

Memories... Do Not Open by The Chainsmokers

Ed Hightower
30 October 2017

Electronic Dance Music duo The Chainsmokers released their full-length debut *Memories... Do Not Open* in April. It follows a number of popular singles released by the group since their 2014 song “#Selfie,” about a young woman who lives to party, dance and post pictures of herself on social media, first received significant radio airplay.

Previous hits include “Don’t Let Me Down,” featuring pop singer Daya; “Inside Out,” featuring Swedish singer Charlee; and “Closer,” with vocals by rising American pop star Halsey.

The group was nominated for three Grammy Awards in 2017, winning for Best Dance Recording.

DJs Alex Pall and Andrew Taggart started their collaboration as The Chainsmokers in 2012 under the management of Adam Alpert, the CEO of Disruptor Records and Selector Songs. Alpert, who introduced Pall and Taggart, is a University of Pennsylvania graduate and served for nine years as marketing director for New York hospitality company Butter Group before entering the music business. Disruptor Records sold over 15 million singles in 2016.

Pall grew up in Westchester County, New York and was studying art history and the business of music at New York University when he met Taggart, then a student at Syracuse University and an intern at Interscope Records. The duo cites singer-producer Pharrell Williams and Taylor Swift as influences, along with electronic acts Daft Punk and deadmau5.

Memories... Do Not Open is an extremely limited collection of songs, reflecting a lack of anything important to say. Listening to the album feels somewhat like sitting at a dinner table and staring at empty plates and unused silverware, waiting in vain for a meal.

All 12 tracks on *Memories* blend into one another,

employing a formula that affords little variation. In general, The Chainsmokers do make effective use of drum machines, synthesizers and other staples of electronic music, but the songs on *Memories* would be better off without lyrics, or at least without the lyrics they have. The content of every song is drawn from the apparently very limited experience of the writers, centering on doomed romance colored with substance abuse and related problems.

Alcohol, the nightlife and “the morning after” dominate. Despite the artists’ familiarity with this subject matter, they shed light on nothing here. One often finds the same crudity and superficiality that characterize much of what passes for love songs at the top of the charts today.

Lyrics feature swearing in the manner of a mouthy, despondent teenager. The words do not generally advance much, only serving the simple rhyme scheme and vocal melodies. The following from the first track, “The One,” is a representative sample:

I know it’s pathetic;
F— it yeah I said it
there’s a chance that I’ll regret it
I’ll delete before I send it

And the refrain in the album’s second song, “Break Up Every Night,” sounds the same notes:

She wants to break up every night
Then tries to f— me back to life

As does the third song, “Bloodstream”:

I’m f—— up, I’m faded
I’m so complicated

Those things that I said
They were so overrated
But I-I-I-I-I, yeah, I meant it
Oh yeah, I-I-I-I-I, really f—— meant it.

The songs “Don’t Say” and “My Type” feature the

pleasant vocals of singer Emily Warren, but have little else going for them. “It Won’t Kill Ya” might be the catchiest song on *Memories*, describing a woman’s eagerness to dance with a certain person. Nothing new here, but it’s not badly done. That said, it sounds very similar to The Chainsmokers’ earlier hit “Don’t let me Down.”

“Paris” and “Young” recount the excesses of a privileged life, differing from one another mostly in that the former takes place more recently than the latter, which describes more youthful misadventures. Neither song reveals much about love, drunkenness, regret or anything else. These songs, and much of the album, sound like children’s songs for young adults, the night club equivalents of “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” and “The Wheels on the Bus.”

The track “Something Just Like This” features British pop band Coldplay. While the song achieved commercial success—it was the theme song for the 2017 NCAA Division I Men’s Basketball Tournament—it suffers from the same weaknesses as others on *Memories*, a problem compounded by the sentimentality that is one of Coldplay’s stocks in trade.

The lyrics, such as they are:

I’ve been readin’ books of old,
The legends and the myths,
Achilles and his gold,
Hercules and his gifts
Spiderman’s control
And Batman with his fists
And clearly I don’t see myself upon that list
But she said, where’d you wanna go?
How much you wanna risk?
I’m not looking for somebody
With some superhuman gifts
Some superhero
Some fairytale bliss
Just something I can turn to
Somebody I can kiss

The entirely worthwhile theme of love between everyday people finds dull expression here along with a poor knowledge of Greek mythology and silly references to comic book heroes.

In the end, *Memories* feels more like a franchise or business effort than an album. Far too much feels calculated. The Chainsmokers are like an acquisition firm, associating with new vocalists to build their

brand, churning out cookie-cutter hits in the manner of an assembly line. They are appealing to the lowest common denominator.

On January 3, 2017, the group announced, according to *Billboard*, that it had “signed an exclusive three-year deal with Wynn Nightlife which guarantees its properties XS [Las Vegas] and Encore Beach Club will be the only night and dayclubs where the chart-topping, Grammy-nominated duo will perform live from now through 2019.”

“We are so thrilled to have this residency at the Wynn,” Pall is quoted in a press release. “They represent the best of what Las Vegas has to offer and we look forward to a great partnership.” No need to say much more.

In the music of The Chainsmokers, life is a continuous party. But for others, play time is over. Very little of the real, intriguing world finds its way into the music. Finding inspiration outside the club will fall to artists other than Taggart and Pall.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact