

PINNACLE POP

MARS BABY ECHOES FROM SPACE

ISSUE #15
08/2022

#15 - MARS BABY

Budding super producer Mars Baby expands on his career, inspirations and aspirations as he navigates his new era with the sobering and haunting ECHOES.

Story and photography by Sindi Ndaba.

Styling by Jake Jemba.

Story on page 15.

INTERVIEW

p.g. 4 kyabo: Tears in the Club

pg. 23 Wethu: The Sentience of Rap

OPINION

pg. 6 The Typology Associated with Early 2000s R&B

PLAYLIST PLUG

pg. 7 Oldie but Goldie

pg. 25 This Is Grown Folks' Business

REVIEWS

pg. 9 2am's 'Close Enough': A Road Well Travelled, A Sound Most Welcome

pg. 11 GEMINI RIGHTS: A Tale of Longing For A Love Lost

pg. 12 Imani Basquiat's 'Hootie Music'

pg. 21 Did Ravyn Lenae Deliver on the Anticipated 'Hypnos'?

pg. 27 Serenita Commands Your Attention With 'Risqué'

FAN FILE

pg. 28 BEAM: Excellence Rediscovered



Hey. We're 15 Issues Deep.

I need to say it again. We're 15 issues deep. We've done this 15 times, now, and we just keep getting better.

To me, each issue is a rebirth of sorts. Whether a new column pops up or a different approach to a topic comes up, we are always doing our best to push the envelope forward and we are doing a damn good job at it — I'll even say so myself.

I want to take this moment to praise the team for putting this together, this issue and the 14 before it. You are all the heartbeat of these pages and I'm thankful that we're on this journey together.

I also want to thank the people who have joined our community whether as friends, collaborators or as readers. It's not lost on me that you're all here to watch us do this, to watch us document a culture that we absolutely love and enjoy. You all make this a pleasurable experience.

For this issue, in particular, I want to thank Kay Bhengu, popularly known as Kay The Manager. Thank you for taking me seriously when I randomly texted you "Hey, Issue #15 - Mars Baby."

Thank you to Jake Jemba, the stylist behind the sick outfits Mars Baby is adorned in for this issue. Thank you for coming through at the 11th hour, thank you for being a part of our growing community.

A huge thank you, as well, to the man of the moment himself, Mars Baby, for also taking me seriously when I (also randomly) told him what my plans were. You've been a joy to work with and to profile; thank you for allowing me to tell this part of your story.

It's a blessing to do this 15 times. I hope you enjoy it as much as we enjoyed putting it together. We hope you'll stick around for the 16th, 17th and so forth and so forth.

I love you deeper than any of you could ever know.

- Sindi Ndaba
Founder & EIC

kyabo: Tears in the Club

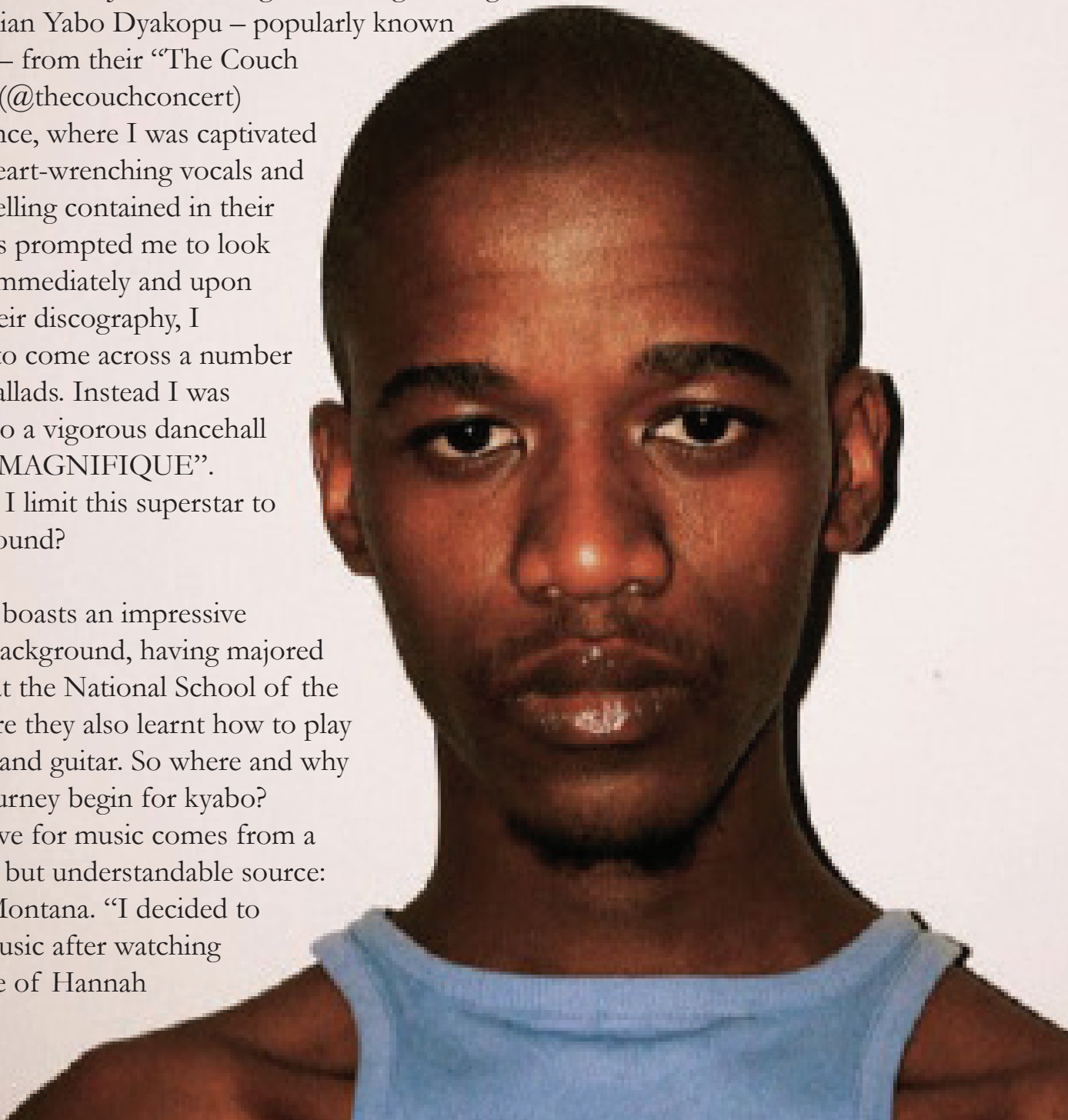
by Nthatile Mavuso

I am a true sucker for love. I cannot look beyond a romantic scene in a film that makes me swoon, lose my breath and cause heart palpitations to ever scrutinise finer details. kyabo's music sounds like the soundtrack to such a film, as I find myself writing to their song "3:45" and crying at the poignant lyrics & melancholic instrumental. I often praise vulnerability in music but for RnB and Pop it is a prerequisite; it is the way kyabo executes it that draw me in. It is the comfort kyabo's words and soothing vocals bring.

Welcome to the vibrant and eclectic world of kyabo.

I first heard of the Johannesburg-based singer, songwriter and musician Yabo Dyakopu – popularly known as kyabo – from their "The Couch Concert" (@thecouchconcert) performance, where I was captivated by their heart-wrenching vocals and the storytelling contained in their lyrics. This prompted me to look them up immediately and upon finding their discography, I expected to come across a number of soft ballads. Instead I was pulled into a vigorous dancehall anthem, "MAGNIFIQUE". How dare I limit this superstar to just one sound?

The artist boasts an impressive musical background, having majored in Music at the National School of the Arts, where they also learnt how to play the piano and guitar. So where and why did the journey begin for kyabo? kyabo's love for music comes from a surprising but understandable source: Hannah Montana. "I decided to pursue music after watching an episode of Hannah



Montana and it was one of the episodes where she actually had to perform on a stage,” they said. “I just remember seeing her singing her heart out, and that was it for me; I decided I wanted to do that, to make music. Afterwards, I started singing and writing more and even keeping journals,”

Like many other artists, the maestro grew up listening to the classic ‘The Manhattans’ and Whitney Houston records played by their parents on Sundays, but it was Taylor Swift who had the biggest impact on them. “Taylor Swift is the reason why I could go into depth with my song writing skills. I would listen to songs like ‘We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together’ and write a rebuttal. Stylistically, she has always moved from genre to genre and makes the transition effortless. She went from making country to pop and now she’s making folklore music with great success,” kyabo stated further.

It amazes me that kyabo makes this comparison because to me, they have acquired and displayed the same ability to be genre-fluid. Tracks such as “Faking It” and “MAGNIFIQUE” are distinct from one another, from their vocal performance to their lyrical content. kyabo found themselves learning this skill back in 2018 when they were trying to establish their own sound. They explained, “I was surrounded by a lot of trap music because it was so popular then. I had a difficult time trying to find people to work with people who wanted to do pop music or wanted to try other styles of music, so I did some Soft Trap that I would probably would not stand by now. Now I do whatever I want.”

While this is true, I cannot help but ask why kyabo’s discography is limited, with their last



project being from December 2020. But with this artist, it is all about quality control. kyabo speaks with the conviction of someone who has their career meticulously planned according to their vision; however, they encounter the challenges of being a queer person in this music industry.

“I feel like I have to work 10 times harder to be regarded on the same level as my peers.” kyabo’s music is also a reflection of themselves throughout, never conforming to heteronormativity and telling the story of queer love. “It’s uncomfortable for some people but then work is being done. More queer people are taking charge of these spaces, changing things up, and it will be a better place.”

Given this, the songwriter has shown immense support for and collaborates with many other upcoming artists such as Cxrter, Liebah and Tiya, whose work & sound fit so well with kyabo’s style.

It is hard to deny kyabo’s creativity, enchanting vocals and boundless potential – things that we have yet to fully tap into.



The Typology Associated with Early 2000s R&B

by Mongezi Sibande

When it comes to music and marketing there are a plethora of ways to showcase the aesthetic at hand, from album covers to visual teasers. One of my favourite ways to showcase your aesthetic prior to listening is the typology of songs.

Typology - the study and interpretation of types and symbols.

The use of lower-case and upper-case song titles has been gradually increasing throughout the 2010s, with notable examples for the lower-case typology being Ariana Grande's positions and thank u, next, and upper-case songs represented by Kendrick Lamar's DAMN. While interpretations of why these artists chose those aesthetics vary, typology is a clear statement for words to invoke feelings or themes, be they subconscious or loudly.

One clear effect on typology is the technology present. New innovations and increased accessibility to technology will often lead to a pattern of use of certain typology markers, such as fonts or themes. The inspiration of the early 2000s RnB typology is clear – in

cell phones for example. The introduction of cellular phones had all of us acting wild. Equipped with the original T9 keypad, where the 26-letter alphabet was spread across 9 buttons, acronyms and slang were bound to develop. R&B utilised this vernacular more than any other genre – and U know exactly what I'm talkin' 'Bout.

The replacement of words such as “to” and “for” with the digits 2 and 4; the replacement of an S with a Z. The regular texting habits of the time bled into R&B - and rap to a lesser extent - in an intense way. Usher's “U R The One”, Aaliyah's “I Care 4 U” and T-Pain's “I'm N Luv (Wit A Stripper)” are just a few out of numerous examples of this, and it often spans whole albums.

Additionally, typology changed to fit the enunciation of slang at the time. Clear examples include 50 Cent's “In Da Club”, as well as when the G was dropped from Jay-Z's “Parking Lot Pimpin'” and the D dropped from Usher “Good Ol' Ghetto”; this works to invoke the swagger of the times or the southern American-esque twang. The

typology invokes a feeling or association which is further explored within the song. Noticeably, the recent music (post-2010) from these artists all drops the slang in favour of traditional spelling, which amplifies the association that this typology has with the era of early 2000s music, rather than being associated with the artists themselves.

I believe this movement was implemented for two main reasons. Firstly, the crux of R&B music is relatability. That the listener is able to relate to the stories told by the artist is an essential part of the digestion of R&B, especially in the early 2000s. I would compare its essentiality to that of a rapper being their own writer. Therefore, an artist's song title being written in the same format which you would text in (we all used the slang, don't act like you're innocent) increases its relatability and adds to making an artist appear as an everyman/everywoman.

The second reason is differentiation. In music, whether we realise it or not, there are numerous calculated steps in the marketing of artists: from their look to their behaviour,

the effect of the industry machine can have numerous unseen effects. Many of them are used to encourage you to understand why this person fits under a specific description but is different enough that they require your attention. Amongst a wave of traditionally-spelled songs, the first introduction of slang within song titles definitely had some effect.

The slang of 2000s R&B hasn't disappeared, but its definitely dwindled. In addition, its function has changed. Now, when utilised, it's clearly to prompt the memory and association of 2000s R&B - which most people hold to extremely high regard - and hopefully advertises itself as music that is true to the music of the age. Instances of this range from Brent Faiyaz's "First World Problemz / Nobody Carez" and H.E.R's "U" to Jack Harlow's "Luv Is Dro".

Often heralded as the best era of R&B music, many factorz of the era are either cruxes of modern R&B, or are eternally tied back to the era itself. Let us never 4get 'bout how the era undoubtedly spread the use of text language.



Oldie but Goldie

by liisamonae

I am a sucker for nostalgia, and Burna Boy's "Last Last" blowing up took me back to the days when a mini-me had just discovered & fallen in love with afrobeats. I'm not even sure that 'discovered' is the right word to use, because I grew up listening to afrobeats playing around the house or at events thanks of my mom's ties to the Nigerian community. I also sometimes feel overwhelmed trying to keep up with all the new music all the time, so going back to my favourite songs is such a comfort. That being said, here is a playlist plug to some oldie but goldie afrobeat tunes that made my childhood.

I was such a huge P-Square fan – I mean I still am – but I know right now they are no Davido or Burna Boy. Nonetheless, they had some fire songs a few years ago:

"Chop My Money Remix (featuring Akon & May D)". I put the remix here and not the original because the Akon feature honestly took an already amazing song and made it even better. This song is a staple, and you are not a real afrobeats fan if you do not know this number.

"Collabo (with Don Jazzy)". I remember being with my HS friends and trying to make up a dance for this song, which is crazy because I matriculated in 2018 and this song came out in 2014. Talk about longevity.

"E No Easy (with J Martin)". Now this song? It's the theme song of every wedding, function, braai – you name it. If you are trying to get the party started, this is your jam.

"Alingo". You did not need to make up a dance for this one because P-Square made



sure that they gave us one. As soon as the chorus hit, everyone got into position and danced alingo.

I gave a special nod to P-Square because I truly believe that afrobeats would not be where it is today without this duo. I only mention four songs, but I encourage you to look at their whole discography; it is worth the listen.

Now onto the rest of the songs that had my stiff hips moving madly:

"African Queen" by 2Baba. A name not without scandals, sure, but that man knows how to make a good song. I must say though, finding out about his philandering ways kind of ruins the romance of this song for me.

"Jonny" by Yemi Alade. I have to be honest: the music video is what sold me on the song. The drama, the story, the acting, it all just screamed Nollywood and I loved every moment. That being said, it is still a fun song on its own and the reason I listen to Yemi.

“Soldier” by Falz (ft Simi). I know this song word for word; it’s storytelling at its finest. I have seen the music video, so I know how everything plays out visually, but you don’t even need to have seen the video to get the image in your head.

“Amaka” by 2Baba. The infamous philanderer returns with another 2000s hit. This song was another staple at the events, which is where my fondness of the song comes from.

“Leg Over” by Mr Eazi. So I might be slow, but I still do not know what it means to give someone ‘leg over’. However, that language barrier has not stopped me from enjoying

this song. It has this really sexy vibe to it that I like a lot.

“Juice” by YCee (ft Maleek Berry). Now this song was a hit. The only other song that had me trying to whine as hard as this song did is “Love Is Wicked” by Brick & Lace. I can literally see people going mad as the beat for this song drops, everyone running to grab someone to whine on. What a time.

This was just a small glimpse into the soundtrack of my childhood. I do hope that my young blast to the past unlocked some memories in you or maybe added a few tunes to your playlist.

2am’s CLOSE ENOUGH: A Road Well Travelled, A Sound Most Welcome by sam_SON

I have a problem with modern RnB music, especially that which is rooted in the trap-soul-esque sound of the mid-2010s. On the whole I think that sound works pretty well for what the music is about: heartbreak, indecision, interpersonal conflict, and romantic dramas played out at length. The brooding, hazy atmosphere this kind of RnB creates can be sonically and thematically satisfying – but it can also be so BORING!

There’s a thin line for artists in this lane. A line between treading those familiar waters while bringing a personal uniqueness to the mode; and doing so much of the generic subgenre tricks that they become faceless and voiceless in the mass of similar-sounding



people. Much has been said about the issues with female RnB artists of today, but I've found that male vocalists find themselves on the wrong side of this line far too often.

Too many men try to imitate both Bryson Tiller and Crisp Round that they end up sounding like secondhand Jacqueeses (or the actual Jacquees – this is not a compliment). The trapsoul road is extremely well-travelled and threading the needle while walking it alludes many male RnB acts nowadays.

Thankfully, 2am is not one those acts. As the title of this review implies, the work he does on his latest album, *CLOSE ENOUGH*, is very welcome to my ears and great addition to the trap'n'B canon.

CLOSE ENOUGH immediately appealed to because it walks on the right side of the line that I described the whole way through. From track 1 to track 8, one can hear clearly the influence of 2am's musical forbears. Looming figures like Drake show through on "TIME HEALS", which is reminiscent of the 6God's many contemplative album closers. The intro run of "KEEP IT REAL", "PULL UP" and "GRATEFUL" harken to Kly's *KLYMAX*, an album which I consider to be a staple of South African RnB. And in general, 2am rides beats that capture the atmosphere and mood of the original *TRAP-SOUL* (if that record sounded more like it had Wichi1080 in the booth – real ones will know).

Yet where another artist might drown under the weight of these influences, 2am masters them, and in doing so is able to use the familiar to shine a light on his own talent and story. Much credit for this achievement goes to the experience that this 24-year-old



music have. *CLOSE ENOUGH* is 2am's third project, following on the heels of 2019's *(E)MOTIONS* and 2020's *JADED*.

This new work is, to me, a clear sign that 2am has grown in confidence and skill: lyrically, vocally, and sonically, he has made great strides in refining the genre tools at his disposal and making them his own. I'm sure much credit can also go to FTL Radio, the collective 2am belongs to, for guiding a new artist who began releasing music at the pandemic's outset and moulding him into a seasoned muso with ever-improving projects.

CLOSE ENOUGH is 2am's best work to date, and it's strongest moments are where it walks the fine line like a trapeze artist. He walks the well-travelled road of this subgenre like he paved it himself; in a singular way he did, for it was in the growing moments of his earlier work that the shining moments of this latest album are born. 2am delivers a vocal performance that is commendable and consistent, and these vocals carry into one's ears & heart the woeful tales of love lost, lamented, and laid to rest in song.

Album highlights such as “PULL UP”, “GRATEFUL”, “ONE LAST SUMMER” and “TIME HEALS” showcase just how much 2am understands the lane he runs in. He understands it, and he’s lapping a lot of the competition. My earlier comparison to Kly is a highly favourable one: to me, 2am stands poised to shake up male RnB in SA the same way the former artist did.

I could say a lot more about this record, but the title of this piece sums up my thoughts perfectly. I welcome what 2am has brought with CLOSE ENOUGH, and I invite you the reader to give it a listen.

CLOSE ENOUGH is available now on Apple Music and on Spotify. Follow 2am on Instagram and Twitter @2am_ftl.



GEMINI RIGHTS: A TALE OF LONGING FOR A LOVE LOST (PROD. STEVE LACY)

by Nthatile Mavuso

Steve Lacy navigates the five stages of grief following the end of a relationship on his 10-track sophomore album Gemini Rights, following his 2019 Grammy-nominated Apollo XX’ debut. His growth is unquestionable and propels Steve out of his ‘prodigy’ title and into a brilliant musician in his own right.

In an age where lack-lustre effort is put towards album rollouts, Steve Lacy really showed up and showed out. Prior to the release of the album on July 15th, Lacy had released three singles: “Mercury”, “Bad Habit”

and “Sunshine (featuring Fousheé)”, along with a series of enthralling music videos. In all of the music videos the guitarist wore the same outfit and hairstyle, only changing his eyewear, which introduced not only a new album but also the beginning of an era.

Unlike Steve’s previous projects, Steve Lacy’s Demo and Apollo XXI, Gemini Rights explores grief in its entirety. The longing, nostalgia and regrets all form a part of heart-break. It is the desire to return to your ex, forge a new path and then give them the world you could not offer previously on

these newer 'greener' pastures. It is also begrudgingly accepting that that is only a fantasy and that things are unlikely to change.

The opening track "Static" serves as a resentful and scornful farewell to Steve's ex-lover with him singing, "Hope you find peace for yourself, new boyfriend ain't goin' fill the void." It's accompanied by subdued vocals and mellow guitar and piano chords.

"Helmet" increases the tempo as Lacy reflects on how the relationship consumed him and his partner whole, while trying to find a way to escape it and the hold it still has

on him. "Bad Habit" has quickly become a commercial success, with its groovy bassline accompanied by Steve's sweet and colourful vocals over the popular "I wish I knew you wanted me" line, where he expresses his regret over losing a love interest.

As the album comes to a close, the artist succumbs to his longing and pleads for his lover to give him another chance by offering heaven on Earth, on the funk-infused and languid "Give You the World". The power in this album is Steve Lacy's ability to contrast the heart-break that inspires the lyrical content and the warmth of peachy vocals & instrumentals. The guitarist never shies away from his 1970s and 80s-influenced sound despite the content of his lyrics and still manages to make it sound refined.

This is easily one of the best releases of the year and I say this with complete bias towards the phenomenal artist that is Steve Lacy. Because who else could make a break-up sound like a sunset?



Hooptie Music
by liisamonae

If there is anything I love more than a good discourse piece, it is an EP/album review. Today we have a 6-track EP titled *Hootie Music* by Imani Basquiat. Imani is from PTA, and I just have to say that musically this year? PTA has been carrying the country so far. The title of the EP really interested me because I did not know what ‘Hootie’ means, so your girl took it to Google and found out that it refers to “an old car.” Now depending on the context and tone, calling a car a ‘hoop-tie’ can either be a compliment or an insult. Taking all of that in, *Hootie Music* would then refer to old school music, a homage to the past. Whether hootie is a compliment or an insult we will find out at the end of the review. Stay tuned.



1. “Po’Sum”

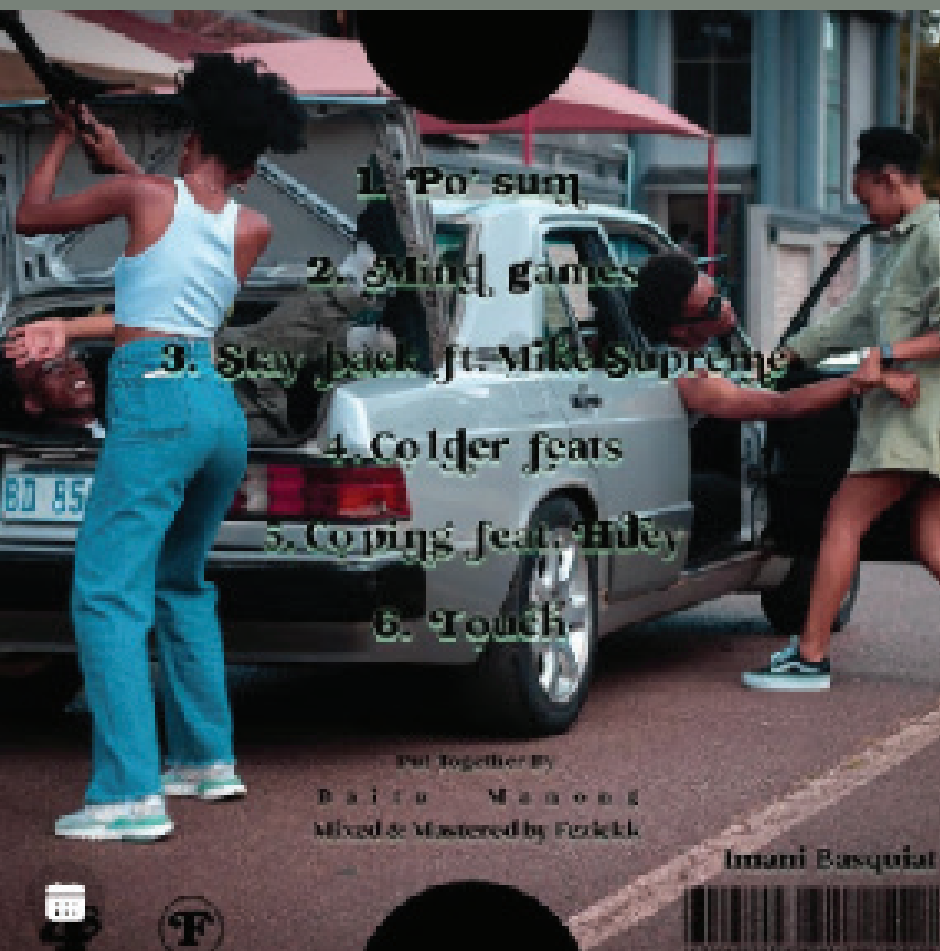
I really enjoyed this song because it convinced me that the rest of the EP would be fire, and I was not disappointed. That’s what any opening song of a project should be doing to be honest - and if it’s not, then you need to go back to the studio. The beat for this song was giving heavy Mick Jenkin vibes which had me sold because I love me some Mick Jenkins. I also like it a lot when rappers do the sing-talking thing for the chorus and then go straight into hardcore rapping for the rest of the song.

2. “Mind Games”

A good beat and chorus do so much for a song and this song handled both extremely well. The beat is bouncy but in a very chilled way; then the chorus starts and the two weave together so beautifully. “Mind Games” is a 10/10. Imani is a great rapper, and it really shows on this song. It’s that type of rapping that has you really focused so you can keep up with the flow and the bars. My only qualm is that it is a bit of a short one.

3. “Stay Back (ft Mike Supreme)”

The song does not contain that many vocal elements which put the beat right into the spotlight and I was not disappointed. The beat is really great: it is strong and has that boom-bap feel to it. There is even a part in the song where the beat sounds like its changing but it’s really just another element of it. I would have liked to get more vocals on the song because it feels more like an instrumental, but it was a good song overall.



4. “Colder Feats”

Imani’s pen on this song is too good: “Flooded the market, now drip is consistent”/ “It ain’t weighing on me heavy how you niggas staying featherweight.” Those are just two of my favourite bars from this track. Other than that, this is one of my least favourites on the EP. I just was not vibing with it as well as the other ones, and the beat was not speaking to me either.

5. “Coping (ft Huey)”

This is my favourite track on the EP. It sounded like he was having a lot of fun on this song and that energy really transfers, because I was having the most fun listening to this. Besides the beat, the chorus

is my favourite part because it is so catchy, especially the part where he’s like, “I’m so damn determined, man I’m so damn determined.” The beat for this song has the most energy yet; the other songs are pretty mellow but this one is alive. It’s a great addition to the EP.

6. “Touch”

The final song was a bit of a let-down for me because of the energy of the song before it. If they had swapped the two songs and ended with “Coping”, I would have enjoyed this song a lot more and the EP would have made more sense. That aside, this is still a good song. The chorus was carrying the song which is fine because it was a good. The beat was okay too, not my favourite but not the worst on the EP either. This was more of a singy-song too – no rapping at all, which I would have liked to be included.

Overall, I would rate this project a solid 7 out of 10. EP’s that stick to being an EP will always have a special place in my heart, not those 10 track EP’s that are actually albums. I also think that the elements of the EP work well together. The beat, the chorus, the lyrics, and the features all come together to form a coherent project.

The title of the EP also matches the feel of the EP; it definitely sounds like old-school music, albeit American old school hip hop/rap. Even the visuals for the EP match the title, which I loved. I think that if you wanted to show someone that you had great taste in music, this EP would be the perfect starting point.

Mars Baby's Trajectory Is Brighter Than Most

A look into the new wave's most mysterious talent

To say that Mars Baby is exactly like his music would be misleading. The music, often termed “sad boy music”, has an air of consistent melancholy; almost as if one is always under a cloud of calm sadness.

The cloud is not who the juggernaut multidisciplinary artist is, in fact, he is friendly and personable, often cracking a joke and a smile here and there. When I asked him to describe himself, I anticipated a response that spoke to personal qualities. However, the answer I received exceeded my expectations and presented the man behind the music in his barest form.

“I would describe myself as someone who loves music. As someone who processes and goes through life through music and uses it as a tool to communicate. I try my best to involve myself in music in whichever way I can.”



And he's not wrong. Whenever he was not speaking on set, Mars was humming a tune; very lightly under his breath but just loud enough for us to catch it. As he hummed away, it looked as though he had left us to our devices and escaped to a calmer space in his mind or somewhere far away. A glance into his eyes while in that state proves this to be true as you can see a slight glimmer in his eyes, a glimmer that can't be found anywhere other than music. It's clear, then, that he doesn't just live music, he is music.

Super producer. That's a title that has been thrown around whenever Mars Baby comes into the conversation, and I am inclined to agree. His list of production credits span across artists such as Nanette and Money Badoo, and vastly different genres such as R&B and Hip-Hop. From the looks of it, his range as a producer is unlike many of his peers as he continues to push the envelope one release at a time.

You would assume that someone would shy away from such a title, especially so early on in their career. However, the sonic genius gladly accepts the title as he contextualizes his achievements right now. "I'm a super producer in the context of the wave that I'm in, within the ecosystem I'm in. And I think it will remain that way as I take things further, on an even bigger scale throughout my career."

Network is a huge part of finding success, and Mars Baby has built an expansive one for himself. However, the Stay Low signee was actually a freelance producer who worked closely with labelmate Lordkez before signing to the label. What's interesting about Mars Baby's career is that at the time of his signing, he had very little music out but what he had in the vault was enough to make label head Vaughn Thiel sign him. That would be the move that would take the laidback crooner's career from 0 to 100.



“It really forced me to work harder because almost overnight I was signed to the same label as Priddy Ugly and Zoocci Coke Dope. I had to prove, to myself, that I could hold my own on this roster and I had to maintain all the opportunities and collaborations coming my way.”

Having spent a large portion of his life in the US, Mars Baby credits a teacher of his who was a Blues guitarist for his musical start. That explains the Blues-y aspect of Mars’ sound that and the fact that once he was back in South Africa, he opted to tap into Jazz and similar sounds. This would also be the time when he decided to start producing and eventually writing music. The journey to producer and singer-songwriter was one of chance.

“I was always surrounded by musicians, and sometimes didn’t really want the stuff I wrote for myself so I would pass it on to someone else. So, that’s how I became a producer for other people.”

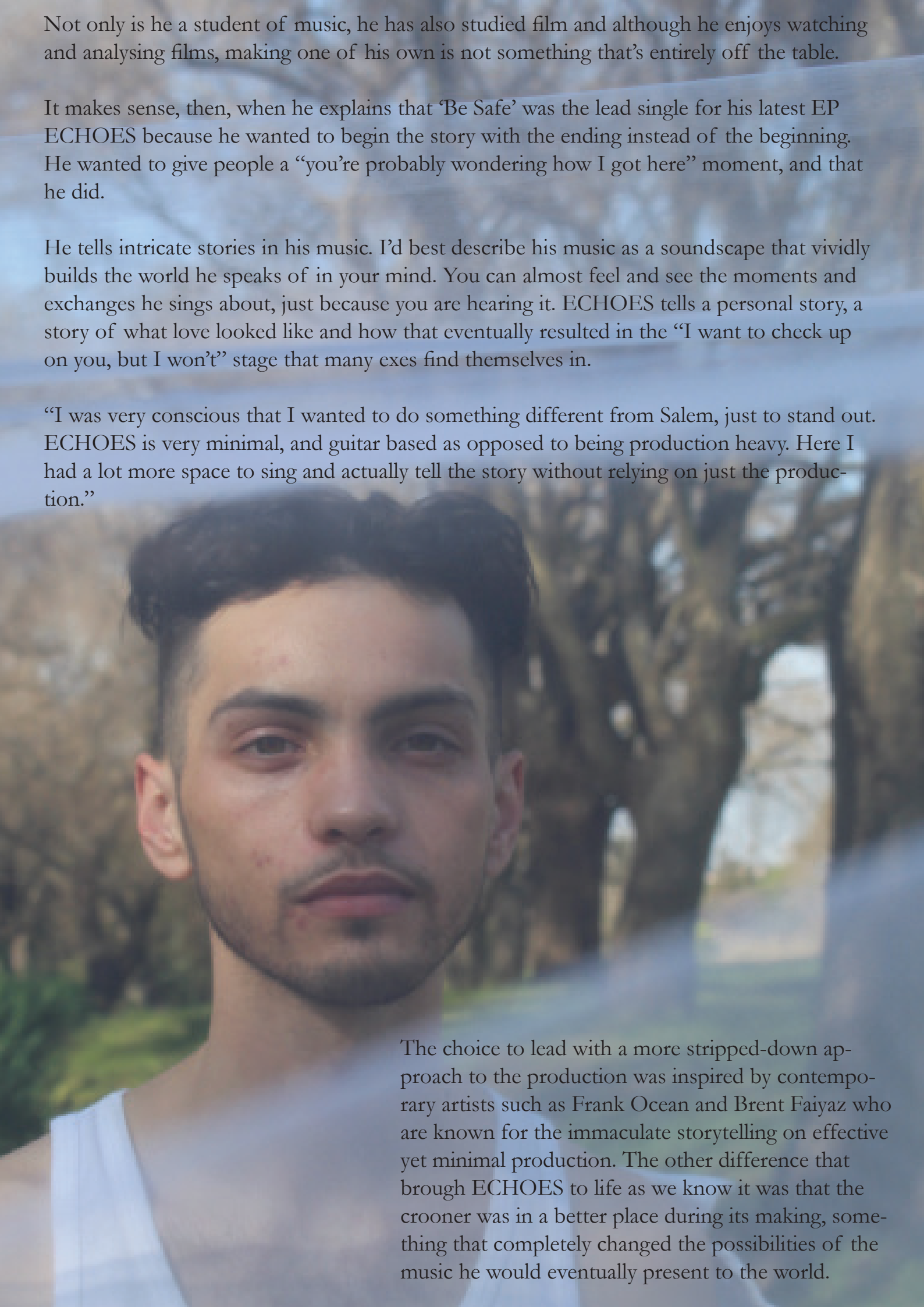


Not only is he a student of music, he has also studied film and although he enjoys watching and analysing films, making one of his own is not something that's entirely off the table.

It makes sense, then, when he explains that 'Be Safe' was the lead single for his latest EP ECHOES because he wanted to begin the story with the ending instead of the beginning. He wanted to give people a "you're probably wondering how I got here" moment, and that he did.

He tells intricate stories in his music. I'd best describe his music as a soundscape that vividly builds the world he speaks of in your mind. You can almost feel and see the moments and exchanges he sings about, just because you are hearing it. ECHOES tells a personal story, a story of what love looked like and how that eventually resulted in the "I want to check up on you, but I won't" stage that many exes find themselves in.

"I was very conscious that I wanted to do something different from Salem, just to stand out. ECHOES is very minimal, and guitar based as opposed to being production heavy. Here I had a lot more space to sing and actually tell the story without relying on just the production."



The choice to lead with a more stripped-down approach to the production was inspired by contemporary artists such as Frank Ocean and Brent Faiyaz who are known for the immaculate storytelling on effective yet minimal production. The other difference that brought ECHOES to life as we know it was that the crooner was in a better place during its making, something that completely changed the possibilities of the music he would eventually present to the world.

One of the things that put him in a better place was being able to move away from working under the confines of lockdown and finally engaging with the people who consumed his music. “Working under lockdown, and success during that time, was heavily influenced by how much of yourself you were willing to put out there. But now, being able to be back out on stage and trying to win a crowd over makes the experience so much better.”


Knowing how much he enjoys performing makes it easier to understand why his weekly fixture at Hallmark’s Marabi Club excites him so much. He gets to bring his music in its purest form right to the people who want to hear it and he even finds more joy in capturing people who weren’t even aware of him. For Mars Baby, the thrill of performing is what makes the experience of being a musician come full circle.

Another full circle moment for the guitarist was being featured on the talented Zoocci Coke Dope’s ‘PLUS+’.

“I’m proud of that feature because it was well-written and well-received. I was talking about something very personal and for people to get that means a lot to me. It also means a lot to me to be on such a well produced and well thought-out project at such an early stage of my career.

Community is a fundamental part of Mars’ story as a growing artist. So much so that his overall style is also changing as he takes fashion notes and cues from the likes of





Money Badoo. “I think my look is changing because I’m starting to feel myself a bit more, coming into my own a bit more. I can say I’m a rockstar, and even dress like one from time to time.”

He has a band that’s not quite that, as he jams around with some of his peers just for the heck of it. At first it’s surprising when he exclaims that he would never put together a “Mars Baby & Friends” kind of tape. Rather, he would take on a similar route to Kanye West where he gives room to others on his own projects while he remains the focal point.

And the focal point he is. 2022 continues to burn bright as he is set to perform at the highly anticipated return of Rocking The Daisies. The grind doesn’t stop there as Mars Baby promises to release visuals that speak to the ECHOES era, visuals that he’s put a lot of time and effort into bringing to life.

The artist may be a simple spin of ECHOES away but with the plans he has for himself, Mars Baby will also be coming to a stage near you. So, take time out to experience him at his most comfortable – as the star of a very intricate and well-intentioned show.

Did Ravyn Lenae Deliver On The Anticipated *Hypnos*?

by Mongezi Sibande

In 2016, Ravyn Lenae released her debut project, *Moon Shoes EP*. She dazzled us. There's a handful of artists I vividly remember wanting to share amongst my peers, and Ravyn has sat atop of that list since that release. Following was *Midnight Moonlight* and *Crush EP* in 2017 and 2018, respectively. We were fed - full, some could argue, but eagerly anticipating an album. And then, when the world needed her most – much like the *Avatar* – she disappeared.

I think it's important to reiterate that artists don't owe us music. They're people who live their own lives, which are obviously subject to the same variables as ours (ex. pandemic), on top of the fame and perils that come

with it. But in the case of Ravyn Lenae, I think her absence was so hurtful because I truly wanted her to succeed. The potential, personality, vocals and lyrics are all present. I didn't want an album for my personal satisfaction, I wanted an album because I knew she could deliver. She had all the potential as Teen Gohan (badass who kills the main villain), but without the album, it felt like she would be much like Adult Gohan (almost as useless as Krillin).

But here it is. We are in 2022 and at last a full album is here, 16 songs full. I never thought the day would come. Now that the project is here, how does it measure to my hopefully reasonable expectations?

Immediately, we're reminded of some hallmarks of hers: synths and grooves. Not that she created them, but rather the way the synths are used to make grooves have a peak 80s techno bounce; definitely a derivative of *Crush EP*. And the vocals throughout the opener sound like she's playing with her harmonics in a cave. Playful musicians might be my favourite. The ability to convey their personality into song in a coy manner - love it.

Guitar is another important aspect of a Ravyn Lenae project. And while the first three songs utilise a tonal guitar oft-associated with Steve Lacy, an acoustic guitar is found on "Inside Out".





That being said, what would a Ravyn Lenae be project without some Steve Lacy sprinkled in it? “Skin Tight” sees the two artists reunited and the vibes are as immaculate as ever.

And the features! They’re limited to four: frequent collaborators Steve Lacy and Smino, plus first-time experiences with Fousheé and Mereba. The first two bring familiar energies of the sound and world of their collaborative past. The Smino feature noticeably combines both of their similar carefree musical aesthetics. The Mereba and Fousheé features are special. These are what features are supposed to do, which is align the vibrations of separate but wholly complimentary worlds Fousheé really glides elegantly throughout her guest song. Another component of a good feature is how smooth artists can transition between one another and wow. Smooth as silk truly.

An afrobeats Ravyn Lenae song was not something I thought I needed, but I can’t imagine life without it. It works so well because while afrobeats is not a genre associated with her, the way the song is produced feels just like a Ravyn Lenae song. Both warm and fun, the afropop nature is peaking in through the door to check if you’re sleeping sound, as opposed to haphazardly slamming your door open to wake you up.

The album ends on “Wish”, a simple and soothing closer. Partially dramatic orchestral strings echo, swell, rise and fall alongside a simple guitar loop, and all this beneath the whispery yet all-reaching falsetto Ravyn Lenae sings in. Suddenly I am awakened from a dream I never thought I’d experience: a Ravyn Lenae album.

Do I have any qualms with the project? Maybe too long? I, like most of the Pinnacle Pop team, prefer shorter albums. Personally I think the optimum album length is 10 - 13 songs. Hypnos doesn’t overstay its welcome, but would feel more potent if songs were cut out. Leave them wanting more, as they say. Still, I think it’s safe to say the fanbase is well fed and truly grateful for this full circle moment for Ravyn.



Wethu: The Sentience of Rap

by Nthatile Mavuso

S.A hip-hop is making a huge comeback and we can attribute this to the explosive rap scene in Pretoria, with formidable artists such as 25k, Thato Saul, Tyson Sybateli and now Wethu delivering compelling raps. Wethu joins the list of the hottest up and coming rappers, having released his mesmerising 12-track debut project MORAL COMPASS on the 2nd of June. The project has since been included on Apple Music's 'New in Hip Hop' and 'New in RnB' editorial playlists.

MORAL COMPASS makes for both a compelling and hypnotic offering due to Wethu's varying sound. This rapper's ability to produce an idyllic song such as "SENTIENCE" and then have the braggadocious & trap-infused "I'M BACK" as the following track pulls me back to my love for rap.

I sat down with the rapper/producer to discuss his project; the resurgence of S.A hip-hop in Pretoria's music scene; and the change in how we consume music.

Nthatile Mavuso: Where do you come from and how has this influenced your character and artistry?

Wethu: I was born in Port Elizabeth but moved to Pretoria in 2009. PTA is very different from the tranquillity in Gqeberha. There is this constant hustle and bustle at all times of the day. I would be in Central Pretoria and hear people driving to work at 5 am and that put a battery on my back. It motivated me to keep moving.

NM: Pretoria is alive with music right now, it's at the forefront of revitalizing hip hop. How has the music community contributed to your success?

W: In Grade 8 my peers were open about their love and passion for the arts. It was great to know that other people had interest in music, but it also made me shy away from it; I didn't want to be like everyone else. Although the music I shared with my friends was diversified. It opened me up to a different plethora of what hip-hop is. Shoutout to Tyson Sybateli too, because back in high



school he gave me a USB with Fruity Loops on it and that gave me a start in making music. In PTA, we always show out for each other, and it makes for a homely environment regardless of the music being made. I remember being at an event last year where the crowd was showing love to me even though I was not really known then.

NM: I think the “hip-hop is dead question” is very easy to answer ‘no’ because we have seen the resurgence of the genre. Instead, I want to know how you think we can we get hip-hop back to forefront?

W: Genuine collaborations between the older generation and upcoming artists. Established rappers that truly love hip-hop should show out for those who are coming in. I mean if Drake co-signs anyone, everyone is more inclined to listen to them. As the younger generation, we should continue to support each other. It can be reposting each other’s links. It might be minuscule, but it goes a long way in the long run.

NM: What does MORAL COMPASS mean to you and what was the process behind making it?

W: Releasing the project felt like a relief because I have been working on this for nearly four years. I just noticed many things in my life changed after the release; my skin looks and feels better. When I was in my first year of varsity, I was new to the freedom of being outside of my parents’ home. I was questioning myself like, “Damn, am I really gonna go out binge-drinking for the second day in a row?” Being moved in different directions, both physically and mentally was the compass aspect, the physical aspect of moving around. But also mentally, doubting myself, knowing what I want to do, but not knowing how I am going to get there. Then there was the morality of it all, like I am just a person and I have morals too.

NM: As an independent artist, how important is a good rollout to you and what would you advise other independent artists improve in this regard?

W: With MORAL COMPASS I did not have an extensive rollout but I was more active on Instagram. I then dropped a single and I am so grateful to Apple Music for assisting with the pre-order campaign and rollout. I had a song that was exclusive to Apple Music and later playlisted in ‘New Music Daily’. I would also see stats and it boosted my confidence to see that my music was being listened to in Cape Town and I do not even have friends there. Artists should not use a rollout plan as an excuse not to drop. You will find a rollout plan that works for you but you can even push your music with your friends who can share your links on their social media. I used the resources I had to keep the momentum going. Artists sometimes hold on to snippets for so long that they lose our attention and by the time the music is out, no one is really looking forward to it.

NM: Even with a good rollout, I think

we are seeing a shift in how we listen to and perceive music. How do you think streaming music has affected the way we consume the art?

W: I think the consumer is changing; people are consuming quickly and discarding just as fast. Back when I was younger, music was tangible and expensive. I remember in Grade 7 and having to buy R10 airtime to go on a dodgy website to download an album that would fill up the storage of my Nokia Xpress & would be mine forever. An album's lifespan can be like that one week before and

after release. Artists also stop promoting at the same time. Now everything is fleeting.

NM: What collaborations are you hoping to have in the future?

W: Mars Baby and SBX make music that is so scenic and cinematic, the type of sound you would hear in movie theatres. I also think having female vocalists would add a harmony and melody to my music. I love the duality. I am meticulous with who I work with, but if you make good music I will shoot my shot, shamelessly.



This is Grown Folks' Business A Playlist Plug

by sam_SON

I'm sure we've all heard the cliched phrase, from old people and old heads alike, either in real life or in media: "You don't know nothing about this!" More often than not it's said with a cheeky jubilation at the start of a classic piece of music, typically hip-hop or RnB. Some song or album comes on from a yesteryear that an older generation grew up listening to and the members of that gen lose their minds.

They're ecstatic to be able to claim tunes that they helped immortalise and playfully shove off the 'youngins' who received those tunes as legacy records. It's cliched but it's largely harmless and usually a good sign that you're about to hear a HIT.

And yet, we – readers of this zine in the early to mid-20s demographic – do know something about this. Where our parents and

grandparents came of age listening to what are now classics, many of us heard those same classics from the womb in our homes. And though we found sounds of our own and are creating our own classics, the music of yesteryear feels as much ours as anyone else's.

What's more, the musicians that we jam today also grew up on those same tracks, embraced them as part of their sonic backgrounds. The Whitney Houstons, Boyz II Mens and Michael & Janet Jacksons of those hey days not only inspired their peers, but countless younger musos – right up to the present day.

This Playlist Plug is dedicated to current jams that capture the flavour of older school RnB, the kind that we supposedly don't know nothing about.

Whether it be in the production, the themes, the lyrics or the general atmosphere, these records feel like vision from the past while simultaneously keeping things fresh, innovative and high quality. This is a playlist for when you are an elder relative or caregiver, and it's time to show the kids some REAL music. Take a peak at a sample of the tracklist, and get into some grown folks' business!

1. Sidibe, Devin Morrison, Herb Alpert – “Ready Enough”
2. Masego, Devin Morrison – “Yamz”
3. Kadeem Tyrell, Omar – “All My Love”
4. blAck pARty – “Dancing”
5. Berhana, Mereba – “Golden pt.2”
6. THEY. – “Blue Moon”
7. John Legend, Muni Long – “Honey”
8. Ian Isiah – “First Love”

Find the full playlist [here](#).





Serenita Commands Your Attention With *Risqué*

by Mongezi Sibande

The first word that comes to mind when I think of Serenita's EP, *Risqué*, is "certain". This EP, which dropped in February 2022, showcases belief and certainty which demands you to appreciate every song on the tape. Any question you could have is answered with clarity.

Can she sing? Yes!

On "More", she serenades you over a simple instrumental. Not simple to suggest laziness, but rather to provide the perfect introductory stage to showcase her vocal range. With confidence, Serenita displays her lovely yet distinct voice all over the track. She is clear in tone and clear in her confidence in her voice. On "Midnight Call", her voice climbs notes repeatedly with ease and pace without ever being rushed. It's always just right. Whereas "More [Outro]" has Serenita repeating the same phrase throughout, once again on a simple instrumental. But this time the instrumental is shrouded as her background vocals surround the song like a choir that is welcoming you to heaven.

Is she confident? Absolutely!

Risqué is an apt title for this project because wow, does it get steamy. Accompanying Serenita's voice is sexy, confident and alluring lyricism. The confidence in her sexuality and in her body is ever-present. Not overbearing or arrogant, but rather commanding and self-assertive. It's the kind of confidence which a listener can relate and empower themselves with. Lines such as, "Prolly asking why my ass so fat" on "Only One" convey this. She's also not afraid to say exactly what she needs as on the same song she exclaims, "Smoke me up then break my back". On "One Night Stand" she's similarly seductive, while being complimented by a fitting feature from Al

Xapo, a solid guest whose verse compliments and echoes similar sentiments Serenita expressed in previous songs – which makes the feature sound complete on this tape.



Is she versatile? Incredibly!

"Need You" is a smooth yet bounce jam. Instrumentally, it would fit perfectly on an island-themed vacation playlist, and Serenita rides the song elegantly & with ease. All this while also displaying the same confidence and vocal ability discussed prior. "Gin & Tonic" follows in a Trapsoul-inspired avenue, one which she is still able to navigate with grace.

At just shy of 20 minutes, Risqué is a confident and worth introductory EP for Serenita. Imbued with confidence and ability from start to end. It's a truly exciting beginning for a promising talent.

BEAM:
Excellence Rediscovered
by sam_SON



The Basics

Full Name: Tyshane Thompson

Stage Name: BEAM (aka Beam Everything And More)

Date of Birth: 1995

Discography

95 (EP) ─ October 18, 2019

Crimson Soundtrack (EP) ─ October 29, 2020

ALIEN – February 4, 2022

I decided to release the body of this piece from the usual Fan File structure by my thoughts and feeling about BEAM are themselves unstructured. It's that thing that sometimes happens when you have an artwork or artist you really love: it becomes near-impossible to express that love in anything else but stream-of-consciousness babbling. The boss lady editor will certainly kill me I don't restrain myself a leetle bit though (lol), so I'll stick to simple paragraphing and hope for the best.

In one sense I'm not surprised that BEAM has crept into my musical heart the way he has; reason being, he's kinda always been there the whole time. When the young Tyshane produced under that name in the early 2010s – or as Elite of the production duo 808xElite – he had a hand in making some of my favourite Christian Hip-Hop records of all time. Longtime readers will be familiar with my love of CHH, as I've Fan Filed many artists from the subgenre: Lecrae, Andy Mineo, Social Club Misfits, and Propaganda come to mind.

So, when I retroactively learned that Lecrae's "Black Rose" and "Violence" (taken off his Church Clothes and Gravity albums, respectively) had BEAM's magic touch on



them, it was like rediscovering an old friend who's gone on to reach for their dreams in the biggest way but still feels like home. The ingenuity and talent that characterized those songs hasn't left BEAM, or me.

In another sense however, my headlong fall into BEAM's world took me fully by surprise. I enjoy hip-hop and rap a whole lot, have for years, but after the middle of last decade my taste for trap in particular declined quite a bit. I wasn't finding myself impressed by much and often wrote off many genre players & new releases as 'generic'.

Additionally, I'm also not the beeegeest fan of reggae and dancehall (you may boo). It could be a cultural thing, or because what I grew up on wasn't that, but those sounds just don't connect with me. Finding out in 2020 that modern-day BEAM was not only a serious trap musician, but fused his trap and hip-hop with reggae & dancehall, got my guard up in a serious way. I was honestly ready to be bored or unimpressed or pleasantly entertained, dassit.

Thank God that BEAM is everything and more.

Tyshane's deep roots in the musical sounds of both the West Indies and the United States – the inheritance of dancehall and gospel from his father Papa San, and the immersion into production in his Stateside youth – has given the super-producer a solid bed-rock of inspiration & versatility to mine from. And I do not idly call him super-producer: BEAM is a multi-talented, multi-genred, incredibly creative artist who's command behind the decks allows him to work magic behind the mic.

Watch BEAM jump from pure reggae to trap-n-B to gospel-tinged boom bap rap, and then watch him mix them all in something truly unique. This guy has not flopped on a track one time okes, not once! I rate this especially highly since his transition from producer-only to performer & producer is quite recent: though BEAM has been active since

2005, his debut as lead artist was in 2017. Five years later and he is truly one of the most exciting artists out right now. I could go on and on because I am a Fan in every sense. BEAM is and always has been a gamechanger, at least to me, and reckon you should listen to him to find out why.

Tracks to consider:

“Cactus” – {single}

“95”; “2X2”; “NUMB (feat. Morgan Saint)” – {95}

“23”; “NOTHING” – {Crimson Soundtrack}

“ANXIETY”; “30mgs (feat. Vory)”; “ICE COLA”; “HURT PEOPLE (feat. Zacari)”; “SUN-DOWN (feat. Justin Bieber)”; “CONSCIENCE (feat. Jorja Smith)”; “BLOOD MONEY” – {ALIEN}

Pinnacle Pop is a bi-monthly installation into a living archive of zines highlighting music and the sub-cultures within it. We are archivists, taking note of it all as it happens. We are the Apex of Culture.

**Find us online @PinnaclePop_
Email pinnaclepopmusic@gmail.com
Issue #16 drops September 2022**