The Music Review/The Summary

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Title: Santogold (Downtown Records)

Santogold’s auspicious debut arrives bearing the weight of near-constant media hype and a Bud Light commercial, which pimps her dub-glitch manifesto “The Creator” for its soundtrack. In spite of the infamy, however, she has delivered a remarkable and assured album. Its confident tone is the result of having spent years paying industry dues, first co-writing several songs for Res’ vastly underrated rock-and-soul gem How I Do, then experiencing an early failure fronting her own band, the new wave outfit Stiffed.

Santogold is a veteran, but to her credit, she makes music that sounds fresh, all while unearthing alternative rock nuggets that wouldn’t sound out of place on an '80s hits compilation. One of her best songs, “Lights Out,” breezes along like Pat Benatar’s “Hit Me With Your Best Shot,” while “My Superman” feels like an outtake from Siouxsie and the Banshees’ Juju. Casual listeners will notice that Santogold’s voice resembles M.I.A., particularly since both celebrate the same urban pop/electro-rave scene, but the musical resemblance mostly ends there.

As an artist building a debut from borrowed parts, Santogold’s secret weapon is her charismatic persona. She flips her lyrics with stylish cool, howling, cooing, and ranting. She embodies her songs, breathing them into brilliant life. A performer that mixes coquettishness and swagger, she draws her listeners close, but not too close. “We think you’re a joke,” she sings on “Shove It,” an anthem for her native Brooklyn. “Shove your hope where it don’t shine.” Like Chrissie Hynde, Santogold has the makings of a rock 'n' roll icon; she's a tough cookie that’s all heart.