

REVIEWS

ALICIA KEYS

Girl on Fire

[RCA]

Some combination of talent and luck—the former outweighing the latter—gave Alicia Keys one of the biggest debuts of the '00s. *Songs in A Minor* (2001) was a hit with hip-hop fans, housewives and just about everyone in between, and in the decade since, the R&B songstress has continually shown her savvy and taste. She's built a career that lets her cruise the middle of the road without becoming middle of the road. Who else sings hooks for Jay-Z and gets name-checked in Bob Dylan songs? *Girl on Fire*, Keys' fifth album, is a celebration of success, but it's not audacious and it's as much about personal growth as it is chart performance.



In the last three years, Keys has gotten married and given birth to her first child, and those major life changes inform "When It's All Over," a track that exemplifies what makes *Girl on Fire* such a winning record. Produced by Jamie xx, the single opens with buzzing synth and clattering hip-hop drums before giving way to vintage house piano and bass kick. It's a tricky balancing act fusing those styles, but as she sings a sweet ode to her family—son Egypt

even shows up at the end—she doesn't pretend to be a gangsta or EDM artist. Again, it's a matter of taste—just like when she duets with deliciously bizarre rapper Nicki Minaj on "Girl on Fire (Inferno)" and does some Rihanna-lite dancehall grooving on "Limitedless." Destined for a long career, Keys lights fires without burning bridges. —Kenneth Partridge



Alicia Keys

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