

Stormzy's third studio album '**This is What I Mean**' transcends the boundaries of musical structures he has felt constrained by since '**Gang Signs and Prayer**'. Seeing him surpass the struggles brought forth by the pressures of his musical prowess on '**Heavy is The Head**'. Stormzy's development and focus-shift is made clear, as the gang signs have turned into solely prayers, and the head is no longer heavy. '**This is What I mean**' sees the man come into his own.

Musically speaking, this is the most versatile project in the arsenal of the rap star, substituting his gritty flows, and knock-out heavy punchlines for a softer melodic tone and full-blown poetry. A symbolic shift to the depth presented by '**This is What I mean**'. The stripped-back approach in production and vocal direction places you in a headspace of contemplation and intimacy, as a melodic dialogue surrounding Stormzy's reflections and realisations unfold through-out the twelve tracks.

'**Fire + Water**' the introductory track, invites the listener into the serene atmosphere through a gospel-esque chord progression and Stormzy softly singing, a stylistic theme prevalent throughout the entire album. From the offset presenting a softer approach to his expected rapping nuance, as you notice a maturing man reflecting on his love-life and current circumstances. A heaviness is felt in Stormzy's delivery, as it he bears the weight of his words as they leave his heart '*Second guesses really got you havin' second thoughts/Second thoughts never hurt nobody, everybody has 'em*'. Introducing a dimension of vulnerability and openness, which begins to alleviate as he offloads all that he is pondering off his chest. The eight-minute track features harmonies from *Jacob Collier* (A regular musical presence throughout the album) and acts as a continuation to '**Lessons**' from '**Heavy is the Head**'.

The title track '**This is What I mean**', is the showstopper of the album. This is where *Stormzy* reminds every listener, from the casual to his industry counter-parts, that he is the still rapping royalty in the UK scene. *P2J's* production shines through here, as an anthem consisted of haunting choir vocals, violin stabs and an underlying dark, mobile synth that creates an alarming sense that *Stormzy* is ready to drop into the warzone. A bouncing rhythm comes to life as the track progresses giving *Stormzy* space to lay-down those knock-out punchlines we are so used to '*Mind your business, 'fore you mind my bread/If ten milli' weren't enough, I make a lifetime pledge, alright*'. *Jacob Collier* harmonies join in again, threading another dimension into an already busy track to set-up the stage for a feature from *Ms. Bank* and *Amaarae*. As the track closes off with *Black Sherif*, adding fans flames to a fiery war-cry, see *Stormzy* defending his honour as the undisputed King of Grime.

'**Firebabe**' and '**Give it to the Water**', see the feature of *Debbie Ehirim*, a young talent chosen by *Stormzy* to lead the emotionally charged tracks in '**This is What I Mean**'. She effortlessly transcends any barrier set by the listeners wary of newcomers, as her peaceful and beautiful voice guide the tracks to positions of vulnerability. As you reach the last track '**Give it To The Water**', which she is heavily present on, you seem to forget that this is a *Stormzy* album you are listening.

This is the key take-away from **'This is What I mean'**, the *Stormzy* of the past is no longer, he stands before the world as a changed man. Matured and re-invented, who has now redefined his own musical direction and produced a project so true to who he is It's difficult to imagine this is the same young-man rapping **'Shut Up'** in the park with his mates all those years ago.

'This is What I Mean' will stand as a musical benchmark in the UK for many years to come, from a production perspective, lyrical depth and dexterity, and overall synthesis of project coherence. This is his greatest project released to date, and deserves to be treated as such.