



ALICIA KEYS

The Element of Freedom

Producers: *various*

MBK Entertainment/J Records

Release Date: *Dec. 15*

"I thought love would be my cure,"

Alicia Keys sings on her fourth album. "But now it's my disease." Let's hope there's no cure for it. On "The Element of Freedom," Keys delivers a musically understated but richly passionate set of soul paeans to being in love, out of love, lovelorn and pining for her man to return. As usual, her vocals are spot-on throughout, especially when they're layered into evocative choral pieces. The percussion-free "That's How Strong My Love Is" is a change-of-pace standout, as is the gospel-flavored "How It Feels to Fly." An early-'80s Prince flair is heard on "This Bed," while "Like the Sea" drowns in its own metaphors. But fans who enjoyed her collaboration with Jay-Z on the song "Empire State of Mind" will find the reworked "Empire State of Mind (Part II)" refreshing. The guest features—Beyoncé joining in for the girl-power anthem "Put It in a Love Song" and Drake on "Un-Thinkable (I'm Ready)"—are well-deployed. But they hardly eclipse Keys' performances in her pursuit of "Freedom."—GG