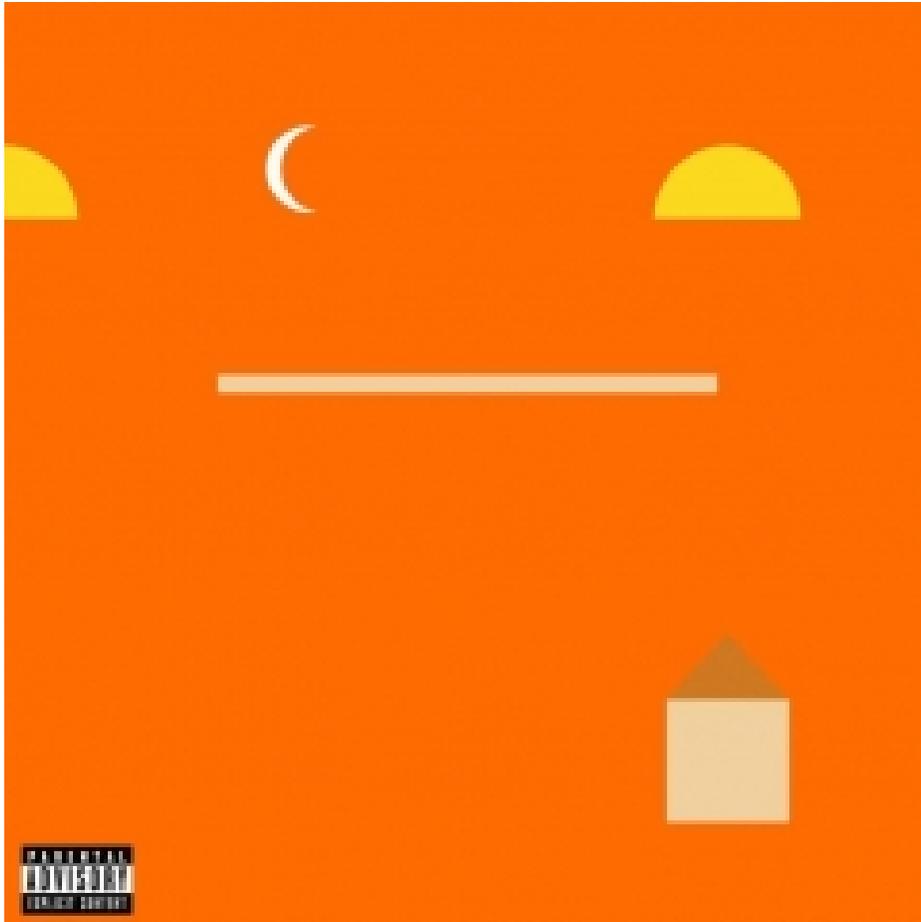


Mike Posner: A Real Good Kid

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Mike Posner's *A Real Good Kid* is one of the most jarring pop albums in recent memory. It's an incredibly sad album that is obviously about real pain and doesn't sell a chic portrait of numbness like Drake and his emo-rap progeny. It's not great – Posner's writing is rote and his taste questionable – but it's a sincere portrait of a very successful, very depressed man.

"If at this time you are unable to devote 40 minutes of undivided attention," he says as a disclaimer at the beginning of the album "I politely ask you turn this off and return at a later time." It sounds phony at first, rooted in the untruth that art about one's pain is worthier of undivided attention than that about more frivolous subjects like sex. Soon it becomes clear he just wants people to listen.

Either way, the disclaimer turns out to be irrelevant by the fifth track, "Drip," dominated by an extended monologue on which Posner's screams of *"fuck"* cut into the red. He explains, very simply but through dramatic shifts in volume, that he feels like he should be doing okay as a millionaire pop star but that he is *definitely not doing okay*. It's one of the most alarming things I've ever heard on a pop album.

The intro isn't the only time a sad affectation turns out to be purposeful. "Drip" opens sounding like "Heart Shaped Box" by Nirvana, a band fronted by a mythically self-destructive person, but it sounds less like easy grunge angst when Posner implicitly invokes Kurt Cobain on "How It's Supposed to Be" as a poor role model and disavows the rock-star dream of dying young.

There are acoustic guitars, pianos, classic cues of confessional music. There are also tropical house beats and soul orchestras summoned from Frank Ocean's *Blonde*, which might be an influence on the album's fragmented structure. Even the voicemails from his dad, an easy shortcut to pathos on many a rap record, have an impact because of how desperately we understand Posner misses the old man.

Again, this not a great album. Posner still relies on stock situations like being visited by a mystical man in an ashram. Some of the drug references and profanity feel forced. He compares his apocalypses of the heart to both street protests and global warming. But its pain transcends pop. Its gaffes linger in the memory less than its fearsome invocation of feeling.

And it's brave. Surely Posner, whose public image is of an innocuous frat-boy pop singer, banked on the success of 2016's "I Took a Pill in Ibiza" (which shouts out late DJ Avicii, eulogized on "Drip") and used his clout to demand creative control by label goons that would otherwise sniff at this album as commercial suicide.

This feels like a necessary unburdening, the sort of album John Frusciante might have made in the mid-'90s if he could be trusted with a label advance. It will probably not spring forth a hit. It does not rely on being confessional the way Ed Sheeran might. It isn't "real" in a way that sounds good but in a way that burns.

