Daily Life

BABY KEEM TAKES A GAMBLE WITH 'CA$INO'

by Ayyan Tamjeed
STAFF WRITER
HE/HIM/HIS
art24001@uconn.edu

After five long years, Los Angeles rapper Baby Keem released his sophomore effort "Ca$ino," on Friday, Feb. 20.

In a marked turn from his bouncy and upbeat debut album, "The Melodic Blue," Keem delves into his past and troubled family life. The album title is a reference to his mother's gambling addiction while they were living in Las Vegas. The scant promotional material — three short documentaries about his early childhood and an album listening party — also discuss Keem's rough childhood further.

The opener "No Security" details the two main themes Keem tackles throughout the album: his family trauma and the pressure associated with being 'the next-up' in the rap world. Behind a somber Natalie Bergman sample and piano instrumental, Keem raps with a new, deeper voice, in contrast to the high-pitched fervor on his debut. He delivers more of a spoken-word performance on this track.

"Ca$ino" is a song split into two parts, and a great change of pace after the bleak intro. The first half is Keem rapping about his cavalier life over a thumping rage-type beat. After the beat switch, Keem becomes a lot more introspective. He begins talking about the death of his grandmother, who raised him in the absence of his mother, sounding close to tears.

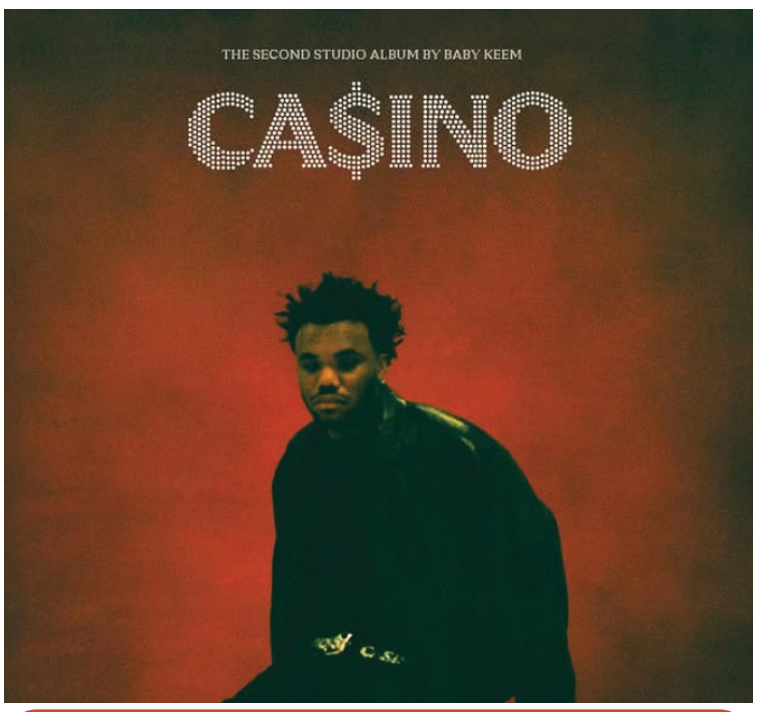
"Birds & the Bees" debuts Keem's new alter-ego, "Waseem," in a romantic R&B song. Waseem is a masculine Arabic name meaning "handsome" or "graceful." In this song, the ever-graceful Keem flirts with his girlfriend, and the song's funky keyboard instrumental makes it a great 2000s R&B pastiche, while giving him the opportunity to flex some of his singing chops.

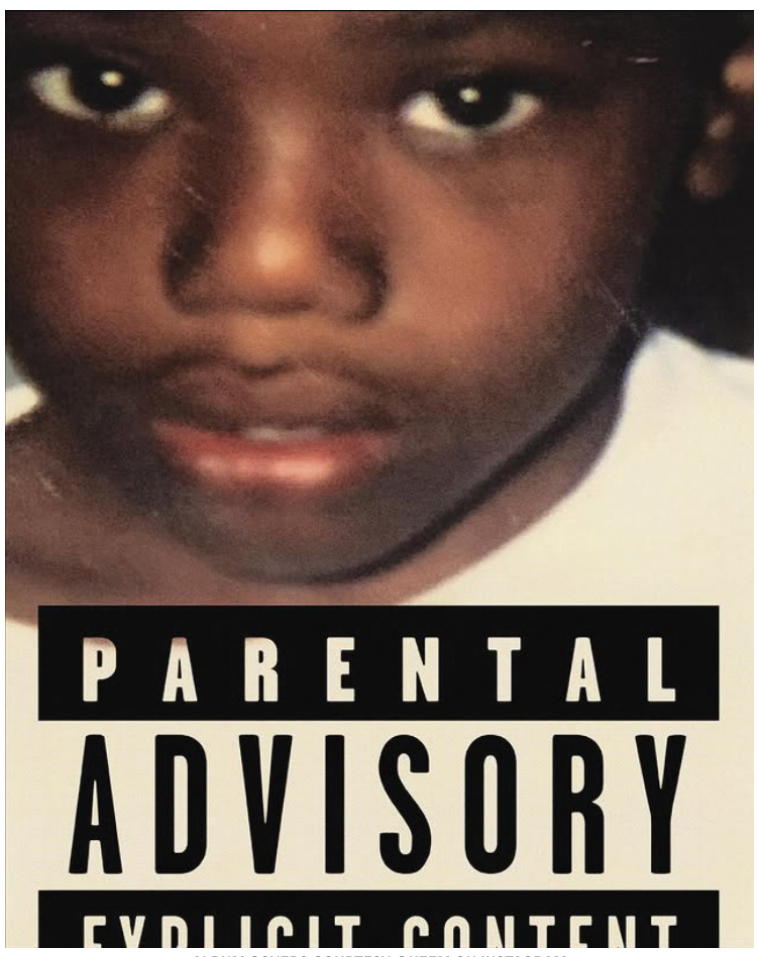
Kendrick Lamar enters the ring for his feature on "Good Flirts," another lithe love song with a beat that calls back to 2000's R&B. While Lamar sounds like he's sleepwalking through his verse, it has some funny moments with the slight diss towards Young Thug and Lamar calling himself goofy.

Even if Keem lost steam at the end of "House Money," it transitions perfectly into one of the heaviest songs in this album, "I am not a Lyricist." Despite the song title, he delivers some of the hardest hitting lyrics about living in Las Vegas, or "Sin City," as a child in an unstable home. Keem contradicts the song title a second time by not using any complex rhyme patterns or metaphors or double or triple entendres; he delivers his lines in a dejected, rote cadence, as if he is numb to all the vices presented in this song.

Sandwiched in between two bleak songs about Keem's family life is the west coast funk-inspired "$ex Appeal." Even then, the album's one outright club track keeps its feet in the melancholy with the downtempo beat and bass-heavy instrumental. The autotune on Keem's voice adds a fun dimension to Keem's flirtatious lines that keeps it distinct from other tracks like "Bird & the Bees" or "Good Flirts."

In "Highway 95 pt. 2," the spotlight is centered purely on Baby Keem, as he reveals his history as a runaway child, speeding down Highway 95 to escape the abusive environment and poverty he lived in. Unlike "I am not a Lyricist," Keem sounds a lot more emotive here, and is a lot more revealing of his traumatic upbringing, dropping details here and there that add to the mosaic of his childhood.





ALBUM COVERS COURTESY @KEEM ON INSTAGRAM

RATING: 3/5

For a palette cleanser "Circus Circus Free$tyle," is an endlessly entertaining romp. This song has a similar structure to "Ca$ino;" a braggadocious first part complemented with a hard-hitting beat. Then after the beat switch Keem becomes more introspective and reflects on his family life, painting a portrait on how his childhood is connected to his current life as a rap star.

"Dramatic Girl" is the most unique song on this album; less west-coast rap, more indie pop. In a high-pitched register, Keem and co-singer Che Ecru sing about wanting to have a deeper emotional connection and honesty from their partner, in contrast with earlier songs which never dove that deep.

This struggle for connection perfectly complements the final track, "No Blame," where Keem's first words are "I don't blame you mama." Keem opens up more about his traumatic past and says he doesn't blame his mother, because he knows she had traumatic experiences as well.

Baby Keem's new artistic direction takes some getting used to, and some listeners may be bristled by the heavy subjects this album explores. While others commend the effort to create a deeply personal record that defied outside expectations.

West of the Gate wins WHUS Radio's Battle of the Bands

by Maleena Muzio
ASSOCIATE LIFE EDITOR
SHE/HER/HERS
maleena.muzio@uconn.edu

Four New England-born bands duked it out on stage on Saturday, Feb. 21, during WHUS Radio's Battle of the Bands at the University of Connecticut.

West of the Gate, an indie jam band from Willimantic, Conn., won the competition. Saturday marked the band's first official live concert since forming in September 2024.

"Winning means we stay together; we make this work," Jack Lombardo, the singer and rhythm guitarist of West of the Gate, said.

In the first round of the competition, West of the Gate was pinned against Vices Inc., a pop-punk alternative rock band from Portland, Maine. Frontwoman Eleanor Langthorne sang a mix of originals and covers — including "Psycho Killer" by Talking Heads and "Pink Pony Club" by Chappell Roan. The band, however, did not advance to the next round.

West of the Gate's first set was opened by an original, currently titled "Driving Song."

Lombardo noted the opener, a song inspired by his commute to work, was his favorite of the set.

The group also performed covers of the 1994 hits "Zombie" by the Cranberries and "When I Come Around" by Green Day.

Elizabory, an experimental heavy metal band from central Massachusetts, and Part of the Problem, an alternative rock band from Bethel, Conn. took the stage next to compete for a place in the final round.

Being the only returning band from last year's event, Elizabory performed a lengthy and energetic original set fronted by singer Icez Killz. The group used horror movie visuals, costumes and makeup to set an eerie tone for their performance.

Part of the Problem, fronted by singer Lana Botex, advanced to the final round after also performing an original set. "Wildfire," the final song of their first set, contained transitional instrumentals and strong vocals.

"I'm excited for people to be able to see the hard work that our organization as a whole puts in, as well as these bands," Sire-Lawrence Brock, the events coordinator at WHUS Radio, said.

They've done a lot in terms of preparing and creating their bodies of work — I'm excited for people to hear that."

In the final round of the competition, West of the Gate and Part of the Problem went head-to-head, performing brief, but engaging sets.

The winner was determined by the loudness of the audience's applause. Almost a tie, the voting process was redone multiple times. However, West of the Gate pulled through as the winner of the competition after their second, instrument-heavy set. West of the Gate will get the chance to open at WHUS' Spring Fling concert.

"We're in a unique spot to give local bands this opportunity," Colin Edwards, the general manager at WHUS Radio, said.

Throughout the night, students and audience members danced and sang along to songs and were exposed to new material from the diverse group of bands.

"I really loved the show," Rebecca Beebe, a sixth-semester design tech major, said. "I love live music; it's my whole life. It's just so great that we have these kind of events at our school that support local music."





Bands perform during Battle of the Bands, hosted by WHUS Radio, in the Rome Ballroom on Feb. 21, 2026. The annual event brought together student bands to compete in a live music showcase on campus. PHOTO BY OLIVIA DICKSON, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS