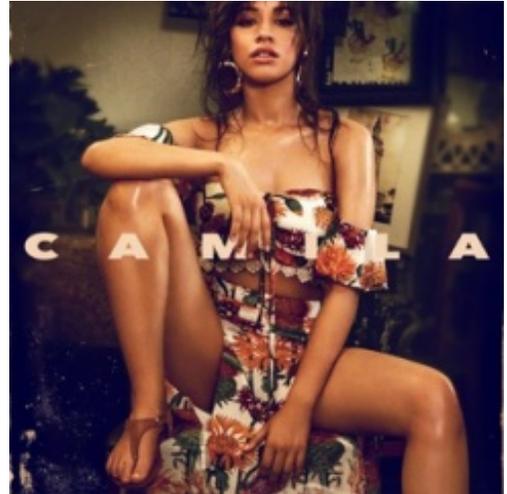


Camila Cabello: Camila

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Camila Cabello's solo debut *Camila* is the rare album where we get to see a pop star grow in real time—but it's easy to wish more of that growth had happened before she actually dropped the album. After a less-than-amiable split from “The X Factor” girl group Fifth Harmony, Cabello hedged her solo bets on a sappy Sia song called “Crying in the Club,” which stalled halfway up the charts. It was subsequent single “Havana” that shot to the stratosphere instead, and knowing she had to go back to the drawing board, she drafted new songs that closely followed its template. Those songs are on *Camila*, surrounded by the debris of her discarded personas.



The core of the record is “Havana,” with its punchy live horns and reliably slurry Young Thug verse, and the two songs that flank it. “She Loves Control” flips the devil-woman ballad on its head, like Beyoncé’s “6 Inch” with a dembow beat instead of an Isaac Hayes sample. “Inside Out” feels minimal but never undercooked, its feather-light steel drums stabbing out a familiar progression as Cabello shouts out the places she’s lived. These songs feel like a serendipitous meeting of the increasing acceptance of Latin sounds on the U.S. charts and the music Cabello must have internalized while spending time between Havana, Mexico and Miami growing up.

Cabello’s so at home on these songs that the other seven tracks, which largely ascribe to the Sia school of melodrama, start to feel like they’re from a different artist. “Something’s Gotta Give” and “Consequences” are trite, treacly ballads that suggest the cheesiest stretches of primetime singing competitions more than the potential of stars like Cabello to transcend them. “In The Dark” has a clever lyrical conceit—the title refers to sex, but Cabello also uses it as a jumping-off point to play with horror-movie tropes—but musically suggests that at some point Cabello flirted with the idea of becoming an EDM diva. “Never Be the Same,” by contrast, has a great hook that’s wasted on a love-as-drug metaphor already done better by a thousand other songs.

Camila has one thing going for it as a back-to-front album: take away a radio edit of “Never Be the Same,” which removes some of the harder drug references, and the album is 33 minutes long. This is preposterously short for a largely untested pop star, especially given that the laws governing “album-equivalent units” stipulate that 1,500 on-demand song streams equals one album sale—so the longer the album, the higher its chart potential. It would have been more

lucrative to shoehorn all the songs Cabello left behind in fine-tuning the album (collaborations with Ed Sheeran and Quavo among them) into a longer album. She didn't, and the album is infinitely better for it.

It's a shame *Camila* is such a rush-job, but it's understandable. To start from scratch based on the success of one single is a hell of an undertaking, not to mention that by the time that album was ready, "Havana" might have already been forgotten and the entire task rendered pointless. Hopefully, now that she knows where her strengths lie, she'll make an album that plays to them.

- Label:
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