Katie Melua - The Katie Melua Collection (2008)

01 Closest Thing To Crazy 02 Nine Million Bicycles 03 What A Wonderful World 04 If You Were A Sailboat 05 Piece By Piece 06 Call Off The Search 07 On The Road Again 08 Mary Pickford 09 Spider's Web 10 Thank You Stars 11 I Cried For You 12 Crawling Up A Hill 13 Tiger In the Night 14 When You Taught Me How To Dance 15 Two Bare Feet 16 Toy Collection 17 Somewhere In The Same Hotel

With combined U.K. album sales of nearly three million copies, Georgian-born Katie Melua has quietly become one of the biggest-selling female artists of the decade. Without the media profile of Britney Spears, the powerhouse vocals of Anastacia, or the critical acclaim of Dido, her success has been based purely on old-fashioned songs that have managed to have appeal beyond the usual folk-pop market. Indeed, just like her biggest influence, Eva Cassidy, who appears here on a posthumous cover of "What a Wonderful World," Melua's soothing and jazz-tinged tones found an audience through repeated plays on Terry Wogan's BBC Radio 2 show. So the fact that the majority of The Katie Melua Collection never really moves past first gear shouldn't come as any surprise. But what her detractors may call dull, others may call refreshingly simple. Indeed, her back-to-basics approach sometimes works wonderfully, particularly on her two biggest singles, the naïvely charming "Closest Thing to Crazy" and the Celtic-inspired "Nine Million Bicycles," one of the most lyrically unique love songs of recent times. Elsewhere, "I Cried for You" showcases Melua's heartfelt, impassioned vocals to full effect, while the dramatic "Spider's Web" is a decent stab at a rock-led political song. However, the less-is-more production sometimes renders the songs so nondescript that it's hard to remember anything about them. And the likes of "Call Off the Search" and "Crawling Up the Hill" do little to dispel the unwanted Norah Jones comparisons. However, the three new tracks, Melua's first since her split with longtime collaborator Mike Batt, suggest a different direction for album number four, with the jaunty big-band party song "Two Bare Feet" a particular highlight. Overall, this is a comprehensive roundup of a surprisingly successful, if fairly unadventurous, first chapter of her career. Without the aid of her chief songwriter, it will be interesting to see how she develops from here. ---Jon O'Brien, Rovi

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