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On The 1975 – Legacy

I've been an avid music listener as long as I can remember. I like getting lost in it. The 1975 are my favorite band. The four members are all living and hopefully that won't change anytime soon. But, for the purposes of this exercise, I pretended they'd been killed in a meteor shower. By simulating their untimely deaths, I was able to create a posthumous legacy album (more info in the album description). I'd been contemplating the idea for months—ever since I learned about the posthumous handling of Lil Peep's unreleased material—and wanted to explore what that process might be like.

Since I didn't have access to unreleased 1975 tracks, I decided to re-release sixteen of them. I decided on sixteen because it's the average length of a 1975 studio album. But which sixteen? You'll need to know a bit about my music consumption habits to understand how I narrowed it down. Among millennials, I'm a little unconventional. I listen to entire albums; not just singles, which I've always found unsettling. I don't like an artist, manager, or producer telling me which songs are the best. I can figure that out for myself. In fact, that's part of what makes listening to an album all the way through one of the best things ever; you can listen to every song in the context for which it was created. Singles, though? Often, there's not much to separate them from the rest of the album (of course, there are exceptions, but as a general rule, this seems true), and yet, they are prematurely marked for success. I get why they do it. Singles are like trailers that focus or refocus people's interest on the band so they get listened to even if people don't commit their shortening attention spans to entire albums, and they become hits, but

that doesn't mean there aren't 6+ other songs on any given album that aren't worth a listen. So, I never really liked the idea of singles. Shouldn't everything on the album sound like one? Doesn't everything on a good album? It does. I decided to demonstrate this and limit myself to material The 1975 had released on studio albums but not as singles. This left me with 33 songs. I cut the songs that had previously been released on EP's and could delete two more because they have a different version of the same intro for each album. I then whittled the album down to 16 songs that would at once be representative of the band, unremarkable in their popularity, and play like a greatest hits album. Then, I ordered the songs, so they'd sound good sequentially. This essentially consisted of putting 'The 1975' first, like it is on all three of their albums, then paying attention to things like immediate catchiness and tone and tempo so the songs hooked the listener in and played well next to each other, and finally weighing some poetic implications like the number of songs that talked about death (which they do a disproportionate amount of in this group of songs) and where they were placed (for example, I Like America & America Likes Me—a song about the fear of dying a random, needless death in the age of American gun violence—is last, framed as something akin to a prediction of their own random demise). The result became *The 1975 – Legacy*.

Releasing a posthumous album carries a lot of ethical implications. Not only are you “preserving the voice beyond the death of the [artist];” you are redefining their legacy, expanding the contours of their resonant tomb (Sterne, 287). This throws you into dicey territory. On the one hand, the artist did record the sound and give it a sort of irretractable permanence. On the other hand, they released or didn't release the songs the way they did or didn't before their death for a reason. They considered the sequence, how the tracks might be received, what those tracks revealed about them, etc., and they used those to inform their decision. This is where

Peep's story caught my attention. He died in 2017 of an accidental fentanyl-Xanax overdose, but, at the age of 21, left behind a trove of unreleased, unmastered material that he wouldn't have had a chance to make a decision on since it wasn't finished. And he was on the verge of stardom. Stardom was inevitable. His mother gave the unreleased material to his musical collaborators, and they began to define him, releasing a series of collaboration singles, and then a full-length: *Come Over When You're Sober, Pt. 2* (Caramanica). But it's hard to say whether that was the right thing to do. When someone doesn't know they're going to die and they leave something like music behind and we don't know what they would've done with that music, it's tricky to begin with. Then, you factor in the financial implications—somebody's going to profit off of that release, and it's not the artist. Peep didn't leave behind a spouse or children, but his parents are living and divorced. From the available information, I've surmised that his father has neither had a role in nor profited from his posthumously released music. And what if he didn't want the music released how it was? Someone might argue that he wouldn't have worked on it if he didn't want it to be released. I'd counter that some art is intended to be personal rather than public, and even when it is intended for the public, the artist still has to agree to its release and the decisions made about it when they are alive, so why should we go beyond that and raid their music and do with it as we please after they die? Two examples come to mind with Peep. The first is 'Falling Down,' which was released as a collaboration with XXXTentacion, who Peep was reputed to have a bad opinion of, arranged after both of their deaths. The second is 'I've Been Waiting,' which had originally been prepared as part of a collaboration project with ILOVEMAKONNEN but saw Fall Out Boy added to it after Peep's death. Both singles contain explicit references to Peep's death as they begin to commoditize it, and the second is certainly a stylistic departure. Peep didn't approve either of those, nor is he profiting off of them, yet they've still been released

into ethically problematic territory. For more on the publicization of the private and the commodification of the dead artist, I'd recommend checking out Jensen & Jones' analysis of those phenomena in the aftermath of Kurt Cobain's death (Jensen & Jones, 6-12).

Again, I don't have any unreleased material from The 1975, but there is a similar ethical dilemma at hand. They have a bit more material than Peep, but their artistic legacy isn't settled either, after their rapid transformation from pop culture pariahs into a critical success. And then, every time a new album is released by any artist, an effect termed *backward spillover* occurs. This refers to the tendency of consumers that enjoy new material to revisit and/or discover old material (Hendricks & Sorensen, 325-326) (Coincidentally, this is more-or-less how I discovered Peep). The effect could be massively detrimental to the band's legacy. Supposing the album were released in the immediate aftermath of the meteor shower, we could reasonably assume that it'd be popular. "Rarely does any performer with the slightest bit of popularity fail to increase sales immediately after death, and often those who only have the slightest bit of popularity are the ones whose sales benefit most, (Jensen and Jones, 3). At 335th in the world (per Spotify), The 1975 are popular but that popularity has room to appreciate.

Another question relates to the legacy of the individual songs. My guess with The 1975 is that no matter what, they'll be known for albums rather than singles or greatest hits collections, but pretending they're like any other indie pop outfit figures a different legacy could be in store, where bangers like 'This Must Be My Dream,' 'I Always Wanna Die (Sometimes),' and 'Robbers,' replace 'Somebody Else,' 'Love It If We Made It,' and 'Chocolate,' atop the band's charts because of their timely re-release.

But can you release a legacy album without including the traditional greatest hits? That brings us to my role, and I can't give a definitive answer. This is because a few different answers

can be justified. I could defend myself by reflecting, once more, upon the manufactured nature of singles. I'd be no different than the artists, managers, and producers that manipulate songs' popularity by releasing some as singles and others on albums. It'd still be up to the people whether the songs on this album (released without singles) became popular. I wouldn't be altering the makeup of the songs, just removing them from the context for which they were originally intended. Art is primarily up to the audience's interpretation, or maybe the artist's, or maybe its most important relationship is to other art, or the outside world. The point is, nobody can say. On the other side of the debate, you'd find issues of history and property. One camp would charge me with being untrue to The 1975's memory, while another might side with me, citing the band's stylistic awareness of postmodernism and arguing that a legacy album loaded with obscurities is in that exact spirit. Where property is concerned, I probably couldn't break through countless barriers to the rights to their music, but even if I could, my right to remove it from its original context and adopt it to my own is highly problematic. It would be my creation rather than their creation, even though it took just a few hours to design, and I—not the band—would profit off of, placing 'I Like America & America Likes Me,' at the end, with its many references to a fear of dying, could be decried for irresponsibly invoking a possible prediction of the band's demise, while framing 'Inside Your Mind,' between 'Robbers,' and 'Be My Mistake,' deprives it of its original earnestness, in favor of something more sinister, contributing to a manufactured negative perception of The 1975. Then again, the people on my side would probably call that overanalyzing.

After all, this Spotify Exclusive album is a form of remembrance. It allows fans to experience and remember and share the memory of The 1975 via the medium they were primarily known for. In this manner, it becomes central to their grief, much like a physical or

online gravesite, though not so restrained as the former, and because music unites us publicly and connects us privately to the artist and those comprise a big part of the reason we listen to it, this album allows for a public and private emotional presence that online gravesites cannot offer, demonstrating how our memorialization might evolve for future generations—though, obviously, not everyone is an artist, so we'd have to look for other media to remember them through (Graham, 52). Is it a gravesite though? It feels a little too sarcastic, too playful to be a gravesite. They were killed in a meteor shower? Come on! Who came up with that bullshit? If you go to Wikipedia, you'll discover that they're in fact alive and well, preparing to release a fourth studio album. This is because the internet is anarchical at its best and we can put anything we want on it and do whatever we please in art and put that on the internet, so if we put art on the internet and own up to its artistic nature, we can say whoever we want died in whatever catastrophe without worrying about it. Then again, there are ethical implications.

Anyway, the whole thing is contrived, meant to hover between fantasy and believability, calling out conventionalists on the peculiarities of their approaches, while questioning the adequacy of that betrayal. I'm relatively satisfied with the result, but having listened to it on repeat all day as I wrote this, must confess; I like the songs better in context. Still, it was an enjoyable exercise and cool yet disturbing showing how the internet can be used to manufacture death and mourning. But, don't we all want tall tales told about us one day?

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