

BEYONCÉ: A MANIFESTO OF UNAPOLOGETIC FEMINIST EXPRESSION

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In today's pop music circuit, popularity, overexposure, and disposability seem to be the leading constituents of change – or lack thereof – as several of the genre's leading acts serve up their best concoction of microwavable "pop" for underdeveloped ears. With releases from the likes of Katy Perry, Lady Gaga, and Britney Spears receiving lukewarm to ice cold receptions at best, hope for 2013's pop prowess was proving to be unredeemable at best. That is, until Beyoncé dropped a bomb encapsulated with refreshing blueprints of struggle and joy, unorthodox feministic paradigms, and altruistic approaches to self-love that made the world shudder in both shock and relief.

Re-entering the struggling music scene in the form of a self-titled project, sans promotion, snippets, or any pre-cursor of its release at all, Beyoncé attracted more critical acclaim to her Friday Dec. 13-released project than any artist has garnered throughout the course of the year's entirety. What took many by surprise, however, is the manner in which the singer exposed her own personal life in musical form, turning her own life experiences inside out, and politically steering a new age of understated feminism that

critics and self-proclaimed feminists alike have pressured the star of ignoring for years. Addressing the various plights and fulfilling moments of womanhood including body image, societally constructed beauty standards, jealousy, marriage, sexuality, and motherhood, "BEYONCÉ" ultimately serves as Bey's most honest and affirmatively creative album to date.

Opening with the spine-chillingly anthemic "Pretty Hurts," "BEYONCÉ" wastes no time delving into the crux of things. Declaring her agenda, Beyoncé reassesses American society's faulty focus on conventional beauty as a product it can sell to women. Further magnifying the premise of the song, its accompanying music video displays an insecure Beyoncé competing for the crown as Miss Third Ward (named after the street where she grew up) in a beauty pageant. While the beauty that is Mrs. Carter may prompt one to ask "Isn't that kind of conceited?" it is, in actuality, the underlying construct of the pageant brand to reveal that praising females solely based on outward aesthetics can lead to self-destruction. In the ballad, Beyoncé puts it best: "Perfection is a disease of a nation."

Continuing along the thread of female power, Beyoncé abandons the theme of societal critics and transcends to the concept of self-empowerment and body positivity found in many of the album's following cuts. What makes this such a gratifying progression is not Bey's common role as girl-power empress, but rather her ability to unapologetically tackle and praise her own womanly beauty without hesitation or worry of public opinion. On the freestyle-flavored "Yoncé" (first half of "Partition"), "Rocket," and "****Flawless," which

features the heavily criticized "Bow Down" released in early 2013, the songstress' confidence is anything but restrained, proving that it is not damaging for one to indulge in self-praise. Furthermore, marrying the often debated themes of feminism and female sexuality, Beyoncé chose to unconventionally address her critics who deem her "not feminist enough" by featuring an eerily – and strangely fitting – excerpt of a Ted Talk lecture by Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in "****Flawless." What is most surprising, however, is that the unlikely pairing works so well that it can arguably be considered one of Beyoncé's best offerings to date. It boasts that genuine thread of self-acceptance and self-veneration that makes all women – and men – feel beautiful regardless of appearance or forced societal norms. Her pronouncement "I woke up like this," which has now evolved into a viral Vine-frenzy, encourages a sense of premeditated authentic confidence that begins even before leaving the pillow.

In contrast to her previous albums and works of the past, "BEYONCÉ" ditches the often aggressively-interpreted aura of spite found in "If I Were A Boy," and "Irreplaceable," and, instead, uses the image of the man as a supplement in an overarching love affair with none other than herself. While it is unmistakably noticeable that much of the album's romantic and sexual content stems from experiences recollected with her husband, rapper Jay Z, her individual voice always tends to prevail in the song's end.

Every album cut that focuses of sexual ecstasy on "BEYONCÉ" shows the 17-time Grammy award winner as the central being that this story is being built upon, and not vice versa. Whether it be her riding with her "serfboat" on the already iconically quotable "Drunk in Love," or metaphorizing pink Skittles for a fun time downtown in the slinky retro-themed "Blow," she clearly shows that she has complete control over everything she produces. Also taking that notion of sexual objectivity that she is often criticized for – now more than ever – Queen Bey delivers the D'Angelo-inspired "Rocket," where she gives an instructional course on sexual pleasure, using her male subject as a prop for her to "sit her asssss" on.

Other unexpected, yet notable acts of unconventional feminism are displayed throughout the album, produced in a manner in which only Beyoncé can effectively employ. In the wittily breathy "No Angel," she clarifies to her partner that he's "no angel either," all stated in a juxtaposition that commences with her own ability to deviate against standards of perfection and virtue. In fan-favorite "Partition," with a beat that can be sonically dubbed as the lovechild of E-40 and the Ying Yang Twins, Bey teases her man, and even transforms the ultimate masculine act of ejaculation into a womanly event with the lyric "he Monica Lewinsky-ed all on my blouse."

Beyoncé even transcends her own womanly desires from sexual empress to flawed lover in the dangerously honest "Jealous" and "Haunted," a positively sinister production and vocal masterpiece. In each of these standout gems, she abandons slut-shaming, and embraces the humanistic quality of being wanted by another: "I'm just jealous/I'm just human/Don't judge me," she unguardedly sings during the bridge of "Jealous."

Following this desire to be desired, Beyoncé follows up with a remixed air of vulnerability with a slew of emotionally-charged tracks which boast euphoric vocal arrangements ("XO"), haunting relationship revelations ("Mine," featuring Drake), rap-induced poetic lyrical lamentations of the music industry ("Ghost"), cinematic old-school love stories ("Superpower," featuring Frank Ocean), the acceptance in losing a loved one ("Heaven"), and the ultimate joys of motherhood ("Blue"). After this ingeniously multifaceted compilation of emotional definition, it goes without saying that Beyoncé has reached new heights that place her above the mere capacity of a musical diva; she has now earned the role of a politically redefining public figure who is congenially aware of both her musical counterparts and her own humanistic makeup.

