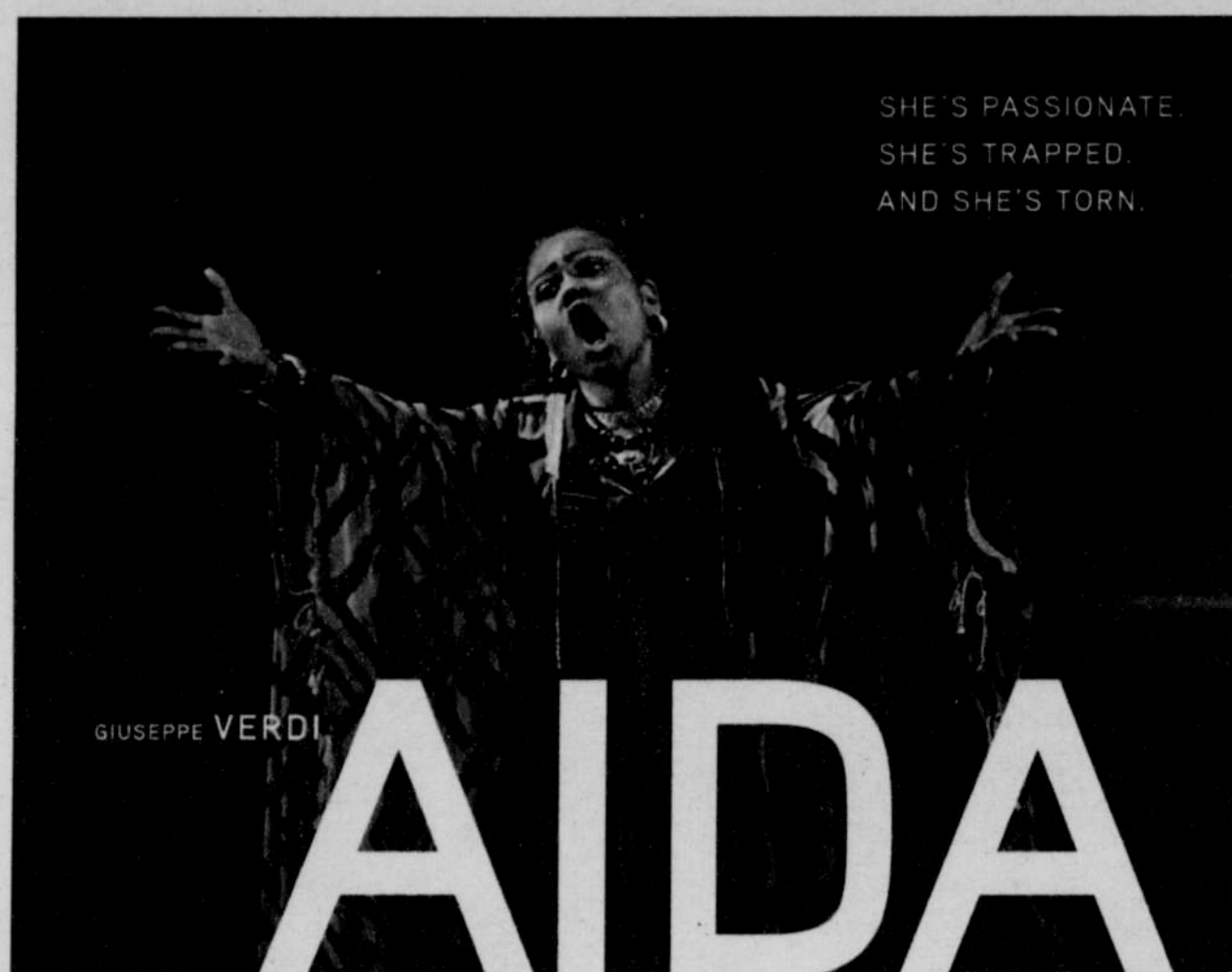




Lisa Daltirus—Portland Opera's Aida

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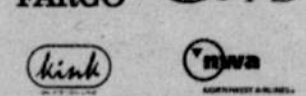
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Timing Is Everything

Ellis lives in the moment; R.E.M. picks up the pace

Break the Spell

Ellis • Rubberneck

Ellis is a modern-day folk troubadour. Her sixth release, *Break the Spell*, on her own label, Rubberneck Records, is a mindful collection of intimate and thoughtful songs with subtle, introspective lyrics that expand in meaning with repeated listening. In "Before You Leave," a testament to grief and loss, she sings, "Every star at night is a beating heart/That someday will fall/Young and old they are bright/and make a grand exit."

Ellis paints lyrical imagery that is simple yet poetic. She described her process in a phone interview: "When I was writing the songs on *Break the Spell*, I felt a sense of clarity and openness with every moment being intentional, culminating in a cohesive journey."

Handsome and angular with a fringe of brown hair that almost disguises her piercing blue eyes, Ellis walks on stage, flashes a bashful grin and does what she does best: singing her heart out every single time. She has a lovely voice, guitar chops and a graceful songwriting style; however, there is something about her live performance that is transformational. The sum is greater than the parts, and she is amazing.

When asked about live performing, she said, "I try to get out of my own way, to be totally present in the moment and experience." According to Ellis, this has everything to do with her Buddhist practice. With eight years on the road and a grueling touring schedule of 150 gigs annually, she is remarkably centered, approachable and real.

Portland musician Julie Cantonwine, owner of Healthy Pets Northwest, agrees. She became Ellis' road manager in April.

"Ellis pulls everything out at every show; she is genuine and entirely present for the audience," Cantonwine said. "Ellis is ordinary in a magnificent way, totally authentic and without pretense."

Recorded in New York with money borrowed from fans, *Break the Spell* was produced by Ben Wisch, whose production credits include releases by Marc Cohn and

Patty Larkin. To quote Ellis' song "How Would It Be": "What if loving what you have is everything?" To Ellis, it is everything. She loves what she does.

—Dale Schiff

Accelerate

R.E.M. • Warner

In 2000, U2 released the comfortably familiar *All That You Can't Leave Behind* to win back the hearts and minds of disillusioned fans soured by the clubby overtones of 1997's *Pop*. Eight years later, after a decade of mostly mid-tempo balladry and oft-unspectacular experimentation, R.E.M.



Ellis performs May 13 at Mississippi Studios.

is attempting a similar move, cranking up the guitars, as well as the lyrical intensity, in a bid to become Your Second Favorite Resurrected Alt-Rock Band from the '80s and '90s. Their application: the lean, mean audio fireball *Accelerate*.

I almost required chiropractic help after a nasty whiplash double-take at my boombox as the impossibly dense guitars of the excellently titled opener, "Living Well Is the Best Revenge," filled my kitchen, thinking perhaps I'd forgotten to remove a particularly noisy new disc. Soon enough Michael Stipe's familiar yelp, sounding as if he was being forced at gunpoint to spit out lyrics as quickly as he possibly could, joined the ferocious fray and alerted me that, hell yes indeed, this was the new R.E.M.

"Man-Sized Wreath," "Supernatural Super-serious" and "Hollow Man," aggressively upbeat all, follow breathlessly, rounding out the most rollicking first four tracks ever on an R.E.M. record. (Argue that, fanatics!) The remaining seven songs aren't quite as ridiculously sublime; there are high points aplenty and only a couple of less-than-riveting numbers ("Sing for the Submarine" nearly sinks the latter half of the disc for me), but neither of those as close to embarrassing as half of 2001's subpar snoozefest *Reveal*.

The cryptic haze of

Stipe's oft-baffling lyrics clears occasionally for an urgent call to arms. However, the battle cries that resonate the most are those tempered with a sense of playful fun. "Throw it on the fire, throw it in the air, kick it out on the dancefloor like you just don't care," Stipe encourages exuberantly on "Man-Sized Wreath."

"Death is pretty final, I'm collecting vinyl, I'm gonna DJ at the end of the world," Stipe promises on the album's triumphant B-52's-on-steroids closer, "I'm Gonna DJ." With R.E.M.'s newly energized frontman at the turntable helm, that is one party I want to attend.

—Jim Thompson 10

R.E.M.'s audio fireball *Accelerate* will win back disillusioned fans.