‘All the Signs’ point to another Don Toliver success with ‘Octane’

By COOPER WOODWARD
Associate Sports Editor

In the modern age of music, there are few artists that you can count on to give you consistently good projects time in and time out. It either highly exceeds the expectations given to it, or falls significantly under.

One of the artists who has produced a great product time in and time out is Don Toliver, who released his fifth studio album “Octane” Jan. 30.

The 49-minute long project marks the sixth consecutive year Toliver has released either a song or an album dating all the way back to 2020 with the release of his debut “Heaven or Hell.” That project also propelled him into superstardom as the lead single “No Idea” became one of the most popular songs of 2019.

Two months into his 2025 collaboration with fellow labelmate Travis Scott on the album “Jackboys 2,” Toliver began the rollout for “Octaine” with the release of the lead single, “Tiramisu” on Sept. 5.

The song leans heavily into Toliver’s R&B ties, featuring a more laid back production style with heavy use of easy on the ear synthesizers. Lyrically, the song gives teases of what's to come on the rest of the album, as Toliver goes deep into exploring all of the feelings that come during intimacy and romance with a partner.

Two of his other singles released with the rest of the album, “ATM” and “Body” follow in its footsteps as both dive into the more physical aspects of intimacy. That’s about where the community ends as Toliver goes two completely different directions production wise. The two singles feel like a classic Toliver project of heavy percussion and bass, while the ladder goes a lighter route. Especially in “Body”, giving a sample from Justin Timberlake’s 2009 song “Rock Your Body.”

The fourth and final single “E85,” is my personal favorite of the entire album. Lyrically, Toliver explores the feeling of euphoria that comes with driving down a highway with your lover by your side.

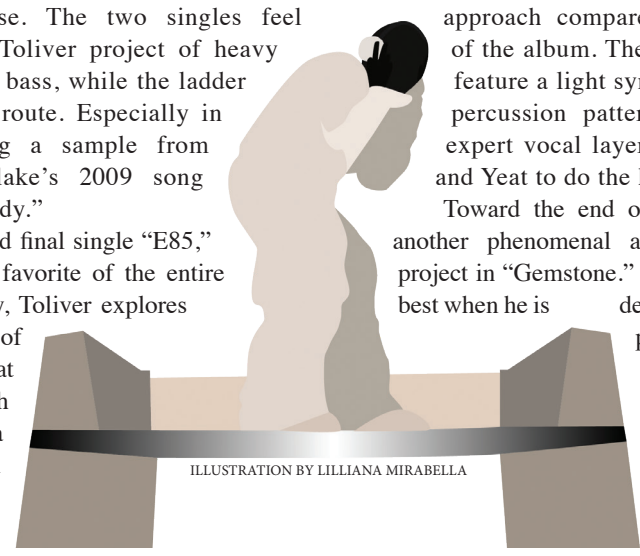


ILLUSTRATION BY LILLIANA MIRABELLA

Sonically, the production matches it perfectly. It’s simple, easy on the ears and, although it’s a rap song, is pop perfection.

“E85” was the song that put the album on the map, as it recorded multiple weeks atop the Billboard Hot 100.

Two tracks later, there is another highlight of the album for me in “Rendevouz.” Featuring American singer-songwriter Yeat, the song takes a more relaxed approach compared to the rest of the album. The instrumentals feature a light synth and a basic percussion pattern, letting the expert vocal layering of Toliver and Yeat to do the heavy lifting.

Toward the end of the album is another phenomenal addition to the project in “Gemstone.” Toliver is at his best when he is delivering high-paced and high energy songs with lyrics that back it up. That’s exactly what this track does and that’s why it’s one of my favorites.

All of this praise is not to say the album doesn’t have its struggles. A big one is the penultimate track “Pleasure’s Mine.” Sonically, it isn’t anything special. It just sounds like a generic run of the mill rap song. Lyrically, the song falls flat on its face. The lyrics tackle themes of penance to a former partner. It’s boring, dull and I really believe it could’ve been scrapped off the album.

Another major downside comes with the following track “Ultimate.” It unfortunately suffers from a similar fate that its predecessor does. The production is serviceable at best but the lyrics remain dull and unmoving.

Overall, “Octane” is a solid addition to Toliver’s discography. Like its predecessors, it’s filled with hits and good songs that fly under the radar while delivering the most complete version of Toliver we’ve seen to date.

Toliver remains a key player in modern day rap & hip-hop on the door step of becoming a superstar. While “Octane” may not be remembered as an all time great project, it is not an album that should be ignored.

All the reasons why I can't stop listening to ‘EPIC: The Musical’

By ALEXANDRA MARTINAKOVA
Editor-in-Chief

I didn’t really anticipate reviving my obsession with Greek mythology in my 20s, but then I stumbled upon “EPIC: The Musical” and here we are.

I am arguably a little too late to the party as this masterpiece has been steadily coming out for the last three years, but better late than never and you can bet I am never leaving.

Inspired by Homer’s the “Odyssey,” “EPIC” is a two and a half hour product of a college senior thesis idea by singer-songwriter and actor Jorge Rivera-Herrans, that takes inspiration from video games and anime and other musical genres — separated into two acts and nine sagas (40 songs), last of which came out on Christmas Eve last year.

I could genuinely write separate essays about every single one of the songs — including the cut ones, I will forever mourn the loss of “I need her to be mine” — and I’m not even exaggerating.

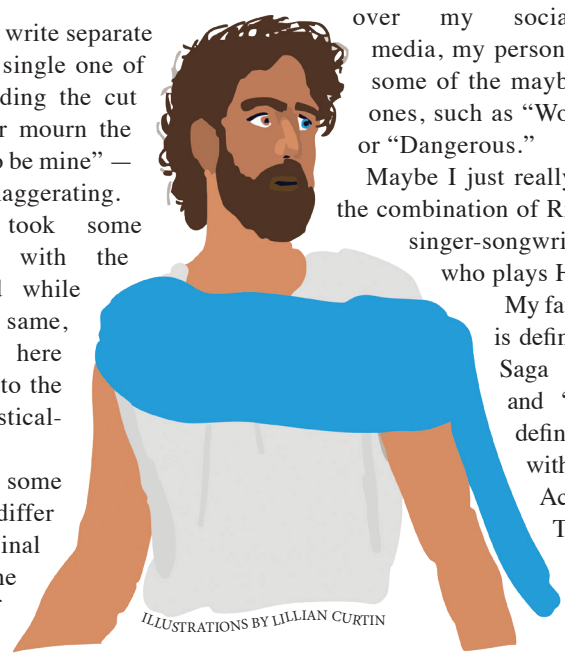
Rivera-Herrans took some creative liberties with the original story and while the main idea is the same, the small changes here and there only add to the video game/fantastical-like storytelling.

He observes some moral topics that differ from the original text, especially the way the topics of sexual assault and violence are handled, the guilt and consequences that were maybe not typical for that time period, but speak to the modern viewer and he truly handled these topics well.

Even though it’s officially only on Spotify, Rivera-Herrans amassed 3.1 million monthly listeners thanks to this project.

The cast is made up from a mixture of people close to him as well as a few singers that got cast through TikTok auditions over the years, with Rivera-Herrans himself playing Odysseus.

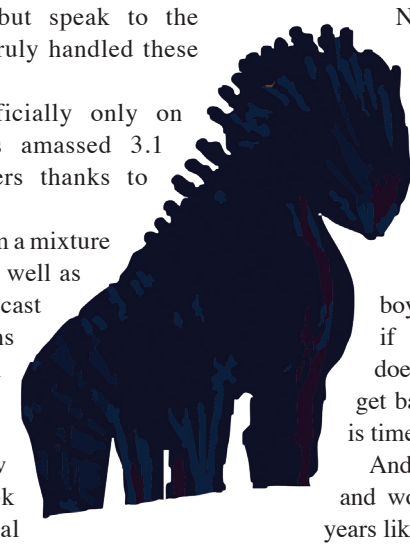
While there are a few standout songs that took over my social media, my personal favorites are some of the maybe few underrated ones, such as “Wouldn’t You Like” or “Dangerous.”



ILLUSTRATIONS BY LILLIAN CURTIN

Maybe I just really like listening to the combination of Rivera-Herrans and singer-songwriter Troy Doherty who plays Hermes, sue me.

My favorite saga though, is definitely The Wisdom Saga and “Legendary” and “Little Wolf” are definitely up there with the best songs. Actress and producer Teagen Early who plays Athena and musician Miguel Veloso (Telemachus) compliment each other so well and Early is just phenomenal throughout all her appearances.



Not to say the crowd favorites didn’t earn their praises. There is a reason “Would you fall in love with me again” is the most streamed song from the musical (spoiler alert, it’s the yearning).

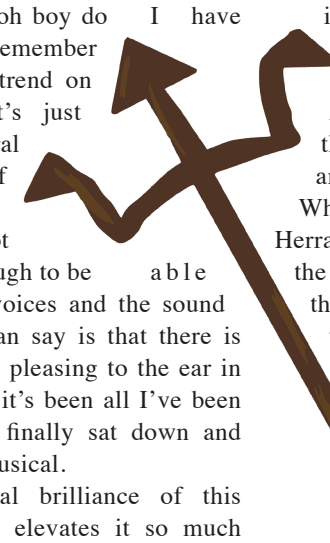
All I’m saying my girls, boys and non-binary folks, if your man isn’t loyal and doesn’t spend 10 years trying to get back to you like Odysseus, it is time to find a different man.

And if your woman isn’t loyal and wouldn't wait for you for 20 years like Penelope, same message.

And if you think you’ve never heard of any of these songs, oh boy do I have news for you. Remember that she’s my wife trend on TikTok? Yeah, that’s just one of the many viral sounds to come out of this musical.

Listen, I’m not musically sound enough to be able to delve into their voices and the sound composition, all I can say is that there is something extremely pleasing to the ear in all of the songs and it’s been all I’ve been listening to since I finally sat down and watched the entire musical.

The sheer musical brilliance of this musical aside, what elevates it so much more is the animatics that serve as the official movies, so to say.



It might honestly be what makes this so great. There isn’t one official animation for any of the songs. A bunch of YouTube animators create animatics for the songs that get pieced together to create the movie.

It can be slightly confusing, especially since everyone has their own style of animation and draws the characters differently, but it also adds so much to the story.

Yes, there are lyrics that Rivera-Herrans wrote that guide the story and the original plot that it is based on. But the creative liberties that different animators take with facial expressions of the characters, or the way they portray them, is what really elevates it to a completely new level and makes it so much more than just a simple musical.

I have to agree with YouTuber Danny Motta, I am also personally partial to the way Neil Illustrator draws the gods — even if I don’t like their Odysseus. Though my favorite “EPIC” animators will always be Duvetbox and Gigi. And maybe also WolfytheWitch but that might be my Minecraft DSMP animatics nostalgia.

While I was too late for this saga, Rivera-Herrans has already teased his new project, the retelling of “The Illiad” by Homer, or the prequel to “Odyssey,” for which I am too early to the train this time.

It’s fine though. I’m going to spend the time obsessively listening to the musical until I grow tired of it, which I do not think is humanly possible.