

# Jaden Smith: Syre

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12/4/2017

Jaden Smith, the older and weirder of the two famous Smith siblings, isn't a great rapper. Maybe he knows this and that's why he smartly ducks into the staging. The less attention you pay to what he's saying on *Syre*, the more you're likely to enjoy the album, which is a cold, downcast, gothic, big-tent carnival of a rap record in the vein of Travis Scott's *Birds in the Trap Sing McKnight* or Kid Cudi's *Man on the Moon: The End of Day*. Like those albums, it works in spite of its star.

Like his sister Willow, Jaden is a careless lyricist tripped up by a jones for conspiracy theories.

What's especially odd is that he espouses them in bed. "*We all come from Africa*," he tells a girl on "Ninety" (true, but less meaningful than he thinks). "*This country kinda cold/ I mean they feed the children dopamine*," he sings on "Fallen," shortly before rhapsodizing about how he wants to kiss his girl. If he ever sets his sights on me, he'd better not start talking about the Rothschilds.

Worse music has used these theories for its heft, but Smith never seems to be preaching—they just seem to be stray thoughts running through his mind. Even when he endorses 9/11 trutherism on "Hope," it's hard to cringe because he's such a minor player in the picture. His worst lines come across less like facepalm clunkers than minor embarrassments, like one of those Beatles recordings where you can hear John stub his toe in the background and say "shit" or something.

The songs here are largely split between bangers and more load-bearing songs that support the larger work. Best of the former category are "Batman," a great glam-rock "Jumpman" riff, and "Icon," a fun bit of braggadocio that could have been at home on *Cruel Summer*. Best of the latter is the four-part, 13-minute opening suite, its titles corresponding to the initials of the word "blue." It doesn't serve much purpose for *Syre* as a work of art, but it lets you know what you're in for.

It's hard to say if *Syre* works because of Smith's God-given gifts or because of his budget. But his decision to mostly hide within the set pieces at least suggests he's aware of his handicaps; he's bad at rapping, but he's good at putting together a big-tent rap event. His taste in producers is intriguing: he brings out the best in Lido, who did "Angels" and "Same Drugs" for Chance; and ambient artist Ricky Eat Acid shows up on "Syre" to drown Jaden's maundering in cute little digital mewls. (That's not a shout-out to Matmos's Drew Daniel on



“Lost Boy,” alas.)

Whether or not *Syre* is to your taste probably depends on what you already think of Jaden Smith. If you resent his rich-kid *carte blanche* to make as weird and expensive a record as he wants without consequence, nothing here will sway your sympathies. If his “conspiracist” views turn you off, the ugly babble will stick out like a sore thumb. But if you can enjoy it holistically—to use a word Smith would appreciate—it might just satisfy your hankering for really weird rap.

- Label:  
Roc Nation/MSFTSMusic
- Release Date:  
November 17, 2017