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CD Review: Shawn Mendes

SEP 28, 2016 by SAVANNAH NELSON in MUSIC REVIEW

Illuminate (Universal/ Island Records)

An album that balances the desires of intimacy and the reasoning of backing away, **Shawn Mendes' *Illuminate*** reveals an unembellished truth for himself as an artist: he really can do more than rhyme with the word "stitches."

Beginning with the soothing track "Ruin," the sophomore record shows an undiscovered side of the former Vine star, brimming with crooning vocals, coffee house aesthetics, and a favorable lack of pop-hype. It's quite a leap for listeners who might associate Mendes with pre-pubescent-**Justin-Bieber**-fame: a talented vocal range, though paired with little substance other than repetitive choruses, all overshadowed by an inspirational Internet-to-fame story and youthful good looks.

Illuminate continues with "Mercy," pushing the tone of intimacy further, while deepening the complexity: the song paints the boundaries between attraction and emotional abuse. Mendes sings, with a pleading urgency, "Baby, please have mercy on me/Take it easy on my heart/Even though you don't mean to hurt me/You keep tearing me apart."

Though it was released as a highly anticipated draw to the album, the single "Treat You Better" serves as the lowpoint of *Illuminate*. The track plays more into the hands of pre-teen girls lusting over the fantasy of Mendes sweeping them off their feet, and appealing to the desires of nearly eradicated chivalry with lyrics

like, "any girl like you deserves a gentleman." Labelled the "song of the summer," "Treat You Better" makes an unfortunate attempt at lyricism that likely will not echo into further seasons.

From "Don't Be a Fool" to "Patience," Mendes gives listeners reasons to become fans. The album is defined by softness that compliments sincerity, ballads lamenting loss, and a charming persistence. Listeners are faced with two realizations after playing *Illuminate*: Mendes desperately needs a hug; and his next release won't come soon enough.

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