

Monster in my Heart

Erin Benjamin
Independent



It isn't possible to describe Erin Benjamin's style in simple terms, so, let's just call her a pop-folk-jazz hybrid. Benjamin's second CD, *Monster in My Heart*, proves to be a varied collection of pieces true to that mix.

Comparing Benjamin's music to other folkies in her genre, such as artists like Dee Carstensen,

Luanne Kowalek and Dayna Manning, is quite easy. Now, add a big splash of Holy Cole Trio-style jazz and a dash of Holly McNarland gutsiness, and you have Erin Benjamin.

And it doesn't take long to realize Benjamin has obscene amounts of musical talent. It's refreshing to find an artist who utilizes her own lyrical talent rather than borrowing from other artists.

Even more satisfying is finding something original that tingles the auditory system.

There is one area where this CD is lacking, though. Despite the melodic and powerful music, the lyrics just aren't as inspirational as they could be. A lot of the songs on this album are social commentaries, and the gushy love songs are kept to a comfortable minimum. However, there's nothing excessively profound or thought provoking about Benjamin's lyrics.

But Benjamin's album is definite ear candy for folk music

junkies. Musically, the album is intriguing and pleasantly experimental, although the lyrics leave something to be desired. Nevertheless, Benjamin has much of her career ahead of her, and her music should only improve.

JANET FRENCH

Built to Last

Maestro
Attic Records

You wanted it, you got it. And if you didn't want it, well... you got it anyway. Maestro Fresh Wes is back.

But this time he left the Fresh Wes part of his name behind and is just called Maestro. It's been about five years since the release of his last album, *Naah... Dis Kid Can't Be From Canada*, and Maestro's out to prove that he is indeed *Built To Last*. And the big question with

this album is, "is he or not?"

I would have to say yes and no. This is a good Canadian hiphop album, but comparing it to Maestro's previous efforts, it is by far not his best. With this CD, he has shied away from what made him so popular — through and through commercial jams like "Let Your Backbone Slide" and "Conductin' Thangs". The closest tracks on this disc are the ones more underground hiphop heads would appreciate such as "416/906" and "Clap Ya Hands/Turn It Out," which is also on this year's CKDU promotional compilation.

But there's no doubt that Maestro still has the skills to pay the bills. It's just that his status as a pioneer of the Canadian hiphop scene ups the ante in terms of expectations— expectations this CD almost meets.

There is some great production by Canadian artists, such as the up-and-coming DJ Scam (who produces about half the album), 2Rude, and Quattro from Ghetto Concept. The guest artists on the CD are strong, but you just expect more. For example, Maestro collaborates with Snow on a track called "Still In Da Game", but the song just ends up average and nondescript. The same goes for other guests such as Choclair and Ghetto Concept.

However, Maestro shows he is still one of the 'wittiest' rappers north or south of the border with lines such as "I put the afro in the disiac" and "Like David Hasselhoff I'm swimmin' in women".

But for those who were expecting the old Maestro, well, he's not here. For those who are looking for a new and evolved Maestro, or just any fan of Canadian hiphop, pick up this disc for sure.

ASHIR SIDDIQUI

Hard To Swallow

Vanilla Ice
Universal Music

You have to love it when a musician comes out with a second album where the music's completely different. It makes you wonder if they had some transforming self-insight. In Vanilla's case, you wonder if he's just jumping on the bandwagon.

Usually even if you don't like a group's music, you can respect them for voicing their opinion. But it's hard to have respect for an album with such a radical change in style — in fact the album does prove to be a bit *Hard To Swallow*.

Hard to Swallow features Vanilla rapping over Marilyn Manson-style beats. Lyrics from his one and only hit, "Ice, Ice Baby", are set up with some sadist instrumentals in this new album. Let's not forget the much needed additional vocabulary of swear words. How original is Vanilla? About as original as rechewed gum.

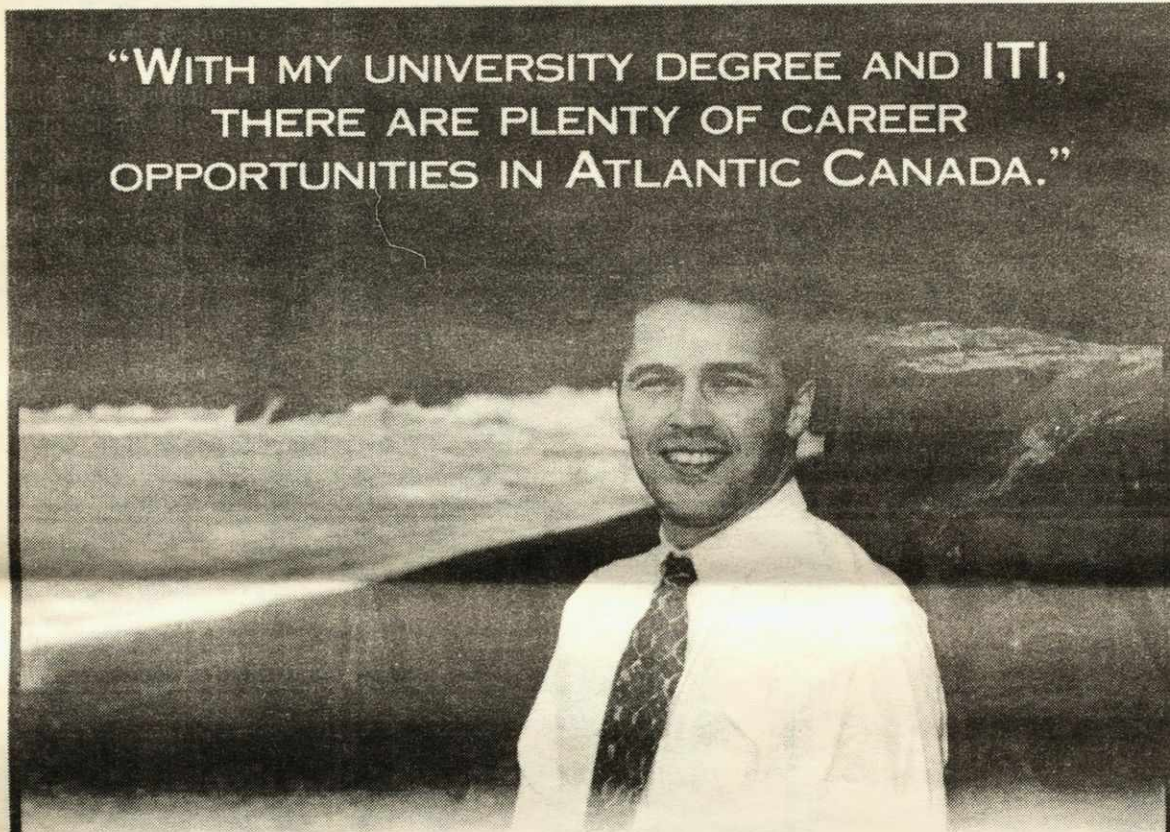
The only way to relate to this music is by working yourself up to an enraged state of mind where anger and frustration collide. Trying to express yourself in this state, for me, and on *Hard To Swallow*, is a verbal impossibility.

One wonders what Vanilla hopes to get from this radical, and tired, change in musical style. Is there a message or is he just 'copping' a shock rock style that has made Marilyn Manson rich? In either case he could have at least come up with some fresh lyrics.

The title proves too true, so maybe Vanilla Ice is truly a master of irony and wit. Too bad rapping and creativity aren't things he masters as well.

LINDSAY VICTOR

"WITH MY UNIVERSITY DEGREE AND ITI,
THERE ARE PLENTY OF CAREER
OPPORTUNITIES IN ATLANTIC CANADA."



Michael Cotter, IT Systems Analyst, Stratos Mobile Networks
Diploma, Applied Information Technology, ITI; BSc (Agr.), Nova Scotia Agricultural College

Shortly after graduating from university with a degree in Agriculture, Michael Cotter received several job offers in his field. Unfortunately, the job that he accepted ended much sooner than he had hoped. "I thought about going back to school, but I didn't want to spend another two to three years on my education. Then I heard about ITI."

"I had always had an interest in computers, so ITI made sense. Of all the schools I looked at, it was the most professional. It was also the most expensive, but you got what you paid for. I researched it well and talked to graduates. I wrote the entrance exam and that was it. I'm glad I have my degree, but it wasn't enough to get ahead in a more professional, shirt-and-tie kind of way. What attracted me to ITI was knowing that it could help me do that."

"ITI teaches you to interact in a professional environment. That puts it above any other school. It made me a more marketable person, not only technically but also personally. When I was interviewed for my job at Stratos Mobile Networks, I knew it was important to my employer that I fit in with the group. So I stressed that I had team skills from attending ITI and working in a collaborative environment."

"I turned down a job in New York to come back to Newfoundland, because the IT industry is really growing here and I knew that I would be working in a comfortable environment with friendly people. Some people may think coming back has limited my future career growth, but the IT industry is so technically advanced that it's easy to keep in touch with the rest of the world. The skills you obtain from ITI let you stay in touch with developments and other job prospects wherever you are."

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