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A Release from the Past: David W. Jacobsen's New EP

Music Review of the EP "Release"

[Emery Malachowski](#), Editor-in-Chief

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NYC-based musician David W. Jacobsen's new EP, "Release," is a step away from his normal fare. Mr. Jacobsen's past work, including his last full-length album "Begin the Chagrin," has been reviewed as clinging "a bit too faithfully to its image of a lone man with an acoustic guitar," as college music journalist Erin Caine puts it. In "Release," Jacobsen begins to explore new musical pathways, but tends to play it too safe and ends up feeling a bit one-faceted.

A review of his music would not be complete without complimenting Jacobsen's truly unique, soulful, and spiralling voice, often oddly reminiscent of a Gaelic folk singer. Jacobsen always rides the line carefully between being genuine and sarcastic, spoofing off of classics as varied as "Free Bird," "Piano Man," and the Shakespearian play As You Like It. In "Release" he is producing more overtly political or socially-minded material, such as "Litigious" or "Christmas from Washington, DC" (a song about the

corruption of the White House) that play with these same concepts of parody. These songs tend to feel a bit simplistic, focusing on one specific aspect of the issue and reiterating it and rephrasing it throughout the lyrics. "Christmas from Washington, DC" boasts an interesting juxtaposition of gentle instrumentals and vocals with a straightforward, angry political message. "Litigious" breaks from the folksy vibes of most of his discography with punk-rock undertones and angrier, growling vocals. However, this track features some of the most unfortunate puns and forced lyrics on the EP, with lines like "this ain't no exaggeration, they'll be no arbitration, talking about a straight-up trial, all the motions I'm gonna file." The song feels a bit like a karaoke track, as the mixing puts the vocals front and center, and the instrumentals and electric guitar seem under-practiced and hokey. It is one of a string of small musical mishaps (like the attempt at a 7/4 time signature in the unlistenable "What You're Looking For"), and many of Jacobsen's positive aspects are undermined by what sounds like hastily thrown together drum beats from FL Studio. However, it is fun to listen to Jacobsen experiment with new ideas and genres, and I'm looking forward to a full-length album exploring the concepts that I don't think he quite landed on this EP.

The funniest song to me from the album is "Honest," a song that gradually reveals the levels of dishonesty in a married man's relationship with his lover on the side. I think this song plays on Jacobsen's best skills by consistently sticking to one theme and idea, but gradually increasing the stakes and humor as the song goes on. It feels like a song from a musical, and reminds me of 35MM, a musical composed of songs from different unrelated characters talking about their lives and often funny and exaggerated mishaps. "Honest" helped me to understand Jacobsen's songs as a series of characters, each with their own context and history that play into the lyrics and tone of the song, and leave you with a curiosity about their lives and personalities.

"Release" also has tracks that feel much more genuine, such as the title track, my personal favorite from the album. It, similar to another good track called "Today's Your Birthday," embraces the little eccentricities and disappointments of life, and allows the reader some space for interpretation and to think for themselves. There are really enticing lyrical snippets in both songs, such as from "Release": "David had Bathsheba on a hot summer's night — We all make mistakes — that doesn't make it all right," or from "Today's Your Birthday": "Today it is your birthday — No, I will not call — The only words I've left now — Are trite and banal." I craved more vocal expression in the title track, and sensed similarities between Jacobsen to melancholy, sensitive, and irreverent artists such as Jens Lekman or Father John Misty.

Jacobsen's music feels authentic and grows on me a little bit more every listen. I admire his independent musician public relations strategy (seemingly emailing every college newspaper in the nation to review his music), and his gumption as he tries out a new flow on this EP. I hope that some of the instrumental distractions and sometimes cheesy political lyrics are ironed out as he begins his next full-length album, which would make for a provoking and lovely listen.



Emery Malachowski, Editor-in-Chief

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