

Kelsea Ballerini proves to be underrated yet again

A 'Mount Pleasant' review

By **LILLIAN CURTIN**
Opinion Editor

The frankly underrated Grammy-nominated singer, Kelsea Ballerini, has blessed us once again with an angelic, vulnerable EP: "Mount Pleasant."

Each track feels like her therapy session, in the best way possible. You can tell when some artists just write to get an album out and Ballerini isn't one of them. It's what separates a singer and an artist.

I've been a fan of hers since I saw her on Disney Channel's "Next Big Thing" when her first album came out in 2015. That album, "The First Time," didn't showcase her writing talent. Don't get me wrong, it's a great album, but you can tell she's not the same artist who wrote it.

She's been developing into a new, more vulnerable artist. We started seeing it in her 2020 albums "Kelsea" and "Ballerini," which have the same songs, with "Ballerini" being the acoustic version.

We can see her start to open up a little more, specifically in tracks like "homecoming queen?," "half of my hometown (feat. Kenny Chesney)" and "the way i used to." Funny enough, her first track on that album is called "overshare." Never stop oversharing. Ever.

When her EP, "Rolling Up the Welcome Mat," dropped in February 2023, I was coming to terms with the fact that I needed to leave my long-term boyfriend. So, obviously, that album about her divorce to country singer Morgan Evans got me through a lot.

Ballerini released her most recent EP, titled "Mount Pleasant," on Nov. 14, and she did not disappoint. Her lyricism is next level, and she's clearly singing from her heart.

Now, if you haven't been paying attention to the circle of drama that's transpired over the past couple of months, let me catch you up.

Madelyn Cline and Chase Stokes, two of the main cast members of "Outer Banks," dated for a year before they split in 2021. They continue to work together on the show, where they are still love interests. Stokes and Ballerini started dating in 2023, but called it quits this year.

They split on good terms, but it seems some issues were just too mentally draining to overcome, and we hear that in the album.

So what does the title have to do with any of this? Mount Pleasant is in Charleston County, South Carolina, where Cline, Stokes and the rest of the "Outer Banks" cast filmed the show, which basically leaves no speculation needed that this album is mostly about her feelings in that relationship, and out of it.

But I think it would be a shame to just say that this album is about that relationship, and only that relationship. This album is about her feelings as a woman.

The opening song in the EP, "I Sit in Parks," is the best example of this. She sings, "Did I miss it? By now is it a lucid dream? Is it my fault for chasing things a body clock doesn't wait for?"

It's hard as a woman to want to focus on yourself when you have people constantly reminding you about the "biological clock" that's ticking to have children.

It's one thing if you don't want kids, and you can focus on your career. But when you want a family, but you also want to do what you can in your "prime," there is no right answer on how to deal with that, and it's maddening.

I'm afraid that if I continue to work as hard as I do, and go at the speed that I'm going professionally, I won't pause until it's too late. The fear of missing out on motherhood because you're focusing on yourself doesn't just hit when you're in your thirties. I'm barely 20, and

it eats me up when I think about it for too long.

In another line, she sings, "They lay on a blanket, and God damn it, he loves her/I wonder if she wants my freedom like I want to be a mother."

I went into college thinking I was with the love of my life — the guy I was going to marry. A part of me hung onto that godforsaken relationship as long as I did because, I think, in the back of my mind, in my subconscious, I still had that timeline gnawing at me.

The next song, "People Pleaser," talks about making decisions and changing your personality for everyone else. Almost every decision you've made has been based on what other people want, so when all is said and done, you don't know yourself, because your personality has been molded to please other people.

The next songs, "Emerald City" and "587," are where we really get a taste of that post-breakup pain.

Some people took "Emerald City" as a diss to Cline. It just wasn't. This song was about how destructive jealousy is to yourself and your relationship. She knows it's a toxic mindset, and she feels horrible about it; that's why she keeps repeating that her "true colors" come out — it's guilt.

It's realistic. Yeah, we hate when women put down other women, but we also hate ourselves when we do it internally. Especially when we know we don't have a reason to. If that's the mindset you're in, you have to force yourself out of it, and it's hard.

"587" is also about the relationship. The distance between Mount Pleasant and Nashville, Tennessee, where Ballerini usually is, is around 587 miles. The song, opening up with "Where you at?" reminds me a lot of "Mountain With a View" from her EP, "Rolling Up the Welcome Mat," about her divorce, where she sings, "I wonder if you even know where I am." We can see the similar patterns that took place in both breakups, the way she might've too.

The second-to-last song, "The Revisionist," digs into having to accept bad decisions that you've made, no matter how much you want to go back and "call the Revisionist."

In the last song, "Check on Your Friends," she sings, "Pretty far from the girl that she was when she was twenty-four." It seems like it's more about her own story than a general message. The beat of this song gives me that old Lady A-type, older country vibe, which gives it a comforting touch to such a heavy song.

Ballerini's work is always filled with emotional depth and, at least for me, gut-wrenching relatability. It's why I'll sit in parks and continue to listen to Kelsea Ballerini's poetic lyricism.



Movies you need to watch once in your life

By **SOPHIE MURRAY**
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Movies offer more than entertainment; they provide comfort and spark nostalgia. In a world full of uncertainty, we turn to films as an escape, allowing ourselves to tune out reality and become immersed in stories that feel safe, familiar or transformative.

There are countless films across every genre. People who turn to movies for nostalgia, comfort or emotional depth, a handful of movies stick out to me as must-watches. While none of these titles aim to reinvent cinema, they offer rich storytelling. What ties these films together is their emotional depth and their deeply human stories.

"LITTLE WOMEN" (2019)

"Little Women," the classic coming-of-age novel written by Louisa May Alcott in 1868, follows the lives of the four March sisters — Meg (Emma Watson), Jo (Saoirse Ronan), Beth (Eliza Scanlen) and Amy (Florence Pugh) — as they navigate adolescence and adulthood during the Civil War.

In 2019, director Greta Gerwig brought the story to a new generation with an Oscar-winning adaptation. What makes this film stand out is the deep sense of nostalgia. Many viewers grew up reading the novel, and seeing it brought to life on the big screen adds a powerful emotional layer.

Beyond nostalgia, the film delivers deeply human storytelling. It is an empowering work that champions female autonomy, portraying women who actively shape their own paths to happiness. Moving and emotionally resonant, "Little Women" remains essential viewing.

"SOUND OF MUSIC" (1965)

When I think of the "Sound of Music," I immediately think of love, comfort and my

childhood. Growing up, I went through a phase where I watched the "Sound of Music" everyday, captivated by its music, warmth and gentle storytelling.

Set in Austria in 1938, on the eve of Anschluss and the start of WWII, the movie follows Maria (Julie Andrews), a free-spirited woman who quits her life at the abbey to go work as a governess for the seven Von Trapp children. What begins as a rigid, emotionally distant household slowly transforms as Maria brings song, laughter and affection back into their lives. The film weaves together themes of love, family and resilience, that is only elevated by beautiful scenery and iconic musical numbers.

Watching the Von Trapp family rediscover connection and find love in their own ways makes the film so enduring. This is a timeless movie that doesn't just entertain, but brings people back to something safe and hopeful.

"TITANIC" (1997)

What makes "Titanic" so powerful to me is that it is based on a true story. Seeing such a catastrophic event brought to life on screen emphasizes just how devastating the tragedy was, and the film's ability to recreate it so vividly speaks to its cinematic achievement.

Set aboard the



Titanic, the story follows the romance between Rose, a wealthy 17-year-old, and Jack, a poor, struggling artist, told through the memories by an elderly Rose. While the love story between Jack and Rose is undeniably captivating, the film also focuses on Rose's personal journey and her struggle to find independence and empowerment in a world that tries to suppress her. Their love flourishes as Jack supports her, helping her realize the possibilities of a life she could choose for herself.

As their romance unfolds, they are forced to confront the unimaginable disaster of the iceberg collision. The film doesn't just show the sinking of the ship, it immerses viewers in the fear, courage and resilience of those aboard. "Titanic" is a cinematic experience that reminds viewers of the fragility of life and the power of love in facing adversity.

"BLACK SWAN" (2010)

"Black Swan" is a psychological horror thriller that tells the story of Nina Sayers (Natalie Portman), a ballerina competing for the dual role of the White Swan and Black Swan

in a New York City production of "Swan Lake." The pressure of the role causes Nina to have a mental breakdown, where her quest towards perfection leads her to embody both physically and mentally the Black Swan, blurring the line between reality and hallucination.

What makes it a must watch is how the film is the way it immerses viewers in Nina's unraveling mind. The tension is heightened by haunting, visually stunning imagery, with dreamlike sequences and symbolic mirrors that amplify her descent into obsession with perfection. The unique

camerawork and creative angles keep audiences off balance, creating a nightmarish experience that is as mesmerizing as it is horrifying. "Black Swan" is a striking exploration of ambition, identity and the dark side of artistic perfection.

"WHEN HARRY MET SALLY" (1989)

"When Harry Met Sally" remains one of the greatest love stories of all time because of its authenticity and relatability. The film follows Harry Burns (Billy Crystal) and Sally Albright (Meg Ryan), who meet after college and instantly dislike each other, but over time, they form a deep friendship that eventually blossoms into romance.

They were always so sure of their differences — Harry's cynicism versus Sally's optimism — however, they learn so much about themselves through each other. What makes the movie so compelling is its honest portrayal of friendship evolving into love. At first, Harry said women and men can never be friends because it'll always turn romantic. However, the two of them form a several-year, deep, foundational friendship without crossing a romantic line.

Since they had grown such a deep friendship, their eventual romance felt so natural and earned. The idea that we can be so sure of ourselves but not the world around us makes this a timeless and authentic exploration of human connection.

These films remind us why we turn to movies time and time again. They make us feel, take us back to familiar places and remind us what it means to connect with others. Each of these stories is worth visiting once, whether it's the warmth of "The Sound of Music," the love in "When Harry Met Sally" or the thrill in "Black Swan," each has the power to make you feel something new.