



Artist: Shad
Album: "The Old Prince "
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As fresh as Shad's "The Old Prince" is, in actuality, it's not that fresh. The Canadian rapper's sophomore album was released in mid-2007. Following his major success and Juno award win, Old Prince was rereleased on Black Box record label. In the first listen, Shad and his low key sound stands out on strong hindlegs from the MTV pop-rappers or scandalized superstars whose faces are unavoidable in today's media. The sound of opening and closing cash registers are far from Shad's flow. At the core of his sound is an attitude

he defines himself in "I Don't Like To": "Cause I rap like it's my hobby/ Not a jobby-job, all sloppy and off-key". In this hobby is artistic intention, rather than money symbols in green that read on the faces of contemporary rap stars, that sport Bentleys and in-ground pools. In a sea of auto-tuned madness Shad is a refreshing revisit to a more mature rap, a decades old throwback.

The concept of the album itself moves in many directions. One could view the beginning track as a preface to the tale of this album, a lack of youth, about The Old Prince himself whose problem is that he was "an old prince", in a world where princes are supposed to grow up to be profound, adult kings. It could be the rapper's own, "Quest for Glory", with his complete denial of a popular rap scene. It is a fight against society. However, most striking is Shad's ability to contain a chunk of current subject matter, even into a record recorded nearly three years ago. Among the presented is the controversy behind music downloading and musical artist rights (i.e., Metallica's 2000 upset with Napsters Peer-2-Peer file sharing of their work) in "I Don't Like To", racism (a topic more and more important in a country with a black president) in "Brother (Watching)" and even an environmentalism (referenced smoke stacks) in "Now a Daze". He builds his modern distinction by hollering out and dismissing the abject apathy of his generation. He truly places himself as a youth conscious in the beginning monologue of "What We All Want" or a deviant of the "conformist day" as stated in "Get Up".

Behind his modern matters of rhyme is an earnest voice. The rhythm of his voice is natural, smooth, and non-abrasive. The album really doesn't quite pick up until perhaps the fourth track, which ironically utilizes a sort of trite version of sampling throughout. You can't hear these beats in a club per say, but perhaps on a sickly warm or painstakingly cold car drive. The tempo isn't exactly danceable, yet warrants a head nod or sway.

Full force into a juxtaposed mess, "Old Prince Still Lives Home" was ironically one of Shad's bigger singles. The video of "Old Prince" even won Polaris Music Prize. The track falls almost exactly in the middle, becoming an interesting calamity, however, it channels the "Fresh Prince of Bel-Air" a bit too much. Shad reflects his talent as an actor (or at least a voice actor) in his ability to distort his voice and tonality to one of a goofy, early 90s Will Smith. After a relatively low key, serious repertoire of songs preceding, this is all a bit jarring. Hilariously, in character with the "Old Prince" persona, the song's beat completely cuts out, because, as Shad explains to the Whoever, "he couldn't afford to keep it going". He's certainly got it covered though, as he choreographs a chorus of handclaps, some smile-worthy hooting and hollering of a group of dudes. My personal opinion changed halfway through, then faded a bit back to the original, when the strange contrast into the next track occurred. From zany, laziness of the Old Prince begins a beautiful, two-minute piano interlude.

From piano into the next very distinct track comes, "I Heard Your Voice Like An Angel". Here lies some experimental instrumentation: haunting reverbed guitar work, that utters the

sounds like a sad wash of cool water in tremolo, with just as haunting lyrics as, "lately, I'm been seeing why you hate me". His sincerity from the beginning here begins to shine back through, in a gleam, to fade back with the sound of an acoustic guitar.

Still, the transitions between individual songs are awkward at times from slow to fast, from absurdist to rhythmic. In fact the beginning of one track, "Compromise" left me asking, "did he just sample the beginning of 'The Phantom of the Opera?'" However, within a song, the vibe is a consistent entity, for example, like the funky brass forefront of the aforementioned "Compromise."

Essentially, Shad is a poet. A peace monger. Someone willing to take some sort of stand. The poetry is guiding light through the quirks of the album. In listening, we are reminded of the language of rap music, its ultimate purpose to provide a message not always heard. Here words are concise and precious, as they create a story of this Old Prince, but the beat certainly helps. Cue the bittersweet string fade out.

Start with Tracks - Get Up, I Heard Your Voice Like An Angel, What We All Want
See also - Common, K-Os, K'Naan

-Kaley Haskell, WERU Volunteer Host of "Metamorphoses" (Sat. 3-4 PM)