

Everlore: Two Albums that Accurately Portray the Melancholic Mood of a Pandemic
By Jannie Gowdy, 12

When I was seven years old, my mom took me to a Taylor Swift concert in Des Moines. I was obsessed with the artist, and I showed up with a paper guitar and my favorite dress on, elated that I was going to finally see my role model perform. My greatest hope was fulfilled: Taylor put on a phenomenal show, gliding over the audience and displaying her powerful vocals. I left there holding her in the highest regard. Over the course of her career, I followed her albums as she went from one era to the next, loving every style change. After all, Taylor Swift *is* the queen of evolving her discography. She started out with country roots in her debut album, *Fearless*, and *Speak Now*, and progressed to pop in *Red* and *1989*. While her next two albums, *Reputation* and *Lover*, are also categorized as pop albums as well, they each have a very unique tone displayed by differing characteristics. *Reputation*'s electro-backing and musical mixing songs are powerful and fierce, while *Lover* contrasted sharply with softer instrumentals and a self-discovery theme.

While Swift's style is characterized by more specific 'eras' and there is always fan speculation about her next era, no one expected her to go the route of indie-folk music. On July 23rd, Swift announced on social media platforms that her eighth album would be dropping at midnight. She wrote in an accompanying statement, "Before this year I probably would've overthought when to release this music at the 'perfect' time, but the times we're living in keep reminding me that nothing is guaranteed." She went on to say, **"My gut is telling me that if you make something you love, you should just put it out into the world."** The sixteen songs she released (later releasing "The Lakes" as a bonus track) incorporated bleak and soft themes, reflecting life during the pandemic. Swift experimented with new elements, including songs from third person points of view ("The Last Great American Dynasty") and a love triangle (between the narrators of "Cardigan," "August," and "Betty"). I personally am invested in the songs for different reasons. "My Tears Ricochet" tells the story of an expiring relationship, and the vulnerability and pain that goes along with it. "Epiphany," (which I think is a very underrated song on the album) relates to the suffering in the pandemic: "Someone's daughter, someone's mother / Holds your hand through plastic now / 'Doc, I think she's crashing out.'" My current favorite song from *Folklore*, "This is me Trying" is written as a burnt-out confessional: "They told me all of my cages were mental / So I got wasted like all my potential." I could write essays about each song on the album and expand on what they specifically mean to me, but they all come back to one thing: the profound lyrical and melodic talent Swift presents in the album is apparent in every single song. Not only did Swift write these songs with her own experiences and feelings in mind, she also wrote them for her listeners to be able to associate their own mentalities with.

If I had a nickel for every time Taylor Swift released an album about reflection and perspective at midnight without sufficient warning during a pandemic in the year 2020, I'd

have two nickels... which isn't a lot, but it's weird that it happened twice, right? If one surprise album wasn't enough, Swift dropped yet another album, *Evermore*, on December 10th. In another statement, Swift said: "I've never done this before. In the past I've always treated albums as one-off eras and moved onto planning the next one after an album was released. There was something different with folklore. In making it, I felt less like I was departing and more like I was returning. I loved the escapism I found in these imaginary/ not imaginary tales. I loved the ways you welcomed the dreamscapes and tragedies and epic tales of love lost and found into your lives. So I just kept writing them."

This album, while significantly more warm and pop-fueled, is definitely the sister album to *Folklore*. Some memorable songs from the album include "Gold Rush," a piece of longing for a gorgeous partner, "Champagne Problems," the story of a failed proposal and the aftermath, and "No Body No Crime," which is just some good old-fashioned murder. The deepest and most vulnerable song on the album is "Tolerate It," the expression of relationship anxiety and the innermost fears of having a one-sided partnership. Morgan Kielly, 12, loves "Coney Island": "I like the lyrics and slower-paced musicality. The National also collaborated on this song, and I really like the feature."

While I love *Evermore* and it's warmer, but still thoughtful tones, I still think that *Folklore* reigns supreme as the best album of 2020. *Folklore* lifts an atmosphere that its sister album did not: that of careful reflection throughout the entire album. These albums have helped keep me sane throughout these past few months, just like any good music does. I encourage everyone to make the choice to listen to either *Folklore* or *Evermore*. Listen to both, if you're inclined to do so. Take a page out of Swift's book too: if you have something you want to share with the world and you can't get it out of your head, put it out there. You never know who it might help