

RE-INVENTING ANI DIFRANCO

By LLUVIA MULVANEY-STANAK

Vanity Fair has likened her voice to “the murmur of a lover who knows every last secret and decides to stay.” The UK feminist rag *The F-Word* wrote “she writes snappy, clever lyrics and memorable music.” *Rolling Stone* called one of her last albums “powerful listening for anyone struggling to make sense of a seemingly capsizing world.”

Who murmurs? Who is

snappy and clever? Who can make the world (and colored money too) make sense? Ms. Righteous Babe – Ani DiFranco.

Long-term fans to new fans: brace yourself. It’s a new year. That means there is a new Ani album. And this one, kids, is not for the faint of fans. Her 16th full-length disc is called *Educated Guess*. Wanting to make a clear break from her band-oriented work of the past five years, she has put a new definition to “solo project.”

It is complete Ani. She

wrote it. She sang lead. She played all the instruments. She sang back up. She mixed it. She drew the artwork. This is as solo as you can get.

Fans will be jarred a bit because of all this. The cutting yet smooth sounds of past albums are gone. *Educated Guess* sounds like an echo of *Little Plastic Castle* and *Dilate*, with some hard-hitting first-person lessons learned from love. It also has the maturity, growth, and musical experimentation that are reminiscent of *Evolve*.

DiFranco has unleashed her new reinvention of herself on this album. If you are aching for the solo sounds and the “fuck you” of *Untouchable Face* you will have to settle with the subtle “Bubble” that has lines like: “I hated to pop the bubble of me and you / but it only held enough oxygen for a trip or two.” More than one track has themes about men – something that her sometimes-rabid lesbian/bi audience might cringe at. But if you listen closely, you will hear that she feels like she is drowning – she is tired of taking care of men. Is this hope for her queer followers? Or just another reflective composition about a chapter in her life?

A majority of the lyrical content of *Educated Guess*, both in the spoken word and some songs, speaks to the state of the world: patriotism, feminism,

social and individual responsibility in our political world, all topics and messages that the disillusioned, the sleeping and even the agitators could do well with a listen.

For passion, inspiration, even healing – for the sheer respect that Ani DiFranco has earned and long deserved – pick this album up, let it run through a few times, and it is bound to make even the most skeptical get that “new” Ani chill. ▼

Lluvia Mulvaney-Stanak enjoys Ani DiFranco’s music as often as possible in Burlington. She is also the co-director of Outright Vermont.

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