



Demi Lovato



Doja Cat



The Pretenders



Bakar

# TON & FLAME

WHERE MAJOR & INDIE MEET!

SEPTEMBER 2023 ISSUE N.45

"OPTIONS"



FT. WIZ KHALIFA

# MR. REAPER

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# CONTENTS

4

**DEMI LOVATO**

6

**JESSICA NICOLE BROWN**

8

**THE PRETENDERS**

10

**FEATURED  
MR.REAPER**

14

**ICONA POP**

16

**KENNY GEMINI**

18

**DOJA CAT**

20

**JORDAN CABO SMITH**

22

**BAKAR**

24

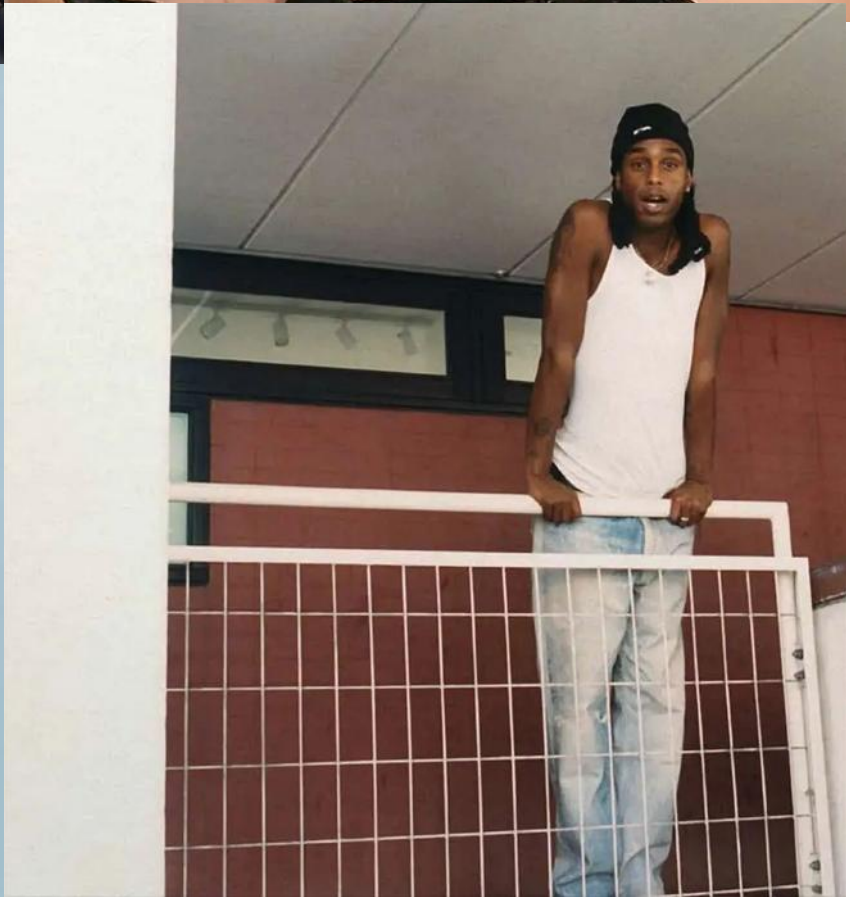
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# DEMI LOVATO

## 'REVAMPED'

Since the release of her eighth studio album, *Holy Fvck*, primarily influenced by pop-punk and hard rock, Demi Lovato has enjoyed somewhat of a change in image. It shouldn't be surprising to devoted fans since she famously held a "funeral for [her] pop music" in a photo posted on social media at the beginning of 2022. But once it came time to reimagine her existing pop songs to coincide with the performance of new punk-rock stylings from her last LP, she needed to find a way to make them all work together on tour.

That process ended up being more fun for Lovato than she initially envisioned, and the positive reception of the reimaginings prompted her to consider re-recording older songs from her catalogue. The result is *Revamped*, the singer's first remix album composed of ten new "rock versions" of some of her biggest pop hits.

Critics have already labeled Lovato's remixes as a copycat of Taylor Swift's ambitious re-recording project, even though the circumstances surrounding the two are quite different. However, the popularity of new versions of previously recorded tracks in an artist's discography has seen a vast increase in streams on music streaming services, indicating that many listeners enjoy hearing new life breathed into songs from over a decade ago.

Besides, *Revamped* feels less like Lovato trying to contribute to the current popularity of re-records and more like an attempt to rewrite her history, which is her right. Coming of age in the entertainment industry as a former Disney child star comes with its own set of complications without being burdened further by management and record labels pushing such an artist towards a particular sound or genre.

Indeed, her split from her toxic Disney management in light of her 2018 overdose likely caused some of her work during that reign to be difficult to return to. So instead of pretending they don't exist, Lovato has taken to re-recording some

of the songs that made her famous to reflect the challenges she's faced and overcome and the better person she became because of it. *Revamped* sounds just like that, an update of a catalogue she might not necessarily like anymore but still appreciates, and sometimes that's the best we can do.

Many of the songs re-recorded on *Revamped* had neared over-play status in their original versions, including but not limited to "Heart Attack", "Confident", and "Cool for the Summer". But here, they sound better as alt-rock songs and give listeners a better shot at believing that Lovato is feeling more confident now than ever. She further updates singles like "Neon Lights", "Give Your Heart a Break", and "Tell Me You Love Me" with continuously flawless vocals and rock production that inexplicably works. The only track that doesn't quite land as a rock song is "Sorry Not Sorry", since most pop "diss tracks" aren't meant to be translated into alt-rock stylings, no matter who's singing them.

Lovato is grateful for her *Revamped* remixes since they have allowed her to fall back in love with songs she had since grown tired of performing, namely "Give Your Heart a Break", which she reimagined into a duet with Bert McCracken. She described "Tell Me You Love Me", the title track from her R&B and soul-influenced sixth LP, as the most difficult to transform into a rock song.

"The vocals are just so soulful on that one, and so trying to keep it soulful while also amping it up for this record was pretty difficult," the singer told *Billboard*. But she seldom misses the mark during the re-recording process, likely because her current rock sound comes so naturally to her. More than just having fun updating her work, Demi Lovato refashions herself and her music to reflect the person she is today, which is bold and defiant.





# JESSICA NICOLE BROWN

## "DUST" EP: AN ECLECTIC JOURNEY THROUGH POP INNOVATION

There are those who artists embrace the boundaries of genre and fearlessly venture into uncharted territory. Among these trailblazers, Jessica Nicole Brown stands as a shining example of innovation. Her music, a kaleidoscope of influences ranging from Art Pop to Alternative R&B/Soul and Indie Acoustic, refuses to be confined to a single category. The unpredictability of her sonic palette is the very essence of her allure; in the world of Jessica Nicole Brown, one never knows quite what to expect, but the results are always a captivating auditory tapestry. Brown's latest offering, the EP "DUST," serves as an exquisite showcase of her multifaceted talents.

As one of the newest members of the Recording Academy, Brown has sent a resounding message to the music world—she is an artist on the brink of something extraordinary. Building on the attention garnered by her 90s film-inspired masterpiece, "Chinese Food," Brown released "DUST" on August 25th, inviting listeners on a journey into her dark, yet vibrantly alive universe.

From the very first note, it becomes abundantly clear that Jessica Nicole Brown love for cinematic storytelling runs deep within her musical veins. Each track on "DUST" carries a cinematic quality, as if she is crafting a vivid narrative with every melody and lyric. It's no wonder that she has already captured the attention of media outlets early in her career; her creations have the remarkable power to captivate anyone fortunate enough to encounter them. "DUST" comprises six tracks: 'My Own Place,' 'Chinese

Food,' 'Mister Twister,' '26,' 'Cigarette,' and 'Masterpiece.' Each of these songs is a testament to Brown's exceptional vocal prowess, her artistic depth, and the magnetic personality that defines her. With an authenticity that touches the heart, she breathes life into these compositions, making them instantly relatable to a wide array of ears.

"My Own Place" is a thought-provoking song that addresses the themes of self-discovery, independence, and the search for a sense of belonging. The lyrics are rich in imagery and take the listener on a journey through various locations, both real and metaphorical, as the singer searches for her own space in the world.

"Chinese Food" portrays the protagonist's relentless pursuit of Chinese cuisine, but it's also about the persistent pursuit of what one desires, a metaphor for life's cravings and obstacles.

"Mister Twister" is a poignant and introspective song that explores complex emotions and mental health issues. Jessica Nicole Brown's lyrics effectively convey the longing for escape, the struggle with inner demons, and the desire for moments of respite. "26" is a raw and emotionally charged song that captures the universal struggle of navigating the uncertainties of young adulthood. It explores themes of time, identity, and the pursuit of meaning, all set against a backdrop of upbeat groove and counter harmonies. "Cigarette" is a thoughtful exploration of the need for escapism and a brief respite from life's challenges. The use of metaphor and vivid imagery helps convey the

emotional turmoil faced by the protagonist, making the song relatable to anyone who has sought solace in a small indulgence during difficult times. "Masterpiece" is a reflective and introspective song that explores the challenges and uncertainties of following one's own path in the pursuit of artistic and personal fulfillment. The lyrics convey a sense of determination and the need for self-discovery. The musical landscape of "DUST" is a rich tapestry, intricately woven with rolling basslines, jangling guitars, warm keys, flourishing brass, and thumping drums. It's an organically vibrant soundscape that resonates with authenticity. What's remarkable is how distinctly Jessica Nicole Brown it all sounds. Her music, simultaneously chaotic and calm, both unfamiliar and familiar, is uniquely hers.

Each track is a testament to her fearless spirit and an astonishing willingness to take creative risks. It's perplexing, honestly, that she isn't a household name by now. Brown occupies a rarefied space among artists who consistently challenge their limitations, push the boundaries of their craft, confound expectations, and provoke listeners to ponder what music truly can be.

In "DUST," Jessica Nicole Brown has not only solidified her place in the musical pantheon but has also signaled that she is a star in the making. With a career that is still in its nascent stages, one can't help but wonder what other sonic adventures she has up her sleeve. For now, we bask in the brilliance of "DUST" and eagerly await the next chapter in the mesmerizing journey of this exceptional artist. Jessica Nicole Brown is not just an artist to watch; she is the artist who demands to be heard.

LINKS: <https://www.thejnbway.com>



# THE PRETENDERS

## 'RELENTLESS'

When the Pretenders were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2005, Chrissie Hynde ended her characteristically terse acceptance speech with “two notes—boom-boom, boom-boom: Keep moving, but never change.” It’s a little alarming, then, when the first line she sings on the Pretenders’ new album, *Relentless*, is “I must be going through a metamorphosis.” Never change?

The line opens a song called “Losing My Sense of Taste”. According to Hynde, it’s her take on the pandemic lockdown—a theme almost no one wants to hear about anymore, and despite what Hynde says about the song, you don’t have to. Although “Losing My Sense of Taste” was inspired by the COVID times, it’s clearly about something else: late-life loss of all sense and sensibility. Over a heavy but chugging minor-key backing track, Hynde sings of “senile dementia or some kind of psychosis / I don’t even care about rock and roll.” In addition to violating her induction-speech enjoinder to “never change,” is she also going to stop moving and park the Pretenders for good? By the song’s end, she’s moved through losing her sense of taste to losing her sense of smell to—perish the thought—losing her sense of hearing: the one thing no rock and roller can live without.

The very existence of *Relentless*, the Pretenders’ 12th studio album, proves Hynde isn’t about to stop or change, no matter how fungible the personnel or sporadic the band’s output over the last few decades. Currently, the band’s core is Hynde and James Walbourne, who initially attracted notice as the secret weapon in the Pernice Brothers in the mid-2000s. Walbourne attached himself to the Pretenders in 2008 and is now Hynde’s chief collaborator. The duo co-wrote the songs on *Relentless* and its predecessor, *Hate for Sale* (2020), and it’s Walbourne’s expressive lead guitar that confirms we’re listening to the Pretenders and not a solo Chrissie Hynde record.

There’s no question that Hynde is the Pretenders and the Pretenders are Hynde, but she has insisted for decades that there’d have been no recognizable band without founding guitarist James Honeyman-Scott, who died of a drug overdose in 1982 when he was just 25. It was

Honeyman-Scott’s guitar tone and style that, in tandem with Hynde’s voice—one of the most distinctive and expressive in rock history—created the band’s original musical signature. Hynde knew not only how important Honeyman-Scott was to the band’s identity but also how essential his role was to her traditionalist rock ideology: “One thing that never goes out of favor is a guitar hero,” she recently told an interviewer. “And I make sure I always have one.” (“Always” isn’t quite correct, and when she hasn’t, the Pretenders’ music has tended to suffer as a result.)

Nearly 50 years of rock relentlessness have also earned her the right to court schmaltz. (She was already doing that 30 years ago, let’s not forget, when she paid hitmakers-for-hire Tom Kelly and Billy Steinberg to write “I’ll Stand by You” for her and get her back into the Top Ten.) After “Let It Go” pushes the emotionality right to the edge of tolerability, “I Think About You Daily” may topple over it (perhaps she is losing her sense of taste, after all?). Featuring a seagulls-crying-over-the-spindrift string section composed by Radiohead’s Jonny Greenwood, the song dwells lengthily and heavily on Hynde’s regret over how she mistreated the one she lost and now thinks about daily.

This wallowing guilt is a little surprising coming from Hynde, who has always been an avowed love-and-leave type, a solitary soul, and a believer in the impermanence of all things and experiences, including (indeed especially) romance. It might suffice to characterize the song’s sentimentalized and self-pitying breakup vibe by saying that it would be fun to hear Lana Del Rey cover it (which might, in turn, suffice to acknowledge the debt women in rock continue to owe Hynde). It might also suffice to assess the song by saying that the degree to which it works for you will probably depend on how much you need Hynde to conform to the image and persona of the boxer on the cover of *Relentless*. Whatever you think, you can be sure it’s all the same to her.







FEATURED ARTIST



# Mr. Reaper

## UNLOCKING THE VIBES: 'OPTIONS' BY MR.REAPER FT. WIZ KHALIFA

Ladies and gentlemen, gather 'round and brace yourselves, because we're diving into the seismic tsunami that is Mr.Reaper's latest sonic creation – "Options," a masterstroke collaboration featuring none other than the legendary hip-hop luminary, Wiz Khalifa. This is no mere musical jaunt; it's an electrifying odyssey that proves without a shadow of a doubt that Mr.Reaper has ascended to the celestial pantheon of hip-hop royalty. If you've been riding shotgun on Mr.Reaper's wild ride, you know that this DMV dynamo has been cultivating a trail of sonic dynamite since 2020. The underground domain trembled under the weight of his hits like "Ballad Of The Reaper," a chilling serenade that caressed the very edges of your psyche, "Come Follow Me And We Ride," an anthem that beckoned us to journey through the cosmos of his creativity, and the hauntingly hypnotic "Thru The Dark."

But Mr.Reaper ain't a man to rest upon his laurels. Nah, he's got dreams bigger than the universe itself, dreams that catapulted him into the limelight with a feature alongside the venerable Sean Kingston on the exultant symphony "Higher." The dotted lines were inked, the stars aligned, and history was in the making for Mr.Reaper.

But the machinations of the industry game can be as capricious as the wind. Fate had its own design, and though the masses sang praises to Sean Kingston's name, Mr.Reaper's fiery brilliance was destined to blaze a parallel trail. The official version came forth, sans our valiant protagonist, but let it be known, the fire in Mr.Reaper's spirit burns brighter than the sun. With unwavering resolve, he dropped the gauntlet of his version of "Higher" on his personal website. A testament to his indomitable spirit, which soared and swooped like a phoenix reborn.

Now, if you've had the privilege of caressing the auditory senses with Mr.Reaper's rendition of "Higher," you've borne witness to a hurricane of self-empowerment. It's a lyrical tapestry woven with threads of resilience and audacity. However, the quest for a major label feature didn't halt at "Higher," for Mr.Reaper has crashed through yet another stratosphere, unleashing upon us his latest endeavor baptized as "Options."

"Options" is a downtempo trap symphony pulsating with the hypnotic resonance of booming basslines that throb with the very heartbeat of the streets. Skittering percussion pirouettes in perfect synchrony, a ballet of rhythm that enlivens your very core. Shimmering pianos and analog synths paint a cosmic backdrop, a canvas for the lyrical prowess that's about to ensue.

Mr.Reaper and Wiz Khalifa, come across like two titans of the genre, locked in lyrical embrace, trading bars like dueling wizards of rhyme. They saunter through the landscape of their cravings, their wordplay a symphony of choice and consequence, desire and destiny. "Options" is a West Coast groove, a sun-soaked journey through the labyrinth of carnal and romantic inclinations, a tale told with the swagger of kings. And let's not mince words – Mr.Reaper stands unflinching in this major-league carnival, his verses as sharp as the blade of a master swordsman. He doesn't merely hold his own; he commands the stage, his flow like a tempest, his confidence radiating like a supernova. With each verse, he elevates his art form, leaving us wonderstruck, mouths agape, minds racing.





# Mr. Reaper

## FEATURED ARTIST

“Options” is a proclamation, a declaration that Mr.Reaper is here to keep rewriting the annals of his own hip-hop history. The question that quivers upon our lips is one of boundless curiosity: where shall this master of rhyme and rhythm take us next?

The sky is not the limit, for he has the ambition to defy the limits and waltz among the stars. The game awaits his next lyrical whisper, his next seismic sonic creation. And we, the fortunate witnesses, stand ready to be swept away once again.

OFFICIAL LINKS: <http://reapgotflowz.net/>





# ICONA POP

## 'CLUB ROMANTECH'

Icona Pop's 2012 song "I Love It" was such a world-beating smash that it even found its way out of dance clubs and into at least one clubhouse. A men's pro sports team used the song as the theme for their closed-door celebration after they won their league championship. (I not only have this firsthand, but it's also preserved somewhere on a voice recorder.) When you've got a room full of sweat- and testosterone-soaked ballplayers to choose your neo-teenybopper pop confection as the tune they want to bounce around to while further soaking themselves in sprays of shaken bubbly, that can only mean that you, too, are the champions, my friend.

For a few months in 2013, "I Love It" seemed to be everywhere in the US, from *The Vampire Diaries* to *Good Morning America* and from *Girls* to *Glee*. No doubt the song's ubiquity owed at least partly to the general tendency of anything that gets popular in one place to spread all over (or "go viral", if you must, in this post-Covid world) just because it's the readiest thing to hand—a tendency the social media age has hugely increased.

It's not only that, though. "I Love It" is much more interesting than the usual dance track pabulum. The tune has a semblance of melody and chords, and its verse is well built to spring load the infectious chorus. Lyrically, before the insouciant rah-rah of the refrain, we get this verse: "I crashed my car into the bridge / I watched, I let it burn / I threw your shit into a bag and pushed it down the stairs." There's also a bridge (in the compositional sense) in which the singer half taunts, half boasts, "You're from the '70s, but I'm a '90s bitch," making it clear that this

is a song about a younger woman dumping her significantly older (in)significant other and, for good measure, scorching the earth, or at least her car..

Flash forward ten (!) years, and Icona Pop are finally back with their second record, *Club Romantech*. To kill a decade of suspense, no, there's nothing here on the order of "I Love It", which may or may not have to do with Charli XCX having written none of the new release's 15 songs.

Nonetheless, this music is quite successful at doing what it's designed to do: fan out into clubs, teenagers' playlists, and Urban Outfitters franchises and reach the nearest available pleasure receptors of young listeners. These are essentially interchangeable dance tracks, nearly all around the same length and tempo, and written mainly by the same consortium around the same repeating keywords (feel, heart, body, dancing, tonight, etc.).

The last song on *Club Romantech* is also the longest, clocking in at a whopping 3:19. It's called "Spa", a word Icona Pop draw out—"spa-ah"—so it rhymes with "sauna", which is pretty funny. They're done dancing their hearts out tonight and are ready to go to this spa, where the song's opening couplet, "Naked bodies everywhere / I'm OK, you can stare," sounds a good deal less NSFW than it would if the setting was still the club—except, wait a second, "Spa" is deceptively but unmistakably extremely NSFW, if you pay a little attention. The naughtiness starts in the line after the one about naked bodies: "You and me forever young, with this facial made of"—and then there's a very conspicuous absence where a word is called for to rhyme with "young",

until a sampled (male) voice circles in to supply a big "O". [Beavis and Butthead laugh.] A real male voice—the only one on *Club Romantech*, and a charmingly fey one at that—soon chimes in with a little godfearing spa S&M: "Slap my body with a birch / In the morning, we go to church." Presumably, this voice belongs to Tucker Halpern, one half of the duo Sofi Tukker, who co-wrote "Spa" with Icona Pop and producer Jon Hume. Sofi Tukker are so called because the duo's other half is named Sophie Hawley-Weld. Halpern and Hawley-Weld met in college, where Halpern was the captain of the men's basketball team (!) before the Epstein-Barr virus forced him to quit and follow the usual transition from Ivy League All-Star sportsman to purveyor of electropop. The college they met at was Brown University, which explains why "Spa" is by far the cleverest and most exciting song on *Club Romantech* because everyone knows that all the smartest and most interesting people go to Brown.

Does "Spa" fit with the rest of the tunes on this album? No. Is it going to become a worldwide hit for Icona Pop? Unlikely. Will it be heard thumping in the background of a clubhouse celebration after a sports team wins its league championship? That prospect is marvelous to contemplate, but no, certainly not. I don't care. I love it.





# Kenny Gemini

Unlocking the Meaning Behind 'God Gimme Money'



Kenny Gemini, a name that has become synonymous with authenticity and unwavering faith in the hip-hop scene, brings us a song that has steadily carved its place in the hearts of listeners since its release in 2021. "God Gimme Money" is more than just a catchy tune; it's a testament to the artist's journey, his resolute commitment to his craft, and his steadfast faith in a higher purpose. Born in the

heart of New York, Kenny Gemini's roots run deep within the original boom-bap sound that defines the city's hip-hop legacy. However, life's twists and turns have taken him far and wide, leading to the creation of a truly distinctive musical style that reflects his rich tapestry of experiences. As a loving husband and father of two, Kenny's music transcends generational boundaries. It's a testament to

his authenticity as an artist that his songs resonate with people of all ages. His artistry is not confined to mere entertainment; it's a reflection of his real-life experiences, the trials he's faced, and his unshakable faith in God. Kenny's mission is clear – to spread positivity, love, and hope through his music and to inspire others to do the same. Based in the vibrant hip-hop scene of Dallas, Texas,

Kenny Gemini is more than just an artist; he's a catalyst for change. He firmly believes in the power of music to unite people and effect positive transformation. With a platform like his, he's dedicated to making a difference in the world. "God Gimme Money" isn't just any rap track; it's a journey into the heart and soul of Kenny Gemini. With a Latin-flavor that adds a unique twist to the song, a steady mid-tempo beat that hooks you from the start, and Kenny's elastic vocal flow, this track infiltrates your thoughts and refuses to let go.

The song paints a portrait of Kenny Gemini as a wise, confident, and relatable artist who raps as if he were your mentor. He's not just rapping; he's teaching, and he's doing it with an infectious passion that's impossible to ignore. His delivery is sharp, his words resonate with excitement, and he pulls you into his narrative with every verse. In the opening verse, Kenny dives headfirst into the struggles he's faced, feeling as if life has dealt him a tough hand.

He weaves a vivid narrative, comparing his situation to "milking the cash cow" while wading through challenging circumstances. The desperation and determination in his voice are palpable, giving listeners an immediate connection to his story.

He reflects on the chaos of life, the constant "go-go" without control of one's mind, and the need to piece together what's been broken. Kenny's lyrics explore the theme of trust in a world where authenticity can be scarce. He touches on the duality of human nature, where people may act like they love you, but their actions prove otherwise. The chorus is a heartfelt prayer, a plea for blessings, but with a

twist. Kenny Gemini doesn't just ask for material wealth; he prays for wealth that can be used to benefit others and emulate the life of Jesus. The essence of his living, he says, should be abundant praise, and his actions should reflect the teachings of Christ. Kenny's lyrical prowess shines here as he contemplates his decisions, realizing the value of time spent with his children and the need to focus on his mission.

He beautifully juxtaposes speculation and contemplation with running out of time, creating a thought-provoking contrast. In the second verse, Kenny Gemini takes a moment to assert his identity, unapologetically showing his strength and determination. He acknowledges his "vicious" side, making it clear that he's not to be trifled with. His choice of words, mixed with a touch of French ("cest la vie"), adds depth to his character.

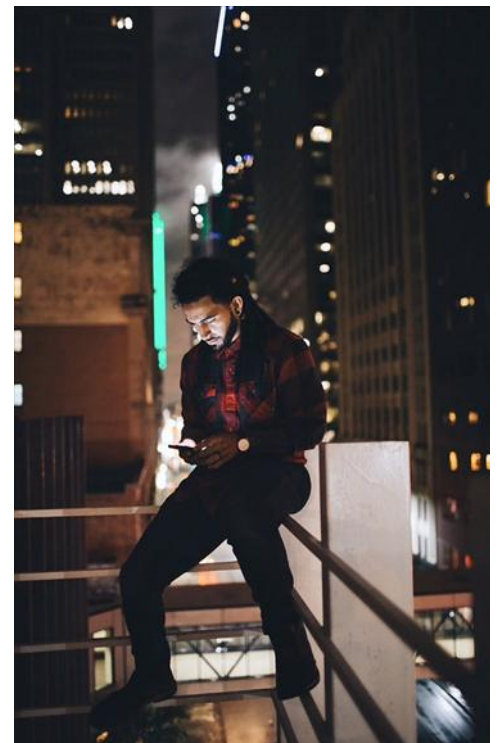
He reflects on the people around him who may not truly understand his journey and dismisses those who bring negativity into his life. Kenny Gemini's desire for peace and contentment is evident, and he emphasizes that he's not difficult to please. His self-confidence shines through as he declares himself "gifted" and deserving of the best life has to offer.

In the final verse, Kenny delves into the business of life and the need to keep personal matters just that – personal. He questions the authenticity of those who claim to know him and warns against those who try to deceive or pry into his affairs. The imagery of mud on sleeves and the darkness clouding his vision paint a picture of the challenges he's faced. Greed and ambition collide as he acknowledges the worth of his dreams

and aspirations. He doesn't apologize for his drive, making it clear that he's willing to leave a mess behind if it means achieving his goals. The verse ends with a poignant prayer and confession, a testament to his vulnerability as an artist. "God Gimme Money" is a track that encapsulates Kenny Gemini's artistic journey. It's a song that hooks you from the first beat and refuses to let go, inviting listeners into Kenny's world of trials, triumphs, and unshakable faith.

Kenny Gemini is not just a rapper; he's a storyteller, a teacher, and a vessel of hope. His music serves as a reminder that, no matter where life takes us, faith and authenticity will always shine through. As we await Kenny's future musical endeavors, one thing is certain – his commitment to creating authentic, uplifting, and inspiring music will continue to impress.

<http://www.kennygemini.com>





# DOJA CAT

## 'SCARLET'



Just shy of a decade ago, Amala Ratna Zandile Dlamini, otherwise known as Doja Cat, crept onto the TikTok scene with 'So High', which led to subsequent interest from Kemosabe and RCA Records. 'Say So' was also the beneficiary of TikTok virality, escalated to success by viral dance challenges, becoming a 'sleeper hit' for the artist.

To get a sense of Doja Cat's ascent, her videos on YouTube alone have amassed over 7 billion views to date. In a monochromatic world, bloodied and ominous, Doja Cat plucks out her own eyeball and gently flicks it across the desk.

It drops into another fantasy realm; this time she's poised, towering atop the head of an illustrated pistachio green devil. 'Paint the Town Red' ensues; it's unfalteringly infectious sample of 'Walk on By' by Dionne Warwick gracefully revolves through a dystopian dreamscape.

Controversy, extravagance and viral success are ultimately synonymous with the LA singer-songwriter. Doja Cat's fourth studio album 'Scarlet' is no exception to this unspoken rule. The run-up to its release date has stirred a cacophony of chatter online, perhaps most notably for the arsenal of comments steered towards

'Scarlet's dark and demonic iconography. "Has she sold her soul to the devil?", the line emblazoned underneath the video to second track 'Demons', as Doja Cat skulks around in flickering shadows, glossed head to toe in black prosthetics and ruby eyes that flash in the darkness.

The animalistic figure crawls across the ceiling – perhaps as a nod to The Exorcist – above actress Christina Ricci's bed whilst she sleeps. The morbid visual direction certainly delivers on the record's hype. Though sadly, this vitality and penchant for the macabre doesn't translate to the record's sound.

The infamous bathtub scene in The Shining morphs into a gnarled, disturbing hand appearing from the suds in Nightmare on Elm Street; it carries allusions to static TVs courtesy of The Poltergeist and found footage in true Blair Witch Project essence.

Embracing and relishing horror movie tropes – the gothic and the gore – it's a polished transformation for Doja, though these prevailing themes stumble in consistency throughout the record, at odds with the reined-in sound design Doja Cat is exploring on this record. Overall, this is a sonically and thematically more mature

offering from Doja; track feels fuller and more adventurous than her previous work. There's a healthy dose of self-mocking and self-aware lyricism which never falters to brand her sound with trademark wit and character; she nods to her notorious red carpet vaping altercation and references "selling out" in her career – of her own volition.

'Fuck the Girls' offers swathes of punch and grit, channeling the laissez-faire attitude and bravado she is so closely associated with. On 'Go Off', however, there's a sharp change of pace and the record rests in a slower tempo for the remainder of the song cycle. From 'Can't Wait' to 'Balut', 'Scarlet' wallows in a daydream-like haze for one song too many and the record loses its vigour and sense of adventure.

The chilled, languorous template delivers on value, but offers little else and you can't help but feel like these are unnecessary filler tracks. At its core, 'Scarlet' is an interesting exploration into the world of ego trips, the trappings of fame, escapism and novelty, a welcome deviation with a heightened sense of maturity and finesse.



# JORDAN CABO SMITH

LEAD YOU AFAR (REMIX)" TAKES CENTER STAGE!





In contemporary R&B, where artistic versatility is king and vocal virtuosity reigns supreme, Jordan Cabo Smith emerges as a beacon of musical brilliance. A maestro of emotion, Smith has consistently demonstrated his prowess as a songwriter, singer, rapper, and producer, earning him a well-deserved spot among the genre's underground elite. With a resonant baritone that exudes raw soul, and lyrical storytelling that transcends the ordinary, Smith's latest single, "Lead You Afar (Remix)," transports listeners to a realm where melody and message meld seamlessly.

Jordan Cabo Smith's unique vocal prowess is immediately evident as his deep velvety baritone envelops the listener. Each note is a brushstroke on the canvas of emotions, creating an auditory masterpiece. His vocal range effortlessly traverses the song's diverse terrain, from gentle crooning to fervent lyricism. This remarkable versatility allows Smith to craft a melodic journey that is as rich in complexity as the human experience itself.

Accompanying Jordan Cabo Smith's soul-stirring vocals are background harmonies that strike like celestial beams, delivering an added layer of emotional depth. These harmonies, meticulously arranged, complement the lyrical narrative with an ethereal grace, reinforcing the emotional resonance of the track. The lyrical prowess displayed in "Lead You Afar (Remix)" is a testament to Jordan Cabo Smith's exceptional storytelling abilities. His lyrics are a profound exploration of

human relationships, trust, and self-discovery. Smith invites us to reflect on the transient nature of human connections and the potential for deceit lurking beneath seemingly friendly faces. "Remember Judas was a friend not foe," he reminds us, a poignant metaphor for the betrayal we may encounter in life. Jordan Cabo Smith skillfully weaves this timeless cautionary tale into the fabric of his narrative, urging us to tread cautiously in our interpersonal dealings.

Yet, amidst these cautionary verses, there exists an ever-present beacon of hope. Smith extols the virtues of wisdom and self-preservation in the face of loneliness, encouraging listeners to "never let loneliness lead you afar." It's a message of empowerment and self-care, delivered with eloquence and heartfelt sincerity.

Jordan Cabo Smith's composition is a masterful fusion of musical elements. The eloquent strumming of guitars, executed with precision, weaves a warm tapestry of sound. These melodic threads are complemented by the gentle skittering of percussion, which serves as the rhythmic heartbeat of the track.

The subtle yet entrancing keys provide a harmonic foundation, wrapping the listener in a sonic embrace. The result is an immersive and soothing listening experience that transcends genre boundaries. Smith deftly combines elements of R&B, soul, and contemporary pop, forging a sonic path uniquely his

own. As we navigate the complex landscape of contemporary R&B, artists like Jordan Cabo Smith stand out as luminaries. "Lead You Afar (Remix)" is a testament to his multifaceted talents – a sonic journey that defies beckons listeners to delve into the depths of their emotions. With a voice that is a vehicle for introspection and lyrics that spark contemplation, Jordan Cabo Smith urges us to remain vigilant against the pitfalls of trust and to cherish the wisdom that solitude can bring.

In a world where artistry and authenticity often wane, Jordan Cabo Smith shines as a symbol of musical sincerity and emotional resonance. His latest offering is nothing short of a transformative listening experience—an evocative journey through the labyrinthine corridors of the human heart.

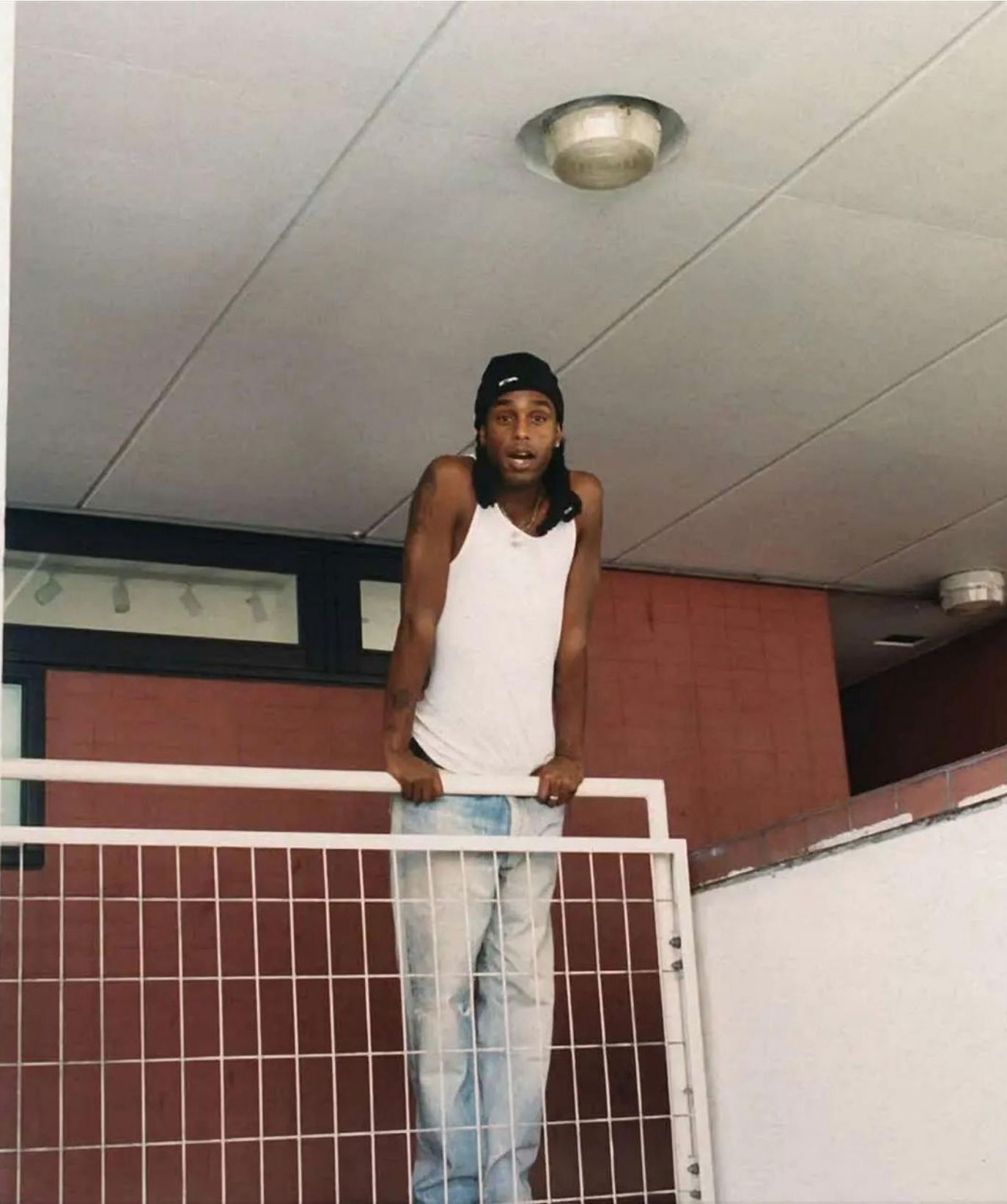
LINK:

[www.instagram.com/jordancabosmith](https://www.instagram.com/jordancabosmith)



# BAKAR

'HALO'



Bakar has perfected a gorgeous blend of rap, pop, R&B and synth electronics across new album 'Halo'. Described as one of the most exciting artists in Britain and praised by the likes of Elton John, Virgil Abloh and Skepta, Bakar ensures he is on the path to becoming one of the greats. 'Halo' starts with 'One In One Out', a pulsating track with an addictive guitar solo. He sings "sooner or later I'll change for the good", warming up the listener to an album focused on the loneliness and lifestyle of a musician on the road.

The pace picks up with 'Alive!' full of acoustic guitar and quick tambourine, demonstrating – as ever – that Bakar can spread himself over many genres. This song also has moments of tender vocals, but pop choruses quickly sweep these away.

One of the strongest tracks on 'Halo', 'Alive!' has a contagious warmth, making it the perfect choice for the first single release. 'Facts Situation' is a slower, calmer part of the album, pausing pop and rap.

Singing "I hate the facts; I hate the situation" it's a song of slow frustration and acceptance. It features Mark Crown on trumpet and a spoken outro

by Mona Tougaard. 'Halo' is mostly an upbeat album, but it paces itself by taking breaks with more reflective tracks like this song. The pace accelerates again with 'All Night' full of reverb guitars and emotion.

It may not catch Bakar at his optimistic, but the upbeat drums keep the album high. It has moments of isolated vocals sighing in chorus, showing the never-ending depth of Bakar's music. 'All Night' focuses on the complexities of affection and infatuation.

'Selling Biscuits' is another breath from the upbeat R&B-meets-pop blend, acting as the interlude with softly sung lyrics saying: "Selling biscuits to all the rich kids, same old habits because we're all misfits..." With minimal instrumentation, it focuses most on Bakar's lyricism across the whole album. It gives a moment to show the more emotional side of the album with little instrumental distraction.

'Hate The Sun' is another slower, more mellow song. Bakar sings about heartbreak and anger, his excoriating lyrics stating "I hate the sun because that's the

sun that we had..." 'Hate The Sun' highlights Bakar's great lyrics and powerful vocals at the end more than any other time in 'Halo'.

Bakar experiments with trippier and distorted vocals in 'Invisible'. It is one of the more rap-focussed songs, underpinned by droning synth. The penultimate song 'Sofa' feels like a mix of all the tracks on 'Halo'. It is full of vibrato guitar, which makes it feel trippy, but it has cleaner vocals and a big-sounding, smooth pop-like chorus.

The album finishes with a mix of the hit song 'Hell N Back', featuring Summer Walker, R&B goddess and close friend of Bakar. Most of 'Halo' was sculpted on the road, a moment of pause and introspection that affords Bakar space to surge forwards creatively.



# DR UD OBI

'WORTHY OF LOVE' SHINES LIGHT ON DOMESTIC ABUSE



Artist of the Month

In a world where music serves as a conduit for emotions and healing, Dr. UD Obi emerges as a powerful force, seamlessly blending her faith and passion for spreading love through her latest single, 'Worthy Of Love.' With a heart dedicated to both God and her musical craft, Dr. UD Obi unveils a soul-stirring composition that not only resonates with the depths of human emotions but also carries a profound message of hope and empowerment. Dr. UD Obi, a luminary in her own right with a doctorate in Engineering, transcends the boundaries of academia to immerse herself in the realm of music, driven by an unshakable faith and an unwavering commitment to inspire change.

Her journey as a singer-songwriter began in the echoing halls of choirs during her childhood, and her music has consistently been inspired by her Christian faith and the essence of her name, 'Udoka,' meaning "Peace is great" in the Igbo language. It's this very foundation that allows her to craft music that not only soothes the soul but also delivers powerful messages of love, peace, and resilience.

'Worthy Of Love' stands as an inspiration of hope and a stark reminder of the resilience that resides within us all. Dr. UD Obi masterfully navigates the sensitive and often harrowing theme of domestic abuse, offering solace to survivors and encouraging them to break free from the shackles of blame and silence. The song's narrative is poignant, and its emotional impact is undeniable. As the melody gently unfurls, Dr. UD Obi's voice takes center stage, delivering the song's messages with striking clarity and authenticity. Her vocals are not merely beautiful;

they are alluring, captivating the listener's attention from the very first note. Her composure throughout the track is praiseworthy, exuding a sense of control that perfectly complements the song's overarching message. The lyrics of 'Worthy Of Love' are a testament to Dr. UD Obi's exceptional songwriting prowess. Her words are profoundly honest, addressing complex themes and emotions with ease. The opening lines, "Fear is my companion, / And I feel a mess," pull us into the depths of despair and vulnerability. Yet, through the pain and trauma, there's a glimmer of hope – "This fight will end in Praise."

The chorus serves as an affirmation of self-worth and resilience. "I'm anointed, special, / His good works in me, He will surely complete," Dr. UD Obi sings, dismantling the destructive notions of self-blame and unworthiness that abuse victims may carry. "Shame is my companion," the lyrics continue, addressing the crippling burden that shame often becomes.

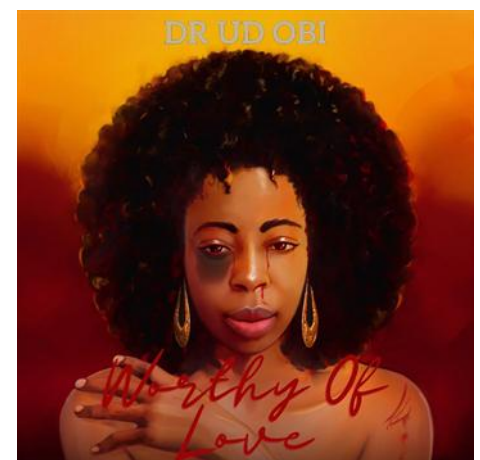
It's a powerful acknowledgment of the emotional ordeal that survivors face. But again, the chorus offers a lifeline, reminding us that we are "victorious" and "worthy of love." The closing verse is a testament to the healing power of faith and the support of a higher power. It beautifully encapsulates the journey from brokenness to triumph, offering a message of hope that will resonate deeply with listeners. Once again the chorus reminds us that, in the face of life's trials and tribulations, we are God's chosen

ones, anointed and special, with the promise of completion in His good works. The message that "It was never my fault" resonates deeply, dispelling the shadows of blame and shame that often plague survivors. As the song progresses, it's impossible not to feel a sense of catharsis and empowerment. Dr. UD Obi's unwavering faith and her acknowledgment that it's okay to ask for help propel the narrative towards a triumphant climax. She reminds us that, even in our brokenness, we are not alone, for Christ is enough to heal, save, and make us whole.

In 'Worthy Of Love,' Dr. UD Obi offers more than just a good listen; she provides a transformative experience that resonates with the soul. Her profound understanding of the human condition, coupled with her remarkable vocal talent, makes this track a recording that empowers and uplifts. It's a song that speaks to the heart, reminding us all that we are indeed worthy of love.

Links:

<http://www.instagram.com/drudobi>



DR UD OBI



TONEFLAME

DR UD OBI

Artist of the Month