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HOW

TikTok

IS CHANGING HOW WE DISCOVER MUSIC

WRITTEN BY CHRISTINA SMITH

You said you'd only go on TikTok for a minute... now it's 1am. It's been an hour.

You've seen the same dance routine so many times you could perform it with your eyes closed, and now you're glued to a random live stream. We've all been there. It's addictive...but we love it. And even though we all vow to delete the app whenever we view our screen time, **statistics show that TikTok currently holds around one billion users who, on average, actively spend around eight hundred and fifty minutes per month on the app.**

Given these figures, it's clear to see that TikTok is dominating the social media landscape...and with this power, comes great ability to change how we consume media, and what we do with it...especially for the music industry.

From choreographed dance routines, to viral memes, music on TikTok is what keeps the app so successful with its users and, according to Junkee journalist Jules Leferve, success on this app has also proven to be replicated in the charts; **Lil Nas X, Lizzo, Olivia Rodrigo, Jack Harlow** and so many more have been boosted by trending audio tracks.

While you and your friend both simultaneously hum the same five lyrics of a song you don't even know the name of, **stats in 2021 showed that over 175 songs that have trended on TikTok also charted on the Billboard Hot 100**, which was reported to be twice as many than that of the previous year. For music producers, it's far from breaking news that TikTok is becoming so effective in changing the way we discover and consume music. And

for artists such as singer Olivia Rodrigo, this was especially apparent. Star of *High School Musical: The Series*, Olivia Rodrigo's song 'All I want' first became a memorable trending audio on TikTok in the summer of 2020. Most famously, in January 2021, her own song 'Driver's Licence' quickly followed suit and has since been used on the app over a million times. **At just eighteen years old, the actress-turned-singer celebrated three UK 'top 20 tracks of 2021' in Spotify's 'wrapped' annual year in review.** TikTok is arguably to be thanked for her sudden success, as trending audios can help artists to immediately boost their songs across the platform, reaching huge audiences all over the world in a matter of hours.

"The last 12 months have provided so many music moments, inspired our community of one billion and shown the world that music starts and lives on TikTok"

Last year, **TikTok's newsroom reported that over a whopping 75% of TikTok users say that they have discovered new artists on the platform**, in addition to the **63%** of users who heard new music on the app that they have never heard before - currently making it the number one place for music discovery, more than through other digital platforms, streaming services and friends. These figures are only expected to continue to grow and reports have suggested that it can largely be thanks to TikTok's algorithm method (aka; the 'for you page'). The 'for you page' effectively works by showing users content that is somewhat

Olivia Rodrigo
SOUR





Olivia Rodrigo
SOUR

personalised to them, based generally on their recent app activity (such as their searches, likes and comments) and are not necessarily uploaded by accounts that they choose to follow. This feature helps artists reach their target audience, by putting their trust into the algorithm that they will appear on the FYP (For You Page) of users who have actively interacted with similar content.

However, according to a recent BBC News article, these figures are also raising concerns among artists that they are 'missing out on a big part of their audience' if they are not present or consistently active on the creative social media platform. British dance-pop artist Becky Hill told BBC News, "I don't think people know the pressure there is on artists to go viral" This worry has led to many artists putting the pressure on themselves to ensure that TikTok has become a vital part of their social media routine, particularly those looking to emerge into the music scene, in the hopes of getting noticed and attracting their target audience. In a time where TikTok is a key part of music discovery, presence on the app is now more important than ever, and artists are at risk of losing listeners if they tune out of the app.

What does this mean for the future of music on TikTok?

If you haven't already been convinced to become a social media musical sensation, then TikTok's latest plans could sway you. As of March 2022, TikTok announced that they were launching a new platform 'SoundOn'. According to Talking Influence online, SoundOn is an 'all-in-one platform for music marketing and distribution' and will reportedly allow artists to upload their music to TikTok and effectively earn royalties when it is used in videos by creators. For up and coming musicians, this news is like music to their ears. This feature will provide artists with the opportunity to gain earnings on their viral content and boost their careers within such a competitive industry.

In addition to this, in August 2021 Tiktok launched 'Find the Unsigned' - a new campaign in order to "shine a light" on talented users of the app, who are yet to be recognised as signed artists. The 'Find The Unsigned' campaign featured billboards, located near iconic music venues across major cities in the UK, which included QR codes to unlock an in-app page dedicated to showcasing a range of unsigned artists on TikTok.

Together with SoundOn, Find the Unsigned supports new artists hoping to break into the music industry, by offering them a platform to showcase their talents, attract an audience and earn royalties when their sound is recognised.

"Music is a central part of TikTok and every day our global community are discovering new sounds and genres, and helping artists build fanbases and achieve success"

Return of the Mac

Not only has TikTok provided opportunities for up-and-coming artists, but the use of nostalgic classics have also become a popular trend for TikTok creators. According to TikTok's 2021 music report, your parent's favourite tracks such as; George Michael's 'Careless Whisper', Earth, Wind and Fire's 'Let's Groove' and the Bee Gee's 'More Than A Woman' were all part of the conclusive list of the top ten classic tracks used on TikTok in the US. Over 40 years since its initial release in 1977, More Than a Woman - described by TikTok as 'the ideal soundtrack for moments that boost serotonin' - was remixed in 2021 by British music producer SG Lewis. The track, 'More Than A Woman - SG's Paradise Edit', has been used over 300,000 times on TikTok since its release, and has also been made available for listening on streaming platforms, such as Spotify and YouTube.

As well as these golden oldies, it was also reported that our 2021 listening history similarly saw the return of nineties and noughties chart toppers (aka; 'comeback tracks'). TikTok's list of the top ten most used comeback tracks of the year included songs such as MKTO'S 'Classic', Britney Spears' 'Gimme More', and of course topping first place, Destiny's Child's 'Bills, Bills, Bills'. For people who love their throwbacks, or those who are too young to have heard them before, TikTok continues to provide its users with a range of music.

Whether it's shining a spotlight on up and coming artists, or helping bring back the forgotten club classics, music on TikTok is what makes the app so successful. And it's pretty clear to see that the platform is only at the beginning of its plan to shape the way we discover and enjoy music.

Taylor Swift Is Re-Recording Her Albums: Here's What Her Fans Think

WRITTEN BY KATIE THOMAS

With the unpredictable March weather, the sun perfectly shines off the newly formed puddle, creating a flawless rainbow to shine through the window. The air is flooded with the soft tones of Taylor Swift playing off the laptop, it feels like spring is in full force with the sound of laughter echoing from the street. To me, this is exactly what listening to Taylor Swift feels like.

Swift, from the age of 15 has gone from writing music on her 'bedroom floor' to selling out stadiums around the world and that is truly inspiring. However, Taylor Swift has not had it easy, and understanding fame at such a young age can be tough, Taylor signed a record deal with Big Machine Records where she essentially gave full ownership to the record label. All her albums, music videos and the rights to use her music however they wanted, essentially, Swift had no power.

Regardless of the fact Taylor Swift's career was being controlled by her record label, she wanted to create music for her fans, within a Time interview, she expresses how she wants her music to show people 'how they should feel and how it's acceptable for them to feel.' Taylor herself, has stated that people crave 'connection and comfort' when referring to music, so to hear Sammy, a long-time listener of Taylor's art describes the significance of her music as a 'form of escapism' is something Taylor should be proud to achieve.

Through every album Taylor creates, for not only her fans but for herself, we unlock a new experience. Speaking to Ella, who has been a fan of Taylor Swift for 'over 10 years,' she explains the impact that Taylor has made on her life and the relationships that have grown because of the artist. Ella expresses that 'Taylor's music brought me and my sister a lot closer when we were younger, and I have made so many friends online through our love of her music.'

Taylor Swift creates a sense of realness to her fame, with every music video, album or even documentary, we as fans feel she creates a personal relationship with us. With Swift even reiterating the same point, stating she has a close and intimate relationship with her fans, she suggests that 'there is an element to my fan base where we feel like we grew up together.'

Whether it be from her first release of her self-titled Taylor Swift album, all the way to her latest album Evermore, Ella articulates that 'there's always a



“Taylor fundamentally writes the soundtrack to our lives”



song you can relate to.’ Taylor fundamentally writes the soundtrack to our lives, listening to her music has been described as ‘reading a page from your diary. Taylor herself has communicated this same feeling, within Taylor’s 2020 documentary *Miss Americana*, she explains ‘I’ll be going through something, write an album about it, and then it’ll come out and sometimes it’ll just coincide with what they are going through.’

Throughout Taylor’s career in the music industry, she has adapted her style and genre with every album. Primarily, Swift was known as a Country artist however, throughout the years, she has evolved into a pop star. With the release of *Folklore* and *Evermore* in 2020, fans enjoy the ‘mature’ sound, with *Sammy* expressing how she believes her 2020 releases ‘have a lot more depth to them.’ However, throughout her whole music career, one thing that always remains is her niche. Delving into her documentary on Netflix, Taylor Swift begins to talk about the importance of a niche when it comes to creating music, in which she declares ‘my storytelling is what it is for me,’ and that is what makes Taylor Swift so loveable and relatable.

Because of her ever-growing success with her music career, so many of us were perplexed and stunned to see Taylor Swift compile a lengthy but heartfelt Tumblr post to her fans. Within this online post, we see Swift explain how Scooter Braun had acquired the rights to her first six albums through purchasing Taylor’s label Big Machine Records. Swift wrote ‘[f]or years I asked, pleaded for a chance to own my work. Instead, I was given an opportunity to sign back up to Big Machine Records and ‘earn’ one album back at a time, one for every new one I turned in.’ Thankfully, Taylor denied their proposition, however, this meant Taylor Swift had absolutely no rights over her music, earning nothing off the albums she worked so hard for.

Ella expressed that she was ‘in utter shock when I first heard the drama about Taylor and her old music.’ It has always been public knowledge of Scoot Braun’s affiliation with a handful of musical artists such as Justin Bieber, Demi Lovato, and Taylor Swift, with Valiant CEO even labelling Braun as ‘one of America’s most successful entrepreneurs in the entertainment industry.’ Justin Bieber, who is publicly associated with Scooter Braun, came out against Swift on social media and wrote ‘[f]or you to take it to social media and get people to hate on scooter isn’t fair.’ *Sammy* expressed her disbelief

through affirming that she knew ‘Scooter Braun because of Justin Bieber, so to hear he is one of the main reasons for Taylor losing rights to her own music is surprising.’

‘A sorrowful goodbye to six impactful and nostalgic albums’

With Taylor Swift quickly turning Big Machine Records over to Republic Records who Swift has said ‘thankfully, I am now signed to a label that believes I should own anything I create.’ Therefore, Swift suggested to CBS News that she intends to re-record her six albums. Within her contract with her previous record label, it stated she could record albums one through six all over again starting in November 2020. Taylor decided to call her albums and songs the same exact name however, beside it says (Taylor’s Version), she explains this to Seth Meyers cheerfully stating, ‘when something says (Taylor’s Version) next to it, that means I own it, which is exciting.’

But how is this possible? Taylor re-recording her albums essentially means she will be creating new masters, which she will officially have full ownership of. Swift alludes to this through claiming ‘I was the one who made this music first, I can just make it again.’ Every song in her re-recordings will however have to have minor changes, this could imply instrumental alterations, singing in a different key, or even a lyrical change. Talking to *People Magazine*, Taylor emphasises her main goal for her re-recordings was just to create ‘the same but better’ and explains how the process of her re-records allowed her to go back and include the ‘initial melodies that [she] thought for these songs.’ Ella and *Sammy* were just two out of millions of Swifties having to say a sorrowful goodbye to six impactful and ‘nostalgic’ albums, however, Ella exudes contentment for Taylor, suggesting that by ‘knowing it helps Taylor Swift I was excited and ready to support her in this new endeavour.’

‘A moment in history for music’

Personally, I had never heard of an artist accomplishing this before, and apparently neither had a lot of her fans, *Sammy* effortlessly explained it as a ‘moment in history for music’ further detailing that she felt seeing ‘Taylor taking a stand for what she created was sort of beautiful.’ Because of this moment in history, Taylor got to witness both

Fearless (Taylor's version) and Red (Taylor's Version) reach number 1 in the UK charts.

Due to Taylor coming forward against her record label, it did however create a stir within the industry with the public finally becoming aware of the corruption and misconduct that is involved within the entertainment industry. Whilst appearing on Late Night with Seth Meyers, Swift explains how 'most of your favourite artists do not own their work,' thus, finally fans like Sammy eventually understand how 'many artists get messed over by their record label.'

Alongside Taylor's re-recordings of Fearless (Taylor's Version) which came out in April 2021 and Red (Taylor's Version) in early November 2021, we are lucky enough to receive additional songs that Swift likes to call 'From the Vault'. Within her re-recording of Fearless, we accumulated six extra songs, while her most recent release of Red produced nine vault tracks, these songs were initially written for when both Fearless and Red were originally released, however, got cut from the albums. Ella expressed that she 'was over the moon' to hear new songs from Taylor Swift, she explains that 'Taylor's style in music has changed a lot throughout the years, so it was exciting to hear songs that fit her old style again.' Unanimously, 'Mr Perfectly Fine' from the vault within Fearless (Taylor's Version) quickly became a fan favourite, reaching number 11 on the Rolling Stones Top 100.

After understanding the issues surrounding Swift, fans stressed the importance of not supporting Scooter Braun by refusing to listen to albums he now has full control over. Ella depicts it from a 'moral standpoint' arguing that as fans we should not be aiding people who 'stole her music from her.' To avoid this, fans have found themselves removing the old versions of songs from a playlist and replacing it with Taylor's version, some even taking it a step further by hiding Swift's old albums on Spotify. With only two re-recorded albums out as of yet, fans like Sammy have a mixed opinion on this matter, while she wants to support Taylor, she is a fan for a reason, and thus, enjoys her music and wants to listen, Sammy argues 'I obviously try to avoid them' but continues to state that she 'won't turn it off if it starts playing.'

With fans having full support of Swift, controversy over using her old songs on TikTok has arisen. While most people are aware of Taylor's problem regarding Scooter Braun, some are not. TikTok is

a music driven platform where people can create short videos from 30 seconds to 10 minutes, and upon this app many of Swift's songs have gone viral, including 'All Too Well' and 'Wildest Dreams.'

Ella explains what arises when users on the app use Taylor's old music such as the original recording of 'All Too Well,' stating that 'people flood the comments telling the user they should use Taylor's version instead of her old stuff.' While participating within the trend of using the song 'Wildest Dreams', TikTok user @ScottySire, was confronted by a swarm of Swifties, informing him of his misuse of her music. Sammy mentions that 'once brought to their attention people seem quick to apologise or recreate the video with Taylor's version,' which is exactly what @ScottySire did.

'Taylor Swift likes to tease her fans with little easter eggs'

With every release, be it a new re-recorded song, a new music video or even a new re-recorded album, Taylor Swift likes to tease her fans with little easter eggs, which has now become a 'tradition' with Swift and her fans. Her main reason for initially starting these easter eggs was because she 'wanted to do something that incentivised fans to read the lyrics.'

When it comes to Swift's re-recordings, the most recent easter egg that Ella seemed to pick up on, is thought to be for her third album to be re-recorded and released. Ella explains that she found this theory through her friends and other fans on Twitter, she describes what they found stating 'Taylor put her 'Red (Taylor's version) on CD and on her online store she was charging \$20.10 and used a purple colour for the price. Many fans think this is in nod to her Speak Now album which was released in 2010 and has Taylor in a purple dress.' Obviously, this is all fan theory, and nothing has been confirmed yet, but knowing Taylor Swift, this definitely something she would do to joke with her fans.

However, one easter egg the fans did spot that came true was presented within her 'I Bet You Think About Me' music video, released in November 2021. Within this vault track music video, the Swifties paid close attention when Taylor drew an equal sign with her fingers into a cake, many believed to be in reference to Ed Sheeran and his new album title. Not only that, Ed himself dropped a few hints, Sammy picked up on these clues from Sheeran, she states 'he had her name on a

jacket which had a joker and a queen on it.' This information would seem a bit underwhelming if that is all we had to go off, but Sheeran had announced earlier he was working on a remix of his song 'The Joker and The Queen' with an American artist. Sure enough, in February 2022 Taylor Swift and Ed Sheeran collaborated on 'The Joker and The Queen' together.

'Taylor Swift is there to tell a story'

Swift will always mean something special to fans like Sammy and Ella, her music was and still is a place to show us how to live life, with lyrics being a 'coded form of gossip,' and who doesn't love that. Throughout Swift's career, she was always portrayed in the media as someone you should be embarrassed to admit you listen to, even Sammy had mentioned how she used to 'secretly listen to 'Speak Now' and 'Fearless.'" However, with the apparent newfound love for Taylor Swift that has been shown on social media, through thousands of TikToks and Tweets supporting her re-record, Ella believes 'more people are becoming Taylor Swift fans because of her re-recordings...it seemed everyone was talking about it and wanting to listen to her new albums and from the vault songs.' And I for one am here for it, more people need to hear her melodies, the blissful tones singing about love, family, heartbreak, and overall life. Sammy articulates Taylor's importance stating, 'I will forever be grateful for her and her music' and understanding that Sammy is not the only person that feels this way about Taylor Swift is crucial. Whether it be her new music or her re-recorded music, Taylor Swift is there to tell a story, and we will always be there to listen.

Signing off, Forever & Always (Katie's Version)

Taylor Swift
Red (Taylor's Version)



Camilla Cabello
Concert for Ukraine

CONCERT FOR UKRAINE

WRITTEN BY CARLIE GRIFFITHS

War; to most it seems like something of the past, a collection of horrific stories passed down through generations, a thick part of history with the nagging hope that it would never become a modern memory.

Yet for others, they are faced with the harsh reality of current life being compressed full of death, panic and loss. Ukrainian people are currently prisoners inside their houses, living in fear of their lives with their world, houses and jobs being destroyed around them. Living in rubble and torn apart by the devastating decisions of leaving the only country they have ever known or risk losing their lives in consequence of Russia's invasion.

In these dark days the rest of the world has held out a candle to them and offered words of comfort, a seemingly small gesture which has definitely not gone unnoticed. It has been recognised that more needs to be done to help the strong nation refusing to be stripped of their homes.

Radio host Amanda Holden of UK's Heart radio was reached out to on social media by Katarina, a Ukrainian woman currently surviving within the heart of the Ukrainian war, who is taking shelter with her children in an underground shelter. Holden saw this as an opportunity to use her platforms and public voice as a way of broadcasting those 'hidden voices' that without celebrity recognition would go unheard.

In order to further help those in Ukraine and widen the awareness reached by many, including those reached by Holden's podcast, Heart advertised that they would be holding a one-night-only concert

named 'Concert for Ukraine' and encouraged celebrity singers to get in touch as a way of further expanding the reach, drawing in fans and raising as much money for the cause as possible.

Grammy nominee and regular candidate for the UK number one, singer Anne-Marie, "jumped" at the chance to take part in Heart's 'Concert for Ukraine.' She explained to Heart's Dev Griffin, reporter and correspondent, along with Sian Wellby, on the night how: "We all want to help, we all want to help as much as possible and sometimes you feel helpless," adding how "when this happened, I was like, 'Well, I can sing!' So hopefully me being here helps in some way raise a lot of money." The ideal celebrity becomes a public figure that is looked up to by many and can help in seemingly any circumstances.

We all want to help, we all want to help as much as possible, and sometimes you feel helpless - Anne Marie

Theorists Lisa Ann Richey and Alexandra Budabin wrote a research article within the field of 'Celebrities in International Affairs' (2016) that celebrities have a complex relationship with the general public which aids goals of humanitarianism, development and advocacy which causes celebrity coverage to often be more influential to the public than political and government figures.

With blogger Daniel O'Connor summing up the impact of celebrity by concluding that we see a more relatable side of celebrity than a hidden political figure as in the end they are "just like me and you, they eat, sleep and breathe, and yet

somehow they are at the centre of attention for a lot of people... [and] are held in high regard by others in their community, and this is good for salespeople and companies ... [and] advertising purposes, they know that these people are looked up to in some regard by their audience, and so if they endorse their product then they increase sales.'

This idea of drawing in audiences and increasing sales has the same premise for charity events such as 'Concert for Ukraine.' Homeless Charity Crisis highlights this perfectly by explaining how celebrities allow them 'to help...raise awareness' not only through them directly but also through their own public platform. This further emphasises a celebrity's "human drive" to help others, with the added benefit of bringing an already large and developed fan base into the mix which will in theory drive donations towards the cause.

This want and ability to help through music resonated with a lot of the performing community who knew that their talents and fan bases could draw positive attention towards the crisis. Musicians and performing artists united for one night in a two hour fundraising concert in order to show their collective support for the people of Ukraine, which in total raised a whopping £12.2 million. Airing live on Heart's Global Payer and ITV, the full line-up was huge with artists performing throughout the evening, notably it included stars such as Ed Sheeran, Camila Cabello, Snow Patrol and Emeli Sandé, with Sandé highlighting the power that music has to 'unite us.'

Music allows people to "expand as a creative person," giving people an 'identity and the freedom' to be themselves

As well as celebrity's impact and input, music is a key help in its own right. Seeing evidence of music's impact is key in understanding its ability to help. Theorists Graham Welch, Michele Biasutti, Jennifer MacRitchie, Gary E. McPherson and Evangelos Himonides composed a chapter entitled The Impact of Music on Human Development and Well-Being (2020) which focussed on music's ability to 'have a positive impact on health and well-being'. Seeing this in action, testimonies from young people from Charity Youth Music (2020) highlight music's direct power to change lives.

The individuals involved in this charity's programme highlight how music allows people to "expand as a creative person," giving people an 'identity and the freedom' to be themselves. Looking back to Emile Sandé's key statement made at 'Concert

for Ukraine,' Writers for The Benefits of Listening to Music (2020) found that 'the most important functions of music is to create a feeling of cohesion or social connectedness' with emphasis on how 'music remains a powerful way of uniting people'. This togetherness can be achieved in seemingly the most simple of ways, this includes; national anthems, protest songs, hymns, love songs and, collective collaborations.

Music remains a powerful way of uniting people - The Benefits of Listening to Music (2020)

The latter resonates with the current war happening within Ukraine. Palladium Private (2018) the private mental health provider highlights how 'for centuries, music has played an important role when it comes to our ability to cope through life's greatest highs and lows.' The people of Ukraine are now in need of escape and support more than ever. The 'Concert for Ukraine' was able to raise funds and awareness for this, but it is also key to know how music can go further to help everyone involved.

Ukrainian people have a deep-rooted history with music. The culture has a devotion to original Ukrainian songs and traditional music which is mentioned by Theorist Rudnitsky (1943) to be something that 'lies in their blood' - further highlighting that music is intertwined within their idea of culture.

Folk music remains as a vital part of Ukrainian culture today, from ritual songs, ballads and historical songs, the beauty of a cappella and the richness of folk instruments, to church anthems and secular music of the grand opera. The voice of the people is communicated clearly through song. Popular music does hold its importance, yet with the rich history of Ukrainian people, these are the people who understand Music!

Poetry performed as lyrically as song, Ukrainian Poet Szweczenko famously says a beautiful phrase of "nasza pisnia ne wmre, ne zahyne" which translates to 'our song will not die, not disappear.' This quote is particularly relevant within today's current war-drawing climate, highlighting the Ukrainian people's strength and giving them a universal voice which is crucial in getting their message and needs across.

Music is clearly a key part in supporting individuals and groups of people in need, through celebrity collaborations and songs which connect, music is a tool for positivity and change. Yet, despite all the help and support created through the music industry, the people of Ukraine still need more help.

It is essential for us to do our best in supporting the people of Ukraine in order for them to find an escape and feel that they have someone and somewhere to turn to.

WHAT CAN I DO?

As an individual we all have ways in which we can help. Tina Benitez-Eves Journalist for American Songwriter writes how: 'In the midst of the ongoing war in Ukraine, artists and labels are offering music and merchandise to help aid humanitarian and other needs within the country' and highlights that music is especially important to the people of Ukraine and that there are ways to support them through this medium.

The British Government have made it clear that they are to **#StandWithUkraine**, this hashtag is much more than a social media campaign, they are actively helping and encouraging the British people to do what they can to help.

You can donate to the Disasters Emergency Committee Ukraine Appeal with the UK Government matching your donation, you can go straight to a charities website which will go directly to those affected, you can even donate essential supplies, as not everyone is able to help through cash amounts. And of course, you can use your social media to share messages of support and share links to charities and donating pages for others to help! But whatever it is, raising awareness through any means is amazing and will and can help!

PLEASE FIND A LINK TO HEARTS HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CONCERT BELLOW:

<https://www.heart.co.uk/events/concert-ukraine/backstage-concert-ukraine/>

The key messages and themes within this article may have been distressing, **please reach out if you need support or are affected by any of the topics discussed above;**

[Ukraine help](#)
[Mind.org](#)
[Beyond Blue](#)



FANS ARE BECOMING DISENCHANTED BY HARRY STYLES AND IT COULD BE HIS OWN FAULT



Harry Styles
Love On Tour

WRITTEN BY HEATHER LOCKS

Standing in her kitchen adding together the ingredients for pancake mix into a bowl, Fern explains to me her current status as a Harry Styles fan: “I prefer One Direction to Harry Styles” she begins, as if setting a bold disclaimer.

Recounting her exact location, McDonalds, when the boyband lost member Zayn Malik back in 2015, she jokingly comments with a smile; “I remember because I was distraught”, however, there is a touch of brutal honesty in that statement. She continues, describing how as she matured, she became a Harry fan as he seasoned his own style of music post-Direction era. Having secured tickets back in 2019 to ‘Love On Tour’- for Harry’s second studio album from the same year, ‘Fine Line’- along with her friends, Fern was raring to see the British pop star live at the O2 arena in London. However, along came the Coronavirus pandemic, as did the cancellation of the show.

Understandably, the tour was rescheduled and cancelled, rescheduled, and cancelled multiple times, but fans became frustrated with Styles for what came after. The previously planned arena tour was scrapped and instead a shiny new stadium tour was organised, to previous ticket holders’ dismay. Fern details the way fans were told via email they would “have to re-buy tickets, but you’ll get a code” for the presale. Yes, some might see this as a fair apology for the disappointment’s fans went through, however Fern, with frustrated gestures, acts as a voice for those who instead felt let down.

She explains “I’ve been holding onto these for years”, almost shouting as though volume could express exasperation. In continuation, she references more hardcore Styles fans in that they

could have “been heartbroken by the fact they never got to see Harry Styles!” She puts down her batter-coated whisk, clearly serious now.

“It wasn’t fair for people who were excited for it and had to go through the stress of buying them again” She is clearly sympathetic for fellow fans, defending their feelings, yet detailing little of her own anger. I ask whether she repurchased the tickets for the new tour, no. “I think I just can’t be bothered to sit in a queue for tickets, also I don’t really care to go to a massive stadium gig”. She is more nonchalant when describing her own experience, demonstrating a loss of interest in the singer, even admitting

“I’m not as much of a fan as I was when I was 16”

I press for why this is. Taking a minute to organise her thoughts, Fern begins her explanation. “He’s always like: ‘I’m always thinking of the fans, they’re the best’”, she mimics disparagingly, “but actions are louder than words”. The disappointment in her voice is subtle, but its there. To have someone you admire let you down is a difficult blow to take. “It’s not hard to make a tweet... I think its just a bit of disconnect from the fans”

It has been three years since the tour was originally announced. Communication issues between Styles and his fans alongside an inevitable change





Harry Styles
Love On Tour

in tastes from maturing listeners, would make a disenchantment with the singer understandable. Wishing to delve deeper into another topic, I change the subject. I recite a quote by Mr Styles himself from a 2017 Rolling Stone interview concerning why being a fan of pop music is considered less respectable than appreciating any other genre: “who’s to say that young girls who like pop music- short for popular, right? - have worse musical taste than a 30-year-old hipster guy? That’s not up to you to say”.

Now cooking the batter on the stove, Fern divulges how she used to read about Harry in his One Direction days in ‘Girl Talk’ magazine, but not tell anyone, and listen to their songs in secret on various ‘Now... That’s What I Call Music’ albums. The way she describes it is as if she had to have an undercover life in order to enjoy One Direction, like a spy. As a young school girl, I’m sure it would have felt world-destroying with the potential threat of this secret being exposed, trying to remain ‘cool’ in front of friends. However, you would be forgiven for seeing it from a present-day perspective and viewing the whole situation as quite minor. Sexist stereotypes rear their ugly heads far too often when it comes to bashing people, for so-called ‘good’ tastes in music, especially when it comes to young women peacefully enjoying pop.

“I wouldn’t say I was a Directioner... everyone at school was like ‘ew’”

Pulling a face and altering her voice into a higher pitched tone on the final word, she parodies those who judged her. “I secretly liked them, but I wouldn’t tell anyone”, she says in a matter-of-fact way. The memory not seeming to pain her, she chuckles. Fern appears to look back on the time laughing at her younger self’s lack of confidence. However, it would be hard not to have sympathy for young girls who are shamed into hiding their music tastes. She flips the pancake.

Insightfully, Fern explains her own shame of her tastes as “internalised misogyny” based around the idea that having typically ‘girly’ interests would have been considered embarrassing, a topic spoken about more openly today fortunately. “Same with...” she pauses, rethinking her words. “I used to hate Taylor Swift, and then I realised that was because people would be like ‘Taylor Swift?’”.

Fern uses a mocking tone here, painting a picture of the social culture around liking such an artist

years previous. “But now I’m a Swiftie!”, this time her voice celebratory in nature, she is proud to own what she is interested in, no longer feeling the pressure to invent a separate ‘social’ persona. As Fern rolls and subsequently eats her pancakes, I reflect on what the life of a Harry fan must be like. It seems that being a member of that fandom as a young woman comes with plenty of judgement from those who think their alternative taste superior. ‘Pop’ music is simply just short for popular music, as stated by Harry Styles himself, yet it seems many young girls feel they cannot be open about their tastes without fear of criticism.

This impressive resilience shown by Harry Styles’ fans throughout his career, remaining supportive despite what was deemed ‘cool’ and what was not, is testament as to their dedication. However, following the ‘Love On Tour’ complications, fans have been left feeling embittered with their previous idol. This is not to say that all Harry fans have lost their love for him, but social media seems to highlight likeminded individuals.

“I’ve grown up and come to realise celebrities aren’t all that.”

The case may be that as people are getting older their tastes inevitably change, although it cannot be ignored that fans are making their disgruntled feelings with the singer known. All in all, there appears to be a disenchantment with Harry Styles following the issues around his most recent tour. Maybe some fans are of the same mind as Fern; “I’ve grown up and come to realise celebrities aren’t all that”





VIDEOGAMES & MUSIC

MORE THAN JUST BACKGROUND NOISE

WRITTEN BY IWAN MORRIS

Video-game music. Electronic beeps and boops, mind-numbing earworms. But is that all they are?

Ever since videogames began to dominate the entertainment industry at the turn of the 21st century, there's been a great deal of discussion around their cultural impact. But even now, academic discussion remains in its infancy, often concentrating on abstract discussions of 'ludology' - the art of playing games or the mechanics behind the games themselves. Whilst we dissect the individual elements of videogames; level-design, sound, gameplay loops, we rarely imagine them on their own. Not merely elements, but as important and independent as cinematography or direction in film. All of them, especially their music, deserve to be viewed as an art in and of themselves.

Music is one of the oldest forms of entertainment, it speaks to something in us, something primal, something universal. With the invention of sheet music, the record and digital distribution, not to mention the availability of tools with which to make music, it's become easier than ever for anyone to compose and distribute their own. Even as early as 1983, the arcade game 'Journey', based on the band of the same name, played an excerpt from one of their songs on an in-built cassette tape. Given how television and movies had adopted the soundtrack as a key element with which to enhance, experiment and on occasion intentionally

exclude, it was only a matter of time before videogames began to adopt them in earnest. And they did, with a vengeance. As video-game technology progressed, so did the music, from monotone, to melodic and onto full CD quality. So diverse and memorable have videogame soundtracks become, that entire genres have sprung up around emulating them, such as chiptune, and artists like Slime Girl, Savant and C418 of Minecraft fame. But even so, say you listen to 'video-game music' and many 'serious' music fans will assume that speaks to your taste, or rather a lack of it.

You might even think that as well, after all how can you separate an element from a whole? Besides, even if you did want to give video-game music a chance, it's difficult to know where to start. Well, that's where I come in, I've been playing games all my life, on everything from computers, to consoles, to my phone and arcade machines.

Throughout it all a number of games have stuck with me not just for what I saw on screen, but what I heard through the speakers. So, consider this a crash course, a beginner's guide, into how the music used to construct the world of videogames can be something more than just background noise. Videogames themselves are a vast genre, so we're going to keep it simple in our exploration of their musical component. I want to examine a few key genres and why I believe they may provide an exciting new way to listen to, study and experience music. See what images it conjures in your mind, if

you've never played the games they originate from it may even enhance the experience further.

FIGHTING GAMES

Throwing fireballs and uppercuts, leg-sweeps and tackles, all with the most outrageous outfits and craziest hairstyles. Fighting games are one of the keystone genres of video-game history; up there with the platformer, the RPG and the strategy-game. Street Fighter to Guilty Gear, Tekken to Killer Instinct watching a colourful cast of eclectic characters smashing each other's faces in awakens something primal within us all. Sure, it's not 'realistic' - but as anyone who's watched an MMA fight can tell you; realistic, no-holds-barred fighting is more boring than it is gruesome. Nobody wants to watch someone get knocked out in ten seconds, no matter how flashy it may be. Whereas in fighting games, you not only get to see the thrill of the fight lasting for minutes at a time, but also get to engage in it yourself.

The music supports this, emphasising the energy, the pace and indeed the excitement of a good fighting game. You need only look as far as the memetic anthem that is 'Guile's Theme', first introduced in Street Fighter 2 (1991). Videos putting this triumphant, horn-infused piece over everything from the vaguely impressive to the decidedly unfitting show just how much Yoko Shimomura's - the composer - has resonated amongst gamers and regular people alike. Her work on Street Fighter 2 and its successors has been revisited and remixed dozens of times by successive composers, as inextricable from the franchise as any of the characters within it. All from a woman who's supposed career would have been teaching people to play piano, had she not been recruited out of university into Capcom and composed all but three of the tracks for Street Fighter 2's soundtrack.

Shimomura is an astounding artist all on her own, and her story is a match for any major artist. Learning music in high school she originally intended to become a piano teacher, but by chance spotted adverts for Capcom's music department during a graduation event. She said in an interview with Red Bull music academy on her acceptance (with no prior composing experience), 'When I joined Capcom, I didn't know anything about composing, especially game and digital music. I was a total amateur and relied on courage and bluffing, saying and doing what I could, trying to convince them of my passion for the job.' Shimomura's compositions would come to define not only many of Capcom's major games, but also franchises such as Square Enix's 'Kingdom Hearts' (2002-2020).

Street Fighter Franchise
(1987 to present)



So why is music such a key ingredient? Well, for one thing it often serves as an extension of a character. When your only impression is their physical appearance and maybe a few lines of text in early fighting-games, each character's bespoke theme-song helps make them that much more unique. It can be something as simple as Dhalsim's sitar theme from Super Street Fighter 2 Turbo (1994), or if we want to jump further ahead, Heihachi Mishima's theme from Tekken 6 (2007). A calm, Indian-inspired song helps us to identify Dhalsim as a peaceful man, reluctantly fighting in the eponymous World Warrior tournament of the Street Fighter Universe.

Whilst Heihachi's bold, orchestral theme mixed with traditional Japanese drums give us an image of a traditional, Japanese martial-artist archetype. Certainly, far different than his earlier Tekken 3 (1996) theme and its snare-drum, bass-line focus with the backing of police sirens.

It's also worth noting that when it comes to attracting players to arcade machines, music and sound is often a key means of doing so. The 'attract mode', wherein a machine will pit two NPC characters against one another, is often how many potential arcade players will first see and hear the arcade machine. Advances in the design of arcade boards, the systems on which these games run, also meant that as time went on these sounds and musical scores became vastly more complex.

In particular one only needs to compare the original Street Fighter (1987) with its complete lack of background music and fairly basic sound, to Street Fighter 2 (1991) only four years later, widely considered one of the best in the series. Whilst the instruments remain abstracted into their most basic form, there are still quite complex mimicry of actual instruments present within the game to compensate for this lack of technical depth.

In terms of a particular song, I want to point to Mick Gordon and Omega Sparx 'I'm back (To Rise)' from 2013's 'Killer Instinct' reboot of the 1994 original. Aside from standing on its own, this song is what I can only refer to as pure, undiluted hype. It gives us a succinct explanation of the character whose theme it serves as, TJ Combo, his fall from grace and titular 'rise'. The dubstep, rap mix energises both player and listener; making us believe that against evil robots, this one MMA fighter can rise to the top. Not only that, but the 'dynamic theme' system in the game synchronises the music to the punches and kicks of the fighters, making the action that much more hard-hitting, the victories that much more breath-taking and the defeats even more crushing.



Stellaris
(2016)

STRATEGY GAMES •••••

If fighting-games embody the energetic, party atmosphere of funk, techno, rap, EDM and dubstep; then strategy games instead delve into the operatic and orchestral, befitting their more cerebral nature. One particularly noteworthy example is the title 'Stellaris' (2016) by Paradox Interactive. Mixing synth tracks with long orchestral pieces, the varied factions available in this sci-fi '4x' (named for the four 'Xs': Expand, Explore, Exploit, Exterminate) means that the game, by necessity must run the gamut of all sub-genres of sci-fi. From the utopianism of 'Star Trek' to the darkest depths of intergalactic warfare in 'Warhammer 40,000'.

Tracks such as 'Faster than Light', with its ethereal piano embody the wonders and mysteries of the universe in the base-game, whilst 'The March of Profits' from the 'Megacorp' expansion instead offers an upbeat, cheesy corporate anthem to imply the idea of a monolithic, Amazon-esque sci-fi business entity. Going to the complete opposite end of the spectrum, 'Nemesis Main Theme' from the titular expansion, offers a cinematic, orchestral and industrial-inspired, synth-tinged remix of the original 'Faster than Light', suggesting galactic upheaval on an epic scale in keeping with the expansion's darker tone.

But perhaps the greatest strategy game soundtrack has to be that of the 'Civilization' (1991-2016) series, one of the progenitors of the strategy gaming genre as a whole. With prestigious achievements already under its belt, such as composer Christopher Tin's 'Baba Yetu', the theme of 'Civilization IV' (2005) becoming the first videogame original song to become nominated for a Grammy. The most recent entry 'Civilization 6' (2016) pushes the boundaries even further.

Rather than a blanket theme for each faction, Civilization 6 instead has different variations of the theme for each 'era' of human civilization. From the primitive, minimalist renditions in the Ancient era, to the multi-layered, synth-infused Atomic era themes. Hearing something so ancient as 'Epitaph of Seiklos', reconstructed from ancient music notations, remade in such a way can't help but bring a tear to the eye in both its musical and historical significance. Something so ancient being remade for modern ears being brought to the masses in a way, I believe, only videogames can do.

The 'Total War' series are particularly exceptional in this regard, spanning everywhere from Ancient Rome to the fantastical battlefields of the Warhammer world. Their soundtracks on games

such as 'Shogun 2' or the 'Total War: Warhammer' spin-off series really set the scene for epic clashes between massive armies. The soundtrack to Shogun 2's 'Fall of the Samurai' expansion deserves special mention, combining traditional Japanese instrumentation with the inclusion of more modern Western instruments such as drums and horns helps to really sell the meeting and conflict of East and West, new and old, honour vs industry.

Meanwhile, Total Warhammer (as it's commonly known by fans) not only has your typical fantasy soundtrack, but also Egyptian, Gothic and even pirate influences, suitable for everything from undead pharaohs to subterranean ratmen.

SHOOTERS •••••

Shooters are perhaps the most well-known, most loved, most maligned and most misunderstood genre of videogames. But the simple appeal of a gun in hand and a horde of enemies on which to use it has undeniable appeal. So where does music come into this? If you look at heavyweight titles like 'Call of Duty' (2003-2021), you'd be forgiven for thinking it's just your average action-film score, layered over everywhere from Afghanistan to the beaches of Normandy and even deep space. But look beyond the 'brown and beige' genre of modern military shooters, and you'll find there's a wealth of games that take the experimental nature of videogame music and run with it.

Games such as, 'Blood' (1997) one of Monolith productions' (creators of the 'F.E.A.R.' franchise) first ever games. Inspired by horror movies, slasher-flicks and the works of both Stephen King and H.P. Lovecraft, the moody, ominous Latin chanting (and occasional skin-crawling children's rhyme) helps turn a run-n'-gun gorefest into a bona-fide chiller. One the other hand, 'Duke Nukem' (1991), everyone's favourite (slightly outdated) macho stereotype, and his titular theme, is iconic of the 'Boomer shooter' genre, even being covered by 90s smash-hit thrash metal artists 'Megadeth'.

The works of production company 'Valve', on games such as 'Half Life' (1998) and its sequels, offer an experimental mix of classic, blood-pumping techno, and more abstract electronic beats. 'Team Fortress 2' (2007) similarly offers a jazzy, 60s inspired soundtrack packed with trumpets, saxophones, piano and drums, as unique and beloved as the game itself. My personal pick, as a favourite of this genre has to be the four-player co-op game 'Deep Rock Galactic' (2020). What would you expect, from a game that touts itself with the tagline 'Danger. Darkness. Dwarves.'? Certainly not

synth, inspired by the likes of John Carpenter and his work on 'The Thing', clearly audible in the slow, bass heartbeat of 'Into the Abyss'. Or how about a complete one-eighty, to the synth and guitar-focused 'Dance of the Dreadnought' with its punchy drums pushing the ordinarily overwhelmed, cave-delving Dwarves from survivors to dominators of their insectoid glyphid enemies?

Or if moderately stylised graphics and non-human enemies aren't your thing, 'Payday 2' (2013) is thoroughly exceptional on the musical front. With each backing track having a 'stealth' and 'assault' version, the former usually sedate, ominous and more 'mission impossible' than 'the expendables.' But when you and your three bank-robbing cohorts are discovered, and it becomes a fight for survival (and a huge payday, pun intended) the music and adrenaline ratchet up.

Composed primarily by Simon Viklund, the soundtrack of Payday 2 is worth not only a listen on its own but layering over any other shooter game when you need to feel the energy as your back is against the wall. 'I will give you my all' is your typical, EDM and dubstep inspired powerhouse, but if you want variety, there's the orchestral 'Ode to Greed', which occasionally dips into an operatic anthem or the 80s rock 'Break the Rules' (fittingly created for the 'Scarface' DLC). Many of these tracks wouldn't be out of place at a rave or on a club dancefloor, just hope there aren't bank-robbers in masks nearby...

The term 'video-game music' may be as abstract and vaguely contemptuous as 'movie soundtrack', the idea that this is merely a pastiche of 'proper' music and not worthy of critique listening to on its own. But if you removed the music from 'Stellaris', 'Payday 2', or 'Street Fighter', there would be something important missing. Something undefinable, that elevates a good game to a great game.

So, insert coin, press start, load your save game and take a delve into the innovative and energetic world of the music behind videogames.





Lana Del Rey
Blue Banisters

Univocally Hers; Blue Banisters is a confessional triumph that's as intricate as it is organic

For some, lockdown bought a winding down of work and exploration of hobbies. For Lana Del Rey, it was spent writing and recording, impressively releasing her second album in one year.

WRITTEN BY LYDIA DOUGAN



Banisters displays vulnerability and acceptance; the realisation paradise is unattainable while a steadiness has been accepted

With this being her 8th studio album, Lana is a veteran for releasing music periodically and having a hefty catalogue of unreleased material online. Originally teased for a summer release under the title 'Rock Candy Sweet', this record was intended to challenge the controversies she has faced in her career. Taking to Instagram and writing over a screenshot of an article, Lana thanks articles written in distaste for her for reminding her that her career was "built on cultural appropriation and glamorising domestic abuse. I will continue to challenge those thoughts on my next record on June 1 titled 'Rock Candy Sweet'". Although not under the same title, Blue Banisters does deal with controversy from the media on tracks like Black Bathing Suit and Arcadia. The direct discourse displayed in crafty lyricism that read like diary accounts allow her to put her controversy to bed, denouncing that "I'll pray for ya but you'll need a miracle": facetious as ever in true Lana fashion.

The glamour so often seen in her discography is refined for Blue Banisters. She moves further away from industry norms with every record release, and this was no exception. **It's abundantly clear she has an aversion for stardom, trading interviews and album promotion for cryptic tweets followed by a complete social media exile.** Blue Banisters

release saw no aerial banners trailing through the Los Angeles skyline like with Chemtrails. Not even a single neon green ice cream truck popped up down the East Coast. The release was unceremonious and intimate, reflective perhaps of the personal and autobiographic nature of the endeavour.

Banisters displays vulnerability and acceptance; the realisation paradise is unattainable while a steadiness has been accepted. However, there is no defeat here. Blue Banisters Lana finds beauty in the mundane, just wanting someone to walk her home from the mall on tracks like Black Bathing Suit. Her American Dream utopic has been traded for equilibrium and she is truly okay with that. Her second album of 2021, this record proves even more personal and candid than predecessor Chemtrails Over the Country Club, with Del Rey herself declaring that Blue Banisters tells her story and does pretty much nothing more. The album's autobiographic nature does make its delivery sincere but all the more melancholic.

Notoriously genreless, this project is no exception for the New York City native. A sweet blend of blues and folk; the combination of piano ballads and brassy beats with injections of hip-hop resounds vulnerable but confident. 2019's release of faultless

Norman Rockwell! saw the push of what could be described as the domino that regresses deeper inside the mirage and transports listeners into Laurel Canyon. What started there with Norman Rockwell is carried through in Blue Banisters, absent from facades and details purely the woman behind Lana Del Rey.

Blue Banisters feels organic and natural, with earthy references scattered throughout. Violets, roses, wildflower, cherry blossom. Blooming and flourishing like the poet she is, Lana well and truly fleshes Blue Banisters with mother nature and all things beautiful. For an artist so typically drenched in Hollywood glamour and cinematic charm, this record parades a tangible return to Elizabeth Grant, and is truly showcased as the girl beneath the glamour.

The album opens with Textbook, a pleasant soft folk rock with a slow build up. The album commences with hesitance, what feels like a tiptoe into the narrative. Lyrical themes of righteousness flicker with romantic yearning wondering “if I go blonde could we get our old love back?” Titled Textbook, the track is seemingly referring to the delicate subject dealt with in the song of how parental relationships influence those of romantic relationships. This divulgence introduces such openness revisited within the album, herself and her mother’s strained relationship with particular emphasis.

Title track Blue Banisters is a soft piano still that moves thematically away from her habitual writing of co-dependence with partners; this song is a love letter to the women in her life who help to mend her post heartache. Its textured, gentle and sombre, and deals with powerful imagery of quite literally painting over banisters to symbolise new beginnings. Its haunting but delicate, the knell for the girl who’s love lost but another found.

The most unexpected and interesting part of the album is undoubtedly the interlude titled “The Trio”. Utilising sample from Ennio Morricone’s ‘The Good the Bad and the Ugly’ soundtrack, this abrupt intermission is a hip hop mariachi fusion that embodies the feistier side of this album. There is a massive contrast with an 808 boom; this is candidly modern hip hop. Here her personality is shown and is an ode to genres she obviously loves but doesn’t utilise often in her music. It’s grandiose, centred, loud and in your face, an interlude I’m not so sure belongs between soft piano ballads.

Stand out track Black Bathing Suit comes next and is the balm for abruptness of the interlude. The most topical song, it opens slow with references to the disruption of the pandemic, from quarantining to meetings on Zoom. Defeatist but acceptive, she simply declares “If this is the end I want a boyfriend”. Sermonising the reality of loneliness that comes with isolation, Black Bathing Suit is an experimental song that pays off. The tempo of percussion is free flowing, vocals are off traditional timings. As if feeling stir crazy was a soundtrack. There is a chaos instilled that perfectly represents the disruption of the past 2 years. **Its whimsical, dark with lyrics that dial back to classic Lana thrust into the 2020s. This is an avant-garde career defining song.**

No Lana album is complete without the colour blue at the heart of it

If You Lie Down With Me is a controlled jazzy song with references of classic Americana that really put Lana on the map with her debut. A beautiful retro trumpet brass section conclusion that distorts is the highlight of the track. The folksy blues provide a gradual but finite closing; this is the Hollywood finale that plays as the curtain closes.

Next track, Beautiful is exactly that. It’s a refined vocal showcase that opens with twinkling piano. Pondering “What if someone had asked Picasso not to be sad?” is an evoking statement; a powerful rhetoric is established of finding power in feeling blue. So often we see blue in Lana’s catalogue as a positive and this song is the manifestation of that sentiment. After all no Lana album is complete without the colour blue at the heart of it.

We truly get an empowered narrative on Blue Banisters. Relatable for the masses, Violets for Roses is the exploration of falling back in love with her city, surroundings and most importantly herself after being in a relationship. Written post-Covid, seeing girls with their masks off excites Lana to new heights. With Sylvia Plath-esque lyricism “You tried to take all the pink of my toes”, this song is a reclamation of her life and is as sweet as the summer breeze. Nearing the midsection of the album, the less-lyrically inclined listeners may begin to lose interest in the pace of piano ballads. That until Dealer, which is truly a highlight of the album. Positioning amongst ballads completely energises the listening experience. It’s smoky, sexy and dramatic. This is Lana Del Rey at

her most illustrious. Dealer has a tropical sound and was co penned by The Last Shadow Puppets alumni, with Miles Kane lending his voice for the narratives ominous figure who is impossible to pin down. The smoky and captivating base sways listeners back and forth like waves enveloping the sand. That is until Lana takes to the mic. “I don’t want to live” she wails, instilling delirium. This is the melodrama that has been forgotten amidst ice cream dates and pleasantries. A revival, this track is a stand-out among beautiful but impact lacking piano stills.

This is the melodrama that has been forgotten amidst ice cream dates and pleasantries

A fan favourite since a demo was leaked online, Thunder follows Dealer. **A nostalgic listen, this track feels like a continuation on from Norman Rockwell’s title track, in which frustration arises from someone who can never be satisfied.** Emotive and powerful, Thunder also has a catchy chorus and would do well with the masses as a single release. It harks back to earlier Del Rey work in that its cinematic and comprehensive but would not make such a good fit on previous work as it does on Blue Banisters or even Chemtrails Over the Country Club. With diagnostic lyricism, poetic dissonance from tracks like Black Beauty in which she introspectively analyses what she does wrong. Thunder feels like a revelation, in which there’s an acceptance of that’s just the way some people are. “You try to see the bright side when each new day begins but you’re not satisfied at the rainbows end.”

The album unfortunately becomes lethargic after Thunder, with Wildflower Wildfire, Nectar of the Gods and Living Legend in succession. All have highlights within them, but this trio of songs slightly fade and become indistinguishable and rather tiresome. Wildflower Wildfire had potential of the same energy injection effect Dealer has, being produced by hip-hop powerhouse Mike Dean. Lyrically honest and vulnerable, Wildflower Wildfire holds the most brutal lyrics about her strained maternal relationship of the album. However, the instrumentation is atypical and chaotic but does not perform like Black Bathing Suit does. It lacks that captivating nature needed to sail another piano song. Nectar of the Gods is a dark and layered track that employs her lower register with a nod to the Ultraviolence album. The song was intended for when she sings “what cruel world is this.” Unlike other songs from her plethora of unreleased songs on Blue Banisters, Nectar of the Gods does feel like it should be on the album it was written for.

The album concludes with two consequential lullabies one dedicated to her future child and one to her sister. Cherry Blossom, produced by frequent collaborator of Lana's Rick Nowels was written a decade ago however slots perfectly into the story of blue banisters. Tender and pure, "Mommy is there" offsets the difficult topics covered and spins the maternal woe into optimistic hope for herself as a mother. A simple composition, cherry blossom serves as an unwind for the project with hushed piano and light fluttery vocals. intimate and gentle, its positioning on the album is an exemplary choice for beginning the conclusion and melts perfectly into final track, Sweet Carolina.

Written with her father and sister, Sweet Carolina concludes her most personal album with appropriately, those closest to her. **Sympathetic and considerate, this ballad stuns from start to finish and confirms sisterhood is a virtue in Lana's life.** Her signature frivolous temperament creeps up out of nowhere; "crypto forever screams your stupid boyfriend" breaking the touching song into light-hearted amusement. This love letter to her sister is a personal and beautiful addition to Blue Banisters providing a gorgeous epilogue for the project.

Blue banisters is exhilaratingly hers. This feels like the album she's wanted to release but hasn't had the opportunity to. There are pockets of previous eras, which makes sense as a number of tracks are those recorded for previous albums. Releasing music intended for different bodies of work is risky but these don't feel disjointed; the songs chosen work in harmony to bring blue banisters to life. Blue banisters is vocally and lyrically rich and complex, diving head-first into the life of Elizabeth Grant, through personal anecdotes and stimulating lyricism, after all she is a proclaimed poet before she is a musician. This is definitely a rewarding listen for those who are long-time fans.

Her discography so meticulously constructed; she truly is a curator of her extravagance. We meet 2021 Lana and her trademark cinematography takes a backseat. **Her timelessness has been trajected into the contemporary.** If her previous albums are vintage film rolls premiered in a theatre, blue banisters is the window into the projector room. **This album feels like a true reclamation of herself and her story and it's clear Lana adores the women surrounding her, ultimately acknowledging that the most important woman in her life is herself.**

For an artist so typically drenched in Hollywood glamour and cinematic charm, this record parades a tangible return to Elizabeth Grant, and is truly showcased as the girl beneath the glamour.

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