

Pop Talk: Pink has a mind and a message - not to mention talent

by George Varga

Prominent tattoos? Check.

Nose ring? Check.

Diamond-studded front tooth? Check.

Platinum blond hair? Check.

Attitude to spare? Double-check.

Were an observer to judge Pink solely by her appearance, they might assume she's just another dance-rock automaton with a big image, big mouth and precious little to say.

But this Philadelphia-born singer, songwriter and vocal powerhouse is anything but another empty-headed pop tart, a la Paris, Jessica and Lindsay.

POWER OF PINK - Pink has had the last laugh on her last album, which skewers 'stupid girls,' mindless consumerism and President Bush, among others targets. CNS Photo courtesy of Steven M. Manzano. Recently turned 27, Pink (real name: Alecia Moore) is the anti-pop tart - a no-nonsense young woman who isn't afraid to speak her mind. In an era dominated by bubbleheaded, wannabe vixens who espouse self-empowerment through bimboism, this two-time Grammy winner presents her fans with an earthy, relatively glitz-free alternative.

Other stars may shy away from criticizing the vapid lifestyles and mindless consumerism promoted by Paris, Jessica, et al., but not Pink. She made these tabloid darlings the focus of "Stupid Girls," a withering song from her fourth and newest album, last year's "I'm Not Dead."

Pink begins by taking a dig at any young women who aspire to be a "porno 'paparazzi' girl," then declares just how alarming she finds the concept of being "a stupid girl," let alone the reality. The scathing couplets that follow leave no doubt about her position:

""Go to Fred Segal, you'll find them there / Laughing loud so all the little people stare / Looking for a daddy to pay for the champagne (Drop a name) / What happened to the dreams of a girl president? She's dancing in the video next to 50 Cent / They travel in packs of two or three / With their itsy-bitsy doggies and their teeny-weeny tees / Where, oh where, have the smart people gone? / Oh where, oh where, could they be?""

The video for "Stupid Girls" reinforces her message. In it, Pink writhes and cavorts like the mostly clueless subjects of her song (which in December earned her a Grammy nomination for Best Female Pop Vocal Performance). She also uses her "Stupid Girls" video to comment on young women who obtain breast implants and regularly purge themselves of food in risky efforts to achieve the "ideal" figure.

But Pink isn't immune from criticism.

Like Paris, Pink has struck some scantily clad poses of her own in so-called "heavy-breathing men's magazines." And soon after she rose to stardom with her first two albums - 2000's generally undistinguished "Can't Take Me Home" and 2001's far more potent and diverse "Missundaztood" - she seemed eager to stir up controversy by acting like the stereotypical "bad girl."

ROCKY YOUTH

Pink was signed by LaFace Records at the age of 16 as part of the R&B group Choice after cutting her teeth on the Philadelphia club circuit. Her signing came soon after what she describes as her near-fatal experiences taking such drugs as cocaine, marijuana, crystal meth, angel dust, Ecstasy and Ketamine, a PCP-like sedative used in veterinary clinics.

"I came close to death so many times. I guess my parents are happy I didn't end up on a street corner somewhere or lying in the dirt," Pink told an interviewer. "I got everything out of my system when I was 13, 14, 15, and now I have no interest whatsoever (in abusing drugs)."

With each of her four albums, she has stretched as an artist. Granted, her work still falls solidly in the pop-rock mainstream. But she is equally adept with R&B, dance-music, blues and more. Pink has also developed a welcome edge, whether she's collaborating with Rancid/Transplants guitarist Tim Armstrong or former San Diegan Linda Perry (who attributes her explosive success as a producer and songwriter to her work with Pink).

"It all started with Pink. I just instantly hit it off with her," Perry said.

"There was definitely a connection there. I had a gut feeling about working with her, that it would lead somewhere. All she wanted me to do was sing on her record at first, and then we ended up writing 15 songs together. Eight of them wound up on her record, and the first ('Get the Party Started') was a massive hit. That's what took me to where I am, where I really wanted to be."

BREAKING STEREOTYPES

Pink has matured in recent years and now regards her high-profile position as an opportunity to speak out on meaningful issues. While Paris appears incapable of any form of self-reflection that extends beyond gazing in a mirror, Pink accepts her responsibility to be more than a disposable commodity.

Witness "Dear Mr. President," another standout song from her latest album. Backed on vocals by the Indigo Girls, Pink offers a heartfelt plea for compassion to President Bush, who might wince if he heard her pointed words about his foreign and domestic policies.

The captivating ballad begins: "'Dear Mr. President / Come take a walk with me / Let's pretend we're just two people / And you're not better than me / I'd like to ask you some questions, if we can speak honestly.'"

In a tone both firm and vulnerable, she continues: "'What do you feel when you see all the homeless on the street? / Who do you pray for at night before you go to sleep? / What do you feel when you look in the mirror? / Are you proud? / How do you sleep while the rest of us cry? / How do you dream when a mother has no chance to say goodbye? / How do you walk with your head held high? / Can you even look me in the eye? / And tell me why?'"

The song is made even more powerful by Pink's plaintive singing, which smartly avoids any histrionics. Her earnest vocals, like the song's lyrics and its accompanying video, pack a considerable punch. So considerable, in fact, that she has earned praise from some veteran musicians who know how to craft a stirring protest song.

"Have you heard Pink's 'Dear Mr. President?' Did you get all the way through it without crying?" asked David Crosby. "That girl just knocked my socks off. I can't believe what a great performance that is. If you go to Neil Young's Web site, you'll see a list of protest songs (he endorses), and Pink's is one of them."

A FUTURE SO BRIGHT ...

Pink, who is married to motorcycle racing star Carey Hart, appears to be well on her way to where she wants to be.

Although she recently shelved plans to star in a Janis Joplin bio feature film, she seems grounded and focused in a way that most of her pop-rock contemporaries do not.

She also has an increasingly powerful voice and isn't afraid to use it, on stage or off. At a time when too many young pop stars are content to be seen but not heard, or prefer - as the late, great James Brown once put it - talkin' loud and sayin' nothing - that means a lot

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