



This file photo taken on February 15, 2016 shows recording artist Kendrick Lamar as he receives the award for the Best Rap Album, *To Pimp A Butterfly* during the 58th Annual Grammy music Awards in Los Angeles. — AFP

In surprise return, Kendrick Lamar warns of spiritual crisis

Fresh from his triumph at the Grammys, Kendrick Lamar has returned with a surprise new album that shows a more spontaneous side to a rapper still thinking big about the world's ills. The album released on Friday-tellingly entitled "untitled unmastered." brings together songs that Lamar has performed in recent months along with studio outtakes in which the rising star both reflects on the discomforts of fame and warns of a society in spiritual crisis.

"untitled unmastered." starts where Lamar left off musically with a jazzy pizzicato on a string bass but quickly goes into heavy lyrical territory. Lamar conjures up imagery from the September 11 terrorist attacks and the Book of Revelation as he cautions against hypocrisy among the religious as well as atheism. "Another trumpet has sounded off and everyone heard it / It's happening-no more running from world wars / It's happening-no more discriminating the poor," he raps.

The 28-year-old artist hails from the gangsta rap capital of Compton in Los Angeles County but, while maintaining street cred, considers himself a Christian. He brings the themes together later in the album as he tries to get inside the mind of a murderer, speaking of how the American business of mass incarceration can crush faith. "Genocism and capitalism just made me hate," he raps, in a neologism that turns genocide into an ideology.

A rougher feel

The rollout of "untitled unmastered." could scarcely be more different than that for his last album, *To Pimp a Butterfly*, which came out almost exactly a year ago after a lengthy buildup and immediately achieved iconic status in the hip-hop world.

"To Pimp a Butterfly" experimented widely with conventional form, bringing in spoken word interludes and jazz segues, to create an intricate portrait of the state of black America, with the song "Alright" emerging as an unofficial anthem of the protest movement against police brutality.

Lamar led the Grammys by winning five awards at the music industry's big night on February 15. He received a near-record 11 nominations and won praise for his spirited, politically tinged performance that teased on the unreleased material.

"untitled unmastered." features a series of cameo appearances, most notably by CeeLo Green who adds his mellifluous yet soulful tenor voice. The latest album digresses toward the end with a more than eight-minute track—which hip-hop artist Swizz Beatz revealed to have been produced by his five-year-old son—that culminates in a lackadaisical sing-along to acoustic guitar. Yet the eight-track album—which, true to the title, assigns numbers and dates rather than names to each song—ends with a polished dose of funk.

Still a 'crash dummy'

On that final single Lamar, as was his wont on "To Pimp a Butterfly," turns his self-questioning about his role into a larger examination of social forces. "Why so sad? Walking around with them blue faces," he sings to the beat, a play on words as he conflates an expression for sadness with the color of the stripes that appear next to Benjamin Franklin's portrait on new \$100 bills.

Lamar reflects on a young woman conned into credit card debt and brings back an enduring image from "To Pimp a Butterfly," that of a South African beggar who makes the rapper wonder about his fortunes. "Ain't no money like fast money / Even today I'm considered a crash dummy / A rapper chasing stardom / How can I fast forward?" he sings.

Lamar delves into the racial dynamics behind the music business on the album's third track, a parable in which the rapper seeks advice from people of four races about his success. The Asian, according to Lamar, urges him to meditate and the Native American tells him to hold onto land. The black man encourages him to seek sexual satisfaction. And the white man? He told Lamar "that he selling me for just \$10.99." — AFP

Sam Smith on new album: 'I'm going even deeper'

If you thought Sam Smith was deeply honest on his first album, expect him to take it a step further on his sophomore release. "It's (expletive) great. It's really deep (stuff) that's coming out - that's all I'll say," a smiling Smith said in a recent interview. He wouldn't say when his follow-up to 2014's "In the Lonely Hour" will be released, but said he's pushing himself to explore new territory.

"Every day I'm having little epiphanies and changes and loving it. But all I can say is that I'm putting my heart even more out on the (expletive) line," Smith said. "I'm going even deeper. I can't believe I'm even doing it, but I'm going even deeper." "In the Lonely Hour" featured emotional pop songs about love lapses and unrequited love, including song titles like "Leave Your Lover" and "I'm Not the Only One." It reached multiplatinum status in the United States and won four Grammy Awards, including song and record of the year for "Stay With Me."

As he reflects on that album, Smith says he has mixed feelings about his breakthrough project. "There's a few songs I really (expletive) hate, but then the core of the album, songs like 'Stay With Me,' 'I'm Not the Only One' - actually all the songs except 'Money on My Mind' - I really love and I'm really proud of the classic-ness of the way they sound, because I still listen to them now and I still love them," he said. "The music I'm making at the moment, it's very much a beautiful little transition from there and it fits."

Smith co-wrote his debut album and also won an Academy Award for co-writing "Writing's on the Wall" from the James Bond film "Spectre." He says



there's a "few moments" on his first album "where I think to myself, 'I would have changed that. I would have done that differently.'" Smith added that when he began to rise in the United Kingdom as a featured act on Disclosure's dance song "Latch" - originally released in late 2012 - there was some confusion about which musical direction he should take.

"As soon as 'Latch' had a lot of success in (the) U.K., my label and me had a little bit of a panic. We were like, 'Maybe we should be doing dance?' And that's what I can hear on (my first) album - there's two or three songs where I can hear the little wobble, but the rest of the album is what I set out to make from the beginning," he said. "But I still love my album, but I'm loving my new one (expletive) more." — AP



Foo Fighters dispel breakup rumors in viral online spoof

After a growing online buzz and chatter about the band's future, Foo Fighters have some news—they are staying together. Foo Fighters, one of the defining acts of the 1990s alternative rock boom, had become a trending topic on social media Wednesday after stating sternly that they would soon make an "official band announcement."

Late in the day, Foo Fighters released a seven-minute video on YouTube with repeated-but, on closer look, over-the-top-suggestions that the band is over. The video ends with a caption that reads: "For the millionth time, we're not breaking up."

The video opens with a parody interview of frontman Dave Grohl—earlier the drummer of grunge legends Nirvana—as the 47-year-old is told that the younger generation is all about electronic music. "One button? One finger?" Grohl asks incredulously on what he needs to do to play electronics, as he blows on his hand to warm it up and heads to a keyboard.

Meanwhile, the other band members convene to find a new singer and jot down an audition list to include Justin Bieber and the Canadian pop celebrity's new electronic producer, Diplo. Finally Nick Lachey, best known for the late 1990s boy band 98 Degrees, enters the studio and offers a rousing rendition of Foo Fighters hit "Everlong."

The band apparently decided to raise expectations of a breakup and put on the spoof after drummer Taylor Hawkins, speaking at an event around the Grammy Awards, said that Foo Fighters needed a break. Despite the denial of a breakup, it remains unclear when Foo Fighters will perform again.

The band ended an extensive tour in November and released a free EP dedicated to victims of the November 13 terror attacks in Paris as it hinted at a hiatus. "I can't help but wonder when we will see each other again. Who knows? But, with everything Foo Fighter related, it will only be when it feels right," Grohl said at the time. — AFP