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Four out of Five Stars

Review by Jason Birchmeier

Just when electroclash had become passé, along came Spalding Rockwell and their debut album, *Kate*, one of the better, less gimmicky electroclash releases yet. The duo of ML and Nikki can easily be slotted between the likes of Peaches, Adult., and Le Tigre — sassy electro-punk chicks with gritty beats, catchy songs, and the ability to turn a party out. Yet unlike the myriad other electroclash acts who likewise could be slotted alongside the aforementioned standard-bearers, Spalding Rockwell have more than one hot single going for them. Granted, up until the release of *Kate* that was indeed the case — they had their long-lasting "White Cotton Panties" single (and also their vocal contribution to Armand Van Helden's "Hear My Name?" single, if that counts) and that was it. Here, though, they have a dozen more or less equally hot tracks with *Kate*, an album that masterfully straddles the line between electro and punk in each and every song. Plus, the album is mighty succinct, running through its cuts in a brisk and breathless 36 minutes, so the duo's shtick never totally feels like a shtick (if it even is one in the first place). Frankly, it's somewhat surprising that *Kate* is so consistently well done, because few of these sort of electroclash acts have proved themselves capable of recording strong albums. Even the best of the best electroclash acts — Peaches and Adult., arguably — have struggled with the album format. That's certainly not the case with Spalding Rockwell. *Kate* is a fine album, one that plays not like a collection of singles and filler but rather like a single work of art. If there aren't any particular standout tracks, that's to the album's credit because highlights are aplenty. *Kate* is one of those rare albums you can play from beginning to end without ever being tempted to reach for the skip button. Were there more Spalding Rockwells out there, the electroclash scene would have more lasting power. There's certainly artistic merit to what Spalding Rockwell have done here on *Kate*, and it's too bad more similarly styled acts can't produce solid albums like this rather than simply the one-shot hot singles that seem to be the norm.

Biography by MacKenzie Wilson

Mary Louise Platt and Nicole Lombardi, aka ML and Nikki, comprise the stylish electronic funk of Spalding Rockwell. Lombardi grew up in Washington, D.C., and religiously followed Fugazi. When she wasn't immersed in the city's local punk scene, Lombardi and her older sister were seeing national acts play shows at the 9:30 Club and Tracks. Platt, a New Yorker by birth, was into hip-hop throughout her teens, listening to Black Sheep, Cypress Hill, and Wu-Tang Clan during the early '90s. By 1994, Lombardi and Platt were best friends, and within five years' time, Spalding Rockwell was born. They perfected a red-hot formula of new wave, hip-hop, and electro while distinguishing themselves from the trendy electroclash crowd taking over the boroughs of the Big Apple. They lent their song "White Cotton Panties" to Larry Tee's Badd Inc. compilation in 2003. "Vicious" appeared on Tee's *Electroclash, Vol. 2* collection a year later. Their popularity was on the up and up by mid-2004 with Armand Van Helden's club hit "Hear My Name?" Platt and Lombardi contributed lead vocals to this U.K. Top 30 smash, which is featured on Van Helden's *New York: A Mix Odyssey* album. Spalding Rockwell's proper full-length debut, *Kate*, followed in September.