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From Rock & Roll to Hip-Hop  
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Lorde : The Voice of The Loveless Generation

### **Melodrama: All the Lovers, How We Kiss and Kill Each Other**

With her sophomore album, Lorde could have followed the formula that shocked radio waves and transformed pop, reiterating another version of *Pure Heroine*. That would have been the safe key to success, but Lorde is not about safety, she is about innovation. Lorde does not look to recreate the past, she reaches into the future and gives audiences fresh, unexpected sounds they did not know they needed, ready or not. So, on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017 we did not get *Pure Heroine 2.0*. Instead, Lorde gave us *Melodrama*.

For her sophomore album, Lorde teamed up with Jack Antonoff, a producer and musician whose efforts have created hit after hit, rather than working with Joel Little again. She also left behind her stark instrumentations and opened herself up musically, writing ballads and dance songs, fusing modern technology with 80s stylized songs. She shifted her focus away from the social issues of a young teenager. Now, her attention zeroed in on how modern culture has damaged romance, producing the heartbreak young people face today in a world that emphasizes independence and naturally places us in positions of solitude (Shaffer 1). Once Lorde found a way to break free from traditional love songwriting in order to make it interesting for herself, she turned heartbreak into fuel for an entire album (Oliver). She did not need the sparsity of *Pure Heroine*; she needed a dynamic palate of emotions she could shout at the universe (Morris para 20).

What remained the same between *Melodrama* and *Pure Heroine*: Lorde's incredibly poignant lyricism. She can take any topic and condense it into the most eloquent verses, and her second album proved that time had only made that gift stronger. As Antonoff has described in interviews, when Lorde makes her music, she goes crazy over perfecting every little detail, working and re-working until she gets it right and "...as close to the heart as possible" (Hunt 19). Lorde worked hard to keep the authenticity of the album. She spent half her time living in New Zealand as a young adult who goes to parties and hangs out with friends. Then, she flew to New York to transform into the writer, where she would preserve all of her New Zealand experiences in song. She felt separating herself between the two worlds helped clarify her thoughts and keep her words honest, as honesty is the chief rule of all of her work (Morris 16). On this album, Lorde takes all of the emotions, doubts, and struggles of the young adult that they keep hidden in the back of their mind and brings them forward, shedding light on truths we all too-often keep secret. *Melodrama* is an intimate experience shared between Lorde and her listener (Touros 20). As Lorde says, "I think I've had a real emotional renaissance in the last 8 months of just being like 'Wow, it hurts,' and letting myself feel all of those things, which has been kind of transcendent" (Morris 18). Lorde might be talking specifically about her ex, but, keeping relatable as usual, her music resonates with an army of heartbroken listeners, cracking open their chests and providing a deeply cathartic experience. In essence, this album reminds us that "all-consuming emotion" does not cease when you turn the page from being a teenager to being a twenty-something year old, still figuring it out. She strived to create not a breakup album, but an album that focused on how you pick up the pieces of your life afterwards. Essentially, *Melodrama* became a concept album without the kitsch, structured as the phases of a party and all of the highs and lows, the good times where you escape the breakup and the low moments

where you find yourself crying in the bathroom. At its root, it is a party album about loneliness. What the album is not is self-pitying. Eventually, you find the strength to heal and build something new and better for yourself (Morris 19). She delivered an industry-changing sound with *Pure Heroine*, and *Melodrama* proved that sensation was not a fluke, but rather an aspect inherent to Lorde's character. This time, she delivered a sensation that highlighted the shattering feelings you experience when you betray yourself by following your heart instead of your head (Touros 25).

Critics received *Melodrama* very well, claiming it as one of the best albums of 2017, but that did not translate into the music charts. Though nominated for Album of the Year, *Melodrama* never got higher than 114 on the Billboard Music Charts, and as far as its singles go, "Green Light" did the best, peaking at number nineteen on the charts (Hunt 2). Lorde did not win the Grammy that year, but she did live up to her precedent for daring to be different in the music industry and inspiring musician's around her. Much of the pop music sound that has come since *Melodrama* has yet again emulated Lorde's style. The world might not have adjusted to it in time to win Lorde the Grammy, but she had done it again, pushing music history past its previously conceived boundaries, making David Bowie's memory proud (Hunt 4). As Hunt writes:

"*Melodrama* in many ways bucked the trends that she had popularised. 'Writer in the Dark' was a blow to whisperpop, suggesting a return to capital-S singing. 'Homemade Dynamite' was up-tempo at 107 bpm. 'Green Light' starts off in a minor key then shifts to major, unexpectedly and "like a small sun rising", to quote the New York Times Magazine.

No wonder *Melodrama* didn't win Album of the Year. Lorde has always been ahead of her time." (para 26-27)

In fact, some people have found that Lorde's lack of chart success might say more good about the album than bad, because it displays an intense commitment to artistic integrity in the face of commercialization. Lorde does not mind that *Melodrama* did not create the same tidal wave effect as *Pure Heroine*. She points out that she only did it by accident the first time, and she does not feel the pressure to constantly keep reinventing the music industry, as long as she is making music that speaks true (Morris 25). Once again, Lorde does not create music because the markets tell her to, she does it because she feels she has something to say. This time, she needed to tell us how to rediscover ourselves and build ourselves stronger in the wake of a breakup (Hunt 22). In our isolated and insecure world, Lorde hit us again with the message we needed, championing our self-worth even in our darkest hour.