

Daphne and Celeste Save the World

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Balatonic

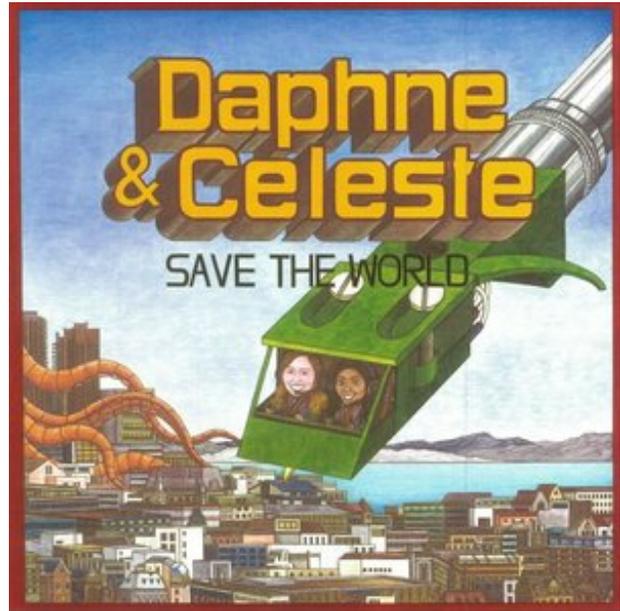
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Seventeen years after telling you exactly what kind of animal you look like on their turn-of-the-millennium UK hits "Ooh Stick You" and "Ugly", Daphne & Celeste have finally found a worthy target for their schoolyard taunts. "Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah," drones a saccharine male voice over the radio. "This is the first thing people figure out when they get a guitar!" exclaims Daphne. "Do people actually dig this?" asks Celeste. Their

opponents are obvious—Ed Sheeran, George Ezra, Jake Bugg, and Britain's other chart-sanctioned bastions of poor-boy authenticity. "Every time I tune to that show there's a basic busker on the radio," they sing—before reprising the "oh yeah" chant as proudly artificial electropop. The message is obvious. It's all pop music; why not own it?

Daphne & Celeste Save The World is deep-cut pop optimism. It's intended less for those who vaguely remember "Ugly" than those to whom the name Daphne & Celeste actually means something. It's aware of its position at the intersection of the chart world and the indie substratum that roots through its trash. This is surely the only album by ostensible peers of Aqua to include references to Arthur Russell, Black Dice, Captain Beefheart (twice!), Captured Tracks, David Foster Wallace, Shocking Blue, and Yaz (not to be confused with Yaz, whom the Brits call Yazoo). Daphne, Celeste and writer-producer Max Tundra don't seem to be just trying to show off how much they know. They're just acutely aware of their place in a cultural current many indie-adjacent artists try to avoid.

The sheer audacity of the patrician references they manage to slide into pop is enough to make one scream with mirth. This is a record where the line "sub-Dylan balladry was okay before the Fairlight was invented" doesn't just work but is *typical*. There's another song where Daphne & Celeste ask each other, in the flirty tones of Wendy & Lisa testing the water, what happened to various bygone pop stars. ("What happened to Daphne & Celeste" is the implied question). There's an entire rap verse that's just hipster touchstones—a *Twin Peaks* character, Pink Floyd's coolest record. They don't condescend or brag; they pander in the best way possible, the way pop music does.



That this is done in pop rather than the drier-than-thou indie rock of someone like Father John Misty or Parquet Courts makes it all the more likable. The songs were all written by Tundra, a guy with actual hipster cred thanks to his run of acclaimed bleep-pop albums in the 2000s, and were it his flat, affectless voice singing these songs they might be insufferable. By filtering them through these singers' peppy skip-rope chants, they sound less like cultural commentary and more like... well, music, something that's communal and fun and meant to be enjoyed rather than analyzed. *Daphne & Celeste Save the World* is highbrow comedy, and the melodies let you know it's okay to laugh.

There's not much precedent for this in Daphne & Celeste's discography. Though they seem a lot smarter than their music, as I suspect most people who make music this happily daft are, their transformation into cheer-squad James Murphys seems totally out of the blue. Tundra, on the other hand, once penned an entire song asking Michel Gondry to make him a music video. What kind of stranglehold Tundra had on the creative process of the two women is hard to gauge (my guess is a lot given the giant "Max Tundra Presents" letters that preface the "You and I Alone" video). But dedicated pop optimists know that gauging the division of labor in pop music is a Sisyphean task. They'll appreciate *Save The World* holistically—as a ballsy, ridiculously fun pop record.

Rating:

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