now" which the singer kind of spills out over the listeners ears.

"I'm Through" is a very tender love song; much more in the familiar Ingrid style of a song like "The Chain." One of the principal differences between the two songs though is that there is no vocal overdub on "I'm Through." It sounds as though on this record Ingrid is growing a lot more comfortable with her instrument. "I'm Through" really represents this liberation. She doesn't have to hide behind the production tricks we've come to know. A song like "I'm Through" proves to her fans and to herself that she can stand at the microphone, sing a straight love song and belt it out to the back-row. So much heart and soul in this song; it's very beautiful.

"Black and Blue" is a lot funkier; a straight piano line but funky beat. The sound of this song reminded me of my first New York City apartment. I lived on 108th Street between 5th and Madison; Spanish Harlem. The neighborhood wasn't quite Harlem but it also was still technically right on the border of some very ritzy real estate on the Upper East Side. And there was not a decided division between the two. I could just imagine an Upper East Side Ingrid in this song running her scales at her piano lessons while secretly messing with her Walkman and listening to the latest hip-hop grooves; all the while listlessly gazing out the window; yearning to be on the streets below from where the same music she was yearning to break into was being created.

"Ribbons" starts out with a mopey undercurrent. Ingrid envelopes the microphone as she repeats "wrapped me up in ribbons then he went for the door" in a silly-low voice. But of course when the chorus comes up she breaks out and pleads the question with this object of her affections; "I'm not flying, am I?"

"Palm of Your Hand" is another powerful song with a driving backbeat. The rhythm on "Palm of Your Hand" sounds like it's pop music out of the 1980's. The storyline of the song though is quite good. The narrator takes us on the road of leaving a controlling relationship. The breakup seems to affect the narrator more than the one she's cutting it off with but her resolve just makes the triumph that much more fulfilling.

A quick summary of other tracks: "In the Sea" sounds like Sinéad O'Connor, "Blood Brothers" is more straight pop and sounds like Gwen Stefani with a Cheryl Crow guitar line.

"Keep Warm" is a homey, synth-laden tune that rises slowly and fully like a 1920's film score and takes the listener on the journey: "Down down down I go on a road that I don't know." The final track "End of the World" also has the appeal of an old-time song.

Then there's this song "Ghost" which I'm not really sure what to make of just yet. It sounds to me as though there's something pointedly personal going on here.

"Human Again" is a sonic wonderland for the listener; a combination of her signature plucked acoustic guitar, piano which slides from big and imposing to demure and almost forgotten, carefully arranged strings, classically warm synth, and even stranger computerized sound effects. The signature Ingrid Michaelson vocal looping feature is noticeably absent on this record. At least insofar as how audiences have become accustomed to it.

Not much about this new record is all that familiar; especially for fans who latched on to the somewhat helpless sounding, flailing heartbreak which many had fallen hard for. But that's a good thing. As the title reminds us; even when we go through our darkest hours; we always emerge on the other side, a little wiser, a little more cautious, but always have been; human again.

Sources:

<http://www.ingridmichaelson.com/>

<http://voices.yahoo.com/the-music-rem-tribute-concert-2872531.html?cat=33>