

= A Love Surreal =

A Love Surreal is the third studio album by American neo soul singer Bilal , released on February 26 , 2013 , by eOne . He recorded the album for five months at various studios with most of the recording crew from his 2010 album Airtight 's Revenge , including producer Shafiq Husayn , drummer Steve McKie , and pianist Robert Glasper . Bilal wrote and produced most of the album , which he titled in reference to his unreleased album Love for Sale and John Coltrane 's 1965 album A Love Supreme .

A Love Surreal explores different stages of love in a cycle of slow @-@ burning songs that Bilal deliberately wrote for female listeners . Its songs eschew the personal and societal themes of Airtight 's Revenge in favor of upbeat songs about cultivating a romance and meditative laments on its dissolution . Bilal wanted to make the album sound multidimensional and drew on the surrealist art of Salvador Dalí for inspiration .

Bilal premiered the album 's music in his performance at World Cafe Live in Philadelphia . Its lead single " Back to Love " was released on December 11 , 2012 . A Love Surreal received universal acclaim from music critics , who praised Bilal 's expressive singing , clever songwriting , and mellow musical style .

= = Background = =

After writing his 2010 album Airtight 's Revenge with themes intended for male listeners , Bilal wrote A Love Surreal for female listeners with lyrics about love . He described writing the album as a surrealistic exploration of love . He was inspired by the surrealism of Spanish painter Salvador Dalí , after viewing a 2005 Salvador Dalí exhibit at the Philadelphia Museum of Art . He also drew on the shelving of his unreleased album Love for Sale , which inspired A Love Surreal 's title . He elaborated on the inspiration behind the album in an interview for Okayplayer :

Bilal was motivated to sign with eOne by the artistic freedom they had given fellow recording artist Dwele . The album 's title was also inspired by John Coltrane 's 1965 album A Love Supreme .

= = Recording = =

After preparing it on his Logic recording software , Bilal recorded A Love Surreal in five months , which he said was the fastest he had recorded an album . Recording sessions for the album took place at Brooklyn Recording and Breeding Grounds Studio in Brooklyn , New York ; Lalabelle Music and Lamont Caldwell 's Bedroom in Clifton , New Jersey ; Pine Studios in Philadelphia , Pennsylvania ; and Prime Rib Productions and The Krusty Lab in Los Angeles , California . He recorded his vocals at a beach @-@ side studio in Los Angeles .

Bilal originally intended to record A Love Surreal as an extended play when he entered the studio , but , according to him , " it was just so easy that the music started to flow ... by the fifth day we were like ' damn , we made a mistake and wrote five extra songs " . He worked with most of the recording crew from Airtight 's Revenge and produced 10 of the album 's 14 songs . Bilal viewed that his role as a producer had progressed from his 2001 debut 1st Born Second to A Love Surreal , which he felt best conveyed his vision for the album 's sound .

Bilal recorded the song " Butterfly " with Robert Glasper , a friend of his since college who had played on each of his albums . Bilal had previously worked with Glasper on the latter 's 2012 album Black Radio . For the song " Back to Love " , Bilal originally programmed the music 's drums on his Logic , but decided to record them live after bringing in other musicians at Pine Studios in Philadelphia . While recording " Astray " , he persuaded his drummer to play in the parking lot and record him live , which he recalled in an interview for The Huffington Post : " I just had this feeling in my head like , ' man , I want this shit to feel big ! ' And when I would park my car in the parking lot , the acoustics in there made you feel like was a Catholic church with all of the sounds echoing off of everything . "

= = Music and lyrics = =

The album comprises a cycle of slow @-@ burning songs about different stages of love , including infatuation , seduction , romance , estrangement , longing , renewal , and existential peace . Bilal 's intimate lyrics address love 's ephemeral nature and how to sustain happiness . It veers between danceable , upbeat songs about cultivating a new romance and bluesy , meditative songs about how romances dissolve . In contrast to Airtight 's *Revenge* , *A Love Surreal* deals more with feelings of lust and flirting rather than personal and societal issues .

The album is also lighter and mellower musically than its predecessor , and deemphasizes electronics in its production . The songs feature subtle melodic hooks , muted drum programming , glimmering keyboards , sparse indie rock guitars , and defined jazz piano . Evan Rytlewski of *Paste* observes unconventional applications of jazz throughout *A Love Surreal* , but characterizes it as a neo soul album due to its " heady , post @-@ Dilla hip @-@ hop thump and periodic psychedelic drift " . The songs are interspersed with long instrumental sections during which Bilal croons wordlessly , while doubling and tripling his voice . His singing veers between a soulful baritone and supple falsetto . Bilal 's sense of melody and harmony is informed by past operatic and jazz training , and his reverence for atmospheric psychedelic soul albums .

The album 's opening series of songs have straightforward lyrics . On " *Back to Love* " , Bilal flatters his date 's shoes and is backed by a bubbling funk groove . The song draws on the music of Prince , while the jazz guitar licks of " *Winning Hand* " draw on Steely Dan . " *Climbing* " has a rugged beat and a lyrical allusion to The Notorious B.I.G. ' s 1993 song " *Party and Bullshit* " . The middle section of the album explores broader emotions and themes of loss and lament . " *Slipping Away* " is a slow @-@ building meditation on loss , with sentimental music backing the narrator 's plea to a departing love . On the slow burning pop rock song " *Lost for Now* " , he comes to terms with being alone and leaves town , but finds salvation in " a smile that changes everything " as the song closes with a shimmer of cymbal . The stark ballad " *Butterfly* " is built around Bilal 's soaring falsetto and Glasper 's rippling piano . Its music explores jazz , and also features dreamy Moog accents . The album closes with lyrics about the promise of tomorrow : " *Woke up this morning to the sound of a bluebird singing / Suddenly I knew just where to begin / Something so simple / How can it speak so loud to me ?* " .

= = Promotion = =

On December 6 , 2012 , Bilal released a free mixtape , *The Retrospection* , on his Facebook page . " *Back to Love* " was released as the lead single from *A Love Surreal* on December 11 , 2012 . On January 8 , 2013 , a music video for the song was released online . Bilal premiered " *West Side Girl* " through his SoundCloud page on February 5 . He performed the album for the first time at World Cafe Live in Philadelphia on February 13 . *A Love Surreal* was released by eOne on February 26 , 2013 .

= = Critical reception = =

*A Love Surreal* received universal acclaim from music critics . At Metacritic , which assigns a normalized rating out of 100 to reviews from mainstream critics , the album received an average score of 82 , based on 11 reviews . Allmusic 's Andy Kellman gave it four @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half out of five stars and wrote that , although he has improved as a producer and songwriter , Bilal " remains supernaturally skilled and creative " as a vocalist , " swooping , diving , wailing , and sighing , all with complete command . " Phillip Mlynar of *Spin* said that the album " pleasingly " reveals Bilal 's production and songwriting skills , which he called " savvy " . *Paste* magazine 's Evan Rytlewski viewed it as his " mellowest , most unhurried album by a distance , yet it 's no less compelling for that lighter touch " , and asserted that , " for the first time in his career , Bilal no longer sounds like an artist with entirely too much to prove ; he 's just a great singer , backed by great players he puts to good use on a set of sticky , deceptively inventive songs " . Steve Jones of *USA Today* gave the

album four out of four stars and wrote that " it 's time that the mainstream paid way more attention " to Bilal .

In her review for NPR , Ann Powers said that A Love Surreal " cultivates the stratospheric vibe " of Coltrane 's A Love Supreme and that Bilal 's ambition is " grounded in fierce intelligence and a commitment to letting stories unfold all the way to their sometimes sorrowful , sometimes orgasmic end . " Ken Capobianco of The Boston Globe called it " bracingly good " , " compelling music " that allows Bilal 's " falsetto to bring the intimate lyrics to life . " Jon Pareles , writing for The New York Times , said that his " full @-@ fledged " voice " needs no studio aid " and that the songs " tease and insinuate " with " meanderings [ that ] lead somewhere . " In a less enthusiastic review , Pitchfork Media 's Jayson Greene called it a " joy " to listen to Bilal " warp his voice into improbable shapes " , although he felt the album lacks any prominent melodies . Mikael Wood of the Los Angeles Times gave the album two @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half out of four stars and felt that it lingers at the end with a series of slow jams and " atmospheric clutter " , even though its best songs " warrant the increased attention . "

= = Track listing = =

? ( co . ) Co @-@ producer

= = Personnel = =

Credits adapted from liner notes .

= = Charts = =