

## Mp3 Ben Arthur - Edible Darling



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Heartfelt songwriter-pop. 12 MP3 Songs in this album (44:16) ! Related styles: POP: Folkly Pop, ROCK: Acoustic People who are interested in Beck Wilco Aimee Mann should consider this download. Details: BEN ARTHUR When Ben Arthur ruefully sings, "The older I get, the more I realize/The best I can hope for is compromise," the singer-songwriter is only half-serious. After all, the young veteran hasn't toiled at his craft for more than a decade to give in without a fight. That line, from "Mary Ann"-one of the songs on his new album, Edible Darling-reflects the litany of near-misses he experienced after being heavily courted by several major record labels over the years. Yet, for his Bardic Records debut (after two releases on his own Chicken Butter label), Arthur made sure he did things his way, with the help of engineer Mike Shipley (Aerosmith, India.Arie, Shania Twain, Def Leppard). "I never doubted that playing music is what I wanted to do," says the Virginia native, who laughs, "In fact, you can refer to me as 'The 'Artist Formerly Known as 'Waiter'.'" He says that music is what he lives for, even if at times he has had to do it while working in restaurants. That grim humility and clear-eyed honesty extends to Arthur's lyrics. Often brooding and dark-laced, images of betrayal, sex, humiliation, faith, yearning and death float behind a super-melodic pop facade. "Edible Darling," a pulsing blues number, is about a friend who raises pigs to eat them. Like much of Arthur's work, it looks mortality square in the face: "The most beautiful angel/Is the angel of death/Vinegar-throated/Confused and bereft." The brooding "Tonight" has a shamed lover pleading to stay over, but it's also a chilling song about not being willing to go gently into that metaphoric night. Similarly, "Keep Me Around" is a morbidly tongue-in-cheek song, wherein Arthur one-ups McCartney's "When I'm Sixty-Four", asking that his body be treasured even after death. If you get the idea Ben Arthur is not your everyday folk-rock-country-blues singer-songwriter, you're catching on. "There's nothing in my work that doesn't smack of some pretty grim, difficult stuff," he says matter-of-factly. "Most of my songs

are a marriage of contradictions: bleak and difficult sentiments lurking under an upbeat, catchy melody." Indeed, Arthur's lyrical poetry and delicate melodies remain key to his appeal, though he incorporates 808's, DJ-scratching and drum machines on several of the songs, with cellos and strings underlining others. There are bits and pieces of John Lennon's cheeky fatalism, Beck's homespun experiments, the earnestness of Kurt Cobain, Jeff Tweedy's seductive psychedelia, the exoticism of David Bowie. Arthur first picked up a guitar when he was 14 and immediately began writing songs. At the beginning, he listened to Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Ozzy Osbourne, and AC/DC, none of which you can hear in his music. He went on to be influenced in his songwriting, so he insists, by Lyle Lovett and Michelle Shocked, which isn't exactly apparent, either. In Charlottesville, where he attended the University of Virginia, he developed a local following, and eventually shared the stage with Tori Amos, Shawn Colvin, Bruce Hornsby and fellow townsman Dave Matthews. In fact, Matthews's collaborators Boyd Tinsley and Tim Reynolds played on Arthur's first album, *Curses and Rapture*. Familiar with Europe after traveling there as a teenager, Arthur toured extensively in the U.K. and Italy. Three years ago he returned to New York City after a long tour. He arrived on Sept. 10, 2001, and the grievous aftermath of the day after can be heard in Arthur's "Broken-Hearted Smile," which portrays the city as an anguished lover. "Focal point's the missing focus/ The empty space through the aisle/ Sometimes it's all you can see/ Like the missing tooth in a smile." "I prefer lush images," he says. "I don't like songs that are too specific, too literal. What interests me is ambiguity and mystery, the spaces between the sentences. Like in 'Strawberry Fields': 'I mean, er, yes, well, no, that is, I think I disagree....' that's the way people talk. I'm most fascinated by the underlying contradictions in people's motivations, the way they deal with one another." "Don't hold me at arms' length/Keep me sun-blurred and clean," he sings in "Sestina." Arthur's music is alluring pop, but if you take a closer look, it's not quite as pretty a picture, "Pick up the pieces scattered resentments/From an old explosion/Grudges and barbs/All just mummery and gypsy fingers." *Gypsyfingers* is also the name of his second independently released effort, which came out last year. To complement his songwriting, Arthur says he likes to layer vocals and instruments to create a densely textured sound. In fact, the melodic element of his music is so strong, the hooks so catchy, that it's possible to miss the underlying lyrical complexity and contradiction in his words. All of which is fine by Arthur. "People can hear what they want in my music," he says. "Like in Bruce Springsteen's 'Born in the USA', some people hear a patriotic anthem and others hear a protest song. If that happens with my music, I'm fine with that." "In fact," he

laughs, "that sounds perfect."

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