

Banks delivers dreary, colorless debut album

Danielle Brubaker
Feature Editor

I do not envy the man who messed with Banks. In her debut album, *Goddess*, she has enough man-hate going on to rival that of Taylor Swift. Most of the songs feel like listening to an ugly breakup, which sometimes feels gritty and raw, and sometimes self-loathing and dreary.

Banks is a first-time artist. The American 26-year-old alternative singer toured with The Weeknd in 2013 and since then has been working on her album. She's had two previous EP's, *London* and *Fall Over*, both of which were released on SoundCloud.

Banks really tries for an icy, brooding feel with

trip-hop beats and hollow lyrics. Stylistically, her music is a bit like Lorde's. Her voice is a little rough around the edges, sometimes inciting chill and other times inciting boredom. While Banks is clearly a talented musician with lots of potential, the whole album feels forced and unnecessary. It lacks the color and vitality necessary to distinguish an album. Most of it is weary and

restless, leaving me ultimately unsatisfied.

A few songs are worth repeating. "Beggin' For Thread" is undeniably catchy, and "Goddess" delivers genuine aggression that had me wanting to punch something—in a good way, I swear. The album's high point is without a doubt the anguished and shameful "Waiting Game." The

the bitter, indignant victim. On most tracks, her misery is a little too trendy to be considered authentic.

The album is composed of a daunting eighteen tracks, and every single one has a similar mopey feeling that gets old fast. Don't get me wrong, I love the whole vengeful-scorned-woman bit as much as the next person, but it would've been nice to have at least one ray of sunshine somewhere in there.

The whole album felt confined to the idea that it had to be effortlessly cold, which ended up hurting it. I hoped for at least one track to be reckless and edgy, purely visceral. She has all this pent-up aggression that builds and builds throughout the album, but never explodes. I wanted violence, passion, and some unrestrained fury. But instead, I got the apathy over and over again.

Banks has a long way to go, but the potential for something great is there. Perhaps with a little more experience, she can let go of the self-loathing and throw in a little versatility. *Goddess*, despite its rather auspicious title, ends up being exhausting and angst-filled, with a few diamonds in the rough if you're willing to look.



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In her debut album, *Goddess*, Banks has enough man-hate going on to rival that of Taylor Swift.

building tension and vulnerability create an irresistible magnetism. When she gets it right, the result is hypnotic. But most of the time, she falls flat on her face.

It's very obvious that she's an amateur artist. Her lyrics can be pretentious and awkward ("I know my disposition gets confusing/My disproportionate reactions fuse with my eager state"). She tries too hard to prove herself as

alt-J starts to lose its charm

Ally Santa Maria
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When alt-J's Mercury Prize-winning album, *An Awesome Wave*, was released in 2012, it blew me away. It was an innovative album with a Radiohead vibe that referenced *Where the Wild Things Are*. Plus, it didn't hurt that a geeky group of students who seemed to be avoiding the status quo was just making good music.

Now, two years and one fewer band member later, the band is releasing its second album, *This is All Yours*, a record that seemed destined for a sophomore slump after the widespread success of the first.

But *This is All Yours* isn't a sophomore slump; it's quirky, innovative and borderline avant-garde. The album is chock full of unusual sounds; it has some electronic quirks with ultra-weird vocals and some occasional chanting that feels like it belongs in a Wes Anderson film. Packing multiple motions in one song, the complex music swirls wildly. Upon first listen, the record may sound pretty terrible in a scrunched-up-nose kind of way, but the album grows on you with its catchy melodies and a strange mix of acoustic and techno that burrow into your head for hours.

However, despite alt-J's eclecticism, the album seems to be falling into a certain formula. The arrangements are unique and surprising, but not in the same schizophrenic way as the first album. "Left Hand Free" sounds similar to the Black Keys and almost seems like a parody compared to the rest of the album. Sure, they did include a sound bit of Miley Cyrus chanting, "I'm a female

rebel" on "Hunger of the Pine," and the male and female vocals cut each other off every other word (which actually makes for a genuinely pretty song) on the track "Warm Foothills." But, all in all, the album just seems like a run off of the first album—not necessarily a bad thing, just platonic.

If you're a computer geek, you probably know alt-J is actually the keyboard shortcut for the delta sign on Apple computers, which is ironic considering the delta sign means change, and the band's second album sounds identical to its first. Sure, for a second record, the album was fantastic. The music is still a lot better than most new releases. And it is easy to fail after creating such a quintessential work of art on the first try. But how long will alt-J's mechanical way of making music work? All good things must come to an end... even if you are a Mac user.



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This is All Yours is chock full of unusual sound, including electronic quirks with ultra-weird vocals and chanting.

U2 reborn in new album *Songs of Innocence*

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Opinion Editor

I've been listening to U2 since my dad played their first album, *Boy*, to me in my crib, and I've always worshipped them. One of their recent albums, *No Line on the Horizon*, came out in 2009 and in the five-year lag that followed, my loyalty strayed. I even told my health class that Coldplay was my favorite band. This was all until September 9, when I, along with U2's tens of millions of other fans, was blessed with their new album, *Songs of Innocence*. The album appeared in everyone's iTunes library for free, and after I pressed play, I said stupid things all day because my mind was caught up in the music.

In their thirteen albums, U2 has done nothing but improve as their musical and lyrical savvy has deep-

ened with time and experience. *Songs of Innocence* is shockingly catchy, more so than I have noticed in previous albums. The heavy bass in "Volcano" is reminiscent of Arctic Monkeys; "Sleep Like a Baby Tonight" opens with a techno beat; and "Troubles" sounds like a romantic orchestral piece. All of them sound like they came off the alternative top 100 list. While these songs seem uncharacteristic of U2, all the songs in *Songs of Innocence* manage

to sound *exactly* like U2; whether it's in their powerful lyrics, Clay-

ton's bass, Mullen's drums, The Edge's guitar, or Bono's distinct

ably U2.

What makes *Songs of Innocence* so breathtaking is its culture as much as its melody. In the lead song, "The Miracle (Of Joey Ramone)," Bono pays tribute to U2's musical inspiration—The Ramones; in "Iris (Hold Me Close)," he sings a haunting song about his mother, who died when



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he was fourteen; in "Cedarwood Road," Bono sings a nostalgic tune about his childhood at 10 Cedarwood Road in Dublin, Ireland; and in "Raised by Wolves," the band delivers a politically-charged memorial of a series of car-bombings that tore apart Dublin in the early 1970s. Each song reminds me how awestruck I am by the kind of band U2 is: the kind that started 38 years ago and continues to stun the world with their music, the kind that has won more Grammys than any other, the kind that doesn't exist anywhere else.

Rolling Stone says that, "No other rock band does rebirth like U2." I could not agree more, and I can't predict how long I will continue to be blown out of the water by a band that has been famous for more than twice as long as I've been alive.