

Vanessa Hudgens – Identified (2008)



1. *Last Night* 2. *Identified* 3. *First Bad Habit* 4. *Hook It Up* 5. *Don't Ask Why* 6. *Sneakernight* 7. *Amazed* 8. *Don't Leave* 9. *Paper Cut* 10. *Party On The Moon* 11. *Did It Ever Cross Your Mind* 12. *Gone With The Wind* 13. *Committed* 14. *Vulnerable* 15. *Set It Off* Vanessa Hudgens – vocals Vanessa Hudgens, Cathy Dennis, Kara DioGuardi, Leah Haywood, Nasri, Ashley Valentin, Rock Mafia, Christopher Rojas, Carlos Alvarez – background vocals Lukasz Gottwald – keyboards Jack Daley – bass Tyrone Johnson, Scott Jacoby – guitar

Ever savvy, Disney started launching the post-High School Musical careers of the franchise's stars while it was still in full swing by having Ashley Tisdale and Vanessa Hudgens make albums with a more mature sound than most Radio Disney fare. Hudgens' debut album, *V*, was her first step toward a less overtly Disney-affiliated career: released by the studio's Hollywood label, it used Christina Aguilera's soulful pop as a template; even if its songs were a bit faceless, they had surprisingly sophisticated production values. Almost two years passed between *V* and its follow-up, *Identified*. That's a long time in Disney terms, especially considering how quickly they release anything related to star attractions like *High School Musical*. *Identified* isn't drastically different from *V* -- Hudgens still sings about love, dancing, and hanging with her girls, and once again, the production outclasses the songs and the singing. With work by Kasz Money's Doctor Luke, Benny Blanco, and J.R. Rotem, the album sounds more playful, more elaborate, and trendier than it has to: "Last Night" builds from a bouncing beat into whispered backing vocals, acoustic slide guitar licks, and warm electric pianos, while "First Bad Habit" segues from chugging electric guitars to breathy electro-pop and back again. Borrowing from Gwen Stefani, Nelly Furtado, Fergie, and Rihanna, *Identified* plays like a simulation of a state-of-the-art pop album. However, strangely for an album named *Identified*, these songs skip from sound to sound, hoping that some of them will stick. Hudgens just doesn't have the presence or pipes to pull off a hip-hop-tinged dancefloor anthem like "Hook It Up" or an intimate ballad like "Paper Cut," which feels like a Disneyfied version of Leona Lewis' "Bleeding Love." The best moments here turn Hudgens' weaknesses into strengths: her vocals aren't powerful, but they are malleable, perfect for tweaking into fembot pop like "Amazed" and the title track. Though there are a couple of truly strange moments here that may or may not be intentionally

campy, such as "Party on the Moon" and "Sneakernight," which features lyrics like "Did you eat?" and a surprisingly good Aguilera impersonation from Hudgens, there are also a couple of genuinely impressive moments: "Did It Ever Cross Your Mind" could be a legitimate pop hit, and the slightly jazzy "Gone with the Wind" makes her transition from Disney star to a more mature singer more convincing. Despite a few stumbles, Identified achieves its goal: it anticipates that Hudgens' fans will outgrow High School Musical soon enough, and gives her a better chance of staying relevant to them as they move on to other kinds of pop music. ---Heather Phares, AllMusic Review

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