Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Mick Jenkins, Pieces of a Man

Malik Walker · Wednesday, November 7th, 2018

Seconds in, clapping arrives. At first listen "Heron Flow" reminds me of Mos Def's *Black on Both Sides*. More specifically it reminds me of the track "Love" off *Black on Both Sides*. "Heron Flow" featuring Julian Bell is the opening track/skit of Chicago lyricist Mick Jenkins' sophomore album titled *Pieces of a Man*. The vibe is real intimate and Jenkins introduces himself in front of an audience that digs spoken word poetry.

The city of Chicago has been infamous for its yearly murder rate but behind the murder is a city that is one of the most segregated cities in all of America and has a deeply rooted historical component of Black America. Many Black Americans from the South of the U.S. migrated to Chicago during the Great Migration era which lasted from 1916 through 1970. Many of its effects are still felt to date but one of many positive things brought to Chicago from the Great Migration is the ability to tell stories through music and even more specifically telling stories through pain and trauma.

Pieces of a Man was inspired by Gil Scott-Heron's debut album *Pieces of a Man*. Gil Scott-Heron was a musician in his own right as well as a poet and author. Scott-Heron's *Pieces of a Man* touched on many important themes during that time period that also parallel today's times. Mick Jenkins pulled out a couple of themes for his album which includes "existentialism" and "environment": two things that most people battle with in today's digital age.

"Grace & Mercy" gives a feeling of what the gritty side of Chicago feels like with the trap drums lifting Jenkins' flow while "Gwendolynn's Apprehension" produced by the one and only Black Milk shows another side of the continuous growing sound of Chicago with the trance-like synths and catchy hook inspired by the late poet Gwendolyn Brooks.

Who is Gwendolyn Brooks and why is she so impactful to Mick Jenkins and Chicago? Gwendolyn Brooks was a Chicago native and was a Black woman poet at that. She once stated in an interview, "Living in the city, I wrote differently than I would have if I had been raised in Topeka, KS … I am an organic Chicagoan. Living there has given me a multiplicity of characters to aspire for. I hope to live there the rest of my days. That's my headquarters." Her impactful writing more so awarded her a Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1950.

Jenkins stays consistent with the themes throughout the album, though, which many artists have a hard time doing. "Ghost" produced by THEMpeople, OV and Dee Lilly, Jenkins states in one line,

“Fuck is conscious if you woke but you still in the bed? A lot of y’all realities is only in your head.”

Whether it’s rappers such as Mick Jenkins, Saba, Noname, Chance the Rapper, G Herbo, Vic Mensa; it’s evident that the Chicago music scene is taking off after a long hiatus of finding the “next savior” after Kanye. Kanye held the crown for years but now Chicago has numerous young kings and queens that are speaking their truths to the world. At a time where East Coast versus West Coast were the only voices that mattered in hip-hop, today’s rappers of Chicago are making history today.

Less Popular Songs to Consider:

“Padded Locks” (feat. Ghostface) (prod. Kaytranada)

As similar to “Gwendolynn’s Apprehension,” Kaytranada so far throughout his career has done an excellent job of bringing the best out of the artists he produces for. This sentiment stands strongly as Mick Jenkins tweeted out stating that the two will work on a project together at some point in the future. Man. To add a cherry on top, Jenkins has Ghostface Killah featured on “Padded Locks” and how many artists can say they have had a hip-hop legend on their sophomore album let alone any of their albums? Not many.

“Consensual Seduction” (featuring Corinne Bailey Rae)

https://youtu.be/-ln3Fq_YKDw

When I viewed the initial tracklist for *Pieces of a Man* on Mick’s Instagram page, I noticed Corinne Bailey Rae and I thought that it was interesting for two reasons. For one, she hasn’t put out an album in two years and has slipped out of the spotlight and two I somewhat wondered how she would mesh with Mick Jenkins. But the track fit well and both Mick and Corinne did their thing on this one.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, November 7th, 2018 at 8:08 pm and is filed under Music
You can follow any responses to this entry through the Comments (RSS) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.