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MUSIC

New Albums Feature Mbongwana Star, Karen Dalton Covers and Zella Day

Playlist

By JON PARELES MAY 29, 2015



The Arizona singer-songwriter Zella Day takes some cues from Lana del Rey. Credit Alexandra Valenti

Zella Day

KICKER

[Zella Day](#), a 20-year-old singer-songwriter, makes broad-stroke, all-or-nothing pop on “Kicker” (Hollywood). “Kicker” isn’t Ms. Day’s debut album; she made one locally in Arizona when she was 13, and has continued writing songs ever since. Taking some cues from Lana del Rey, she sings about desire and self-destruction, about pleasure bound up with addiction, betrayal and surrender. She sometimes draws on Ms. del Rey’s slurred vocal phrasing and film-score nostalgia, too.

But her music is far more fortified. Ms. Day arrives with reinforcements: the booming drums that pace each majestic chorus, the orchestras or massed keyboards and guitars that loom up on cue as her voice thickens and quivers. Her lyrics grasp for archetypal resonances with titles like “East of Eden” and “Sweet Ophelia,” or they get down to basics as in “High,” which opens, “We are high, I’m in love.” There’s ample calculation on this album, but also a hint of genuine darkness behind each treacherous romance.

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