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**Grind Reviews**

With her single 'Bcuz I Luv U' already gaining attention (not to mention airplay), Arika Kane has definitely hit the ground running for her self-titled debut album. The Connecticut-born singer, who comes from a musical family, certainly shows her pedigree with this 15-track album while paying stylistic homage to influences including Mariah Carey and Whitney Houston. Wrapping her voice up in a soulful delivery with a pop twist Arika Kane has the potential to truly make a name for herself. From the outset her coupling of head-nodding beats, a clear and crisp vocal and an undeniable edge come to the fore with tracks like 'Make It' and 'Whatcha Waitin 4.' While the single stands out and gets extra love with two bonus remixes this album is about more than just one strong track as she shows a slower feel on the rich 'Here With Me.' Other smooth moments include the fine '4 The Lovers' which comes across refreshingly as Arika Kane turns her back on the almost-yelling style of R&B singing that seems to have taken hold of late to favor a slow and soothing style. Truly soulful, and with some strong tracks in her arsenal, Arika Kane uses her debut to showcase her undeniable vocal talents while the production keeps pace throughout. While the two remixes of 'Bcuz I Luv U' could perhaps have been left for the single release they don't detract from the overall feel of this strong debut and, with the first quarter of 2010, being relatively light on R&B releases so far this could just keep fans entertained as spring takes hold.

**Arika Kane - Arika Kane**

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Ladies are often over-looked in hip-hop in favor of their male counterparts, but redressing the balance a little comes this 20-track collection of tracks mixed by Japan's DJ Mika. Running across the U.S. map this selection sees contributions from MCs hailing from Cali to New York and down South too. With a host of unknown names this collection plants a flag for female rappers on their grind and has some real highlights too. Kim D comes strong on 'Love For Hip-Hop' while elsewhere Ebony Eyez' 'St. Louis Woman' brings some midwest flavor to the table. 'Mr. Fix It' brings some commercial flavor from Florida as DQ aka Drama Queen uses the Autotune to good effect while Evil Eye drops a solid freestyle over Big L's 'Platinum Plus.' Mala Reignz addresses all "the lovable haters" on 'OMG' while Chevy Blue comes hard on 'Shortie' and Femcee delivers over a soul-tinted backing on 'Dynasty.' Forget the soft focus, R&B tinted raps of the mainstream's female MCs and check this for some true underground hip-hop. Ladies stand up!

### Females Of The Rap Game - We Got Lyrics Too

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Duck Down records are already upping the ante this year with yet another solid, straight-up hip hop release. This time, the interestingly named, Marco Polo and Ruste Juxx step up to the plate with their album, 'The Execution.' Showing that they mean business right away the album opens with a blazing intro featuring DJ Revolution before moving seamlessly into the scratch assisted, DJ Revolution featuring 'Death Penalty.' Taking a slight breather with the still solid 'Rearview' Marco Polo and Ruste Juxx are once again joined in the studio as Heltah Skeltah's Rock is joined by

Freddie Foxx to offer some trademark hardcore bars. While Sean Price also guests on the surprisingly dope 'F\*ckin Wit A Gangster' it is Black Moon who come through to assist on what is possibly the strongest cut, 'Let's take A Sec.' This is 100% single-release material (can we get some vinyl on that one?) and should blow up spots this year. The beats throughout this 12-track album bump with a strong New York flavor as Marco Polo and Ruste Juxx drop lyrics to match, and stylistically recall classic moments from the likes of the Diggin In The Crates crew, or label-mates Smif N Wessun. The street-based rhymes and hardcore stances may not be new to hip-hop, but it works here as this duo come with a veteran's swagger that is sure to please those looking for a slice of authentic East Coast street-hop. Due out at the end of March be sure to mark this one down if you are a fan of classic '90s hardcore hip-hop.

### Marco Polo and Ruste Juxx - The Execution

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A year and a half in the making and at last Rob Swift makes a return with his album 'The Architect' opening with a cinematic 'Overture' and 'Introduction,' Rob Swift brings his turntable skills to bear on the title track as he shows that you don't need an MC to make hip-hop music. With a breaks and cut up sample basis Rob Swift's 'The Architect' could readily see it's appeal transfer beyond traditional hip-hop circles and to a broader spectrum. 'Principio' sees Breez Evahflowin step to the mic to become the sole rapper called by Rob for this 18-track album. While Breez Evahflowin makes a return on 'Ultimo' the focus is certainly on Rob Swift's skills as a producer and DJ. Whether it is the beat juggling of 'Sound The Horn' or the vintage feel of the various 'Movements' it is clear that Rob has lost none of the edge that has seen him recognized as a pioneer of turntablism. However, where many turntable-based albums can readily descend into train-spotting territory as the DJs seem intent on impressing one-another rather than providing something for the non-DJ too, Rob Swift maintains a *musicality* that makes 'The Architect' worthwhile for even the newcomer to turntablism. By cutting breaks, tones, stabs, vocal snippets and more into his mix, Rob Swift is able to keep the soundscape interesting without the need to bring a wordsmith in on each track. Overall 'The Architect' sees Rob Swift show how close hip-hop can be to classical music as he creates movements and genuinely inspiring aural patterns across the length of the album. Elsewhere tracks such as 'D.R.E.W.' use a satisfyingly familiar boom-bap feel to tie in with Rob's hip-hop roots, while the 'Lower Level' section incorporates both worlds into one. By pushing the envelope for turntablism while still maintaining his core duties as a DJ Rob Swift has created a true musical masterpiece in 'The Architect.' Sure to get some strong critical acclaim, this album deserves some love from those both within and without the traditional hip-hop circles as Rob Swift comes off with hip-hop's answer to Holst's 'The Planets.'

### Rob Swift - The Architect

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