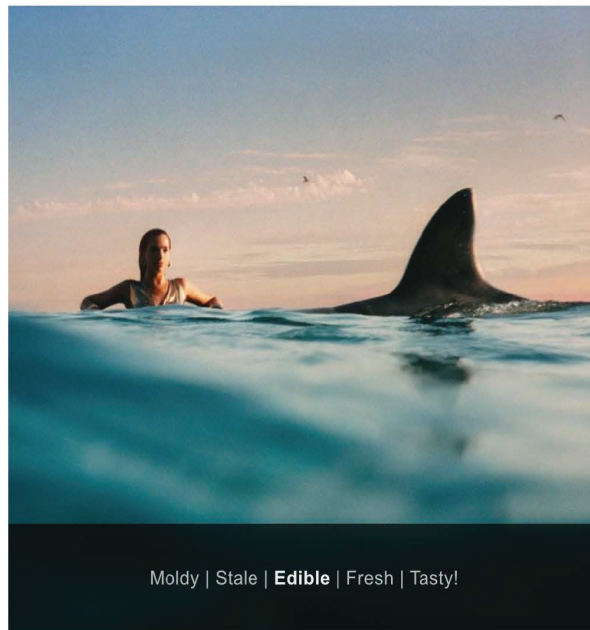


Radical Optimism - Dua Lipa



Tasty Tracks: "Falling Forever," "Houdini," "French Exit," "Illusion"

Why is love always so *complicated*? Can't we all just let go and have some *fun*? Enter Dua Lipa. Four years ago, she released *Future Nostalgia*, the record that pushed her into mega-star status. With its rush of charged pop ballads imbued with the lust of the dance floor and self-empowered, post-breakup anthems that emphatically assert "Boys Will Be Boys," Lipa proved that she is no stranger to the complexities of love. The constant give and take of relationships driven solely by passion provided for some iconic disco-inspired hits, but ultimately left Lipa unsatisfied. Driven by the need for depth, she switches up the sonics for her new record *Radical Optimism* and gives it a narrative focus. Lipa ditches the groovy basslines and catchy, surface-level lyrics that kept *Future Nostalgia* in the club and crafts a more laid-back atmosphere, slowing down the pace in hopes of illustrating her concept and establishing herself as more than just a hopeless romantic.

On *Radical Optimism*, Lipa returns more assured than ever. The intention of her unwavering commitment to optimism provides her calm when confronted with love's chaotic nature, and confidence to push herself as an artist outside of her marketed persona. She aims to commit herself to a new, glass half-full approach to life, but this outlook is ultimately more myth than mantra. With lyrics that don't always align with the presented narrative and a hesitancy to go all-in on her ideas, *Radical Optimism* is left half-baked. The result is a consistently fun while occasionally confused collection of songs that may not have the same lasting impact as hits like "New Rules" or "Levitating," but allow Lipa to showcase her songwriting and vocal capabilities more prominently than before.

Conceptually, Lipa is at her most inventive as she imparts more personality into her songwriting and interplays with each track's production. Lead single "Houdini" embraces ghosting as an art. Lipa tunes out any energy that doesn't align with what she's searching for. "If you're good enough you'll find a way" she confidently asserts as Kevin Parker's psychedelic touch validates the controversial practice. It culminates in a dance break as Lipa struts down the street after hitting the block button, layers of radiant synths and graceful vocals glowing behind her. "Maria" is a sentimental ode to her lover's ex. Long gone from his life but still "somewhere in his heart," Lipa expresses her gratitude towards Maria for playing a part in the formation of the man she has come to care for. A lightness and sense of mystery permeates the track as its flute-driven melody subtly weaves into one of the most striking moments on the record.

The grab-bag of songs on *Future Nostalgia* painted Dua Lipa as a glamorous pop star throwing out ideas and seeing what sticks. There was little room for connection to Lipa herself outside her face and voice. Confounded by her viral dance to "One Kiss" that made her name synonymous with the words "go girl, give us nothing!" audiences began to brush her off as an industry plant. *Radical Optimism* feels more driven by Lipa. It is a breakaway from expectations of another lyrically simplistic, disco-laden record. She adopts her own vision and although it does not get pushed far outside the mainstream sounds she is used to, it is a clear statement that she is willing to evolve and give everything.

Where *Radical Optimism* primarily misses the mark is in its inconsistent implementation of its mindset. At the end of the record, it is still not entirely clear how Dua Lipa defines optimism. She certainly has her moments — "End Of An Era" opens the record in full bliss of new love, and the drums of "Falling Forever" are thunderous as Lipa charges through a storm of fears over fading feelings. More frequently though, she is avoidant and afraid. "French Exit" is the sister ghosting anthem to "Houdini" where Lipa claims that the "only way to go" is by leaving at the first sign of disinterest. Then, "These Walls" details Lipa passively observing as the ship of her failing relationship sinks, needing external circumstances to end it for her. With so much complication, *Radical Optimism* inadvertently undermines its own outlook.

With *Radical Optimism* in her discography, Lipa establishes that she will always put out a good record, but she may need to step out of her comfort zone to bring about her full potential. The inspiration is there; Lipa cites major influences from Britpop and trip-hop artists like Primal Scream and Massive Attack. Unfortunately, these inspirations end up muted and muddled by a pop film, if present at all. Lipa is stuck in the confines of her disco diva persona and struggles to break new ground — hopefully, her optimism can motivate her to fully escape in her next era.