

TRACKS

“Purity” [ft. Frank Ocean]

A\$AP Rocky

2018




BEST NEW TRACK

By Mehan Jayasuriya

GENRE: Rap

LABEL: A\$AP Worldwide / Polo Grounds Music / RCA

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A highlight from Rocky’s new album, *Testing*.

A\$AP Rocky loves to flex. And, in recent years, his affinity for high-end fashion has drawn nearly as much attention as his music. The real signifier of his rap wealth, though, has always been his tracklists. With each record, Rocky seems intent on one-upping himself: more famous guests, more of-the-moment producers, more pricey samples. In keeping with this trend, *Testing* doesn’t just feature two guest spots from the elusive Frank Ocean,

it also drapes one of them over a sample of the even more elusive Ms. Lauryn Hill. But “Purity” is more than just an exercise in conspicuous consumption. Here, Rocky transcends his reputation as a brand-obsessed curator, crafting a surprisingly heartfelt song that’s greater than the sum of its very expensive parts.

“Purity” is built on top of a snippet of Hill’s “I Gotta Find Peace of Mind,” a spare, lovesick performance pulled from her *MTV Unplugged No. 2.0* album. It’s the kind of instantly recognizable sample few producers this side of Kanye would touch but here, the production team (Rocky, Dean Blunt, FnZ, and Hector Delgado) transform Hill’s vocal line and guitar figure, giving the clip a new meditative quality. Frank takes the first crack at the beat, allowing his flow to unfurl slowly before breaking into a sprint with the line, “Woof, woof, dogs in the place,” an absurd sequence of words that sound great tumbling out of his mouth at top speed. From there we get the sort of dizzying, rapid-fire verse that proves Ocean could be one of the best rappers working, if only he felt like it (one particularly vivid stretch: “Brute force, brut champagne, tell the front desk to cut new keys/Reserved in the Mercer for two years, two suites, took out the bed like it’s fuck sleep”).

Wisely, Rocky doesn’t try to top Frank in terms of cleverness or technique. Initially, he raps around the beat, stretching out words until they bleed into the next bar. Far from triumphant, he sounds paranoid, drugged out and guilt-ridden. “Face to face with my demons at a barstool, haven’t checked on my niece in weeks,” he raps, lowering his voice to a near whisper before delivering the kicker: “Lose someone every release, it feels like the curse is in me.” Since he first emerged, Rocky has always projected an air of invincibility, a conqueror with little time for introspection. With *Testing*’s closing track he finally grasps that ineffable quality that makes artists like Hill and Ocean iconic: humanity.