

Review of *You Seem Pretty Sad for a Girl So in Love* by Olivia Rodrigo

9.2/10

an album that seems so good for something which happened by accident.

Olivia Rodrigo, *You Seem Pretty Sad for a Girl So in Love* (Geffen Records, 2026)



Olivia Rodrigo's third studio album is easily her most accomplished and mature. The album is incredibly personal while successfully achieving the pop heights that she has become known for. Rodrigo asserts herself as one of the most successful and fully realised pop artists of the 2020s with this album. Despite its cliché premise, *You Seem Pretty Sad for a Girl So in Love* is a beautiful, albeit heartbreaking, concept album about the full journey of a failed relationship.

Despite being a departure from the previous two albums – having a title which is more than four letters and favouring depth over surface level pop – the album is still authentically an Olivia Rodrigo album. Rodrigo has described her ambition for the record in modest terms, framing success less as chart position than as simply being proud of the finished work.¹ This artistry and intention show through the music.

Yet, there is no subtraction from the songs' abilities to capture a pop-centred feeling. The question was never really whether *You Seem Pretty Sad for a Girl So in Love* would be a commercial success. Her first two records both achieved a Hot 100 number one.² *Sour* (2021) was an angsty teenager's album in the best possible way.³ The album was written to be single-minded, emotionally raw, confined mostly to one register of *hurt*. Then, *Guts* (2023) widened Rodrigo's horizons to a more established sound; adding pop-punk sonic themes and a sharper sense of humour without abandoning the atmosphere that made Rodrigo famous in the first place.⁴

¹ Shaad D'Souza, 'Olivia Rodrigo: Blood on the Tracks', *Pitchfork*, 22 June 2026

<<https://pitchfork.com/features/cover-story/olivia-rodrigo-interview/>> [Accessed 2 July 2026].

² 'Olivia Rodrigo | Biography, Music & News', *Billboard*, <<https://www.billboard.com/artist/olivia-rodrigo/>> [Accessed 9 July 2026].

³ Olivia Rodrigo, *SOUR* (Geffen Records, 2021).

⁴ Olivia Rodrigo, *GUTS* (Geffen Records, 2023).

You Seem Pretty Sad for a Girl So in Love feels like it's the first album focused less on inheriting a certain sound, and more about using her knowledge of these different genres to the advantage of the song. Rodrigo has spoken about her long-standing pull toward musical theatre's more maximalist, crescendo-driven songwriting.⁵ This explains some of this record's stuffed, swelling arrangements. It adds a boldness that may not be tied to a specific genre, but adds to the emotional climaxes of the story throughout the album.

That's not to say this album is genre-less, however. Where *Guts* reached for pop-punk crunch, this record reaches for something more of a 1980s new wave – *The Guardian* claims influences of the B-52s, New Order, and Devo throughout.⁶ The most notable of these influences comes from The Cure, who even have a song named after them.⁷ Robert Smith – of The Cure – himself also appears on 'what's wrong with me?'.⁸ Rodrigo has described hearing his finished vocal on the track for the first time as an emotional moment, and that sincerity is audible in the finished song.⁹

The stylistic themes of the songs form a cohesive narrative just as the lyrics do – combining to form a cyclical nature. For example, 'drop dead' nods toward 'Just Like Heaven' in its melodic shape without quoting it outright. The song's conflation of infatuation and mortal danger – through the idea that a kiss could be fatal – sets the album's tone noting that even the excitement of the relationship could be shot through with a foreboding feeling, a pairing that recurs throughout the record.

In interviews, Rodrigo describes the album as a sort of "graduation" and her first emotionally adult record.¹⁰ She explains that both the music industry and her audience expected her to grow up in the public eye. This album, being as mature as it is, is effectively justifying herself as an established artist.

⁵ fantano, 'Olivia Rodrigo Interview', *YouTube*, 19 June 2026 <<https://youtu.be/UDJpr52gaTw>> [Accessed 2 July 2026], [27:42].

⁶ Alexis Petridis, 'Olivia Rodrigo: You Seem Pretty Sad for a Girl So in Love review – who's she singing about? Who cares when the songs are this good', *Guardian*, 12 June 2026 <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2026/jun/12/olivia-rodrigo-you-seem-pretty-sad-for-a-girl-so-in-love-album-review>> [Accessed 2 July 2026].

⁷ Olivia Rodrigo, 'the cure', in *you seem pretty sad for a girl so in love* (Geffen Records, 2026).

⁸ D'Souza, 'Blood on the Tracks'.

⁹ fantano, 'Olivia Rodrigo Interview', [14:26].

¹⁰ fantano, 'Olivia Rodrigo Interview', [6:40].

Critical response to the album has been almost unanimous; Critics like Petridis note that this artistic growth seems to be effortless, helping the album win praise even from older, unexpected industry veterans.¹¹ *The Guardian* notes that the tabloid notion of guessing which songs are about whom becomes irrelevant in this record, because the songwriting is so accomplished that it supersedes the gossipy nature of the subject matter.¹² Petridis holds a similar perspective, claiming that the songs are sturdy enough to survive without knowing who they are about.¹³ In effect, making this Rodrigo's most "grownup" album.

However, it is important to note that even having this discussion takes away from the maturity of Rodrigo's work; by repeatedly justifying that it is a "grownup" album, almost subtracts from how that's exactly what it is. The album is by all means mature, but it discredits Rodrigo's prowess to imply that this was unexpected. Rodrigo has been building a strong musical palette since *Sour*, and this album is the culmination of years of preexisting growth and maturity.

Rodrigo has notably claimed a degree of detachment from both the reviews and the numbers.¹⁴ Whether or not it is entirely true, it helps shape the authenticity and value of the album as a piece of Rodrigo's artistry – and, effectively, her life.

Yet, despite her apparent lack of interest in the numbers, the album has been an incredible commercial success, the record debuted at number one across six separate Billboard charts and held that position into a second week, in several cases roughly doubling the opening totals of Rodrigo's previous chart-toppers.¹⁵ *Variety*'s Chris Willman calls this album one of the rare releases capable of dominating conversation across varying audiences, while keeping its depth and value along with its streaming numbers.¹⁶

One of the most interesting parts of this album is the account of how the album changed shape mid-process. Rodrigo notes that the record began as more akin to a straightforwardly happy love

¹¹ Petridis, 'You Seem Pretty Sad for a Girl So in Love review'.

¹² Petridis, 'You Seem Pretty Sad for a Girl So in Love review'.

¹³ Petridis, 'You Seem Pretty Sad for a Girl So in Love review'.

¹⁴ fantano, 'Olivia Rodrigo Interview'.

¹⁵ Hugh McIntyre, 'Olivia Rodrigo's New Album Refuses To Budge From No. 1 On Every Chart', *Yahoo! News*, 1 July 2026 <<https://uk.news.yahoo.com/olivia-rodrigo-album-refuses-budge-140446668.html>> [Accessed 2 July 2026].

¹⁶ Willman, 'The Best Albums of 2026 (So Far)', *Variety*, 29 June 2026 <<https://variety.com/lists/best-albums-so-far-2026-mid-year/>> [Accessed 9 July 2026].

album before her own life redirected the focus.¹⁷ This gives the finished product an unintentional documentary quality, almost as though it is an unintentional concept album.

The interesting feature of this change is that you can hear the shift in mood happen almost in real time across the tracklist. Rodrigo insists that the album functions as a time capsule of where she was, more than a curated retrospective.¹⁸ As a result of this, the subtle foreshadowing or *red flags* in the earlier, ‘happier’ tracks become that much more poignant. Rodrigo seems to expertly capture the feelings of the situation, while also documenting the unrelenting reality hidden behind the tracks.

The album title’s contradiction seems to map onto the record’s two sides with a literalness to it. Side one of the album broadly focuses on the rise of the relationship; while side two is its collapse.¹⁹ This album structuring works incredibly well, and yet Rodrigo has been honest that it was not really planned as one. Rodrigo’s producer, Dan Nigro, describes this album roll-out as particularly instinct-driven, with Rodrigo trusting her own read on a song over any external pressure to make it more palatable or marketable.²⁰

Most of the songs existed before the overall theme did. Interestingly, details like the ‘honeybee’ callback were stitched in after the fact, once she noticed a shape emerging from songs that had been written separately.²¹ In a way, the album can be described as more of a scrapbook album than a concept album.

Side I: girl so in love

Rodrigo notes that there is a love sickness to this record, which perhaps describes side one’s anxious, keyed-up quality better than calling it “happy” would.²² That anxiety plays into the story of the album but is also not incidental: Rodrigo has noted that a good love song is harder to write than a good breakup song, because contentment does not naturally generate the same

¹⁷D’Souza, ‘Blood on the Tracks’.

¹⁸D’Souza, ‘Blood on the Tracks’.

¹⁹Willman, ‘The Best Albums of 2026 (So Far)’.

²⁰D’Souza, ‘Blood on the Tracks’.

²¹fantano, ‘Olivia Rodrigo Interview’, [8:08–8:29].

²²fantano, ‘Olivia Rodrigo Interview’, [8:52].

narrative tension as heartbreak does.²³ As a result, side one's best songs seem to almost refuse to be happy in the first place.

'drop dead', the opener and the lead single, sets a strong tone. It works as a 'Just Like Heaven'-indebted melody without the aggressive, TikTok-baiting hook some early listeners assumed it would be. Despite its more marketable tone, it almost reflects the very theme of the album – as she matures in her artistry, she also works through the relationship.

'stupid song' was reportedly the most difficult song to make, with the longest production time and almost being cut from the tracklist entirely.²⁴ But it pays off incredibly well, the song is one of the most fully realised and complex of the record. Complex, of course, both emotionally and technically. Despite being only the second track on the record, it manages to perfectly devolve into a chaotic – almost upsetting – piece of music that foreshadows the *you seem pretty sad* element of this album, while objectively keeping its excitement and fun. The song's bridge, opens up to reveal a slightly darker theme to the song. It is about an obsessive tally of hours spent thinking about the other person, which previews the compulsive, self-erasing devotion that later curdles into something darker on 'maggots for brains'.

'honeybee', the first song written for the album, works as its emotional anchor for the first half. It also perfectly foreshadows the second half with its nearing-melancholic feel. Intentional or not, this song sets up the concept for the rest of the album quite effectively. The melody and images of the song recur later, once the narrative catches up with the foreshadowing and sorrow that the song leads with. Tucked inside the song is an anticipatory dread of the relationship's end. This premonition is planted early in the tracklist to – albeit unintentionally – add a sense of unease and make the later fulfilment feel more like an inevitability.

The songs 'u + me = <3' and 'my way' showcase that Side I is not simply sickly-sweet. 'my way' works as a clear continuation and growth of *Guts*' pop-punk energy. It also works as a deliberate jolt of noise inside an otherwise softer half of the record. Even at its most sweet, 'u + me = <3' slips in a line of scepticism about modern love's durability, a small crack that keeps the song from reading as pure fantasy. This keeps to the central theme of the album being about a corrupting love that will ultimately fail.

²³ fantano, 'Olivia Rodrigo Interview', [10:44].

²⁴ fantano, 'Olivia Rodrigo Interview', [23:13].

‘purple’ is also actually rather sad for the first half, pre-empting the turning point of the record. The song’s colour metaphor, two identities blending into one hue, is knocked down in the song’s outro. As a result, this shifts the mood across the song’s runtime, moving from tenderness toward something more anxious without fully resolving the difference. The blended colour darkens to black, which reverses the song’s image of harmonious merging into something more like suffocation.

Side II: you seem pretty sad

‘the cure’ is the thematic turning point of the entire record. Following the anxious build of ‘purple’, ‘the cure’ becomes the start to the second, more depressing half of the album. The song focuses on the realisation that no relationship, however good, can resolve an internal sense of inadequacy. The song’s insistence that she keeps “finding” the same remedy only to lose it again gives the track a circular feeling, which alludes to how it could never be somebody else that would fix her.

Rodrigo has spoken about ‘the cure’ with a lot of openness, saying that it really shines a mirror on herself.²⁵ The song perfectly describes this feeling of discovering one’s own worst instincts in someone else’s affection. The song reveals a theme of how insecurity will come out even – or in some cases especially – when someone think’s they are in a perfect relationship. Yet, the song also hints very well at the album’s central thesis that the relationship is not good for her. Despite the seeming *perfect imperfection* of her relationship, these problems within it arise relatively quickly. Rodrigo, in the narrative, immediately turns inward and blames herself because of how *correct* the relationship feels.

The song ‘what’s wrong with me?’ was the most divisive track in early listener response, largely because of how much space Smith’s presence takes up. While the pairing occasionally overwhelms the song’s own identity, the collaboration is still emotionally right. Rodrigo’s decision to describe lovesickness in literal physical symptoms like sleeplessness and nausea extends the illness-as-love metaphor established on ‘the cure’. This alludes to the idea that the body can register a problem that the mind refuses to admit.

²⁵ D’Souza, ‘Blood on the Tracks’.

‘begged’ and ‘less’ are two of Side II’s most granular ballads. These songs sound considerably more nuanced and confrontational than Rodrigo’s most commercially successful hits in the past.²⁶ ‘less’ reframes the album’s central wish: rather than begging to be loved more, as the previous track does, Rodrigo begs to be loved less, because of what being loved *more* means in the context of their relationship. ‘less’ analyses the heartbreaking notion of a partner recognising what is better for someone and realising that it can mean leaving. Rodrigo seems to treat diminished love as a mercy rather than a loss in this song. And thus, the song stages a scene of a partner ending things specifically because he can’t bear her unhappiness, which complicates the anger of the album’s closing tracks by suggesting the breakup began as an act of care rather than betrayal.

‘expectations’ works as a tonal pivot towards dry wit and distance, rather than accepting pure grief in the album. This post-breakup narration turns outwards, aiming jokes at recognisable targets. This seems to work as a *stage of grief* type song without being too on-the-nose about it. The song doesn’t wallow, but the distraught-ness becomes very clear throughout the song. The song’s repeated bridge, insisting on ever-larger standards, functions like a protection for Rodrigo. She utilises a performance of toughness and aggressive wit that the surrounding songs suggest hasn’t actually taken hold yet.

The closing track, ‘cigarette smoke’, is a deliberate mirror of ‘drop dead’, the opener. The song seems to end the record on an unresolved anger rather than a tidy closure. Upon first listen; the song felt out of place, with ‘expectations’ seeming like a more fitting ending. Yet, that is exactly what it is intended for. The song works not to bring closure, but to open it up to nuance.

The song works as a sister-song to Tyler, The Creator’s ‘ARE WE STILL FRIENDS?’, albeit slightly less overt in its messaging.²⁷ That song, in the context of *Igor*, follows ‘I DON’T LOVE YOU ANYMORE’²⁸ as an unfortunate u-turn back to a relationship that Tyler claims to be over. The song even ends with a similar chord that plays at the beginning of the first track, opening up his cycle back into the relationship which leaves him jealous and distraught again.

²⁶ Petridis, ‘You Seem Pretty Sad for a Girl So in Love review’.

²⁷ Tyler, The Creator, ‘ARE WE STILL FRIENDS?’, in *IGOR* (Columbia, 2019).

²⁸ Tyler, The Creator, ‘I DON’T LOVE YOU ANYMORE’, in *IGOR* (Columbia, 2019).

Similar to Tyler's song, Rodrigo has described 'cigarette smoke' as feeling less like an ending and more like a loop finally closing.²⁹ This is appropriate for a record more interested in accurately tracking a feeling than in wrapping it up neatly for the sake of the story. The song is intentionally less clear about why it's inconclusive, and leaves the album on a angrier and more upset tone. Through the processing of the relationship, she recognises that even from the beginning – in 'drop dead' – it was ultimately going to turn downhill.

Despite the album's masterful quality, Side II is the stronger half of the record, more consistent song-to-song than side one, whose back half occasionally relies on the mood more than melody. 'what's wrong with me?' is a case where the ambition of the Robert Smith feature is not fully matched by the song underneath it. Despite being a moving gesture, the songwriting does not fully do the instrumental – or even the theme – the justice it deserves.

The two-sided structure, as Rodrigo herself has acknowledged, was decided after most of the songs were already written; it organises the album gracefully, but it is a loose frame which could have worked better to be a bit more polarising. The way that 'purple' transitions to 'the cure' is effective, but there doesn't feel to be a fully realised change after that. However, this is more a consequence of the 'accidental' nature of the concept, rather than a problem with the songs themselves.

Dan Nigro's production, while incredibly accomplished, occasionally under-serves the record's more ambitious arrangements compared to the previous albums. There are a few moments where a bigger, more experimental choice would have served the song better than the more tasteful choices. It would be great to hear riskier, less chart-bait, songs from Rodrigo. She is already capable of experimentation, but Nigro's production seems to restrict her a bit in the album.

None of these issues change the basic authority of the album. The album is an emotionally compelling, heart wrenching piece of music. The project is built around an incredible emotional accuracy that pushes Rodrigo's former sonic-boundaries and has a marked jump in lyrical maturity. The record overall has a coherence that survives its looser structural formation.

²⁹ fantano, 'Olivia Rodrigo Interview', [12:14].

The distance between the swooning ‘drop dead’ and the residual bitterness of ‘cigarette smoke’ is the clearest evidence of the album’s cyclical design. The same imagery and vocabulary of danger recur at both ends of the record, now stripped of the original charm. This, cycles back to the beginning of the relationship and portrays it as something almost doomed to fail. Yet, upon first listen, that is only a faint theme. Upon repeated listen, the issues of the relationship shine through in a much greater fashion. Which, in effect, is a genius move that almost couldn’t have been intentional.

What makes the album work despite its unplanned structure is Rodrigo’s consistency of motifs; her themes of illness, melting, and unravelling are found through both Parts of the album. This gives the record an internal logic of a fully actualised concept album, despite being assembled after the fact.

Ultimately, this is a one-of-a-kind album. Its achievement comes from the unintentional narrative arc, and how it is presented through the incredible tonal range. The album has a willingness to let the development of a single relationship help write songs as the flow of a cohesive narrative, which works to the album’s greatest strengths. The album goes from whirling about a giddy crush, devolving to a scorching account of heartbreak.