

Nelly Furtado - Loose (2006)

Written by bluelover

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1. *Afraid* 2. *Maneater* 3. *Promiscuous* - Nelly Furtado, 4. *Glow* 5. *Showtime* 6. *No Hay Igual* 7. *Te Busque* - Nelly Furtado, Juanes 8. *Say It Right* 9. *Do It* 10. *In God's Hands* 11. *Wait for You* 12. *All Good Things (Come to an End)*

If Nelly Furtado's nearly impenetrable 2003 sophomore effort, *Folklore*, proved anything, it was that this modern-day singer/songwriter is smart and ambitious yet doesn't quite have a handle on those very qualities. Dabbling in worldbeat and chronicling the perils of immediate success, she indulged herself without a care for the audience -- and the audience responded in kind, as the album barely cracked the Billboard Top 40, spawned no hits, and sold about a quarter of what her Grammy-winning debut did. Clearly a rethink of some sort was in order for her next album, and 2006's *Loose*, delivered about three years later, certainly does present a different Nelly Furtado: one who is glammed up, sexed up, and ready for the dancefloor. Borrowing liberally from Gwen Stefani's ghetto fabulous makeover and a little bit from Justin Timberlake's sleek retro-'80s moves on *Justified*, Furtado now has a sound that's straight 2006; with hooks that feel as comfortable as bumper music on MTV as they do as background on cell phone commercials or as ringtones, she can blend into the hyper-saturated media culture of 2006, a move that may alienate fans who were won over by how her debut, *Whoa, Nelly!*, sounded like nothing else in 2000. No matter how club-friendly *Loose* is -- even its quieter moments, like the closing "All Good Things (Come to an End)" (co-written in part by Coldplay's Chris Martin), feel like ideal soundtracks to chill-out moments -- ultimately Furtado did not get a swan-styled makeover, where her original personality has been chiseled and chipped away so only a vestige of her remains. Remember, Furtado is nothing if not smart, and she smartly picked Timbaland, one of the very best producers in modern music, as her main collaborator for *Loose*.

Timbaland helmed all but two of the 12 main tracks here -- the album weighs in at 13 songs, but one is a Spanish version of the Juanes duet "Te Busque" -- and he gives much of this music a bracing feel, dense with old-school synths, subtle sample collages, bone-crunching bass, cascading vocal hooks, and beats that sound so heavy it takes careful listening to realize how

nimble they are. Nowhere is this more evident than on the killer opening triptych of "Afraid," "Maneater," and "Promiscuous," three songs that trumpet Furtado's makeover and make it seem pretty convincing, too -- particularly on "Maneater" with its circular, minor-key bass and "Promiscuous" with its chorus that sounds like vintage Prince. This is Timbaland at his best, and the only weak link is Furtado; no matter how she growls on "Maneater" or murmurs on "Promiscuous" -- no matter how much she sings about sex, period -- she just doesn't sound sexy. She sounds as if she's striving to be sexy, which doesn't generate much carnal heat, but it ultimately doesn't matter much since on all the heavy dance songs, of which there are a bunch, she's mixed into the background on Timbaland's production, functioning as another instrument, which helps the music work as just a stylish wall of sound. Furtado doesn't fight against Timbaland's mix, which proves her smarts more than anything on the showy *Folklore*; there's a reason why she chose Timbaland as a collaborator, and she lets him shine for the first half of the record, as they get the party rolling. Then on the second half of the record, the old Nelly starts to show through. She gets to play the world traveler with "No Hay Igual," where she deftly blends reggaeton and M.I.A., along with the smooth Latin pop ballad "Te Busque." Her words gradually come to the forefront, as on "Say It Right" -- a dark meditative piece that would have fit on her previous records if it didn't have a Timbaland production -- or on the sweetly ruminative "In God's Hands," and then on "Wait for You," which has Indian-influenced hooks and a melody reminiscent of "I'm Like a Bird," both strands are pulled together in a haunting fashion.

It's on this final stretch of the album that the Furtado and Timbaland pairing seems like a genuine collaboration, staying true to the Nelly of her first two albums, but given an adventurous production that helps open her songs up. Unlike the music on *Folklore*, the idiosyncrasies intrigue instead of frustrate, and deliver on the promise of her debut, when it seemed like Furtado could do anything. That said, the music on the second half isn't nearly as immediate or addictive as "Maneater" and "Promiscuous," two singles that were already deserved hits (in the U.K. and U.S., respectively) when *Loose* was released. The genius on these two songs is down to Timbaland, who not only crafts the sound but vocally overshadows Nelly's mumbled raps on the latter. But Furtado is smart enough to let him dominate here, since she knows that Timbaland has revitalized Nelly Furtado both creatively and commercially with *Loose*, so it's only appropriate that he hogs the spotlight on its two best moments. ---Stephen Thomas Erlewine, *AllMusic Review*

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