

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Bon Iver Drops '22, A Million'

BY BEN SCHMITZ
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Upon the release of his sophomore self-titled release, Bon Iver's Justin Vernon made it abundantly clear that he is a master of balancing between too radical and not different enough.

Typically, when an artist finds success in a given style, they continue their body of work in a way that is cohesive and non-alienating to their newfound fan base. Any desire to retain relevance also requires that some change be made from release to release.

With "Bon Iver, Bon Iver" (the act's second release and first as a multi-member band), Vernon pushed experimentation to a dangerous degree but was enormously successful in creating an album that felt very different from his debut "For Emma, Forever Ago," while still retaining his signature songwriting character.

Now, Vernon has returned from a five-year battle for self-definition with "22, A Million."

The album's first words—"It might be over soon" in the opening track "22 (OVER S∞∞N)"—point to the search for answers and internal resolution in the face of fame that Vernon has been grappling with for these past few years. This song also introduces the overall sonic motifs of the album quite well, with lo-fi, warbly, and pitch-shifted sounds being presented directly alongside lush, dense, higher-fidelity elements.

The album's most aggressive track "10 d E A T h b R E a s T," is a clear example of how the artists Vernon has collaborated with in the past few years, namely rapper Kanye West, have rubbed off on him. The highly distorted, driving drum beat in this song, as well as the ear-ripping bass synth sound, are evocative of trademark Kanye production that can be found on albums such as 2013's "Yeezus."

"22, A Million's" is the best example of how profoundly excellent Vernon is at taking a familiar song format, tearing it to shreds through sonic manipulation, and reassembling it in a way that preserves its familiarity."

The track "33 GOD" is where the album returns sonically to the sort of poly-fidelity production heard in the opening track. The instrumentation in this song keeps things intriguing throughout, with the intro-

duction of a brush, overdriven drum groove and choppy vocal samples about halfway through. The last few lines of the lyrics profess a desire and motivation in Vernon to move on from his demons, with him singing, "I could go forward in the light, well, I better fold my clothes."

"22, A Million's" is the best

TER's" sonic build.

Closing the album, "00000 Million" brings back the folk-like songwriting of "29 #Stratford APTS" and closes the album's lyrical themes powerfully.

The line, "If it's harmed, it's harmed me, it'll harm, I let it in," is a clear final word on Vernon's acceptance of the de-



DANIEL FINE / CONTRIBUTING ILLUSTRATOR

example of how profoundly excellent Vernon is at taking a familiar song format, tearing it to shreds through sonic manipulation, and reassembling it in a way that preserves its familiarity. The poly-fidelity production also sees its most potent use in this track, with the song's final chorus breaking apart and dissolving through an intentional playback malfunction as its melody ascends higher and higher.

This startling breakup at a climactic moment in the song and the album is a risky move, but one executed to great effect in highlighting Vernon's desperation to express and understand the complex demons that have fueled the creation of this album's songs.

Tracks "- 666 ", "21 M N WATER", "8 (circle)" flow together in tone, with "21 M N WATER" serving as an interlude between the other two. "666 " is the most catchy and pop-like on the album in terms of composition, evoking the style of '80s artists like Peter Gabriel.

While this number in particular is upbeat and soothing, it lacks the edge and dynamic changes of the album's stronger tracks.

The same can be said of "21 M N WATER" at its beginning, but this track builds and disintegrates in a way that its preceding track does not. The tension that is built toward the end of this track is immediately released at the beginning of "8 (circle)," a choice that is questionable and compromises the impact of "21 M N WA-

pression and anxiety he has struggled with, reflecting the sentiment of the album's opening lyric. The song's wistful and folksy tone along with its cryptic yet confessional lyrics bring the album down gently and offer a sense of release and closure after "22, A Million's" sonic crusade.

Lyrically, Vernon is as cryptic as ever, but his ambiguity and use of nonexistent words like "paramind" and "astuary."

In the context of Bon Iver's discography, "22, A Million" is a clear peak of the otherworldly, genre-shattering composition and production that now define Vernon. At its strongest moments, the album strikes that perfect balance between experimentation and accessibility, while at its weakest it comes uncomfortably close to muzak.

Lyrically, Vernon is as cryptic as ever, but his ambiguity and use of nonexistent words like "paramind" and "astuary" are effective, albeit rather meta, ways of expressing his struggle to convey his turmoil. This is an album that will certainly polarize in its experimental nature and alienate some while earning the adoration of others.

It can be widely agreed, however, that "22, A Million" cements Vernon as a maestro of pushing boundaries and bringing his music to places no one ever thought it would go.

Schmitz is a member of the Class of 2019.

'Sex Object' Offers Truth, Reality in Feminism, Life

BY ISABEL DRUKKER
A&E EDITOR

Jessica Valenti's first memoir, "Sex Object" (2016), says a lot.

And it should come to no surprise that the founder of the award-winning site Feministing and regular columnist for the Guardian has a lot to say—though it's not exactly clear what it is.

But once you figure out what it is that she wants to convey through "Sex Object"—it took me about half of the book to understand, and I think it took Valenti that long as well—you realize that it's very important.

The introduction sets two conflicting goals. Within a page of one another, Valenti writes that, "Maybe it's okay if we don't want to be inspirational just this once," only to then say, "I wrote this book because I want her [Valenti's daughter] to feel that way [brave] always."

I didn't understand if I was supposed to read subsequent recounts of abuse and harassment bravely, sadly, or simply as a woman who already knows that this happens all the time.

I would also call for a greater check of privilege here.

She writes, "This is not to say that women all experience objectification in the same way; we do not," which, I will admit, is big. I do want her to say why and in what way, though—to a reader who wasn't looking for this check, as I was, it'll go unnoticed.

The memoir as a whole is loosely structured. In part, it works chronologically, telling the story of Valenti's life as a white Italian-American woman in New York City, beginning with her school days and going until the present with the beginning of motherhood for her daughter Layla.

At times, however, Valenti digresses.

In one section, we hear about online abuse Valenti suffered as an adult, just a paragraph after an anecdote about her time in high school. Valenti then discusses various occurrences from her teenage years.

As a reader, I'm not sure what to focus on. There's a lot going on—recounts about painful abortions, abusive boyfriends, drugs, the comfort of her supportive and loving family, and this question—"Who would I be if I lived in a world that didn't hate women?"—that seems to float around the cover and inside sleeve, but is never addressed in the book.

The section names would help a reader, but they shift between being useful ("1995," "College,"

"The Baby") and creating an aesthetic ("Subways," "Grilled Cheese," "Ice"). But if there is a consistent aesthetic of the memoir, I have yet to see it.

But I don't think this is a fault. Valenti's memoir reads as a tale of transformation and the idea that no person has to be, or even can be, one theme entirely. People aren't books, and their life stories don't always fall into neat chapters—and, honestly, they really don't have to.

"Sex Object" is about the transformation of a girl who prioritized being cool to a woman who knows the worth of her anger.

She writes that in high school, "They had a nickname for me: Valentitty. I laughed when they told me this because this is what you do when want to be the cool-girl."

But when discussing men who send threats online, she says, "I don't feel bad for them. I don't feel compassion. I just hate them."

Valenti's story is that of shedding the shield of false humor and the arduous confrontation that bad things happen, they often happen to people like you, and they have probably happened multiple times already, whether you chose to address it or not.

And, by showing this transformation and this acceptance, it is positive because you admit it is something wrong that can be changed. In this way, the memoir sends a shout-out to those who aren't entirely admitting that they are feminists: that they might agree with feminism, or simply that they need feminism. It's never too late to switch over.

This being said, I don't see anyone who isn't on the border of this idea if they are reading or even picking up the book at all.

If you aren't a feminist and are considering the book to critique its philosophies, I dare you. If you can make it through this memoir and not feel differently, then you truly hate women, and that must be a painful discovery to make about yourself.

I salute Valenti and "Sex Object." I read this book, and I get to write my real critiques and not have to say that Valenti is "the best" and "so cool." I don't have to pretend that we are two women chatting friendly but instead I can take her and her effort in this memoir seriously.

Though I know the world will continue to default women as sex objects, we will always have our own stories—and, as I think Valenti is saying, they are simply no laughing matter.

Drukker is a member of the Class of 2017.