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‘Tuned In’ review: Pretty Poison lives on in Jade Starling’s ‘Captive’

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Jade Starling

**“Captive”
Rating: 3-1/2**

Those who wish dance-pop music still sounded like 1987’s “Catch Me (I’m Falling)” by one-hit wonder Pretty Poison might be surprised to know that act is still chugging along.

Only now, the Pretty Poison duo of Jade Starling and Whey Cooler are just going by the frontwoman’s name. And the sound isn’t anything like 1987 anymore.

Starling’s new “Captive” is still electronic dance music, and there are still sweet little pop songs at the root of many of the tracks. Yet the new songs are muscled-up for the new millennium, thanks to producers and collaborators who have worked with the likes of Lady Gaga, Kylie Minogue, Rihanna, Selena Gomez, Kelly Clarkson and Nicki Minaj.

The production of “Captive” feels like it might have been a bit of a tug-of-war between Starling/Cooler and the outsiders, with radio-friendly, pop-oriented tracks dominating the first half of the release and club songs taking over from there.

Despite the bracing wash of electricity on early cut “Only Love,” for example, Starling’s simple refrain of “It’s only la-la love-love” is the centerpiece. Also, she’s the linchpin of the sprawling romanticism of “Love of a Lifetime” and uplifting bounce of “Spontaneous.” Plus Starling’s naturalistic vocals give a touch of humanity to the explosive “Insomniak,” and the driving oomph of “Better and Better” would be lost without her.

Starling’s pop voice eventually collapses under the weight of overzealous arrangements, and “Captive” caves in and goes deep into clubland – reverberations and pounding beats pushing her ever-less-important vocals into the aural crevices.

All of the songs have serviceable-to-significant appeal - some of them more appropriate for pop outlets in Europe or maybe drag shows, others more suitable for club-kid partying in the wee hours of the morning.

