

Lana Del Rey – Born To Die (2012)

Written by bluelover

Tuesday, 07 February 2012 20:49 - Last Updated Wednesday, 15 March 2017 15:19

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01. *Born to Die* (4:46) 02. *Off to the Races* (5:00) 03. *Blue Jeans (remastered)* (3:29) [play](#)
04. *Video Games (remastered)* (4:42) 05. *Diet Mountain Dew* (3:43) 06. *National Anthem*
(3:51) 07. *Dark Paradise* (4:03) 08. *Radio* (3:35)
[play](#)
09. *Carmen* (4:09) 10. *Million Dollar Man* (3:52) 11. *Summertime Sadness* (4:25) 12. *This Is What Makes Us Girls* (3:58)

It's hard not to feel a twinge of sympathy for Lana Del Rey. She's hardly the first pop star in history to indulge in a spot of pragmatic reinvention that muddies her comfortable background, but you'd certainly think she was. You can barely hear the music over the carping, which appears to be getting louder as her debut album approaches: a cynic might say that's just as well, given the recent Saturday Night Live appearance in which she demonstrated her uncanny mastery of the vocal style deployed by Ian Brown during the Stone Roses' later years – she honked like the foghorn on Portland Bill lighthouse. But one off-key TV spot is surely not a career-ending disaster. Perhaps the arrival of *Born to Die* will silence the controversy and shift attention to the songs.

Or perhaps not. There's something impressive about her desire to brazen it out, but you do wonder at the wisdom of including *Radio*, one of those how-do-you-like-me-now? songs in which the singer revisits their terrible struggle to achieve fame. "No one even knows how hard life was," she sings, "no one even knows what life was like," which does rather invite the response: indeed not, but given that your father was not only extremely wealthy but so supportive that he took to the pages of the Adirondack Daily Enterprise to promote your debut album I'll hazard a guess at (a) probably not that hard and (b) basically quite nice.

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There's always the chance that she's playing a character, although that seems doubtful, because when Lana Del Rey is in character, she really lets you know about it. The one truly disappointing thing about Born to Die isn't the sound, which understandably sticks fast to the appealing blueprint from Video Games and Blue Jeans: sumptuous orchestration, twangs of Twin Peaks-theme guitar and bum-bum-TISH drums. Nor is it her voice, which is fine: a bit reedy on the high notes, but nothing to get you reaching for the earplugs. It's the lyrics, which in contrast to Video Games's beguiling description of a mundane love affair, are incredibly heavy-handed in their attempts to convince you that Lana Del Rey is the doomed but devoted partner of a kind of Athena poster bad boy, all white vest, cheekbones and dangling ciggie. The reckless criminality of their lifestyle is expressed via hip-hop slang – "yo", "imma ride or die", and, a little Ali Gishly, "booyah" – and the depth of their love through romance-novel cliches ("you are my one true love"). It's Mills and Booyah.

The problem is that Del Rey doesn't have the lyrical equipment to develop a persona throughout the album. After the umpteenth song in which she either puts her red dress on or takes her red dress off, informs you of her imminent death and kisses her partner hard while telling him she'll love him 'til the end of time, you start longing for a song in which Del Rey settles down with Keith from HR, moves to Great Yarmouth and takes advantage of the DFS half-price winter sale.

The best thing to do is ignore the lyrics; easy enough given how magnificently most of the melodies have been constructed. Video Games sounded like a unique single, but as it turns out, it was anything but a one-off: the album is packed with similarly beautiful stuff. National Anthem soars gloriously away from a string motif that sounds not unlike that sampled on the Verve's Bitter Sweet Symphony. There's something effortless about the melodies of Diet Mountain Dew and Dark Paradise: they just sweep the listener along with them. The quality is high throughout, which is presumably what you get if you assemble a crack team of co-writers, including Heart FM king Rick Nowels, author of Ronan Keating's Life Is a Rollercoaster, Dido's White Flag and Belinda Carlisle's Heaven Is a Place on Earth.

You could argue that his presence recontextualises Born to Die, drawing it away from the world of the indie singer-songwriter she was initially thought to inhabit and firmly into the mainstream. It fits better there, where no one bores on about authenticity and lyrics matter less than whether your songs' hooks sink deep into the listener's skin. What Born to Die isn't is the thing Lana Del Rey seems to think it is, which is a coruscating journey into the dark heart of a troubled soul. If you concentrate too hard on her attempts to conjure that up, it just sounds a bit daft. What it is, is beautifully turned pop music, which is more than enough. --- Alexis Petridis, guardian.co.uk

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