Katie Melua – Pictures (2007)

1. Mary pickford 2. It`s all in my head 3. If the lights go out 4. What i miss about you 5. Spellbound 6. What it says on the tin 7. Scary films 8. Perfect circle 9. Ghost town 10. If you were a sailboat 11. Dirtu dice 12. In my secret life Katie Melua - Composer, Guitar, Vocals Mike Batt - Arranger, Composer, Conductor, Organ, Piano, Producer Ray Cooper - Percussion Steve Donnelly - Guitar Rob Farrer - Percussion Dominic Glover - Trumpet Tim Harries - Bass The Irish Film Orchestra - Flute, Strings John Parricelli - Guitar Chris Spedding - Guitar Henry Spinetti - Drums

With a voice that sounds like a more mainstream version of the late jazz cult superstar Eva Cassidy and smoky raven-haired looks to rival a movie lot's worth of young ingénues, it's a bit of a surprise that Katie Melua has remained so unknown in the United States, despite the chart success the Eastern European-born songstress has achieved in her adopted home of the United Kingdom. It seems like she should be at least as popular as, say, Regina Spektor or Nellie McKay. Pictures may not help that much, however, because in comparison to its fairly straightforward jazz-tinged singer/songwriter predecessors, Melua's third album takes a bit of a left turn into the self-consciously quirky. It's a wonder that it took so long, because Melua's producer and part-time songwriter is Mike Batt, a minor legend of the U.K. music scene who has fashioned a decades-long career out of deliberate eccentricity. Much of Pictures sounds like Batt is reverting to his '70s children's music productions for the Wombles, especially "Mary Pickford (Used to Eat Roses)," a horrifyingly cutesy song about the early days of Hollywood royalty; "Scary Films," a thinly disguised cop of early Kate Bush tracks like "Hammer Horror" and "Wow," and the fake reggae "Ghost Town," which sounds like Batt experimenting with getting as close to ripping off the Specials' classic of the same name without veering into actual plagiarism. The closer Melua comes to restrained adult pop, like the unexpectedly touching Batt-penned torch ballad "What It Says on the Tin," and the gently swaying, Everything But the Girl-like bossa nova bounce of "Perfect Circle," the better the album is. The songs written by Melua by herself and/or with lyricist Molly McQueen are uniformly stronger than Batt's contributions, particularly the intimate, smoky "Spellbound," suggesting that leaving her mentor would do Katie Melua a world of good. ---Stewart Mason, Rovi

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