Sarah McLachlan - Fumbling Towards Ecstasy (2010)

1. Possession 2. Wait 3. Plenty 4. Good Enough 5. Mary 6. Elsewhere 7. Circle 8. Ice 9. Hold On 10. Ice Cream 11. Fear 12. Fumbling Towards Ecstasy Sarah McLachlan - Vocals, Acoustic & Electric Guitars, Piano Bill Dillon - Acoustic & Electric Guitars, Guitorgan, Bass, Piano Pierre Marchand - Bass, Piano, Keyboards, Fake B-3 Organ, Drum Machine, Percussion Machine, 808, Shaker, Found Sound Brian Minato - Bass David Kershaw - Hammond Organ Jane Scarpantoni - Cello Michel Dubeau - Saxophone Ashwin Sood - Drums, Percussion Jerry Marotta - Drums, Percussion Lou Shefano - Drums Guy Nadon - Drums

Although 1991's Solace made Sarah McLachlan a star in Canada, her international breakthrough arrived two years later with Fumbling Towards Ecstasy, a softly assured album that combined the atmospheric production of Pierre Marchand (a former apprentice -- and evident disciple -- of Daniel Lanois) with some of McLachlan's strongest songwriting to date. At the center of everything was her voice, an ethereal, lilting soprano that helped pave the way for Paula Cole, Lillith Fair, and a decade's worth of successful female songwriters. McLachlan utilized the crack between her chest and head voice, emphasizing the changing tones as her melodies climbed into the vocal stratosphere. She was also comparatively young at the time of Ecstasy's release, and her combination of vocal hooks and commercial appeal wouldn't be fully mastered until 1997's Surfacing. Even so, McLachlan's work was rarely as raw or honest as it is on this record, where tales of sin, lust, and love are delivered alongside piano arpeggios and electronic flourishes.

"Possession," the album's lead-off single, is a jarring love ballad with lyrics inspired by a stalker's correspondence. There's a double-edged quality to the song's eerie lines -- "I'll take your breath away," "I won't be denied," "Just close your eyes, dear" -- and Marchand underscores that tension by setting McLachlan's melodies to a nocturnal trip-hop beat. Elsewhere, the two lighten up with "Ice Cream," which likens love's sweetness to decadent deserts, yet Fumbling Towards Ecstasy takes most of its strength from the lush, rhythmic

dreamscapes that dominate the album. Alternately dark and shimmering, intimate and ornate, Fumbling Towards Ecstasy launched McLachlan's international star power while setting a high bar for her future albums, many of which approached -- but not never quite eclipsed -- this career highlight. ---Andrew Leahey, AllMusic Review

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