

= Aaliyah (album) =

Aaliyah is the third and final studio album by American R & B singer Aaliyah . It was released on July 7 , 2001 , by Blackground Records and Virgin Records America . After raising her profile with hit soundtrack singles during the late 1990s , Aaliyah started to work on the album in 1998 , but rescheduled its recording around her developing film career . She resumed recording the record in 2000 at Sing Sing Studios in Australia , where she shot her role for the 2002 film Queen of the Damned during the day and recorded songs at night . Aaliyah worked primarily with Blackground 's in @-@ house crew of writers and producers , including Bud 'da , J. Dub , Rapture , and Eric Seats , as well as longtime collaborator Timbaland .

Aaliyah is an R & B and neo soul record with music drawing from funk , hip hop , alternative rock , and electronica , among other styles . The producers incorporated synthesizer melodies , fragmented beats , distorted guitar , and eccentrically manipulated vocals and song structures . Much of Aaliyah dealt with the complexities of romantic love and different stages in a relationship . Most of the songs were written by lyricist Static Major , who shared a close friendship and strong rapport with Aaliyah . She viewed the album as a reflection of herself as both a young adult and a matured vocalist .

Aaliyah received highly positive reviews from critics and debuted at number two on the Billboard 200 , but sold diminishingly afterwards . When Blackground and Virgin wanted a high charting single to increase the album 's sales , Aaliyah shot a music video for the song " Rock the Boat " in the Bahamas , but died in a plane crash on a return flight to the United States on August 25 , 2001 . After her death , sales of the album skyrocketed and propelled it to number one on the Billboard 200 . Aaliyah was released during a period of peak activity in contemporary R & B and , since its initial reception , has been cited by critics as one of the best R & B records of its time .

= = Background = =

Aaliyah released her second album One in a Million in 1996 , and graduated from high school the following year . She gained further exposure with radio hits from film soundtracks , including her 1998 single " Are You That Somebody ? " . After it became the biggest hit of her career at that point , Aaliyah wanted to keep a lower profile and avoid overexposure . A follow @-@ up record was planned for February 1999 , but she postponed its recording to develop an acting career , which led to a starring role in the 2000 film Romeo Must Die . The film heightened her profile significantly , while the soundtrack 's single " Try Again " became her first number @-@ one pop hit . Her label Blackground Records used the film and its soundtrack to set up a distribution deal with Virgin Records America , which would distribute Blackground 's subsequent releases globally , including her self @-@ titled third album .

= = Recording and production = =

Aaliyah began recording the album in 1998 . She recorded a few songs , including two with longtime collaborator Timbaland , before working on Romeo Must Die . In 1999 , while working on the record in New York City , Aaliyah called and asked Trent Reznor , one of her musical idols , to produce a song , but they could not coordinate their schedules . She intended to finish the album by the end of 2000 and resumed its recording while filming in Australia for Queen of the Damned (2002) , as she shot her part for the film during the day and recorded songs at night . She said in an interview for Billboard , " there were nights when I didn 't go into the studio ? I was too tired . On the weekends , I always made it . " Jomo Hankerson , Blackground president and Aaliyah 's cousin , said that he had to " bribe the producers " , who did not want to " go halfway around the world ! " , but ultimately had " a beautiful time ... making hot music " .

Most of the album 's songs were recorded at either Sony Studios in New York City or Sing Sing Studios in Melbourne , including " Loose Rap " , which was done at both studios . Aaliyah recorded " More Than a Woman " at Manhattan Center Studios , " U Got Nerve " at Soundtracks Studios in

New York City , " We Need a Resolution " at Westlake Studios , and " I Care 4 U " at Magic Mix Studios and Music Grinder Studios in Los Angeles . She had first recorded " I Care 4 U " , written by past collaborator Missy Elliott , in 1996 for One in a Million , but scrapped it after that album 's completion . Aaliyah worked with Blackground Records ' in @-@ house crew of musicians , songwriters , and producers , including novice producers Bud 'da , J. Dub , Rapture , and Eric Seats . Music manager Jimmy Henchman , a friend of Aaliyah 's manager Barry Hankerson , helped coordinate the record 's production and arranged for the producers and writers to work with Aaliyah .

Static from the R & B band Playa wrote most of the album 's lyrics . While his band was growing apart , he was invited by Blackground to be a lead writer for the album after writing " Are You That Somebody ? " and " Try Again " . Static was a part of Aaliyah 's close group of friends , which included Missy Elliott and Timbaland , and shared an infatuation with her . He found Aaliyah to be ideal for his songwriting style , while she believed that he could accurately portray her feelings . A subtly sexual lyricist , he wrote " Rock the Boat " for her in 1999 , but Blackground felt she was not ready for the song . Barry Hankerson said of his songwriting , " We always were protective over every lyric ... But he did things where you never felt offended . You just felt like you overheard someone thinking ... he was clever ... Aaliyah depended on him [and] he depended on her . " Elliott said that he was " a part of that bridge of Aaliyah growing up lyrically " . While she discussed the lyrics with Static , Aaliyah consulted Bud 'da about the sound and musical direction of the album . She was interested in learning about the UK garage scene at the time .

In March 2001 , Aaliyah finished recording the album after having filmed her part in Queen of the Damned for four months , which ultimately delayed the album 's release . In Australia , she also did a photo shoot for Aaliyah with photographers Jeff Dunas , Jonathan Mannion , David LaChapelle , and Albert Watson . Aaliyah handled five pythons at the shoot and developed an affinity for snakes , finding them " dangerous , but quite beautiful " and representative of her on the album . She revisited the snake theme in her music video for " We Need a Resolution " in April and told MTV , " They live in solitude , [and] there are times in my life [when] I just want to be by myself . There are times I can 't even figure myself out . I feel they are very complex creatures , [but] at the same time , they 're sexy , too . That 's why they represent Aaliyah pretty well . " She described the record as " a good reflection of [myself] and the person [I am] today " , saying in an interview for Jet magazine , " I am a young adult now , and I think this album shows my growth vocally . " Aaliyah was mastered by Bernie Grundman at his studio in Los Angeles .

= = Music and lyrics = =

An R & B and neo soul album , Aaliyah featured midtempo funk songs , hip hop @-@ textured uptempo tracks , and slow jams that draw on older soul influences . Along with contemporary urban sounds , its music incorporated Middle @-@ Eastern influences , muted alternative rock , and , particularly on Timbaland 's songs for the album , Latin timbres . " Never No More " mixed both older soul and modern hip hop sounds with string arrangements by producer Bud 'da , while " Read Between the Lines " was a rhythmic digital samba with Latin percussion . Aaliyah 's production featured synthesizer melodies , vintage syndrums , distorted guitar , staccato arrangements , and layered , eccentrically manipulated vocals . John Mulvey of NME found its sound subtle and lacking " bombast and histrionics " , while the magazine 's Alex Needham likened its " otherworldly " , high frequency production to dub reggae and the dark , spacious dance music of Dr. Dre and Massive Attack . In Stephen Thomas Erlewine 's opinion , the album was distinct from the older soul leanings of Macy Gray and Jill Scott , as its music was unconventional yet modern , " turning out a pan @-@ cultural array of sounds , styles , and emotions " .

Aaliyah 's beats were produced to sound fragmented , exhibiting techno and electro textures . Tracks such as " Loose Rap " , " Extra Smooth " , and " What If " featured unconventional song structures experimenting with resolution . " I Can Be " and " What If " incorporated 2 @-@ step and rock elements , although the latter song drew particularly from Detroit techno and industrial rock . On the club @-@ influenced " More Than a Woman " , Aaliyah sang over harsh @-@ sounding

synthesizer and guitar sounds , while " Loose Rap " featured underwater noises , low @-@ key electronica in the style of the Neptunes , and harmonically soft vocals declaring " it ain 't just rhythm and blues " . Ernest Hardy of Rolling Stone compared the album 's experimentation to the sounds on OutKast 's Stankonia (2000) , Sade 's Lovers Rock (2000) , and Missy Elliott 's Miss E ... So Addictive (2001) . According to Slant Magazine 's Sal Cinquemani , " like Elliott 's genre @-@ bending So Addictive , Aaliyah provides a missing link between hip @-@ hop and electronica . "

The lyrics on Aaliyah explored the intricacies of romantic love and phases in a relationship such as heartache , frivolous infatuation , and issues near the end of a relationship . Subtle , lighthearted humor and witty sound effects such as comical vocal manipulation interspersed the themes of heartbreak and eroticism . According to Citysearch 's Justin Hartung , the record " transforms the confusion of young adulthood into exhilarating freedom " . Bob Waliszewski of Plugged In observed female empowerment @-@ themed songs that showed a " healthy self @-@ respect " by Aaliyah , who " doesn 't put up with unfaithful cads (' You Got Nerve ') , mind games (' I Refuse ') , self @-@ impressed hunks (' Extra Smooth ') , gossip and envy (' Loose Rap ') , or physical abuse (' Never No More ') " . The key @-@ shifting , drum and bass @-@ influenced " Extra Smooth " addressed an enthusiastic courtship and was inspired by a conversation between Aaliyah and Static about how men try to act suave , while " Loose Rap " was titled after the slang phrase of the same name and dismissed romantic admirers who use trite pick @-@ up lines . " Those Were the Days " dispassionately dismissed a male lover , while " What If " angrily threatened an unfaithful lover and by extension similar men . On " I Care 4 U " , the narrator tried to console a friend who is heartbroken , but found herself distressed by unrequited feelings she has for him .

Aaliyah sang with restrained soprano vocals throughout the album . Vibe magazine 's Hyun Kim argued that its songs drew focus to her singing more than her previous records , " bringing it to the forefront as opposed to hiding it behind the layered production " . " Rock the Boat " was sung with breathless vocals by Aaliyah , who instructed her lover on how to please her sexually and equated her erotic high to a drug high . Ballads such as " I Care 4 U " , " Never No More " , and " I Refuse " were sung more emotively , expressing melancholy qualities and hurt . On " I Can Be " , Aaliyah sang from the perspective of an adulterous man 's mistress who wanted to be his foremost girlfriend . Alex Macpherson from The Guardian wrote that " Aaliyah 's blank , numbed delivery " on the song " makes being the other woman seem like an emotionally masochistic form of self @-@ medication " . Biographer Christopher John Farley said she " emotionally detailed a song " unlike on her previous albums and that " her gentle voice now seemed like something elemental , a kindly wind blowing through the branches of a big tree . " According to Joshua Clover , Aaliyah pushed musical notes " into strange corners of syncopation 's shifty architecture " on the more " shape @-@ defying " tracks . He wrote that " she makes the sonics tell the story , creating meaning outside the lyrics , pleasure beyond the hooks . "

= = Release and reception = =

After Aaliyah was released in July 2001 , it debuted at number two on the Billboard 200 albums chart , selling 187 @, @ 000 copies in the week of August 4 . Although it was the highest sales week of Aaliyah 's career , the album initially sold slower than her previous record , One in a Million . Blackground and Virgin , which had invested heavily in Aaliyah 's commercial performance , wanted a single with a high chart placement to help increase sales . " We Need a Resolution " had been released as the lead single on April 13 , but underperformed on radio and only reached number fifty @-@ nine on the Billboard Hot 100 . In August , Aaliyah shot a music video for " More Than a Woman " in Los Angeles and then travelled to the Bahamas to shoot a video for " Rock the Boat " . But after its completion , she and several crew members who were returning to the United States died in a plane crash on August 25 . Blackground executives were uncertain when they would release the album 's next single and video .

The album 's sales skyrocketed after Aaliyah 's death . Before her death , its sales had been diminishing since the album 's release in July and stood at more than 447 @, @ 000 copies sold . News of her death was reported on the last day of Nielsen SoundScan 's sales tracking week ,

during which Aaliyah sold 62 @, @ 000 copies , a 41 @. @ 5 % increase from its past week 's sales . The following week , it sold 305 @, @ 500 copies and ascended from number 19 to number one on the Billboard 200 . It was the record 's highest sales week and marked the first time a recording artist climbed to number one posthumously since John Lennon in 1980 with his album Double Fantasy . It was also Aaliyah 's only album to top any of Billboard 's charts . The record sold more than one million copies by September 19 and 2 @. @ 06 million copies by February 25 , 2002 . In the US , Aaliyah spent 68 weeks on the Billboard 200 and , by December 2009 , had sold 2 @. @ 6 million copies .

Blackground , which had ended its joint deal with Virgin in November , wanted to send the video for " More Than a Woman " to domestic outlets , but it required both labels to work together . Blackground subsequently moved to Universal Records , and the video was first aired in Europe . In the United Kingdom , " More Than a Woman " was released as a single on January 7 , 2002 , and entered the singles chart at number one , while Aaliyah re @- @ entered the albums chart at number 65 ; it had originally entered the chart at number 25 on July 28 , 2001 . Two weeks after " More Than a Woman " reached number one , the album jumped 17 spots to number five on January 27 , 2002 . Aaliyah went on to spend 31 weeks on the British charts . It also reached number nine on the record charts in France , Germany , and the Netherlands , where it charted for 33 , 41 , and 46 weeks , respectively .

Aaliyah received highly positive reviews from critics . At Metacritic , which assigns a normalized rating out of 100 to reviews from mainstream publications , the album received an average score of 76 , based on 14 reviews . Michael Odell of The Guardian called it a flawless blend of pop and R & B that was " as much a brochure for the current state of R & B production facilities " as it was a showcase for Aaliyah 's singing . He found the music 's textures " scintillating " and believed its distinguishing characteristic to be " a playful and confident reworking of the [R & B] canon " . In the Chicago Tribune , Brad Cawn wrote that Aaliyah demonstrated Sade 's grace and Missy Elliott 's daring with fashionable neo soul that was " equal parts attitude and harmony , and all urban music perfection " , while Russell Baillie from The New Zealand Herald deemed the music innovative dance @- @ pop on what he called " a cohesive , detailed and disarmingly enticing album " . Simon Price , writing for The Independent , cited the record as " further evidence that black pop is the avant garde " . In a review for The A.V. Club , Nathan Rabin argued that the album established Aaliyah as a significant artist unobscured by her collaborators , while Hardy from Rolling Stone called it " a near @- @ flawless declaration of strength and independence " in which Aaliyah explored her " fantasies and strengths " . Writing for Spin , Clover viewed the record as her most profound work and said she had made " art " out of Timbaland and Static 's " formal finesse " by " investing sound schemes with urgency and emotional intricacy " .

In a less enthusiastic review , Connie Johnson from the Los Angeles Times found the production unadventurous and felt the lyrics lacked the depth and " personal revelation that gives music some immediacy " . Mulvey deemed Aaliyah " graceful " and " satisfying rather than extraordinary " in his review for NME , saying although it was redeemed by Static 's consistent songwriting , Timbaland should have contributed more songs . Like Mulvey , Q remarked that its music was decent rather than innovative , with some filler . In Entertainment Weekly , Craig Seymour wrote that there were a few songs that strayed from her musical strengths , but elsewhere she " skillfully portrays love as part woozy thrill , part pulse @- @ racing terror " . Robert Christgau gave the record a three @- @ star honorable mention , indicating " an enjoyable effort consumers attuned to its overriding aesthetic or individual vision may well treasure " . In his column for The Village Voice , he named " We Need a Resolution " and " U Got Nerve " as highlights and called Aaliyah " a slave to her beats , but a proud slave " .

Aaliyah was named the best album of 2001 by Slant Magazine and one of the ten best records of the year by The Atlanta Journal @- @ Constitution and Time magazine . NME ranked it at number 39 on their year @- @ end list . The album finished 73rd in the Pazz & Jop , an annual poll of American critics published by The Village Voice . Christgau , who created and supervised the poll , said Aaliyah finally " developed material nobody can deny " on " a good album " . The record also finished 37th in the annual poll run by German music magazine Spex . For the album , Aaliyah was

posthumously awarded an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Female Artist . At the 2002 American Music Awards , it won in the category of Favorite R & B / Soul Album . In 2002 , Aaliyah received a Grammy Award nomination for Best R & B Album . " Rock the Boat " was nominated for Best Female R & B Vocal Performance . " More Than a Woman " was nominated in the same category in 2003 . In 2005 , Aaliyah was ranked number 66 on GQ 's 2005 list of the " 100 Coolest Albums in the World " . Stylus Magazine ranked it 47 on their list of the " Top 50 Albums of 2000 ? 2005 " ; the publication 's David Drake ranked it eighth on his own list . Vibe included it as one of their " 150 Essential Albums of the Vibe Era " in 2007 . A few years later , Aaliyah was named by Slant Magazine as the 72nd best record of the 2000s decade .

= = Legacy and influence = =

Along with Aaliyah 's burgeoning film career , the album was a part of her rising mainstream success in 2001 . In a retrospective review , Steve Huey from AllMusic called it her most consummate record and said it " completed the singer 's image overhaul into a sensual yet sensitive adult " . Erlewine , the website 's senior editor , called the album " a statement of maturity and a stunning artistic leap forward " , while BBC Music 's Daryl Easlea felt it made Aaliyah 's two previous accomplished albums " look like exercises in juvenilia " . According to PopMatters critic Quentin B. Huff , she had never used her singing to complement her music 's innovative production before with as much variety , conviction , and success as on Aaliyah , which he said was also known as " The Red Album " because of its red artwork . Huff believed the record showcased the growing rapport between Aaliyah and her collaborators , and disproved questions about how she would continue recording music while broadening her profile . In The Rolling Stone Album Guide (2004) , Keith Harris wrote " Aaliyah had grown from studio puppet to a powerful R & B archetype ? a more self @-@ aware Ronnie Spector for a time that requires more self @-@ awareness of its young adults . "

Before her death , Aaliyah had planned to embark on the largest concert tour of her career to support the album . Her recording sessions for Aaliyah produced many leftover tracks that were posthumously archived by Blackground and mostly left unreleased because of internal conflicts and legal complications between the label , Aaliyah 's family , and the producers . The compilation album I Care 4 U was released in 2002 and featured six previously unreleased songs from the sessions for Aaliyah .

Aaliyah 's re @-@ emergence with the album in mid @-@ 2001 had coincided with a period of peak activity in contemporary R & B , as well as the popularity of neo soul . According to Erlewine , Aaliyah was " one of the strongest urban soul records of its time " , while The Guardian cited it as the peak of R & B 's golden age at the " turn of the century " . Alexis Petridis , the newspaper 's lead critic , believed Aaliyah had recorded her most engaging music in a year when R & B and hip hop demonstrated the most creativity in popular music . The Guardian 's Rebecca Nicholson attributed Timbaland 's subsequent commercial success with singers such as Justin Timberlake and Nelly Furtado to his experience producing Aaliyah , writing that he " hasn 't come close to creating anything as sonically stunning since " . Although Jon Caramanica from Vibe believed it " redefines the category " , he said Aaliyah " may be the best soul album of the young millenium " , calling its music " daring in construction , gorgeous from conception ... damn near post @-@ R & B " . Q journalist Eve Barlow credited the album for " creating a blueprint that can be heard across pop music today " with acts such as R & B singers Beyoncé and The Weeknd , and indie pop band The xx .

= = Track listing = =

= = Personnel = =

Credits are adapted from the album 's liner notes .

= = Charts = =

= = Certifications = =

= = Release history = =