

WEEKEND

LISTENING

REVIEW

// BYESMERALDA VASQUEZ-FERNANDEZ

It has been almost four years since Harry Styles released an album, and fans, myself included, have been patiently waiting for his return both to music and the public eye. I have been anticipating a new era since leaving the “Harry’s House” tour at the Kia Forum in Los Angeles as a senior in high school. Styles set up shop in the stadium for 15 days for his last tour. On March 6, Styles reappeared in pop culture to dance with his fans into his new era and soundscape, electronic-pop, with “Kiss All The Time. Disco, Occasionally.” The album is 42 minutes long with 12 songs.

“Aperture” was the album’s first single. Styles’ voice haunts the track like a shadow at a techno night club. The ambient synth music, reminiscent of a podcast intro, is the main focal point of the song, from the 45-second intro until the last chord. It feels like you are waiting for his voice to be louder. He emerges from the shadows for the chorus with his voice amplified at “we belong together.” Fitting because the start of the song feels like you are waiting for him to join you in the song. This feeling remains for the rest of the album.

A lot of lyrical tunneling occurs throughout the album. Key words and phrases from Styles’ previous albums are called back to here. “Aperture lets the light in,” a lyric from “Aperture,” provides a belated response to the “Lights Up” lyric “lights up when they know who you are” from H2, his second solo album. But, similar language aside, the album enters a new era that stays away from mainstream pop music. At this point, Styles knows his audience. It’s clear he no longer feels any pressure to pander to a larger crowd. After all, he’s Harry Styles. His fan base is large enough.

I was anticipating an album like one of LCD Soundsystem’s. However, Styles’ album doesn’t fully encompass the loose disco feel of the early 2000s. It doesn’t step into true club hedonism or pop. Rather than an album inspired by the sweaty catharsis of the club, this one feels manufactured in a synth laboratory. Despite the album not being my favorite on his discography, I believe that it is his best produced one. The songs flow together seamlessly, and as an entire piece there are no skips.

Undeniably, this album is bittersweet. It is mature. There is longing and acceptance. Yet the audience feels hope. With lyrics like “must be lonely out in Paris if you talk like that,” from “Taste Back,” the audience feels like they are being called out. It reminds me of talking with a friend who has no optimism when it comes to dating. Wait, maybe I am that friend. But sometimes, even in Paris, one could be lonely because of their own outlook. Actually, I will likely be visiting Paris this summer — email me. Maybe we can meet up for coffee somewhere.

There is a lot of repetition in this album. Sometimes it feels like the listener is waiting for the buildup of the song to hear a different lyric only to hear the same. This is clear in “Season 2 Weight Loss,” in which Styles repeats “Hoping you will love me now. Do you love me now?” with almost the same melody intonation. The tracks are stagnant and anti-climactic but seemingly on purpose.

Personally, my heart stung listening to “Paint by Numbers.” It is very nostalgic. Since the last album, Liam Payne, a member of One Direction, sadly passed away. As a One Direction fan, I’m reminded of the band’s water gun fights that they had on stages across the globe. Many fans wish they could still see “the kids with water guns ... run.” I certainly do.

“Coming up Roses” is one of my favorite songs on the album. It warms my heart. For some reason, it reminds me of “Bridgerton” and “Wuthering Heights.” Lyrics like “Judging why you drive” parallels “Should we just keep driving” from HS3, his third album. Except this time, it is clear that there are only two people in the car, when Styles sings “There’s only me and you” and “It’s only me and you.”

That is exactly what Styles normally makes the listener feel. But with this album, the listener is on a solo journey. Frankly, Styles is not loud enough. And while that’s definitely a calculated production decision, it makes the listening experience frustratingly akin to being in a loud club, unable to hear the person yelling into your ear. This isn’t a love song where he gently stares into your eyes. You have to stare into your own.

The girls on this album are “Katie” and “Carla.” It has been a tradition for him to name drop a girl’s name in his album. “Carla’s Song” is the perfect last song for the album. I mean, who doesn’t like to be reassured that “it’s all waiting there for you.”

“Pop” and “Season 2 Weightloss” exhibit the sounds that I expected to define the entire album. But that sound is elusive outside these tracks. Maybe I feel this way because my favorite song on the album is “Pop,” and it stands out sonically from the album.

Though the album seems perfectly crafted, I don’t love it in the same way as previous albums. Maybe, like his album, I’ve matured. There isn’t a typical fangirl pop song in the mix. Yet the lyrics, and a listener’s personal history with the artist, elevate the album. I wouldn’t feel compelled to listen to this album on repeat if it weren’t Harry Styles. But it is, and so, contrary to my first impression, I have ended up a fan. I still feel the urge to scream “I know what you really like. I don’t have to read your mind.” His lyrics always hit — that is a constant.

The album is good, but it didn’t make me feel like I needed to hear the entire album live. I do in fact need to hear “Aperture” and “Pop” live. That being said, as a true fan, I feel the anxious urge to hear it live because I want to see him live. If my dad tells me that I should sell my concert tickets for his upcoming tour I will reply with, “But Daddy I love him.” See you there. Maybe we can be together, together.

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‘But Daddy I Love Him’

My thoughts on *Kiss All The Time. Disco, Occasionally.*



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