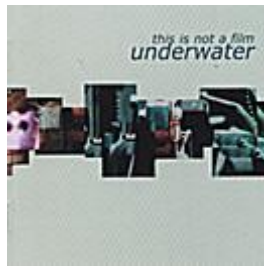


Mp3 Underwater - This Is Not A Film



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electronic pop. dark textures of trip hop beats, ambient keyboards and shoegaze guitars create a backdrop for gorgeous and emotional female vocals. former members of rosewater elizabeth and current members of LARVAE, allegra gellar and gertrude ross. 12 MP3 Songs ELECTRONIC: Trip Hop, POP: New Wave Details: Try to define the genre "synth-pop." The word is almost as vague as "ambient," though not as pointless as "IDM." The earliest synth-pop reference points were early 80's bands like the Human League, OMD, and Depeche Mode, who were considered new wave at the time. As synthesizers became more affordable, other patterns sprung from the same hardware, spawning techno, house, and jungle. But in the emphasis on dance, the pop sensibility was largely lost. The old-school synth-pop sound has survived since the 1980's, and currently enjoys a resurgence of popularity thanks to bands like Wolfsheim and Faith Assembly. There's also another strain that owes more to industrial music, matching progressive trance melodies with pounding, four-on-the-floor beats and urgent vocals. In Germany they call this EBM, known to English speakers as Electronic Body Music-- another useless term. Underwater describe themselves as an electronic pop band. Vocalist Melissa Mileski and multi-instrumentalist Jeremy Wilkins formed the band out of the ashes of Tampa, Florida's ethereal project Rosewater Elizabeth. They added Matthew Jeanes and Alec Irvin, signed to Risk Records, and got NIN-collaborator Chris Vrenna to co-produce their debut album. I Could Lose was a solid effort, though a bit electronic-by-numbers. It garnered little attention, and afterwards, they left their label, started sub:marine records, and recorded This is Not a Film. The first track, "Lightyears from Home," announces its immediacy with the band's most obvious asset, Mileski's voice: a sweet vibrato rises from the gravelly depths of her throat, singing, "We will be covered in this material of flags/ That fly high on memorial of the days when we felt distant from our own land." It's a song about reluctance in the face of duty, and she's accompanied by a crisp,

militaristic beat and slow-burning guitars. Because you've been conditioned by cold, bass-heavy blues, you think "trip-hop," but there's no jones for jazz here. The bass deepens during the second track, "Slide," and the pace quickens, propelled aloft by eerie keyboard drafts, as Mileski asks, "When will we grow?" Most of the vocals on "I Could Lose" floated in phantom abstraction, as if they were completed over already-written rhythm tracks; here, they're part of the music, bobbing and weaving with the flow, morose but inflected with a faint pop-funk. "Canada" breaks through the gloom, delivering bruising beats that would raise the eyebrows of Scorn's Mick Harris. As the album progresses, you wonder when they're going to falter. The somber organ tones of "E" become wrapped in a thin, spidery guitar line, only to be surrounded by layers of electronic beats and doused in feedback. The four musicians have found the balance essential to subtle pop songcraft, adding and subtracting each element in a harmony so Zen-like you barely notice. Headphone listening is rewarding; the sounds that fill each track are drawn from a variety of sources-- both acoustic and electronic-- avoiding laptop monotony. One of the album's most heartfelt moments comes during "Melc," after Mileski admits that she has "given the tools to build around me/ Laying the brick/ Laying the brick faade." To be really successful at synth-pop you need not only an earnest vocalist but clever lyrics, otherwise your musings sound like grade school diary drivel. Underwater mostly shun sentimental pap, but inevitably pop music leads to pop sentiment ("At night I feel inbetween.../ Always, I never know what i need.../ Always"). "A Selfish Girl" echoes the trip-hop torch-song "Sub:space" from the first album; they both share a syrupy keyboard pitch that's a little too consciously crafted. It's not that Underwater shouldn't be allowed sweet moments; it's just that this leaves the listener unprepared for the eight-minute static hum of "I'll Say Your Name." Likewise, "Silver" opens like a Portishead jam outtake, until chorus lines intrude. One fallacy committed by groups with a Great Voice is filling every verse with lyrics; when Morrissey finally shut up, the Smiths recorded the winsome "Oscillate Wildly." The brooding nature of these last few songs don't detract from the album as a whole. Underwater has sidestepped pretension to create an album for cloudy days and rainy nights, filled with all those classic, bereaved emotions: longing, regret, blame, trust, betrayal. You'll play it again and again, until the title of the album becomes a question. -Christopher Dare (pitchforkmedia.com)

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