

"Square One" Review

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Kim DiVine: Square One

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Former San Diego singer/songwriter Kim DiVine has established herself already, with two well-received acoustic albums followed by an excellent EP, *Hummingbird*, in 2006 (all as Kim DiVincenzo). That disc featured her with a full band on most of the tracks, bringing a degree of luster to her songs that wowed many reviewers, garnered a number of awards, and has a lot of folks anxious for more of the same.

Her new CD, *Square One*, picks up right where *Hummingbird* left off. A big reason is the smart move to record at San Diego's Light of Day studio, with *Hummingbird* producer Keith Orfanides. He again manages to let DiVine have the spotlight and plays most of the other instruments himself, while framing her music in tasteful background harmonies, keyboards, and layers of guitars. The result is radio-friendly, polished pop arrangements that aren't overly slick and enhance the musical impact of DiVine's catchy writing.

DiVine is a good singer with a voice that isn't a four-octave siren or the hypnotic throb of a warble singer. She sings her lyrics with an earnest, clear, high voice that imparts just the right amount of emotion. For most of the songs, it is about the songwriting and not her vocal range, anyway.

"Letting Go" starts off, as DiVine sings verses over keyboards that give way to a rousing, full band chorus that sounds like Orfanides is channeling Coldplay. The dynamics work so well that the tune is instantly memorable. A folk-rock approach is taken on "Little Things," with personal lyrics, guitar and harmonies, and DiVine using the opportunity to show some good vocal chops. On "Raining," the band pushes a very catchy melodic hook, with plenty of power keyboards amping up the choruses. "All Night" is quieter but equally catchy, using a repeated refrain over string swells to burn into the listener's memory. A slower ballad, "Without You," follows, but it is another strong cut, with strong vocal by DiVine up front, another winning melody, and plenty of dramatic buildup. The strong tunes keep coming, "We Could" is more smooth pop with driving drums and guitars, nailing a hook with another great arrangement.

All 12 songs feature very personal lyrics about relationships and affairs of the heart, most written in the first person. Many are given a powerful and almost heroic flavor by the arrangements, lyrics, and vocal treatment.

"What's It Gonna Be" appeared in slower, acoustic form on *Hummingbird*; the rock version of the tune here, like "Letting Go" and "We Could," is another highlight. DiVine again is in command on the vocal while the music chimes and swells, echoing the guitar veneer of U2 and Coldplay. Things close quietly with an acoustic version of "All Night."

Square One is certainly a big step forward by Kim DiVine, showing fulfillment of the promise shown in her earlier work. It is a great listen.