

Music Update

Taylor Swift: Pop goes the country

Taylor Swift is a six-time Grammy winner, and the youngest winner in history of the music industry's highest honor, the Grammy Award for Album of the Year (for *Fearless*, released in 2008). Her 2010 album, *Speak Now*, was lauded on *Rolling Stone's* prestigious *The 50 Greatest Albums of All Time* list, and *Time* magazine has named her one of the 100 most influential people in the world. She is without precedent: not as a country star looking for something bigger, but as an artist looking to become the sort of pop superstar that doesn't exist.

Her evolution has been slow by design; she has been cautious not to move too quickly for the legions of young women who hang upon her every confession. With the debut of her fourth album, *Red*, while Swift remains diary-honest, she is clearly leaving behind the country sounds of her past and taking her Tween nation with her every step of the way.

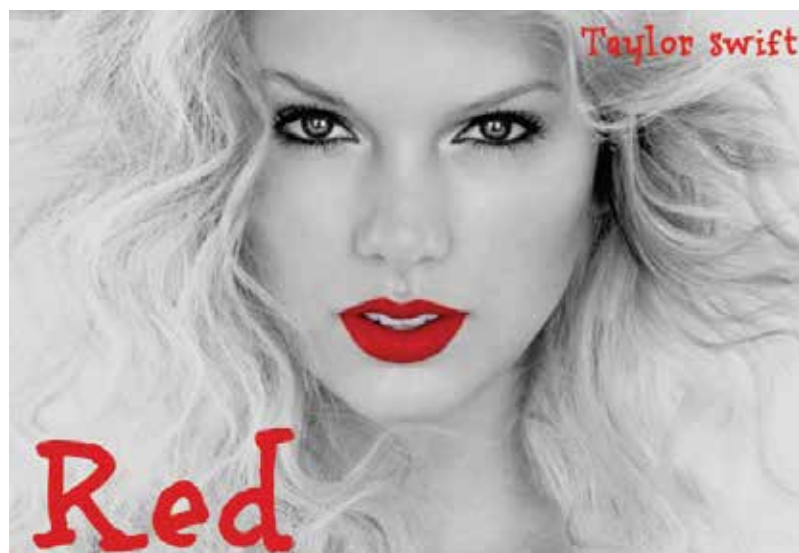
For those looking to decipher which songs Taylor Swift wrote about which ex-boyfriends, let it be known that it's not true what they say, that Swift spends much of this pretty-great album skewering basset-eyed former flame Jake Gyllenhaal. It's more like she examines him under a magnifying glass in the sun until he spontaneously combusts, like an ant. The album's best track, "All Too Well," is a scathing and sad love song about a romantic interlude that deals with a nameless boyfriend who broke up with Swift over the phone — and after she spent all weekend looking at his baby pictures, and being polite to his sister, Maggie. "You call me up again / Just to break me like a promise / So casu-

ally cruel / In the name of being honest," Swift sings, forlorn and plainly angling for a Grammy in passive-aggressiveness. It's a wonderful song, practically the Platonic ideal of broken-hearted songs about boys, part of a passel of the tracks on *Red* that encapsulates what Swift does better than anyone. She connects with clear, concise, relatable love songs that are thrown like punches and steeped in everyday details about first kisses, phone-tossing fights and rom-com misunderstandings.

Other romantic targets are more closely guarded. Some songs (like the appropriately terrible "I Knew You Were Trouble") are probably about long-ago ex John Mayer, who was called out by name on Swift's last album, *Speak Now*, and says he still hasn't recovered.

But when it comes to intimate details, Swift is as chaste as a Jonas brother. She spends most of *Red* managing to have it both ways — untouchable virgin and serial dater. Swift, 16 when she released her eponymous debut and 22 now, has had one foot in adulthood and one foot in unicorns-and-kittens for what seems like forever, a fraught enough transition for anyone, and probably terrifying to contemplate when you've made your fortune being *Every Girl*. *Red* doesn't attempt to solve, or even address, the widening gulf between Swift's biological age (she's old enough to be in grad school) and her emotional age (16, tops). It tries to please everyone; and for the most part succeeds.

The album has three kinds of songs: echoey, galloping, almost-grown-up guitar



The cover for Taylor Swift's new album, *Red*.

anthems that draw heavily upon U2 and Coldplay; familiar, wise-beyond-her-years mid-tempo ballads; and bratty, adolescent-skewing dance pop — all helmed by Swedish producer and songwriter Max Martin, whose solid-gold ear has served the likes of Britney Spears, Katy Perry and Backstreet Boys well.

Red is best when Swift navigates the increasingly porous borders between pop, country and lite-rock. The record-opening "State of Grace" and the slow-burning "Traacherous" are better, more evolved versions of what Swift has always done.

On the Katy-Perry-goes-country track "Starlight," Swift's intermittent twang, like the album's stray fiddles and steel guitars,

offers a link to a past that is increasingly in her rearview mirror. Swift seems to have left country music behind, and it would be lovely to think her future is in songs like "The Last Time," a sweeping, orchestral duet with Snow Patrol frontman Gary Lightbody, whose presence instantly makes her stand up a little straighter and tamp down her ingratiating Swift-isms. It's mournful and spacious, one of many tracks on *Red* that shows that the more grown up Swift sounds and the farther away from yesterday she gets, the better off she is. The song is an open doorway, an invitation to an adulthood that might not be all that bad.

If Swift is smart, she'll take it.

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Promo Only Top 20

for November, 2012

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|----|-------------------------|------------------|
| 1 | Whistle | Flo Rida |
| 2 | Blow Me (One Last Kiss) | Pink |
| 3 | Give Your Heart A Break | Demi Lovato |
| 4 | Everybody Talks | Neon Trees |
| 5 | Lights | Ellie Goulding |
| 6 | One More Night | Maroon 5 |
| 7 | Good Time | Owl City |
| 8 | As Long As You Love Me | Justin Bieber |
| 9 | Some Nights | Fun. |
| 10 | Too Close | Alex Clare |
| 11 | Pound The Alarm | Nicki Minaj |
| 12 | Don't Wake Me Up | Chris Brown |
| 13 | Want U Back | Cher Lloyd |
| 14 | Let's Go | Calvin Harris |
| 15 | Hello | Karmin |
| 16 | Finally Found You | Enrique Iglesias |
| 17 | I Won't Give Up | Jason Mraz |
| 18 | 50 Ways To Say Goodbye | Train |
| 19 | Let Me Love You | Ne-Yo |
| 20 | Dark Side | Kelly Clarkson |

Chart compiled from national airplay charts and Promo Only feedback

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