Pussycat Dolls - Doll Domination (2008)

1. When I Grow Up - 4:07 (Produced by Darkchild and Nicole Scherzinger) 2. Bottle Pop (featuring Snoop Dogg) - 3:32 (Produced by Fernando Garibay, co-produced by Sean Garrett) 3. Whatcha Think About That (featuring Missy Elliot) - 3:48 (Produced by Polow da Don) 4. I Hate This Part - 3:45 (Produced by Timbaland and Danja) 5. Takin Over the World - 3:35 (Produced by Chase N. Cashe of Zone 4 Inc.) 6. Out of This Club (featuring R. Kelly and Polow da Don) - 4:10 (Produced by Polow da Don) 7. Whos Gonna Love You - 4:01 (Produced by Polow Da Don) 8. Happily Never After - 4:50 (Produced by Stargate, bkdg. vocals and written by Ne-Yo) 9. Magic - 3:43 (Produced by Timbaland and Danja) 10. Halo - 5:24 (Produced by Timbaland and Danja) 11. In Person - 3:42 (Produced by Timbaland and Danja) 12. Elevator - 3:44 (Produced by Darkchild) 13. Hush Hush - 3:49 (Produced by Ron Fair) 14. Love the Way You Love Me - 3:21 (Produced by Chase N. Cashe of Zone 4 Inc.) 15. Whatchamacallit - 4:28 (Produced by Timbaland and Danja) 16. Im Done - 3:21

There's a perfectly good reason why the first single from Doll Domination, the Pussycat Dolls' second album, sports the punch line "When I Grow Up/I Want to Be Famous": despite a million-selling debut, the Pussycats aren't famous yet, a fact borne out by the disastrous non-launch of head Doll Nicole Scherzinger's scrapped solo debut Her Name Is Nicole. Heralded by several sexy magazine covers, the record was set for 2007 but disappeared after four singles failed to turn into hits. Maybe they weren't great songs, maybe the public didn't like them, but it's just as likely that even fans may not have known who she was, as her name was buried in the credits to PCD's debut and despite all that skin she flashed on all those magazines, nobody really could tie that girl to this group. Every single thing about Doll Domination suggests that the powers that be at Interscope and the PCD organization decided that PCD was an insufficient launch pad for solo stardom, so they made the second album into a showcase for Nicole and the other four Dolls, none of whom you could possibly name or pick out in a Maxim lineup. On Doll Domination's cover, each Pussycat straddles her own motorcycle bedecked with the initial of her first name, while on the album each gets to sing lead on at least one track and on the double-disc deluxe version -- which clocks in at over 85 minutes, four minutes longer than Pink Floyd's The Wall -- each Pussycat gets a track credited to herself.

So much effort is spent because so much effort is needed: without a scorecard it is impossible to tell who is singing lead in the Pussycat Dolls. That just happened to be an unintentional joke on PCD -- no wonder it sounded like the work of one vocalist, as it was pretty much all Nicole -- where it also emphasized that the brand name was more important than the individuals, but here on an album designed to give all five Pussycats personalities, the parade of pretty, sculpted, generic R&B voices is maddening. If the album was designed as proud, faceless product -- like, oh, the first Pussycat Dolls album -- this interchangeability wouldn't matter, but when the whole idea for the album is turning the group into superstars, it's a bit of a problem. This doesn't mean that Doll Domination doesn't work as pure proud product, at least on occasion: the ever-reliable Kara DioGuardi helps give the shimmering '80s gloss of "Who's Gonna Love You" some shape and Ne-Yo's "Happily Never After" is a good waiting room ballad. But digging out this handful of songs from the 16-track proper album -- inflated to as much as 24 tracks with the bonus disc added in -- is flat-out exhausting, necessitating trawling through too many dull beats, breathy bleats, a phoned-in Snoop Dogg cameo and Missy Elliot name-dropping Katy Perry. Missy's shout-out to Katy can't help but illustrate how the Pussycats happily hand over the crown of strip-club pop to Perry with Doll Domination. It's a mystery for the ages: a group that wouldn't exist if it wasn't for a burlesque revue now runs away from the bump-n-grind, singing about empowerment, heartbreak, love, fame and wealth, but never about sex. And that's the ultimate irony about Doll Domination: the group that's a men's magazine photo spread come to life is now backing away from sex -- and it's a lot better to hear pinups sing a song of striptease than a song of love. ---Stephen Thomas Erlewine, AllMusic Review

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