



Side FX

Turning Point

Those already familiar with the band Side FX won't be surprised that the group has changed its colors again on its latest album. In fact, if Side FX didn't make any creative leaps on this record, it would have been disappointing. Shifting chameleon skin is what is expected from Side FX; anything less is a letdown. Vocalist Kim Cameron wastes no time in reassuring the group's fans that, indeed, new directions are on the menu. The opening cut, "Timeless," is so unlike Side FX that the CD needed to be pulled out of the player and checked for a printing error. "Timeless" is straight-up indie pop, deliberately low-fi and minimal in its production and arrangement. The guitars are sped up, and Cameron sings with a charming little-girl persona that is uncharacteristic of her soul-rooted style. Ironically, it took a mainstream pop/rock act like Side FX to show how hooky the indie aesthetic could be, fully exploiting its *Top 40* potential.

Side FX could have stuck with the current college-radio formula and played it to death, no matter how well they executed it. However, Side FX refuses to be complacent. By the second track, "Are You Thinking of Me," the band turns the steering wheel around, opting for a wonderfully upbeat Big '80s sound with crisp, driving AOR guitars and arena-ready drums. Imagine Pat Benatar supported by Def Leppard in its prime. The mesmerizing "Magic Lands" takes a more rootsy approach but with delightfully pulsating keyboards that escaped from the '80s. And just when you think Side FX has settled into a groove, they throw a curveball in the form of "Stories," late-night smooth jazz. Cameron saves two of her biggest surprises for halfway through the album. Side FX transforms the Carpenters' "Rainy Days and Mondays" into a hybrid of twee pop and jazz, while on "Let's Paint This Town," Cameron rocks with the deep punk passion of Patti Smith. Side FX breaks all the rules of contemporary pop music, making them true rebels, yet remaining accessible to the masses.