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Lara Fabian - Très Bien, Ms. Fabian

Lara Fabian has sold six million albums. Her name may not be familiar to most because her previous discs were recorded in French and most of her success to date has been in Quebec and France. That should change soon if her English language disc, a self-titled effort, is any indicator. Based on the appeal of her French music videos, I thought that the marketing of Ms. Fabian throughout the rest of the world would be a relatively simple task. Nothing can prepare you, however, for meeting her in the flesh. The stunning beauty swept into the hotel suite, her auburn hair cascading onto a figure flattering black sweater. Tight black slacks and stylish black European boots completed the look.

"Would you like some?," she asks, cracking open a bottle of mineral water. Resisting the urge to take the bottle and douse myself, I extend a glass. My line of questioning immediately changes from music to why this goddess isn't an international movie star. The classic black and white shot of her on the new CD's jacket even recalls fabulous French film icon Catherine Deneuve.

"People say that to me a lot," she begins. "It's a big compliment to be compared to her. I would like to act because acting is like interpreting a song. I was asked to do a few films in France but I have to concentrate on this record first. One day I will be doing movies because I want to write screen plays and perform in films."

While this would be considered wishful thinking for some, Fabian should not be taken lightly as she has built her career through sheer determination. The singer, who was born in Belgium and raised in Sicily, admits she is headstrong. By age five she told her father, a guitarist in British pop star Petula Clark's band, that she *is* a singer. She then went through the discipline of 10 years of classical music training. When Europe proved to be an unsuitable launching pad for her career, she pulled up stakes and moved to Quebec at age 17.

"Europe is a beautiful continent but it is very conservative. When you're 17 years old and you're just starting to write your own songs and explore your potential, you want to be able to do it the way you feel it should be done. In Europe I kept meeting people who wanted to tell me what I should do. They wanted me to compromise and that was a little difficult, you know, with my Sicilian temper. I left and went somewhere I felt I could be myself. I set up my own label and publishing company in Quebec."

Fabian's first two albums sold reasonably well in Quebec but it was her third



release, *Pure*, that took off in France. *Pure* racked up double platinum sales and earned the singer a Victoire Award, the French equivalent to a Grammy. She has performed songs in French, Italian, Spanish and now English, but she feels the flow of the language is as important as the actual words.

"I'm more of a Latin kind of person," she explains. "I have an affinity for romance languages because they are close to my personality, but emotion isn't limited to language. If you are to be touched by something, you will be touched. Why is opera so popular when people don't understand a word of Italian or German? It's the emotion."

The new album's most operatic moment is the song *Adagio*, a marriage of a classic 14th Century Italian melody and contemporary lyrics that Fabian co-wrote. She sees the song, which appears on the album in both English and Italian, as a perfect link to her heritage and her long-standing affection for classical music. The album also has uptempo material in the form of the R & B-laced *Till I Get Over You* and the first single *I Will Love Again*, which was produced by Cher's latter day studio wizard Brian Rawling.

"Working with new producers and new songwriting partners really helped me expand my musical horizons, which was one of my ultimate goals for this album," Fabian says. "I wanted to mix my more traditional European techniques with a more pop, immediate sound. I know I'm going to be classified as a ballad singer because that's where my strength lies. I thought I'd start with something from a different perspective. There are four amazing remixes of *I Will Love Again* and I'm looking forward to hearing them on the dancefloor."

Fabian's career has been likened by some to that of Celine Dion, who enjoyed her initial success with French language records in Quebec. The comparison also holds true in terms of vocal dynamics as Fabian demonstrates on a couple of self-penned grandiose ballads, *Part Of me* and *You Are My Heart*. When you ask her about her musical influences, however, her response is not what you would expect.

"I adore Freddie Mercury of Queen," she says. "He had that enigmatic classical-meets-rock thing and I learned how to combine the two from watching him and listening to him. I also like Kate Bush and Peter Gabriel. I like people that give you a great live performance, artists that go to a dimension that's way beyond their records."

Fabian feels that her new album will allow her to be more theatrical, but we'll likely have to wait a year or so before she's ready to strut her stuff across North American stages. She's anxious for that moment to arrive, but the task at hand is to first have a successful English language disc under her belt.

"That would certainly be a pinnacle for me," she agrees. "I think, however, the most amazing moment in my life would be to be able to look back and realize I've lasted 25 years. Longevity is the key for me."

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