

“FROM HUNG UP’S SUGAR RUSH OF ARRIVING TO MEETING A POTENTIAL BEAU IN FUTURE LOVERS, *CONFESSIONS ON A DANCE FLOOR* IS SATURATED IN ALL THE DRAMA OF CLUBBING”



SIDE ONE:

Hung Up
Get Together
Sorry

SIDE TWO:

Future Lovers
I Love New York
Let It Will Be

SIDE THREE:

Forbidden Love
Jump
How High

SIDE FOUR:

Isaac
Push
Like It Or Not

PRODUCER:

Madonna with: Stuart Price;
Bloodshy & Avant; Mirwais

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CONFESSIONS ON A DANCE FLOOR

BY ELIZABETH AUBREY

Time was on Madonna's mind at the start of her tenth album. Opening with a ticking clock on the seismic *Hung Up*, there's an air of urgency as Madonna tells us there's "No time to hesitate," because "You'll wake up one day/But it'll be too late." On the dramatic *Let It Will Be*, Madonna considers: "It won't last long/The lights, they will turn down." In *How High*, she asserts "Nothing lasts forever" and bleakly wonders: "Does this get any better?"

At the start of recording *Confessions*, Madonna was struggling with Mirwais, whom she described to *The Guardian* as being like Jean-Paul Sartre, stating: "You have to be in the mood for it." It was very much evident Madonna was no longer in the mood for it. Her marriage to Guy Ritchie was also in trouble. Alongside the album, *I'm Going To Tell You A Secret* showed Mrs Ritchie working hard on tour, longing for her often absent husband. In one scene, she falls asleep bored in a pub while Ritchie sings Irish folk songs after hours.

Then there was a serious riding accident in August 2005 at the couple's country mansion in Wiltshire. Nearing the end of recording, Madonna broke several bones in a fall, laid up for weeks. She'd already started to crave the bright lights again, longing for the freedom and excitement of the Danceteria days. Madonna demos had been hitting the clubs again, with new producer Stuart Price weaving unreleased tracks into his DJ sets, dubbing her voice for secrecy. Price filmed the reactions on his phone, sending them to Madonna as a means of narrowing down *Confessions'* tracklisting.

Price was as first brought in as a replacement keyboardist on tour, graduating to musical director. Before *Confessions*, they'd written *X-Static Process* and a track for a musical Madonna was working on. While the musical was scrapped, its song survived: *Hung Up*. Madonna was thrilled with how Price had followed her instructions to help make the song sound "like Abba on acid." It resulted in her wanting to make an upbeat album combining electro-pop, club and disco with zero ballads.

Hung Up became the blueprint for an album regarded as one for the ages. Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson allowed rare permission for an Abba sample, from *Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! (A Man After Midnight)*, after Madonna convinced her heroes. "I think they may have had doubts," Madonna told *Attitude*. "I had to send my emissary to Stockholm with a letter and the song, imploring them, telling them how much I worship their music. I told them *Hung Up* was my homage to Abba, which is all true." It is indeed a homage, sounding new, urgent and full of cathartic release.

Confessions nods to more heroes, with love letters to Pet Shop Boys, Donna Summer, Giorgio Moroder and The Bee Gees, put through a 21st century disco filter with vocoders and nods to new tech. "Stuart and I didn't want to remake the past, but to make it into something new," Madonna told *Billboard*. "I'm playing with the idea of the post-modern world that we live in. I'm trying to find the soulfulness in technology."

Madonna got back to basics by travelling to Price's flat in Kilburn, where he had a tiny makeshift studio. "Where you record is really important," Madonna told *The Guardian*. "I wanted it to be exactly as it was when I wrote my first song. I want it always to be straightforward. I loved lying on Stuart's couch with my notebook, writing stuff, then crawling back over to do the vocals."

In Price, Madonna found some much-needed fun too. "I think I needed a release from the seriousness of it all," she told *Billboard*. "When I'd go up to Stuart's loft, it was like: 'Honey, I want to dance.' I wanted to be happy, silly and buoyant. I wanted to lift myself and others up with this record."

The album's structure is a night on the dancefloor. From *Hung Up*'s sugar rush of arriving to meeting a potential beau in *Future Lovers*, it's saturated in all the drama of clubbing, each song segueing seamlessly into the next like a DJ set. As night turns to day, the songs become confessional, as Madonna reflects on fame in *Let It Will Be*, where she's at in life and spirituality in *Jump* and *Isaac*, before *Like It Or Not* sees Madonna finding herself again through music.

The standout *Get Together* has Madonna's earliest edginess, brought up to date by trance and euphoria, while the infectious *Sorry* was a staple of dancefloors and MTV for the next decade. The hedonistic *Future Love*, sampling Donna Summer's *I Feel Love*, is the album's purest escapism, as Madonna urges: "Forget your life, forget your problems, administration, bills and loans."

The album's videos are just as celebrated. *Hung Up* especially went viral in the early days of social media, as Madonna incorporates dance and yoga in her *Fame*-like studio, before strutting down the street in a nod to *Saturday Night Fever*.

I Love New York and edgy closer *Like It Or Not* illustrated how Madonna still gave zero fucks, defiantly singing in the latter: "This is who I am, you can like it or not/You can love me or leave me/Cause I'm never gonna stop."

Madonna looked incredible, but several reviews took aim at a middle-aged woman daring not to dress her age. "At 47, Madonna is playing the role of someone 25 years younger," sneered *The Guardian*. "Those retro space leotards and feathered hair only make her look more mature and matronly, like your friend's mum dressed up embarrassingly for Halloween." Depressingly little had changed among critics of Madonna's looks, except now their words carried a gleeful, ageist punch.

As well as considering ageing, *Confessions* was a dig at her marriage. Madonna had said: "All the songs are to a lesser or greater extent biographical," and at the close of *Jump*, she declares over lush electro synths: "I'm not afraid of what I'll face, but I'm afraid to stay...I'll work, I'll fight, until I find a place of my own."

With *Confessions On A Dance Floor*, Madonna found her way back to the music she loved best, sounding on fire and full of joy. Time became less important at the album's close too: the clock was now silenced as Madonna charged assertively into her fifties, renewed, and firmly on her own terms.

