

# Daley: The Spectrum

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Daley, the bright-eyed singer with the shock of red hair from Gorillaz' "Doncamatic," has a swooning, sincere and androgynous voice that's mercifully devoid of the affected smokiness that bogs down so much British R&B. Most of the best moments on his second album, *The Spectrum*, are sourced directly from his throat, in part because of the beauty of his vocals and in part because there's not much else to grab one here.

This is a frustratingly generic R&B album and not a terribly well thought-out one. A funk guitar courses through a few of these songs, like "On Fire" and the Jill Scott duet "Until the Pain Is Gone," but it doesn't add texture so much as dutifully fulfill the expectations of funk guitar. A glut of great producers, including Daniel Aged and the perennial Stereotypes, contribute. But there's nothing that jumps out the way Damon Albarn's production on "Doncamatic" did. That all these songs are slowly-paced doesn't help much; they melt together into a slog, and there aren't too many hooks to make them memorable.

A title like *The Spectrum* promises eclecticism. Daley delivers on that front, but he doesn't impress by his willingness to throw himself headfirst into wild new genres. Instead, the record just sounds kind of confused. Styles don't shift often or dramatically enough to be exciting, nor are they uniform enough to be cohesive. Though most of the record trades in either harmony-rich '90s throwback or abstract ambient gospel, "The Only One" is classic 6/8 soul and "Careless" is almost a comically British R&B-garage hybrid.

The ambient gospel is the best stuff here. Daniel Aged of Inc. No World produces "Temple," which uses deep pads to create the convincing illusion of a sacred space. "The Fabric (For Richard)" is a dedication to the singer's late manager, and it evokes nothing less than Boyz II Men's "It's So Hard To Say Goodbye To Yesterday" in how it uses huge textures to frame the intimacy of a prayer. And "True" suggests Prince's "The Cross" in its use of a grumbling funk guitar to inject a bit of sex into its otherwise somber, sacred arrangement.

These songs are effective both because they lack obvious reference points and because they bring to the table a melodrama that suits the singer. Anything extreme is a relief on this restrained record, which rarely does anything ballsy and instead seems content to coast on its star's vocal gifts. To be sure, his voice is a treat to listen to, but it's not attached to a strong enough personality to redeem the innocuous music he has to work with; he's as white-bread as his long-lost brother Tintin.

The problems with this album are easily fixable. The songs should be hookier, the production should be bolder, the stylistic shifts should either be emphasized or abandoned in favor of cohesion. And Daley's voice is perhaps better as adornment instead of as a lead, at least until he figures out what to do with his sound. He cuts a striking figure. But it's worth wondering if he'd be remembered as much if there had been no music video for "Doncamatic." A figure this colorful shouldn't be making music this insubstantial.

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