RELENTLESS TAYLOR SWIFT RETURNS WITH 'THE ENCORE'

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Just shy of one year after the release of her latest album "Life of a Showgirl," Taylor Swift dropped "The Encore," a deluxe album with four additional songs, on Friday, Sept. 25.

In classic Swift fashion, she began dropping easter eggs and leaving cryptic messages on Instagram, teasing fans just days before the release.

"The Encore" includes four pop songs: "Patient Zero," "Cleveland!," "Pink Clouding" and "Babylon." These songs shy away from her traditional dark, poetic ballads and lean into upbeat pop melodies. The album exudes marital bliss, emotional stability and fun — a side of Swift we aren't used to seeing.

The four extra tracks share a lot of similarities to their parent album, with recurring themes like stardom and marriage woven throughout.



Taylor Swift has a photoshoot for her newest album, "Life of a Showgirl". The album was already met with discourse on social media.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @TAYLORSWIFT ON INSTAGRAM

Not even a week old, there has already been an abundance of discourse on social media about the album. Fans are calling the melodies bland, and say the lyrics are shallow. Already, Swift is being labeled as unrelatable, washed and separated from her audience. As Swift's following has continued to grow, people have become increasingly critical of her output.

I think it is crucial for consumers to recognize that artists do not solely create music in an effort to appeal to fans. Music, like any other form of art, works as a creative outlet, something the artist should have fun creating and something that they should love and relate to themselves. As listeners, we have become far too selfish in our consumption, and in a sense, have detached ourselves from the purpose of music. You're not supposed to relate to every artist, or every song and isn't that the whole point?

Swift has spent decades pouring her personal tragedies into songs, becoming, for some, a modern-day Shakespeare. Wouldn't it be greedy for us fans to want Swift to continue to endure heartbreak for the sake of relating to her audience?



"Life of a Showgirl: The Encore" graphic. The deluxe album was released on Friday, September 25th.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @TAYLORSWIFT ON INSTAGRAM

Is this my favorite Taylor Swift album? No. Do I relate to all the songs? Also no. But I do recognize that although she has become one of the biggest pop stars in the world, she is still a human being who deserves creative freedom and personal expression.

It is also important to note that with almost every Swift album release, fans usually spend the first week ripping the work apart. They should spend time getting used to the lyrics and melodies and try to find relatable aspects before they decide their final thoughts. I expect that Swift's notoriously loyal fanbase will take this next week to warm up to the new songs before fully embracing them.

Aside from all the controversial rhetoric surrounding the album, I do actually think this new side of Swift is uniquely refreshing for a historically melancholy discography. Although some of the new songs do not align with my personal taste, I appreciate Swift's consistent willingness to explore foreign concepts and experiment with new approaches to songwriting.

Rating: 4/5

SECLUDED RAINBOWS: 'TWO BOYS KISSING'

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A vital aspect of romantic relationships is kissing. When two people develop a strong attraction, they bind their lips together and remain in that position for a few seconds to half a minute.

But did you know that kissing can last a lot longer than that? By longer, I mean more than a day.

Welcome back to Secluded Rainbows, a biweekly column that publishes stories every other Tuesday. In each story, I discuss an LGBTQIA+ book that's currently being banned or challenged. In this issue, I'm highlighting David Levithan's "Two Boys Kissing."

Published on Aug. 27, 2013, "Two Boys Kissing" follows Harry and Craig, two 17-year-old boys who take part in a kissing marathon, an event where couples compete to see which one holds the longest kiss.

The kissing marathon takes place on Harry and Craig's high school lawn, and is supported by their principal, Harry's parents and their friends. During the event, Harry and Craig kiss for 32 hours, setting a new Guinness World Record.

"Two Boys Kissing" mainly focuses on Harry and Craig. However, it features other characters: a hate crime victim named Tariq, a transgender boy Avery and a couple, Neil and Peter. These characters also participate in the kissing marathon.

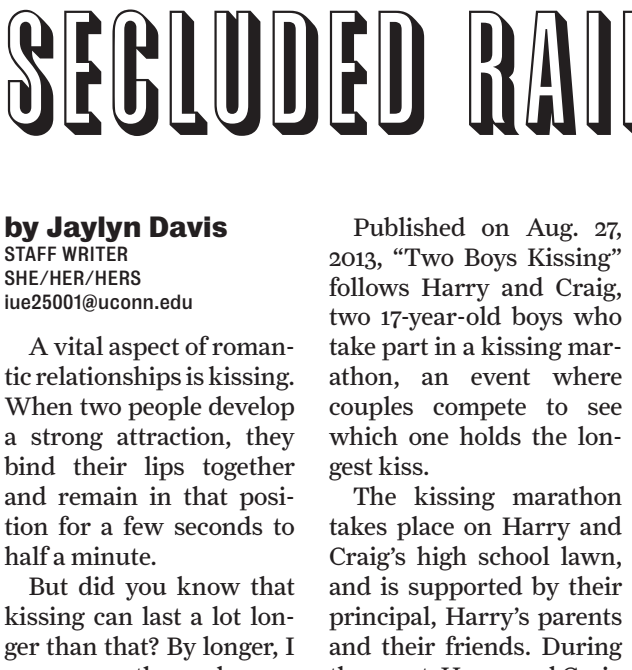


Photo of cover of "Two Boys Kissing" by David Levithan. This book has been banned or challenged in academic spaces.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @OLYBLISS ON INSTAGRAM

What makes the novel unique is that it's based on true events. According to a 2013 interview that Entertainment Weekly conducted with Levithan, one of his fans held a kissing marathon.

"He and his friend had, as a way of protesting marriage inequality and promoting equality in general, done this feat where they had broken the Guinness World Record for the longest continuous kiss," Levithan said. "They kissed for over 33 hours on the campus of their college."

The event propelled Levithan to write "Two Boys Kissing," which also explores the generation that lived through the AIDS pandemic.

"Two Boys Kissing" symbolizes unity and strength. Throughout the novel, Harry and Craig fight sleep deprivation and dehydration while striving to break the record. I see this as a very powerful message that relates to the LGBTQIA+ community's resilience. For centuries, same-sex couples have dealt with oppression and the inability to express their identity. Harry and Craig's world-record kiss demonstrates that same-sex couples can create everlasting love despite hardship.

Another thing Levithan's novel represents is support. In the story, Tariq admits that the kissing marathon provides him with a sense of belonging and the ability to be himself. This is important to him because he's experienced constant homophobia.

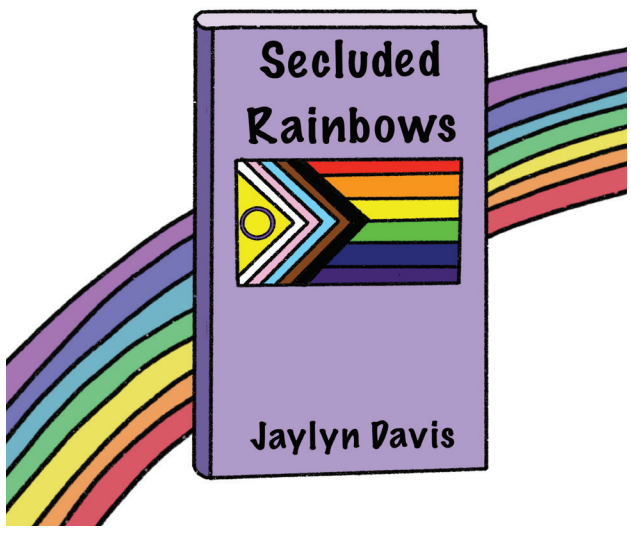
The novel places a focal point on queer teenagers. According to the book's description and reviews, "Two boys Kissing" portrays the gay experience, and it supports teenagers who are exploring their sexuality while "dealing with universal questions of love, identity and belonging."

"Two Boys Kissing" received praise from numerous people and companies. Publishers Weekly called it "a landmark achievement" that helped create "a haven for queer youth." Meanwhile, The Bulletin said it "would be a particularly stellar choice for a multi-generational LGBTQ-focused book club."

Besides praise, "Two Boys Kissing" received formal recognition, including the Lambda Literary Award in 2013. The Lambda Literary Award is given to the best LGBTQIA+ novel each year, according to Lambda Literary's website

"Two Kissing Boys" was one of the American Library Association's best books for young adults in 2014, and it received the Children's Book Committee at Bank Street College Children's Book of the Year Award that same year.

While "Two Kissing Boys" is highly acclaimed as an exceptional novel with an inspiring plot, it's been frequently challenged. It's number 18 on the 2010-2019 top 100 most challenged books list. Furthermore, it was the eleventh most challenged book in 2018, the fifth most challenged book in 2016 and the tenth most challenged book in 2015.



LOGO BY LILLIAN LAFEMINA, ARTIST EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

The novel's been commonly challenged because it includes sexually explicit LGBTQIA+ content and a cover that shows two boys kissing each other.

"Two Boys Kissing" has been banned in a few states. It was banned in Florida, Texas and Pennsylvania in 2023, according to Harper's Bazaar,

The novel is no stranger to court, either. It was challenged in PEN America v. Escambia County School District (2024). The case emerged from a lawsuit arguing that the banning of books related to race and LGBTQIA+ themes is a violation of free speech and equal protection under the law. Judge T. Kent Wetherall of the United States District Court for the Northern District of Florida heard oral arguments from the case in Jan. 2024 and dismissed the case.

There's no bigger disgrace than banning a book like "Two Boys Kissing." The novel illustrates that gay people can exhibit robust force and overcome any obstacle thrown in their path. It inspires queer audiences to not give up and believe that anything is possible.

Banning "Two Boys Kissing" will hurt queer audiences, causing them to miss out on learning about resilience. They'll also miss out on learning through the story about successfully protesting homophobia.