

Various Artists: Bright: The Album

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February 1, 2018

Ah, yes: another one of these weird-ass albums. The soundtracks to the last two David Ayer films, *Suicide Squad* and now the fantasy-cop social allegory *Bright*, are test-marketed past the point of comprehension. While we get big names like Skrillex and Rick Ross, they're shoehorned into collaborations that couldn't exist in a sane world. Sometimes they work; the Imagine Dragons/Lil Wayne joint "Sucker for Pain" is one of the most convincingly kinky things Weezy's made in his sex-rap wilderness. But more often, they're "interesting" in the same way as ketchup on ice cream, a lot more fun to speculate and laugh about than to actually listen to.



Bright: The Album follows the same template as *Suicide Squad*, with two major differences. The first is this album consists entirely of original songs, meaning it's pleasantly short at 42 minutes and we don't have to suffer through dated, clichéd hits like "Fortunate Son" or "Without Me." The other is that while *Suicide Squad: The Album* aimed for pulp excess, *Bright: The Album* is barely any fun at all, with much of its runtime pitched at such a painful level of earnesty it's worth speculating that if in the same timeline where fairies and orcs coexist with humans, *Recovery* somehow succeeded *Flockaveli* as the most influential rap album of 2010.

The album opens with a British blues guy aptly named Rag 'n' Bone Man belting as authentically as he can before Logic twists himself up into his best Eminem-flavored pretzel. The chorus and verses are at right angles to each other: Rag 'n' Bone Man bellows about "*broken people*" while Logic does the whole huff-and-puff thing about the hurdles he had to vault over to get big. The same theme's explored a lot more poignantly two songs later on "Home," where Machine Gun Kelly shares an alarming insight about craving money and fame just to have some comfort in his life—but it's still basically "Love The Way You Lie (Part II)," with Bebe Rexha doing the Rihanna role.

In the first half, we also get a dour ballad from Bastille, whose singer must huff a gas to make himself sound extra English ("*British to the very last*," he sings, though the movie's set in L.A.), and a track where Kiiara karaokes "Hide and Seek" as Ty Dolla \$ign yarls and Future distracts himself with a tangent about cars. The first side's best song is "Crown," a collab between Camila Cabello and EDM duo Grey, which has a surprisingly tactile drop and features orgasmic gasps censoring not the word "fuck," not "cum," but "crown"—that's something I haven't heard before.

We finally get to have some fun on “Danger,” by Migos and Marshmello; Atlanta’s finest are in far from top form, but at least they sound happy to be alive. Snoop Dogg sounds content on “That’s My Nigga,” but when doesn’t he? Lil Uzi Vert does that thing he’s so good at where he sounds like he’s sprinting on top of the beat, courtesy of an on-form Steve Aoki (“Smoke My Dope”). The best song is Alt-J’s take on the English folk song “Hares on the Mountain.” Singer Joe Newman’s barely audible, and the whole thing’s wrapped in those moody synth strings that play in the depths of David Lynch movies. They’re taking liberties—that is to say, having fun.

And then there’s goddamn “Campfire,” by Neil Young and D.R.A.M. Yes, roots-rock’s weird uncle and the guy who once wrote a song about getting off on the fact that he’s using WiFi paid for by his paramour’s boyfriend. This song posits the pair as the Blues Brothers of self-help, traveling the land cheering up random sadsacks on the street. It’s absolutely preposterous, but the pair doesn’t play into that aspect. The song’s played as straight-faced messianism, of which there’s far too much of in the Donald Trump era—the heavy-handed *Bright* itself no exception.

The soundtrack’s probably this turgid so it doesn’t step over the film’s allegory. It’s an instinctive reaction to reduce the musical fireworks in the service of something bigger. It’s why artists record acoustic albums when they’re feeling sad; even in the 14th century, as choral music transitioned to polyphony, religious zealots decried more than one tone being sung at one time too ostentatious for music in the service of God. But come on, David Ayer. If you’re going to put D.R.A.M. and Neil Young together on the same song, do you really expect something subdued?

- Label:
Atlantic
- Release Date:
December 15, 2017