

# Macklemore: Gemini

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Now that we know Macklemore's aware of his white privilege, that the Grammy should have gone to Kendrick, that he reads Malcolm Gladwell and supports same-sex marriage, it's time for him to just make a damn rap album. *Gemini* is almost it, and it points the way for a few promising paths he could take on a theoretical next, better record. But it's still bogged down in good-guy mea culpas that blow up the apologetic streak inherent to half-joking white rappers to such an extreme that it threatens to supercede the fact of his art. The only thing he's not self-aware of is his self-awareness.

If the lyrics are any indication, the price of fame is wearing on him as he struggles with the price of the high life. But he doesn't approach the subject with any humor or pathos; we're supposed to give him kudos for knowing what he's doing is bad. "Intentions" runs through a list of angels and demons, "Hand in my Pocket" style: "*I wanna be sober, but I love gettin' high/I should read a book but I keep watchin' this TV.*" On "Miracle," he actually raps: "*I'm addicted, drugs and women, there's no difference.*" Um, one's a bunch of chemicals, and one is human beings. I'd gander that's a pretty big difference.

Rap has always been great at dealing with these conflicts. Look at Future, who's spent his whole career detailing the stupor of a drug-filled lifestyle but does it through deft, dark comedy. His lyrics—"I'm gonna choose the dirty over you, you know I ain't scared to lose you"—communicate an addict's need and urgency far more frighteningly than Macklemore's mild-mannered apologies. But there's the risk of stumbling over the irony and thinking Future's actually glorifying this lifestyle. Macklemore's major selling point is his self-aware "wokeness"; he can't risk being misinterpreted, so he spells it out for us.

These songs luckily take up only a small portion of *Gemini's* sixty-minute runtime, which contains a lot of unsuccessful experiments—the sub-Blakroc blooze rap of "Firebreather," for instance, and a cloying new fascination with Chance-style choirs and horns—and a few moments that point the way for what Macklemore could do with his career once he's wrestled all his demons. He could be a good twee rapper, for instance. "Marmalade" is a blatant ripoff of D.R.A.M.'s "Broccoli" down to the Lil Yachty verse, but it captures a lot of the Saturday-morning magic of the original, especially when Macklemore shouts out notorious tearjerker *Toy Story 3*: "*It's a great fuckin' movie!*"

And Macklemore, despite blowing up with a novelty song about his discount rapper clothes, doesn't get nearly enough credit for how funny he can be. "How to Play the Flute" dives into the Freudian implications of flute rap. Club songs like "Levitate" are slyly funny. "Willy Wonka" is one of the weirdest twists yet on the Lil B celebrity mad lib, with Macklemore and an exuberant Offset comparing themselves to Roald Dahl's candy mogul. The line "*Willy Wonka got a lot of paper*" sounds a lot funnier out of Offset's mouth than on the page, especially when he punctuates it with a perfect "*racks!*"

This is the first album since 2005 credited to Macklemore alone; his underloved Oates Ryan Lewis is absent. This is likely meant to suggest a scaling-back after *This Unruly Mess I've Made*, 2015's exhausting examination of the white rapper's place in the world. But there's still a portentousness to this music that keeps it from breezing by like good party rap. The public service I'm most grateful for here is his decision to highlight a glut of obscure singers and rappers, many from his native Seattle; scanning the guest list will lead you down a rabbit hole that can be more rewarding than the record itself.



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Bendo
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