



Life

“CRUEL WORLD”
REVIEW



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While you may be familiar with Holly Humberstone from when she opened for Olivia Rodrigo and Taylor Swift, I remember hearing her debut song “Falling Asleep at The Wheel” on the radio in 2021 and immediately falling in love with her sound.

Her sophomore album “Cruel World” is everything you could want from a project by her. It’s got her signature moodiness, but you can also hear how much she’s grown as an artist. She described this album as encapsulating learning, loving and navigating the world as a young woman.

The album opens with the track “So It Starts...” which is entirely instrumental. Humberstone said in an interview with Apple Music she wanted listeners to feel like they were sitting down to watch a play or ballet, taking a seat because the show is about to begin. It fades into the second track “Make It All Better,” which I’m a big fan of. The song is about the newness of a relationship and wanting to protect it while also fantasizing about what the future might look like. The production mixes instruments with electronics to create a unique sound that’s classic Humberstone.

“To Love Somebody” was the first single released from the album and it’s been going triple platinum in my car since. It’s a catchy, upbeat song that’s also very hopeful. It’s about feeling every part of being in love, the chorus goes “To love somebody / To hurt somebody / To lose somebody.” It’s a reminder that even in the pain of heartbreak you’ll get over it and fall in love again, and the world will keep moving anyway.

The title track “Cruel World,” was the song that made the album make sense, and after writing it, Humberstone was able to figure out how to finish the album, she said in an interview with Rolling Stone. The song feels kind of 1980s and the production is very fun. It’s the kind

of song you just want to dance to. It’s about being in a long-distance relationship and how the world can look very bleak when that one person isn’t around.

“Die Happy” was inspired by darker fairytales, and it’s about loving someone so much that it scares you. There’s a danger and recklessness to love that this song fully encapsulates. The production feels very cinematic, and it’s very toned down to match the overall vibe of the song, which allows for Humberstone’s vocals to shine.

“White Noise” was the last song written for the album, and Humberstone said she needed a change of scenery, so she went to Nashville and came out with this. It’s more pop with little hints of country influence. The song’s about crying in the club after a breakup, and that feeling of not even caring about what music you’re listening to because you just want to feel something.

“Lucy” is a love letter to her sisters but also just to girlhood in general. This song has some of my favorite lyrics from the entire album, put against a simple acoustic guitar. The song is about feeling out of place in the world and figuring out what to do with that but also knowing that you’re not alone.

I’m obsessed with “Red Chevy,” it’s got a retro, sexy sound with a touch of saxophone that would make Poppy from “People We Meet on Vacation” very happy as she loves a good sax moment. The song is a simple love song about just wanting to spend time with your person.

“Drunk Dialing” plays heavily with synths in the chorus, and the lyrics are very unserious but play into the universal feeling of being desperate for someone’s attention when they couldn’t care less about you.

I’m always going to be a sucker for a piano ballad, and that’s where “Peachy” delivers. It’s about someone wanting you to be emotionally responsible for a part of their heart, but you’re unsure and don’t want them to put their faith in you. It reminds me a lot of Humberstone’s early



Holly Humberstone poses for promotional images for her latest album “Cruel World.” The album was released on April 10, 2026.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF @HOLLYHUMBERSTONE ON INSTAGRAM

work and is definitely in my top three from the album.

“Blue Dream” is such a fun and catchy song. It’s about how love can feel very all-consuming and almost psychedelic. “Beauty Pageant” closes the album the same way it started with the lyrics “So It Starts...” The song is about Humber-

stone’s experience being a woman and feeling like you have to show up with a smile on your face and perform constantly, and even when you do all of that; people will still pit you against other women. I think it’s a great song to end with because it kind of closes the curtains on everything she

has felt in the past two years while making the project.

Overall, I absolutely adore this album. You can hear how much Humberstone has evolved as an artist, while still sticking to who she is at her core. This is going to be the perfect album for the upcoming summer months because it’s just so fun.

RATING: 4.5/5