

# ji-ent world groove

A JI-ENT MUSIC REVIEW

JAPAN

HEART  
ITO YUNA

Sony Music Records Inc.

Yuna Ito's "Heart". Ichi-ban (No. 1).

That is how the talent from Hawaii (now living in Japan) has been starting out her 2007.

This may be new territory for the 23-year old singer who has exploded into the charts at #1 on Oricon and featured heavily in a variety of publications and on television.

For Ito, Life has been all good after completing her promotion for the "NANA 2" film (which she and Nakashima Mika made in appearance in NYC in December) in December.

In January with the rave reviews for her first full-length album "HEART", a surprise performance at a wedding reception and most recently, an acoustic live concert performance that will be televised, she continues to make headlines in Japan.

I definitely wanted to know what was so good about "HEART" and after listening to all of it multiple times, I actually enjoyed the album a lot.

Many Japanese labels have looked towards the US to find an artist who can transcend from the US to Japan with a good grasp at singing in English and in Japanese.

Toshiba-EMI has Utada Hikaru, Toy's Factory has melody, Avex Entertainment, Inc. has mink and Sony Music Records, Inc. has Yuna.

The version I am reviewing is the normal album version of "HEART" (without the DVD).

The album features a total of 13 tracks and features a ballance of It's CD single releases which comprise of ballads and R&B tracks.

The first track "WORKAHOLIC" is a fun, energetic R&B song which features Yuna singing both in English and Japanese.

The album features her debut single "ENDLESS STORY" (ala REIRA starring YUNA ITO) which was featured in the "NANA" live film.

I've played this song over and over and still not tired of it. It's a beautiful ballad that is worthy for making double platinum.

The third track "Iosin" is her fifth CD single released back in Sept. 2006. Used as the ending theme for the Japanese edition of the American TV series "LOST".

The fifth track "Precious" released back in May 2006 is a love song and her 3rd CD single that reached platinum and was the theme song for the film "Limit of Love ~Umizaru".

The song "Precious" is featured on the



album twice with the second version being the 13th bonus track which is a wedding version.

The major difference between the two songs is that the wedding version starts off with wedding bells and focuses more piano and strings and less drums and not as pop.

Track 9 is "Faith" which was Ito's second CD single released back in March 2006. It happens to be another song that is a ballad and was the theme song to the Shinohara Ryoko's detective drama "Unfair".

Track 11 "Truth" is Ito's sixth CD single released back in December 2006 and released ala REIRA starring YUNA ITO and used for the film "NANA 2".

Most of her CD singles that Yuna has released are on this album with the exception of her fourth single "stuck on you". Although, it is featured as a music video on the CD/DVD version.

Aside from the ballad songs which mostly comprise of this album, there

## HEART YUNA ITO TRACK LISTING

Catalog #: SRCL-6482 (Normal Version)/  
SRCL-6480 (with DVD) | Dur. 1:03:20  
Release date: January 24, 2007

1. WORKAHOLIC
2. ENDLESS STORY \*
3. Iosin' \*
4. Know-how
5. Precious \*
6. Tender is the Night
7. Fragile
8. Nobody Knows
9. Faith \*
10. Stay for Love
11. Truth \*
12. Perfume
13. Precious -wedding extended ver. (bonus track)

NOTE: DVD version comes with 6 music videos (noted with \*) and a 32-page booklet.

are fast uptempo songs that are good but nothing that really stands out.

This is not an artist known for cuteness or dressin'g up in the skimpiest of outfits, Ito is known for her vocals and her beautiful ballads.

This album definitely showcases Yuna's vocals and shows that she is not just a pretty face that can act in films but she can also sing.

Now, the question is if you take Ito Yuna out of the ballad equation, where can she fit as an R&B artist.

From the type of style of music that Yuna has released thus far, she is definitely being marketed as an artist that has class and can sing. So, far the strategy has worked as she has managed to attract listeners of all different ages in Japan.

In a way, I feel that this is a good strategy because different labels have marketed their top female artists in urban and uber-sexy, diva-ish ways but for Ito, the music and her vocals speaks for itself.

She's definitely a class act and I'm curious

to see what kind of (non-ballad) music she will release in the future.

As Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey adjusted early in their careers from singing many love song ballads, they have had their share of dance hits but in the process, had image changes to their style of music and presentation while making that transition.

I do feel that some people who are drawn more to her REIRA starring YUNA ITO style may be expecting a similiar transition for Ito because many female R&B artists in Japan are promoting more sexy while Ito is all about the music.

Again, this is not bad at all but it depends on one's expectations from an R&B artist.

If one was expecting Ito to sing beautiful ballads and then come out with boodie-shaking Nelly Furtado, Shakirah and Janet Jackson style of pop music, then perhaps Ito's fast music might not be for you.

I never had that expectation for this artist so listening to this album, reading about her accomplishments and what she has been doing in Japan within the last

month has made me appreciate her more as an artist and an individual.

The fact that she is different from many of the female R&B artists out there is pretty cool and to see her make it #1 on the Oricon charts is quite awesome.

As for the CD, the normal CD version features the standard lyrics book with a few photos of the artist.

Fans will probably want to get the DVD version of "HEART" as it features music videos of her first six CD singles and a 32-page photo booklet.

All in all, I found "HEART" to be a well-balanced album with very good music production. I never have listened to many of her CD singles previous to "HEART" but having listened to this album so many times already, I'm digging it.

For those that want great Japanese R&B music from a vocalist that can sing and ballads that are just heavenly, check out this album. It may win your "Heart".

— DENNIS A. AMITH

A J!-ENT INTERVIEW BY EDWIN MACARAEG & DENNIS A. AMITH  
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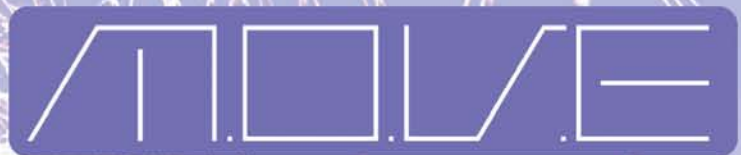
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