

Childish Gambino Delivers with Raucous, and Thoughtful Album: 3.15.20

By Alec Friedman

Childish Gambino, the Atlanta born rapper, singer, songwriter is finally back with his fourth studio album: 3.15.20. The album named after the date in which it was posted on his website, is Gambino's first album since his well-received funk album 'Awaken, My Love!' released in December of 2016. Gambino uses this album to explore themes of self-love, individuality and finding your place in the machine. Gambino, the executive producer of this album, creates a very noisy, and often erratic atmosphere, leading to an album that in many ways feels like it comes from the future. This new album is an amalgamation of his previous albums in especially the most recent two: Because the Internet, and Awaken, My Love! in that it explores several sounds including hip-hop, R&B, and funk but doing it all in a very modern, futuristic, experimental way. Separating itself from many modern hip-hop records, 3.15.20 is much more a cohesive album than a collection of songs. The songs transition into each other and the vibe and aesthetic of each track is one in the same creating an album that is very much the sum of its parts. All but 2 of the songs on this album begin with numbers and the number for each song is where in the album the song starts, following this the album begins with 0.00.

The opening track serves as a very cinematic intro that does a fully sufficient job setting up the vibe and style of what's to come. The next track is one of two songs to have a word as the title with Algorythm. Algorythm, a play on the word algorithm sets up the narrative drive of the album with a song that feels like a cross between 1984 and Footloose. Filled with booming drums, deep staccato vocals, and a funky groove Algorythm sets up the idea of the algorithm that we all live in and how it controls us. From there we have the second and final song with a word title, Time. Time features vocals from pop sensation Ariana Grande as her and Gambino trade

juxtaposed vocals lamenting the idea of our limited time and the universal pressure of finding your place. Much like the preceding track, Algorithm, Time contains loud booming drums however the song feels much less chaotic and hectic. On the next track, 12.38, Gambino delivers a talky rap that he mixes with a few singing phrases throughout in a falsetto pitch. This song creates a tropical island vibe and describes an unusual romantic relationship. The voice and the flow that Gambino uses are highly inflected from his normal tone. The song also features a verse from fellow Atlanta rapper, 21 Savage which comes as an unexpected but enjoyable moment on the album. The verse works really well in the song and fits in well with the groove and vibe set up. The ending outro continues more of the weird futuristic sound that the album is full of. From there we have 19.10, a track that begins with quick punky drums, and a groove reminiscent of Earth, Wind & Fire's 'September.' On this song Gambino explores what it means to be black and lessons he learned from his father. It fits in well sonically with the album delivering an enjoyable dance track with lyrics that hold really important meaning. 24.19 is the seminal point in the album as the character the album has been following finally breaks free from the algorithm. The melody harkens back to Gambino's biggest hit, Redbone. On the surface, 24.19 plays out like a love song to his wife however in context of the album it serves as the character's goodbye as he breaks free of the algorithm and enters a new world. Ending with an audial representation of a panic attack, this song transitions into 32.22, a song that feels very animalistic and jungle-esque with its hard to decipher vocals and erratic drums. Following this track is 35.31, a very catchy song with an infectious chorus. From that chorus it sounds like a dance track, but the verses explore themes of drug dealing and street violence. The song almost has a bit of a country vibe to it as well. The outro of the song is a repeat of the chorus however the production transitions to a much more trap-inspired, somber sound that then transitions to match the more robotic,

futuristic sound this album contains and that transitions us into 39.28. 39.28 is the most stripped back and quiet track on the album. The song begins with a layered acapella chorus and intro verse. Halfway through the first verse the production begins to work its way into the song, a luscious piano that only appears if there are vocals for it to back. It's definitely the most simply produced song on this album but the sound is still extremely full and matches the vibe completely. On 42.26, we get Gambino's 2018 single Feels Like Summer, however it starts with a strange intro not found on the single. The vocals in this song are similar to those on 12.38 and recreates that sunny island feeling that 12.38 captured. Even though it's a single released 2 years before the album's release it still fits in pretty perfectly with the vibe of the album. Gambino's refrain "I know Oh, I know you know that pain" both in lyrical content, melody and pitch is a sonic callback to his 2011 song That Power off his debut album 'Camp.' The next track 47.48, contains a funk groove and flow with a really deep and hypnotic vocal performance. It feels like the heart and soul of classic funk music mixed with modern aesthetics and styles. The lyrics seem like Gambino is singing to his children and that theory holds weight as Gambino's son makes an appearance at the end talking to his dad listing things that he loves. That end discussion goes over ideas of self-love as the boy says he loves himself and asks Gambino if he loves himself to which he says he does, a stark contrast to the repressed manner this album began under. Finally, we reach 54.39, the final track in the album. It starts off with a very impassioned and ecstatic flow and the chorus gives us lyrics about love being everywhere. The lyrics in this song are about self-love and confidence. The flow and singing feeds to that feeling very well especially when Gambino hits those really high James Brown style screams. The ending is definitely a much freer, positive and confident feel than where the album begins as the character in the album has fully broken free of the algorithm and reached a point of individuality and

creative expressionism. The final outro begins with Gambino saying to let everything out and leads into a very emphatic and loud ending about dancing, getting loose, and living the life you want to. The final noise is a quiet holding tone that mimics the tone the album begins on.

On 3.15.20, Childish Gambino delivers an album that truly feels like the buildup of his musical career to this point. Borrowing themes, and melodies from his early work Gambino really creates a brand-new album filled with a compelling narrative, and really engaging, unique experimental sound. Individually the songs may not have as much replay value as a 'Because the Internet' with its viral rap hits like Sweatpants or 3005 but what 3.15.20 does have is an incredibly well thought out and put together album that challenges societal norms, creative expression and modern hip-hop.