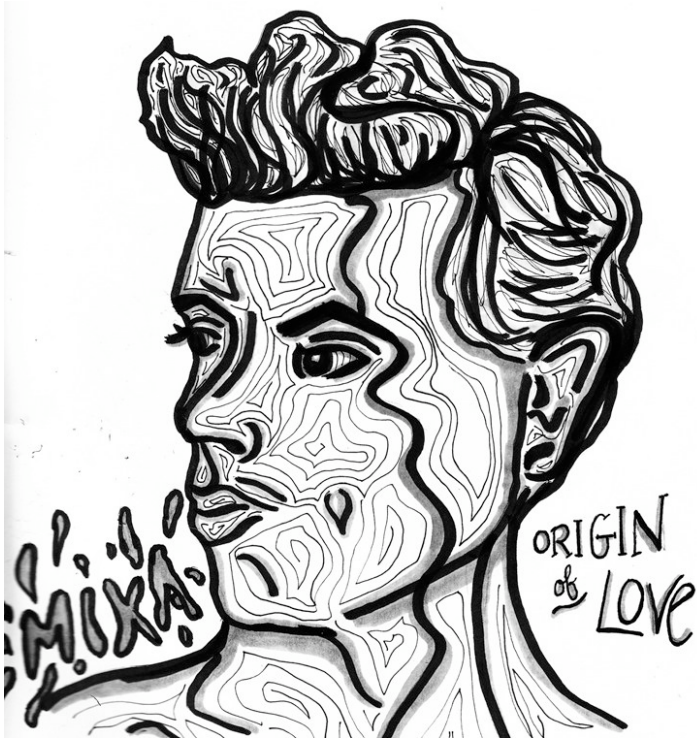


# Arts and Entertainment

## An Indie Magpie Wants to Dance



By Nina Wade and Joe Smith

He wears glittery outfits at live shows. His voice soars high into falsetto. His videos are peppered with bright colors and cartoony graphics. Mika, a British singer-songwriter, is a musical magpie. In his third studio album “The Origin of Love,” Mika sheds some of his child-like camp for a timelier dance-pop vibe; however, in doing so, he loses some—though not nearly all—of his charm. Mika’s first two albums, “Life in Cartoon Motion” (2007) and “The Boy Who Knew Too Much” (2009), centered around childhood and adolescence, respectively, and he has stated in interviews that “The Origin of Love” focuses on adulthood. Fittingly, “Life in Cartoon Motion,” which featured “Grace Kelly,” his most famous song to date, was the quirkiest, with nonsensical lyrics and bubble-gum videos. “The Boy Who Knew Too Much” featured more ballads and piano, and had a gentler, angstier vibe than its predecessor. However, though

Mika promised “The Origin of Love” would be “a serious album, but still [have] the boppy, happy tunes” in an interview with DigitalSpy, the album often comes across as shallow. Throughout the album, Mika incorporates electronic beats and sounds. On some tracks, such as “Celebrate” and “Emily,” it works—they sound fun and upbeat, and marry perfectly his indie flair with his new, pop-tastic sound. “Emily,” in fact, is an English version of his French single “Elle Me Dit,” and his voice is hyper-processed, giving his unique vocals a new spin with a digitized coat. However, on others, such as “Overrated,” it’s less effective—the song is plenty enjoyable, but much more forgettable. One standout, “Popular Song,” is Mika’s take/remix of the song “Popular” from the musical “Wicked.” This song has many rhythmically spoken sections, near-rapped, and lilts over a piano-plunked rendition of the original tune (as well as the original lyrics). It’s fresh and clever, and makes the origi-

nal cutesy Broadway tune sassy and edgy. However, plenty of songs harken back to his roots: musical glitz. The opening track, “Origin of Love,” is anthemic,

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exclaiming “You’re the origin of love!” His ballads, thankfully, allow his incredible voice—he has a range of three to four octaves—to take center stage. “Make You Happy,” the closing track, digitizes the chorus but otherwise lets him shine, as he pours emotion into a tale of trying to fix somebody with, as kitschy as it may seem, the power of love. Another star, “Love You When I’m Drunk,” certainly features more adult themes; it revolves around being unfaithful to a lover because, as the title suggests, he only loves her when he’s inebriated. The

albums consistently receive polarizing reviews. Now, dance songs reign supreme on the charts, so it’s no surprise he takes some of their qualities. What makes Mika, Mika, is his ability to add electronic layers and synthetic beats to his songs and still retain his individual sound. Children grow into

teens, and teens into adults, and Mika’s music grows from campy to emotional to dance, but just as a person’s character stays largely the same, Mika never loses his intrinsic, eccentric self.

## Teen Designers of New York, Unite!

By Othilla Wlodarczyk

“It serves to underscore that you never know where life’s serendipitous path is going to take you,” exclaimed fashion consultant and educational mentor Tim Gunn on the stage of New York City’s Teen Design Fair. This event has been taking place annually in New York City and Washington D.C. for the past six years. This year it was held at the Altman Building on 18th street between 6th and 7th avenue. The space, lit with pink and purple lights, had seating for the multiple designers that were invited to speak with the attendees and a basement with numerous stations of speakers from different design colleges. Tim Gunn, known for his presence on the reality series “Project Runway,” was only one of the many important attendees. “America’s Next Top Model” judge and runway coach Jay Alexander, also known as “Miss J” sat at one of the multiple designer stations. Also present were designers from different fields. Among these designers were architect Stephen Cassell, media/graphic designer Eric Mortensen from Hello Monday, founder of Biomimicry 3.8 Institute Janine Benyus and Facebook’s communication designer Kate Aronowitz. Each designer was able to bring something new and unique to

the table. Getting together with over one hundred aspiring designers is something many design students don’t get to experience. “I never had anyone to go to who was an architect, to ask what it was like, and I think it’s really important to talk to people and see what it’s really like. This is an amazing opportunity and there are some really great designers here,” Cassell said. One of the most important points brought up at the fair was the availability of jobs in the field of design, a concern that parents of many of the teens have. Gunn highlighted the importance of preparation and seizing opportunities to succeed and Aronowitz gave an optimistic view: “As far as interaction design goes, I don’t have enough people to take the jobs I’m offering!” Either way, it was made clear that moving forward in any field of the practical art takes a lot of effort and determination. According to Gunn, another necessity is to pick a school that suits your needs: “You should visit the schools that you are really interested in attending and project yourself into the environment. See if you can see yourself being a successful student there.” With all the advice given to the aspiring fashion designers, the fair was an educational as well as a cultural experience.

## Fresh Picks: Hiatus Kaiyote’s “Tawk Tomahawk”

My friend introduced Hiatus Kaiyote to me as the half-way point between the beat-heaviness of neo-soul/hip-hop producer J Dilla and the soulful vocals of Amy Winehouse, and he wasn’t far off. Paired with the band’s head-turning name (pronounced with Australian accents), you’ve got yourself a musical project that’s bound to generate lots of buzz--and that’s exactly what has happened. Headed by vocalist and guitarist Nai Palm, the group calls itself disciples of “Future Soul,” whatever that means. The band is rounded out with keyboardist Simon Mavin, Paul Bender on bass/laptop, and drummer Perrin Moss. Songs like album-opener “Möbius Streak” broach the question of genre that the entire LP seems to challenge. The group’s music seems to constantly walk the line between good old-fashioned bandstratation--raw with the feel of a live performance--and electronica. Of all genres of electronic music, downtempo particularly comes to mind, with its hypnotic and heavily emphasized beats. “Tawk Tomahawk” is an al-

bum that particularly rewards the active listener. Its recording quality is phenomenal, all parts singing with clarity; this is a great victory, especially for an entirely self-produced debut. The musical composition itself is dense--tracks bear an incredible amount of layers and textures. Drum machine clacks pair with tasteful drumming by Moss; Marvin’s piano and synth work provides room for tinkering with sound parameters, and ambient whirrs and other miscellaneous percussive samples fill out the mix. That’s not to say that the instrumental work is to be ignored: The bass is laid out appropriately sparsely, in a way that is both groovy and classy. Bender serves out a precise low end that maintains a justifiably prominent spot in the mix. Palm’s guitar, too, fits in just right. Her jazzy chords serve as lily-pads in the murky pond of funk the listener has the pleasure of navigating. Rhythmic head-bobbing is obligatory. Palm’s singing provides another equally captivating musical element. Album closer “Nakamarra” shows her off at her most relaxed, as she drifts

between the changes with plenty of variety in her phrasing, warbly and gospel-like. On other songs, her singing can be breathy and somewhat restrained. No syllable is superfluous, as in “Malika,” where each of her words is delivered with impressive calculation. However, it is on “Lace Skull” that her performance seems most powerful; her usual rawness yields an unforeseen dimension of somberness and painful fervor. Her words evoke urgency, understanding, closure. Songwriters, take note. This is how

you write a proto-ballad. However, the albums remains marred with a major shortcoming: there is not enough of it. Tracks like “Ocelot,” with its oddly paced six-step beat, seem to end too early. The same can be said for “Boom Child,” which also clocks in under a minute and a half. Fortunately, the track is pretty terrific, so the offense is mostly forgiven. “Rainbow Rhodes” and “Sphynx Gate” run the danger of the same flaw, ending up more as sketches of songs than fully rounded pieces. But

the potential, even when cut short, is there. Keep an eye out for this band. Talent like this doesn’t pop up every day.



photo credit / The Spectator