

ARTS & STYLE

Critic Assesses Three New Hip Hop Albums

By Rodney Holley
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"My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy"

Features include Kid Cudi, Raekwon, Jay-Z, Rick Ross, Nicki Minaj, Pusha T, Prynce Cy Hi, Swizz Beatz, RZA and John Legend. There are 13 tracks. Best track on the album: "All of the Lights" and "Runaway" featuring Pusha T.

"My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy" is Kanye's comeback album and return to superstardom. After the incident with Taylor Swift at the Video Music Awards, Kanye retreated from the public and immersed himself into his music. The immersion has resulted in Kanye's best album since his debut.

The album kicks off with "Dark Fantasy." Produced by RZA, Kanye and No ID, "Dark Fantasy" has a dark, melodic beat that sets the mood for the entire album. The bulk of the production is, unsurprisingly, handled by West, offering his interpretations of "beautiful," "dark" and "twisted."

The standout tracks are the singles "Power" and "Runaway." Both reference and are results of the VMA incident. On "Power," Kanye questions and analyzes the "power" he has obtained and offers an explanation as to why the incident occurred. "Now I embody every characteristic of the egotistic / He know, he so, f*ckin' gifted / I just needed time alone, with my own thoughts / Got treasures in my mind but couldn't open up my own vault / My child-like creativity, purity and honesty / Is honestly being prodded by these grown thoughts / Reality is catchin' up with me / Takin' my inner child, I'm fighting for it, custody."

On "Runaway," West has accepted the incident and acknowledges that at times he can be a "douche-bag" and/or "asshole": "Let's have a toast for the douche bags / Let's have a toast for the assholes / Let's have a toast for the scumbags / Every one of them that I know / Let's have a toast to the jerk offs."

Kanye provides his listeners with an album that can be listened to from beginning to end. All of the tracks fit within the concept of the album and transition nicely from one to another. The production includes cellos, drums and background vocalists yet maintains its dark melodic theme throughout the album. "My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy" marks West's return to the public forefront, making both fans and critics wonder if he can handle the "power" and praise he will receive from this album. 4.5/5.

"Pilot Talk"

Curren\$y's major label debut, "Pilot Talk" suffered through early leaks and push backs to combat having to face big names and hot newcomers like Eminem and Drake. Curren\$y fans may look at the album as somewhat of a disappointment because a quarter of the album—it contains 13 tracks—has been out for a long time. But fans may overlook this as it seems that Curren\$y has finally found a label home, to drop more album-quality material, at Dame Dash's BluRoc.

"Pilot Talk" opens with the two-minute intro "Example." Here, Curren\$y gives an "example" of how he earned the nickname, Spitta. "Running through my shoes / for the day that I can kick 'em off, relax / I said I quit smoking these beats / but I relapsed." "Example" transitions nicely to "Audio Dope 2," where Spitta takes listeners through his musical journey, mentioning that his independent grind has pushed him over artists, who have major labels backing them.

Standout "Pilot Talk" tracks are "King Kong," "Breakfast," "Roasted," "Prioritize," "Address" and "The Day." For those who are already fans of Curren\$y, it may be hard to choose standout tracks as a large bulk of the album was prematurely leaked. For newcomers, the aforementioned tracks are a great introduction to Spitta.

The album features guest appearances from Snoop Dogg, Devin the Dude, Big K.R.I.T., Smoke DZA, Jay Electronica,

Mos Def, Nesby Phips, Stalley, Trademark Da Skydiver and Young Roddy. Aside from Snoop, who feels out of place on the production that Curren\$y is known to rap over, the rest of the artists mesh well with Curren\$y and only Jay Electronica has an argument that he outperformed Curren\$y. Other standout features come from Stalley on "Address," who raps "starin' out the villa at the ocean miles long / tryin' to figure out raps to put up in a song / nights long but the day short," and from JETS' own Trademark Da Skydiver and Young Roddy on "Roasted."

What makes "Pilot Talk" one of the strongest releases this year is Spitta's choice of production. Curren\$y knows what he sounds best on and it's a unique sound that he owns because other artists couldn't excel on multiple beats that use more instruments and less hard-pounding bass. Ski Beatz handles the bulk of the production with a contribution from Michael Sterling Eaton. Mos Def, Monsta Beatz and Nesby Phips contribute a track of their own.

Overall, Curren\$y shows great improvement since his last album dropped, an independent release, and delivers a respectable major distributed album. I give "Pilot Talk" 3 out of 5 stars, instead of a 4, only because some of the tracks are dated. This album will retain old fans and gain Curren\$y new ones because he's providing them with smooth, laidback music.

"Pilot Talk 2"

Features include Young Roddy and Trademark (of Curren\$y's JETS group), Dom Kennedy, McKenzie Eddy, Fiend and Raekwon. There are 13 tracks. Best track on the album: "Airborne Aquarium."

"Pilot Talk 2" is the sequel to "Pilot Talk," which was released less than six months ago. The majority of the production is once again handled by Ski Beatz and Monsta Beatz, and Nesby Phips return for the sequel offering at least one beat apiece. Drumpy, maybe a recurring figure for future Curren\$y albums, provides a beat of his own.

Part of Curren\$y's appeal is his beat selection and his decisions on "Pilot Talk 2" doesn't disappoint. Curren\$y continues to rhyme over instrument-based beats and the production still feels fresh and original. As always, the beats have a laid-back and soulful tempo and the beat selection helps connect "Pilot Talk" and "Pilot Talk 2."

As far as lyrics go, Curren\$y continues to showcase his nickname (Spitta): "No

square shall enter in the circle of winners / Know I'm prepared for whatever, you know what I been thru / Rearview, Clear vision, memories of paid dues / Confined to a runway, thunderstorms came thru / But look what it came to, somethin' that amazes you / soon as you quit hatin' and hear what I gotta say to you."

Overall, "Pilot Talk 2" is a sequel that lives up to the success of its predecessor. While "Pilot Talk 2" doesn't surpass "Pilot Talk," it does continue Curren\$y's surge into the mainstream and hopefully to greater success. The only real disappointment—as well as with "Pilot Talk"—is the lack of a track with frequent collaborator Wiz Khalifa. While this is a minor complaint, it would have been great if the two could have gotten together for a title track.

Curren\$y continues to be the innovator of "Pilot talk," resulting in a very good album. 3/5.

New Romance, Fantasy Novels Reviewed

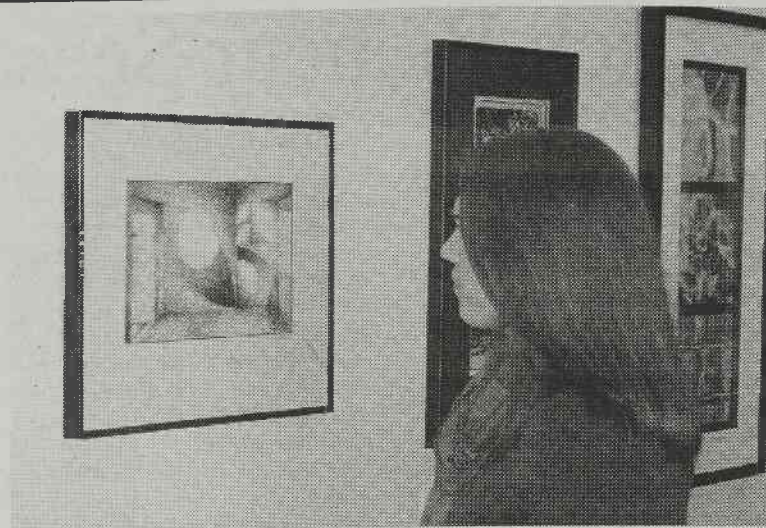
By Alyson Matarazzo
Senior Staff Writer

"Moon Sworn" by Keri Arthur

Keri Arthur's ninth and final fantasy novel in the "Guardian" series, "Moon Sworn" continues the story of Riley Jensen and her thirst to find a new dream. Riley is a dhampire, half vampire-half werewolf, and due to drugs an ex-lover secretly gave her, her body is still going through changes. Not only does this heroine shift into a wolf and seagull, but she can see the souls of newly murdered victims. She can speak to them and that helps the Directorate, law enforcement for nonhumans, find the killers.

In this last book, Riley tries to find the killer who commits ritualistic murders. The only clue? Witnesses state seeing a demon, cloven hooves and all. She must cope with the knowledge that she killed her wolf's soul mate. Quinn may be her heart, but a part of her will always be hollow.

After following a lead at a brothel, and being shot by yet another silver bullet while fighting the bad guys, Riley heads home, only to get into a car accident and watch as Quinn's car is hit repeatedly and crushed to the point that no one would be able to survive. She is kidnapped, has most of her memories removed, and wakes up in the desert not knowing who she was, where she came from, or why she ended up sun burnt in the desert. There was another ritual murder in the town she was in and knowledge started to



The Dunn Center Civic Gallery is exhibiting art made student Aaron Casteel, who works in acrylic, computer graphic inkjet print, pen and ink, and linocut. Beginning in mid-January, the Dunn Center galleries will feature works by the Japanese Embroidery Guild of Rocky Mount, reports curator Everett Adelman.

Decree Photo

creep back into her consciousness.

Finding the murderer is the first priority but with the arrival of the cavalry—Quinn, twin brother Rhoan, and boss Jack—Riley is able to go after the people who took away her memories. It's a fight to the death between Riley and the leader of the Jensen pack, Blake. Will she live to marry Quinn? Will she raise Liander, Rhoan's gay lover, and her babies?

Unfortunately, the middle of the story, where Riley doesn't know her identity, reads like an excerpt from a different book. Though the series is Riley's story, the absence of Quinn, Rhoan, Liander and Jack was disappointing. Happy endings don't always come in the way we think, but there are still too many unknowns with Riley and the changes she's undergoing. Overall, this was a decent ending to Riley Jensen's happily ever after.

"Happy Ever After" by Nora Roberts

(Romance)

Nora Roberts' romantic "Bride Quartet" comes to an end in "Happy Ever After." Parker Brown turned the four friends' childhood game of Wedding Day into a dream business called Vows. Parker meets every bride's demands; she keeps every event on a strict time table. She brings Mackenzie's photographs (book one—"Vision in White"), Emma's flowers (book two—"Bed of Roses"), and Laurel's pastries and cakes (book three—"Savor the Moment") together for

an amazing package that is sure to make every bride's dream come true.

In "Vision in White," Mac doesn't really believe in happy endings even though in her line of business she sets up happy, loving pictures and portraits to last a lifetime. When she looks at her parents, though, it's a wonder she helps anyone have their special days. Linda, her mother, has been married and divorced numerous times and each time something goes bad, Linda turns to Mac expecting a shoulder to cry on, an ear for all her drama and of course, money. Luckily, Mac meets Carter and he soon proves to her that happiness does last outside of photographs.

In "Bed of Roses," unlike Mac, Emma is a romantic through and through. She's the sweet one of the four and believes wholeheartedly that dreams do come true. Unfortunately the man she's falling for is quite the opposite. Though Jack is a sweet guy and a long-time friend of all the women, his parents' divorce and father's frequent conquests left him bitter to the long-term commitments. When they both admit to the attraction but know their wants don't exactly match, they deal with it by...well, not dealing at all. They live in the moment until they are both so caught up there's no turning back.

"Savor the Moment" gives us Laurel's story, and what a story it is. All her life she's been in love with the same boy, Del, her best friend Parker's brother. Laurel has gotten bitter watching Del date other women, women who don't come from the same background as she does, and Del still looks to her as little sister... until one mind-blowing, anger-induced kiss forces them to confront each other's feelings and figure out what to do.

Parker has watched her friends fall in love and get engaged. Now she is helping to plan their weddings. She's happy for them, thrilled for them, and through the series picks out each of their wedding dresses. Parker always envisioned herself marrying a nice, normal man. What she gets is an unexpected and not entirely liked attraction to Vows' mechanic and Del's friend Malcolm Kavanaugh.

Mal likes the look of Parker, her mile-long legs, and wants to figure her out. As a friend of Del, he knows it's a huge step to take his attraction from mild flirtation to a serious hook up with Parker.

There's been no man to shake up Parker's nerves in a very long time, but this motorcycle-riding, ex-stunt man, raven-haired Mal has a knack for rattling her. She opened the door by kissing him first just to annoy her brother, but Mal has taken full advantage of the situation and catches her off guard. He takes what he wants when he wants, interrupts her when she talks, never talks about himself, and she has left her heart open to him without meaning to. Parker is always taking risks on the business and they've always paid off, but now she'll have to risk the most precious of all...her heart.

As this is the last book of the "Bride Quartet" I enjoyed it, but as a light romantic novel. If you haven't read the first three, I wouldn't recommend reading "Happy Ever After" until you read the others. They all intertwine and therefore the reader can become easily confused or lost in the plot. Nora Roberts built the characters up throughout the other stories so by the time you get to the last one you feel like you know them.

Olive Garden Voted Top Restaurant

By Decree Staff

Olive Garden won the title of Rocky Mount's top "sit-down" restaurant in a recent survey of Decree staff writers.

The Italian eatery finished with 26 total points, giving it a 9-point margin of victory over Outback Steakhouse (17 points). Other top finishers were Applebee's (12), Chili's (10), Ichiban Japanese Steakhouse (9), and Red Lobster (8).

Olive Garden, located within the Golden East Crossing mall complex at 1140 N. Wesleyan Blvd., received the most first-place votes, four, along with two second-place votes.

Typical among Olive Garden's enthusiasts, Emelie Lundgren praised the restaurant's friendly service and atmosphere as well as its menu. Her favorite meal is the entrecote pasta with gorgonzola sauce. "The meat is perfectly tender and the gorgonzola sauce breaks through the meat and pasta taste with firmness, making it a perfect combination of taste sensations," Lundgren said, noting that, as "a big fan of Italian food," she finds every meal on the menu to be appetizing.

Kandyshe Shaw likes to order Olive Garden's chicken Alfredo, while Melanie Rhodes favors a simple meal of salad and bread sticks, accompanied by a glass of Lambrusco. "It's an affordable and healthy place to eat for both the budget-conscious and those who are watching their weight," Rhodes said.

Outback garnered two first-place votes, two seconds, and a third. Located at 210 Gateway Blvd. (among the motels near Nash Hospital), Outback is popular for its signature steaks. "Outback was my top pick because the quality of the food is always great, the restaurant is always neat, and the service is always excellent," commented Georgetown Fields-Turrentine, who orders the 16-ounce prime rib steak (cooked medium well), with a house salad and "loaded" baked potato. "I'm very particular about where and what I eat, and this restaurant is one of the few places

I would recommend. When I dine there, I request that they season and sear my steak with the au jus sauce on the side."

Alyson Matarazzo was one of several students who raved about Outback's steaks. "Their house sirloin is amazing and I love the garlic mashed potatoes," she said.

Rodney Holley selected Applebee's as his top pick. He likes the comfortable atmosphere and the varied menu offered by the restaurant, which, at 1120 N. Wesleyan Blvd., is in the same complex as Olive Garden. "I'm a huge fan of pasta and burgers," Holley said, "and feel that Applebee's offers the best of both."

Chili's tied Olive Garden for most total votes with six (two seconds, and four thirds). The Rocky Mount restaurant is at 1276 Home Depot Plaza, just off North Wesleyan Boulevard.

Both Leila Heinonen and Bristy Parker ranked Chili's as their third choice. Heinonen enjoys the relaxed atmosphere. "You can go

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• Private giving/Annual fund, 2%: This category includes money raised during the Day of Wesleyan and support from the United Methodist Church.

Both Gray and Loomis Hubbell believe that the last category should be bigger, something the president is working on at the moment together with the new Vice President of Advancement, Chris Norman.

A high percentage of the total revenue of the budget goes to financial aid for students. Up to 90% of students at Wesleyan receive financial aid in some way, whether it's through loans and funds, work-study or private scholarships, said Gray.

The president said priority one for the future will be changes on the Academic side such as constructing classroom buildings and faculty/staff offices, increasing faculty/staff salaries,

for a dinner or you can order a couple drinks at the bar and watch a game," she said. Added Parker: "It's good restaurant for a casual meal—lunch or dinner. It has a wide variety of different types of food. I like the southwestern tastes. They have really good sampler trays; the southwestern egg rolls and chips and salsa are the absolute best."

Ichiban (191 S. Wesleyan Blvd.) was next on the list, on the strength of three first-place votes. "It really turned me on to sushi," said Jarad Brown, in explaining his first choice.

Football teammates Kevin Quicker and Joshua Meeks prefer Ichiban's hibachi chicken, which is cooked table-side. "Ichiban is the best sit-down restaurant in the area and it isn't even close," Meeks asserted. "The food is simply ama-zuh-zing. The chicken is cooked perfectly with teriyaki sauce and, when combined with the shrimp sauce, it makes the meal divine."

introducing research grants and funding academic-related travel expenses for students.

The school's endowment is \$9 million; it's a small amount compared to most schools, private or public, something that the Capital Campaign seeks to enlarge when it kicks off February 1. According to Gray, some schools have billions of dollars in endowment funds. "This is of course something we envy, but are determined to change as soon as possible," he said.

Gray and Loomis Hubbell both acknowledge the adverse effects of the recession on endowment and revenue sources. "It has definitely affected a family's ability to pay," said Gray, noting that the college has noticed the impact on outside revenue contributions as well. "The running of the institution slows down," said Gray. "We still get donations, but they usually are a lot bigger."

Intramural Champions Fall 2010

Flag Football – Shoulder Pads & Knees
Men's Billiards – Linh Nguyen
Women's Billiards – Destiny Pickney
Kickball – Incredibad 2.0
4-on-4 Basketball – The Heat
Dodgeball – Heated Swag
NCAA 2011 Football – Asmun Washington