

## Music: Ai Feng Le

Penny Dai



To court the beast of Chinese pop music fame is not difficult, but to keep the love alive is mysterious thing. The trick, of course, is to maximize exposure with both acting and singing; talent for either is not required, as long as one's eyes are larger than cowbells. But once in a while, talent comes along. Singer-songwriter Penny Dai's new album, Ai Feng Le, is as good as pop music gets - Mando, Canto, or otherwise.

At times, the 27 year-old Chinese-Malay's sound echoes the tongue in cheek, little girl sugar of early 90's more tart than pop Lisa Loeb, but Dai coaxes her own timbre, rhythm and range like taffy. Her voice is pink lemonade and dolls, a near caricature of femininity, but Dai knows emotion and a curious rawness occasionally peaks in waves of highly-polished pop. Unfortunately, the lyrical mainstay of Dai's sixth LP since her debut in 2000 is still love lost and fretted about, and the rest is a bit touch and go (not to mention the inescapable Chinglish). However, successful flirting with a range of instruments and vocal styles gives her the eclectic sound most pop artists can't be bothered with, or aren't talented enough to create.

Her first single, 'Wang Qian Fei,' is the best kind of catchy, harmonica included. 'Hao Hao De Guo' manipulates the bittersweet irony of jazz with the right vocal and lyrical push and pull. There are a few dispensable songs, and it's sometimes too easy to pick out her admiration of Tori Amos and Sheryl Crow, but in the end, street cred aside, we're not ashamed to say we like her. *Xiyun Yang*

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