

KATE FAIRMAN

SONIC REVIEW: DECLAN McKENNA - WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE CAR?

[HUMONGOUS IN]

FOR 91.3 WHJE, I'M KATE FAIRMAN AND YOU'RE LISTENING TO MY LATEST EPISODE OF SONIC REVIEW. THIS EPISODE, I WILL BE REVIEWING NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD ENGLISH SINGER AND SONGWRITER DECLAN McKENNA'S DEBUT ALBUM, TITLED "WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE CAR," WHICH WAS RELEASED ON JULY 21, 2017.

[FADE SONG IN, THEN DOWN]

DECLAN McKENNA ACKNOWLEDGES THAT HE'S RECOGNIZED AS A "POLITICAL" OR "PROTEST" SINGER, THOUGH HE DOES NOT SEE HIMSELF AS SOMEONE LEADING THE CONVERSATION. INSTEAD, HE VIEWS HIMSELF MORE AS A PERSON SINGING ABOUT THINGS PEOPLE ARE ALREADY TALKING ABOUT. AT FIRST, McKENNA SAID HE TRIED TO FIND INSPIRATION FOR LYRICS AND TOPICS IN HIS PRIVATE LIFE, BUT HE FELT THAT HIS OWN LIFE WAS TOO UNEVENTFUL THAT HE TURNED TO POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES THAT HE FELT NEEDED TO BE DISCUSSED.

[BRAZIL IN, THEN DOWN]

DECLAN McKENNA'S INITIAL STEP INTO THE SPOTLIGHT STARTED OUT PRETTY SMALL. IN 2014, HE SELF-RELEASED THE SONG "BRAZIL" AS HIS DEBUT SINGLE. IT GAINED RECOGNITION AFTER ITS RE-RELEASE IN AUGUST 2015, PRIOR TO HIM WINNING THE GLASTONBURY FESTIVAL'S EMERGING TALENT COMPETITION IN ENGLAND. THE SONG LATER REACHED NUMBER ONE ON SIRIUS XM RADIO'S ALT NATION "ALT 18 COUNTDOWN" IN JANUARY OF 2016 AND HELD THAT

SPOT FOR THREE WEEKS. THE SONG ALSO WENT ON TO REACH NUMBER 16 ON THE U.S. BILLBOARD ALTERNATIVE SONGS CHART. THIS NEW-FOUND POPULARITY ATTRACTED THE ATTENTION OF MANY MAJOR MUSIC LABELS, WITH DECLAN EVENTUALLY SIGNING TO COLUMBIA RECORDS IN 2016.

[FADE IN, THEN DOWN]

ONE INTERESTING THING ABOUT THIS SONG THAT YOU PROBABLY WOULDN'T IMMEDIATELY PICK UP ON IS THAT IT IS ACTUALLY A PROTEST SONG WHICH CRITICISES FIFA, THE GOVERNING BODY OF ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL, FOR AWARDING THE FIFA WORLD CUP TO BRAZIL IN 2014 WITHOUT ADDRESSING THE EXTENSIVE AND DEEP POVERTY AFFECTING THE COUNTRY. WHEN I WAS LOOKING MORE INTO THE LYRICS OF THE SONG, I STARTED TO NOTICE THIS MESSAGE MORE, SPECIFICALLY IN THE CHORUS. IN THE FIRST TWO LINES OF THE CHORUS, DECLAN SINGS

[CHORUS IN]

I HEARD HE LIVES DOWN A RIVER SOMEWHERE // WITH SIX CARS AND A GRIZZLY BEAR // HE'S GOT EYES, BUT HE CAN'T SEE// WELL, HE TALKS LIKE AN ANGEL BUT HE LOOKS LIKE ME.

[FADE DOWN]

THIS PART OF THE SONG TOUCHES ON THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE INCOME LEVELS OF PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN BRAZIL. ALTHOUGH THE COUNTRY HAS SOME OF THE WEALTHIEST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD, CLOSE TO 26% OF THE POPULATION STILL LIVES BELOW THE POVERTY LINE. THE FIRST COUPLE LINES OF THE CHORUS INDIRECTLY CALL OUT THE THE PRESIDENT OF FIFA FOR BEING ONE OF THE WEALTHY INDIVIDUALS AND STATES THAT HE IS BLIND TO THE POVERTY SURROUNDING HIM.

[ISOMBARD IN]

IRONICALLY, ONE OF DECLAN'S LATER SINGLES, TITLED ISOMBARD, APPEARED ON THE SOUNDTRACK FOR THE 2016 VIDEO GAME "FIFA 17." THIS SONG, WHILE NOT ATTACKING A SPECIFIC ORGANIZATION, STILL TAKES A VERY POLITICAL STANCE. DECLAN MENTIONED IN AN INTERVIEW THAT ISOMBARD IS LOOSELY BASED ON THE POEM "NEXT TO OF COURSE GOD AMERICA I", BY E. E. CUMMINGS. THE POEM IMPLIES THAT PATRIOTISM HAS DEVELOPED INTO A COMPETITION OF PRIDE AMONG PEOPLE, RATHER THAN AN ACTUAL LOVE FOR THEIR COUNTRY, AND MOCKS THE WAY IN WHICH PATRIOTS WOULD PRAISE THEIR COUNTRY WITH CLOSED MINDS AND BLINDNESS. IT ALSO TAKES INTO ACCOUNT THE TEACHINGS OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR, WITH THE CHORUS BEING AN INVERSION OF HIS QUOTE "IF YOU CAN'T RUN, THEN WALK."

[CHORUS IN, THEN DOWN]

THIS DISTORTION OF THE QUOTE SUGGESTS THE TWISTED LOGIC OF SOCIETY AS IT IS SEEMINGLY DISMISSIVE OF ISSUES THAT ARE AFFECTING LARGE GROUPS OF PEOPLE, AND THE REPETITION OF THE VERSE SEEMS TO MOCK THE OVERALL DISMISSIVENESS OF SOCIETY REGARDING THESE ISSUES.

[THE KIDS DON'T WANNA COME HOME IN]

THIS NEXT SONG, TITLED "THE KIDS DON'T WANNA COME HOME" IS A SONG ABOUT BEING A YOUNG PERSON IN THE MODERN WORLD. ACCORDING TO AN INTERVIEW WITH DECLAN MCKENNA, THIS SONG IS MORE SPECIFICALLY ABOUT WANTING TO CHALLENGE FEARS AND BE A PART OF CHANGE IN THE WORLD, AS WELL AS LOOKING FOR HOPE EVEN WITH SO MANY DARK, HORRIBLE THINGS GOING ON AROUND THE WORLD.

[PLAY, FADE DOWN]

EVEN WITH A MESSAGE OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION FEELING MORE EMPOWERED TO MAKE CHANGE, THIS SONG ALSO HAS A SOMEWHAT DAZED AND ALMOST CONFUSED SOUND. I THINK THIS SOUND CREATES THE IMPRESSION THAT DECLAN FEELS OVERWHELMED FROM BEING SURROUNDED BY SO MUCH DARKNESS IN THE WORLD BUT, BEING SO YOUNG, HE FEELS THAT HE CAN'T DO MUCH TO CHANGE THE STATE OF SOCIETY.

[FADE IN, THEN DOWN]

ALONG WITH THE POWERFUL MEANING BEHIND THE SONG, I REALLY LIKE THE OVERALL MUSICAL CHOICES THAT DECLAN MADE WITH THIS SONG. THE CALMING, SIMPLE INSTRUMENTALS OF THE SONG REMIND ME OF SOMETHING THAT I WOULD PLAY IN MY CAR ON A WARM, SUMMER DAY DRIVING AROUND WITH MY WINDOWS DOWN. THAT PAIRED WITH THE POWERFUL LYRICS CREATES A REALLY STRONG, EMPOWERING SONG THAT APPEALS TO THOSE SEEKING SONGS THAT ARE BOTH CATCHY AND MEANINGFUL.

[MAKE ME YOUR QUEEN IN]

THIS NEXT SONG, TITLED "MAKE ME YOUR QUEEN" TAKES A STEP AWAY FROM THE POLITICAL MESSAGES THAT HAVE BEEN PRESENT IN MOST OF THE MUSIC ON THIS ALBUM AND LOOKS MORE INTO THE DYNAMICS OF TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS. IN THE RELATIONSHIP THAT DECLAN IS SINGING ABOUT, THERE IS THE ASSUMPTION THAT ONE PERSON IS THE KING, AND THE OTHER IS THE QUEEN. HOWEVER, SINCE THE QUEEN IS USUALLY VIEWED AS THE SECOND MOST IMPORTANT PERSON, THE SONG HAS THE UNDERLYING MESSAGE OF WOMEN IN RELATIONSHIPS BEING PATRONISED, WITH IMPLICATIONS SURROUNDING THE PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY.

[FADE IN, THEN DOWN]

[FADE IN, THEN DOWN]

AS FAR AS THE COMPOSITION OF THE SONG, THIS ONE IS PROBABLY ONE OF MY FAVORITES OFF OF THE ALBUM. THE LAID BACK YET POWERFUL VIBE DOES A GREAT JOB OF BREAKING UP THE MORE POLITICAL SONGS WHILE STILL MAINTAINING THE OVERALL SOUND OF THE ALBUM. ON TOP OF THAT, THE SIMPLE, CLEAR LYRICS AND CHORUS MAKE THIS SONG SUPER CATCHY AND APPEALING TO THE LISTENER.

[FADE DOWN, THEN UP]

FOR SOMEONE WHO IS STILL SO YOUNG, DECLAN MCKENNA DID A REALLY GOOD JOB OF MAKING HIS SONGS RELATABLE FOR A GENERATION WHO IS LOOKING FOR MORE OF A VOICE IN POLITICAL ISSUES, ALL WHILE NOT TAKING AWAY FROM THE QUALITY OF HIS MUSIC AND COMPLEXITY OF HIS LYRICS. DESPITE ALL THE SUCCESS DECLAN HAS HAD UP UNTIL THIS POINT, HIS CAREER HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN, AND I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT HE COULD END UP BEING A HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL ARTIST IN THE WORLD OF ALTERNATIVE MUSIC LATER ON IN HIS CAREER.

[FADE DOWN, THEN UP]

FOR 91.3 WHJE, THIS HAS BEEN KATE FAIRMAN, AND THIS WRAPS UP MY REVIEW OF THE ALBUM "WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE CAR?" BY DECLAN MCKENNA. FOR MORE MUSIC FROM DECLAN MCKENNA AND SIMILAR ARTISTS, TUNE IN TO 91.3 WHJE. FOR MORE CONTENT AND PODCASTS LIKE THIS, VISIT WHJE.COM.