

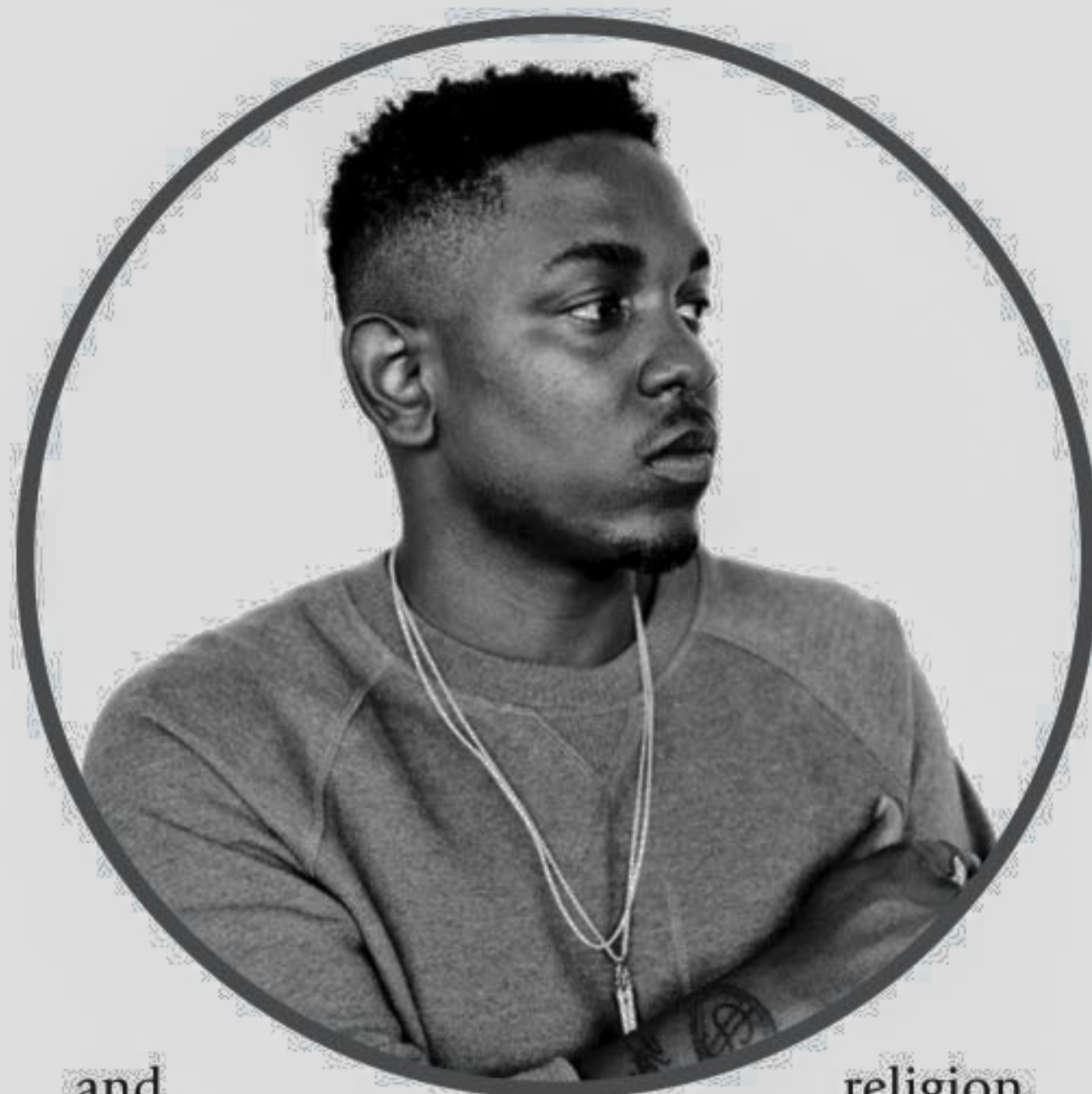
ALBUM REVIEW

KENDRICK LAMAR'S MASTERPIECE

SHUPROVO ARKO

With fantastic album drops from Lupe Fiasco and Death Grips, and with Kanye West dropping later this year, 2015 is already shaping up to be a great year for hip-hop. Adding to this list of albums (and undeniably sitting at the top) is Kendrick Lamar's follow-up to his critically acclaimed 2012 album "good kid, m.A.A.d city". Kendrick has always focused more on lyrical content and narrative flow than flashy gimmicks. Combining traditional hip-hop with jazz, funk and soul music, "To P*mp a Butterfly" is Kendrick Lamar at his creative best.

"Good Kid" was a concept album telling the story of a youth from Compton and his numerous brushes with gang violence. "TPaB" goes beyond that and flows more like a stream of consciousness album with snippets and stories where Kendrick raps about his thoughts on a wide range of topics like fame, politics, American youth, black culture, slavery, oppression, depression



and religion. At almost 80 minutes long, "TPaB" is a sprawling epic of concepts and ideas that in less capable hands would seem like a mess.

In the opening track "Wesley's Theory", Kendrick makes his influences clear with samples from funk legend George Clinton accompanied by bass from the talented Thundercat. This along

with the next two tracks takes jabs at stereotypical, recently-famous rappers who only rap about money and women, a fate some predicted for Kendrick himself. This is evident in the upbeat, radio-friendly track "King Kunta" referencing Kunta Kinte, a famous 18th century slave. The irony of the title is not lost on Kendrick as it means "King of the Slaves", acting as a reality-check to all those rappers who think they've beaten the system and now are kings.

These self-criticisms and double standards also serve as a recurring theme in the album. In "The Blacker the Berry", an emotionally charged rant against racism, he starts every verse with "I'm the biggest hypocrite of 2015." In "Hood Politics", Kendrick blames the government for their apathy towards the ghettos and how it forces young black men to take up criminal life to survive, but then admits that if it wasn't for the dream of "making it out" he probably wouldn't be where he was.

Kendrick's idea of fame is full of doubt and self-loathing, as shown in his break-

down in "u", where he feels like he's abandoned his friends and family as he deals with "survivor's guilt." In another track called "How Much a Dollar Cost" he recounts a time when he refused to give a dollar to a homeless man, only to later find out he was talking to God and that one dollar could have granted him salvation.

Throughout the album, Kendrick reveals parts of a poem that he ultimately recites in full at the closing track called "Mortal Man". Midway through the track Kendrick starts a conversation with Tupac Shakur, one of his idols and inspirations for "TPaB". The audio for Tupac's voice is from an actual interview from November 1994, just two weeks before he was shot and killed. He and Tupac converse about life, poverty and sanity, issues still very relevant 20 years later. Kendrick's lyrics are insightful and thoughtful and touches upon so many aspects of life that it's impossible for one review to cover. Whether it is a hip-hop masterpiece is up for debate, but it is most definitely the best album of the year for me.

MOVIE REVIEW

FURIOUS 7

Paul's exhilarating swan song

FAHMIM FERDOUS

Vin Diesel has been known to get attached to his projects. He got so attached to "The Chronicles of Riddick" that his one-scene cameo in "The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift" was in exchange of ownership of the rights to the Riddick(ulous) franchise, that was already sinking following a failed sequel. The "Fast & Furious" franchise has been a much bigger part of his career, and when Paul Walker crashed into a tree in November 2013 and never woke up – halfway through production of "Furious 7", it was only expected that Diesel would do his best to honour the memory of one of his closest friends. Production was halted, the script re-written, Peter Jackson's CGI team was called in to superimpose Paul's face onto his brothers' – who agreed to step in to finish the film. Anticipation built up too; fans of the franchise waited at the edge of their seats (and in front of their computers, looking to pre-book tickets) long before it released. Thankfully, Dhaka's Star Cineplex was one of the 10,500+ theatres where the film premiered internationally, and it was well worth pushing other work commitments around to be there.

Without giving away any spoiler (and what you don't already know from Wikipedia and IMDb), the film is possibly the best of the franchise so far, not so much in terms of the actual content, but possibly for the treatment of it. With a

director responsible for films like "Saw", "Insidious" and "The Conjuring" at the helm for the first time, the film's action sequences weren't dragged (as opposed to its immediate predecessor). Jason Statham as rogue special forces assassin Deckard Shaw was the best I have seen him (surpassing "Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels"). The cinematic layers beyond the smashing of metals and breakneck driving – the rekindling chemistry between Letty (a coming-back-to-her-own Michelle Rodriguez) and Dom Toretto (Diesel), Mia's (Jordana Brewster) maturing relationship dynamics with Brian (Paul Walker) and Kurt Russell's charisma as "Mr. Nobody" – take the film beyond the typical pace-and-grind-and-explosions. That is not to say there isn't a bucket-load of that though: Furious 7 provides adequate adrenaline rush, as promised in the trailer – there are cars parachuting jumps from an aircraft, and then there's that one supercar smashing through three Dubai towers. The premise to bid Paul Walker a farewell is set up right throughout, setting him up as the "bigger man", and the ending is indeed incredibly emotional.

Strengths: Jason Statham's cold badassery; the expected over-the-top car stunts gone a little further over the top; the action sequences, particularly the fist-fight between Rodriguez and MMA fighter Ronda Rousey, Statham getting Rock Bottomed by, well, The Rock, and the street brawl between Statham and Diesel;



the background scores and soundtracks; and ultimately the ending.

Weaknesses: Leaving Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson (as Detective Luke Hobbs) out for almost the entire movie (although he does return near the end for a typically absurd sequence), and (possibly in an effort to highlight Paul) keeping Tyrese Gibson and Ludacris on the sidelines – although Gibson's comic relief was very passable. Game of Thrones' Nathalie Emmanuel also played a tepid role, but her genius-hacker character of Ramsey was set up for prospective use in future.

All in all, it's the typical testosterone overflow that has generated billions for the franchise, but it's a little more than just that. Go in with

the right expectations and you won't be dissatisfied, particularly if you've been following the franchise even moderately.