**Las Néctares se Mezclan**

D'Angelo and the Vanguard, *Black Messiah* (2014)

Oh geez. This is a tough one, and if I am to be honest I will probably amend and revisit this one somewhere down the road. Consider this a smattered bookmark, and maybe a first-impression - even if this is an album I am rather familiar with.

I think a fair and necessary explanation for my approach is that my relationship with D’Angelo is in parallel with my relationship with Nina Simon’s work: *this isn’t for me*. I have a mild discomfort while listening to both artists in that I am erring on voyeurism…which I feel is summed up nicely in a quote from Gerald Mast: “Voyeurism allows us to experience all the excitement of disaster, catastrophe, and pain, to witness the most horrible human events, without any danger of feeling real pain.”

That being said, I think my unfamiliarity with D’Angelo’s catalog and career context sends me into this review lacking much of the confidence I would want to really formulate a strong opinion. I come to this with weak language, fear of offense, and a stomach full of fruit from the tree of discomfort.

*porro cum dolore ↣*

The album commences with a radio tuning into the sounds of the impending alien annihilation, antennæ carefully tuning to the opener *Ain’t That Easy*. The choral verses build a lush sound that is driven by a marching bass & drum mix. Wonderfully melodic vocal melody, especially on the chorus. The percussive novelties added in are a theme that is repeated in the album throughout. The following track contains a sample from the film ‘The Murder of Fred Hampton’ - followed by largely unintelligible vocals through a somewhat dissonant instrumental.

*The Charade* takes a more conventional approach with a safe and simple musical delivery throughout the piece. *Sugah Daddy* & *Really Love* are about as far as I usually get through this album. I think they both are such a standard at this point they don’t need much critique. I think they only leave room for praise as pillars in soul/funk/R&B history. I can’t express more how perfect these two tracks really are.

*Back to the Future* comes with a poppy yet familiar vibe. The orchestration hangs nicely on the backbone: a perfect splash of bitters into a strong highball of strong spirits. *Till It’s Done* gives me a taste of a more gospel influenced songwriting. *Prayer* takes on a darker tone - evident of the highly reverb’d backing instrumentation and echoing vocals.

Eh - this review gets dry quick without touching on the lyrics. I am sitting in front of a feast prepared and cooked by one of the finest musical chef’s and I have only touched the side dishes and my entree is getting cold. I think I will tap out here. I can’t promise the deep dive this album deserves - not out of an impending deadline or drained opinion pool - but rather the same 3 lines sent into a thesaurus proceeding the track title in italics. I am writing about the sea while ignoring the lush archipelago within. This album is fantastic. My ability to convey opinion while cowering in the face of bowdlerization is not.

* Ape