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Like an energy bar, the gratification of pop is fleeting. Evidenced on the track, "Haunted", Beyoncé's disenchantment with industry status quo and record label executives formed the premise for her secretive album release on December 13 exclusively on iTunes.

Artists taking the reins can prove catastrophic (this is Bey's first release without the input of outside management), but the album sees the singer spread the songwriting wings she's grown into throughout her 16-year career.

The sheer ground 'Beyoncé' covers and the cohesiveness of its statement (namely, "I am Beyoncé, uncut") should be its most-lauded achievement: we have the prima donna vaunting her undisputed Queendom in "Grown Woman", intimating her existential fears in the psychedelic "Haunted," coining tacky, hydrology-inspired metaphors for coitus and the anatomy in "Rocket" and wailing the pure, hair-raising notes of a mother's grief in "Heaven" for the child she miscarried before conceiving daughter Blue Ivy.

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Critics were quick to pounce on "Partition," a minimalist R&B track whose throbbing bass packs Dolby Surround Sound oomph, in which Bey relates a lewd tale of back-of-the-limo sex. We hear the partition rolling up, blotting the volley of camera shutters from encroaching paparazzi. After husband Jay-Z "Monica Lewinskis" all over Bey's gown, a pouty Bey chides "daddy" for not bringing a towel. The song's shamelessness speaks to a larger lack of self consciousness that permeates the album. Beyoncé will have you know that she panders to no one. How else could a song like "Blow" (Warning: NSFW) have made the cut?

The album opens with self love anthem "Pretty Hurts" whose criticism of pop culture ideals of beauty – "Vogue says thinner is better" and "South Beach, sugar-free" – are standard fare. But amidst Bey's clichéd exhortations to "take the crown without falling down" are insights such as "Perfection is the disease of a nation" and "You can't fix what you can't see/It's the soul that needs surgery."

Second track, "Haunted" is sonically confusing, a layering of eerie samplers of synth and ticking clocks, but that's just the mental static seething Bey's mind. Her voice distorted and silvery, she recites "I'm climbing up the walls 'cause all the s**t I hear is boring/All the s**t I do is boring, these record labels boring".

Tracks eight and four are best consumed in private – unless you want to fill the room/office/car with Beyoncé's...sighs of satisfaction in the old-school "Blow", a catchy tune that is otherwise airwave-happy if not for its indecorous lyrics. Meanwhile, "Rocket" is not, as the title insinuates, the bass-laden, sultry stuff of "Baby Boy" and "Naughty Girl," but a play-by-play of Bey and Jay's bedroom antics dressed as a slow, jazzy number in a futile bid for propriety. Oh wait, shame was never an issue. As Bey declares in "Partition": "Radio say speed it up, I just go slow" and she'll take her sweet time "rockin' it 'til water falls."

Bey will have a lot of explaining to do when Blue Ivy is old enough to ask what mommy means by "reaching into the bottom of her fountain." But I see a distinction between Beyoncé's erotically-charged offerings and the mulch peddled by R&B counterpart Rihanna, whose "Birthday Cake" is so desultory and transparent it can't be anything but a "sex sells" paying of dues.

Songs about coupling are rounded out with nuanced tracks "No Angel," "Jealous" and "Superpower," which, as a whole, paint the highs and lows of married life. Would a little delicacy have detracted from the honesty? I couldn't say, but Beyoncé isn't one to beat around the bush.

In "Jealous," Bey has outdone herself to be the appeasing wife, cooking a meal (really?) for Jay naked, and is anticipating his homecoming, shot glass in hand. But when he doesn't show her mind begins to whir. "I'm jealous", she states sullenly; and one must admire her for shooting from the hip. The war cries à la "Girls (Who Run The World)" express Beyoncé's frustration with herself as she sings, "I wish that you were me so you could feel this feeling." "No Angel" is Bey's falsetto reiteration that she's in it for the long haul despite her and Jay's flaws. The incorrigible Sasha Fierce makes way for a woman who apologizes for her shortcomings, that she might not be "the girl you thought you knew and thought you wanted."

The album's sole failings are the meandering "Superpower" featuring Frank Ocean and "Flawless," in which Beyoncé's feminist teeth come out. There is an extract of the TED talk, "We should all be feminists" by Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Beyoncé's connotation of "flawless" is a nod to women who hold it together in the face of adversary day after day. But the extract from "Bow Down/I Been On" cheap R&B noise at its worst, clouds the message.

Beyoncé's ode to her baby daughter, "Blue" is a delightful, piano-led tune of easy bliss, featuring sound bites of Blue Ivy's laugh and "Mommy, mommy, mommy". "Make it last forever/Come on, baby



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won't you hold onto me, hold onto me" Beyoncé croons.

It doesn't always work, but the intention in each song and its connection to the work of art as a whole is evident. At least in terms of messaging, no single track can be justly dismissed as filler – despite some unnecessary lewdness – which is a venerable achievement for any artist. While it certainly isn't sing-along material à la earlier iterations of 'Crazy in Love,' 'Beyoncé' might just be Queen B's finest autobiographical achievement.

Rating: 4/5

Image credit: Beyoncé via [Facebook](#)

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About the author

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US citizen living in Indonesia and a freelance writer for a national newspaper. I just want to write for the rest of my life, make good friends and see the world. Very excited to be a part of Toonari Post and about the abounding opportunities in citizen journalism. Reporting from Jakarta, Indonesia.

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