Kate Ryan - Free (2008)



01. Ella Elle L'a 02. Tonight We Ride / No Digas Que No (Duet with Soraya Arnelas) 03. Voyage Voyage 04. I Surrender 05. Who Do You Love 06. Your Eyes 07. L.I.L.Y (Like I Love You) 08. Take Me Down 09. Put My Finger On It 10. Sweet Mistake 11. Toute Premiere Fois 12. We All Belong 13. Free

Kate Ryan's third album Alive was her first to feature no cover versions, and was an admirable step forward in her development as a pop singer. However it was a commercial flop, so it is with a sense of crushing inevitability that her fourth studio effort features three covers of classic French pop hits: "Ella Elle L'a" by France Gall, "Voyage Voyage" by Desireless, and "Toute Premièr Fois" by Jeanne Mas. As with her earlier Mylène Farmer covers they're rather well-done updates, "Voyage Voyage" in particular is a fantastic reimagining of an underrated classic, but their presence still represents a disappointing failure of nerve on the part of Ryan's team. Not that it matters. Preceding the album's release, "Voyage Voyage" and "Ella Elle L'a" became massive hits; her most successful releases since the aforementioned Mylène Farmer covers in most countries.

While Ryan's sound has regressed, thankfully her quality control has not. "Free" is another consistently strong effort. It only once hits the heights of the best tracks from Alive, on the minimal, brooding "L.I.L.Y. (Like I Love You)," but it is a strong collection of Europop with much less filler than her first two records. "I Surrender" and "Tonight We Ride" are high-gloss disco tracks which should extend her run of hits beyond the cover versions, and Eurogames 2007 theme tune "We All Belong" is a punchy electro number. Best of all though, surprisingly, is closing ballad "Free." Ryan's songwriting abilities have been increasingly sidelined by her quest for hits, but the entirely self-composed "Free" is a revelation. A majestic, string-laden ballad with soul-searching lyrics and hands down the best vocal performance of her career, it's both a great closer and a frustrating glimpse at what she could be capable of if she played things a little less safe. ---John Lucas, AllMusic Review

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