Denzel Curry & Kenny Beats' release 'ii'

By REX NAYLOR
Staff Writer

"ii" is an album between rapper Denzel Curry's with producer Kenneth Blume, also known as Kenny Beats. This is the second time the two have worked together on a project, as "UNLOCKED" and "UNLOCKED 1.5" were released in 2020 and 2021 with high fan acclaim.

Both "UNLOCKED" albums offered high production and in-your-face rapping performances. The pair took a different approach to "ii," opting to strip everything down to an SP-404 sampler and a cheap microphone.

Curry's last two projects had an in-your-face style with a southern sound that he has come to master. The production in "ii" allows Curry's voice to lay nicely over crackly loops, leading the listener to wonder how it's the same voice.

Tracks like "CANDLELIGHT" and "CROWN" are two great examples, with a feature from rapper Westside Gunn, which works well. This isn't to say the nine-track album is entirely laid back. "EVIL GRIN" has a gritty edge, featuring rapper JPEGMAFIA, a proven partnership in recent years.

Both features plug into the album seamlessly, as Blume's production caters perfectly to both voices. Gunn raps over a soulful sample, much like what he's known to do, and JPEGMAFIA … Neither feature feels out of place for Blume or Curry, as the chemistry among all involved is off the charts.

Curry has become known for his lyricism, and while the album isn't his most introspective, it reminds fans of his range. Curry is well into his 30s now, with five studio albums and lots of experience in the industry, and he is more than comfortable speaking his mind.

Curry has always tried to present himself as an ordinary person, distancing himself from the "celebrity" title. Lyrics like "I'm not a celebrity / I'm a psycho with a microphone," from "COLD NIGHT IN HELL" continue that idea.

Similarly, the lyric "My passion is Christ-like / write like Ernest Hemingway," on "GONE FISHING" gives a similar message. Curry compares his lyricism and songwriting to Hemingway's character. Hemingway was very outspoken and lived an adventurous lifestyle. Curry's voice and lyrics are much the same, especially in this song.



ILLUSTRATION BY LILIANA MIRABELLA

Although these features and lyrics are fun and fresh, it's clear the album is neither Curry's nor Blume's best project. The album is fun and a bit of fresh air for Curry's fans like myself. The album goes back to basics, with a turn-of-the-decade style Curry hasn't dipped into much.

For a while, Curry has been known as one of, if not the most consistent rappers of his generation. For me, this album removes him from that category and places him in the running to be one of the greatest rappers of his generation.

Curry is an artist known for speaking his mind; that includes pouring out his feelings. This ranges from emotional turmoil to thoughts about himself in the music industry.

The track "BENJAMIN" speaks for itself. The lyric, "But if it's about the benjamins, it's not about me," is a perfect representation of many artist's thoughts about the music industry.

Everything coming out of Curry's mouth is something of substance; nothing is being said for the sake of it. There's no fluff or fat to be cut off lyrically or production-wise.

Curry's past projects have felt a bit more rigid and constructed than "ii," but that's what makes the album work. "ii" is free-flowing, fun and loose. It's Curry being his most creative and comfortable self with a proven partner in Blume before he goes back to something big.

Not long after "ii"'s release, Curry announced his next project would be his most ambitious yet and would cement him as one of the greatest artists to ever do it.

It's a tough mark to hit, but given everything he's produced, he has all the tools and reason to make the claim true.

For the whole album to be packed into just nine songs and 24 minutes, there's more food for thought than one would think.

The album is worth a listen or two, and a handful of the songs have made it into my daily listening rotation. While there really isn't anything that stands out, there's nothing that stoops below everything else.

The best theater experiences of summer

By ZACH REAGAN
Staff Writer

It's no secret that in 2026, going out to the movies has come back in style. The best part is that as a college student, it's my friends and peers spurring the movement. Over 85% of Gen Zers have seen at least one movie in the theaters in the past year, and on average they saw seven movies live in 2025.

This year has brought along an even bigger craze, since there's been a hit for just about anyone. The obligatory MCU and Star Wars additions killed at the box office, per usual; "Michael" became the highest-grossing biopic ever and horror had a huge double-feature moment with overlapping theater runs for "Obsession" and "Backrooms."

I spent quite a lot of time at the theater this summer, watching 31 different movies in total. Most were new releases, but a good few were legacy screenings at different theaters around the Philadelphia area where I live. With the semester starting and fall coming soon, I'm counting down my top 5 theater experiences this summer.

5. BACKROOMS (2026) (DIR. KANE PARSONS)

The only movie (besides No. 1) that I caught multiple times in theaters this summer goes to director Kane Parsons' "Backrooms," a slow, surreal mystery ride that has firmly wedged itself in my mind several months down the line.

Just about every aspect of this film had something I could appreciate. The performances were top-notch; getting the likes of actor Chiwetel Ejiofor (Clark) and actress Renate Reinsve (Dr. Mary Kline) to star in your first major project is impressive enough on its own.

I would be sincerely shocked if it isn't heavily discussed for production design awards in a few months. The practical sets spanned over 30,000 square feet across four different sound stages, and some actors were even getting lost in there, which I can imagine only helped their immersion.

Parsons not only directed, but also delivered what I believe to be one of the most underrated original soundtracks of the year. The droning ambient swells enhance the atmosphere of the backrooms incredibly well.

I loved what this film had to say about how we carry our trauma, the alienation it causes, and how we can break free. While many friends I know weren't satisfied with the open ending, I thought it only reinforced the mystery of the place. "Backrooms" is a new, true modern folk tale that will become a staple of 2020s horror.

4. TEENAGE SEX & DEATH AT CAMP MIASMA (2026) (DIR. JANE SCHOENBRUN)

Despite knowing it would be seminal for me, I have not checked out Schoenbrun's other work quite yet. However, I knew that right before getting back to Quinnipiac, I couldn't miss out on their latest twist on the horror genre.

Kris (Hannah Einbinder) is a new director and huge fan of the fictional horror franchise Camp Miasma,



ILLUSTRATION BY RYLEY LEE

and was just given the keys to tackle a reboot of the flopping series. She treks into the woods to find Billy (Gillian Anderson), who played the final girl of the first film, to get advice and a new perspective on coming into the franchise.

The genuine and freeing sexual push-and-pull dynamic between the two roped me in instantly. What ensues is a hilarious psychosexual romp through Camp Tivoli while Little Death (Jack Haven), the vent-headed slasher mascot of Camp Miasma, follows close behind.

The practical effects in this movie are gorgeous, especially the hand-painted backgrounds that adorn the camp's transformations. Just as things get too pretty, though, Schoenbrun will never hesitate to find an image or sound to make your skin crawl. If you think you'd be into an extremely sexy meta commentary on modern horror, Schoenbrun's got you covered.

3. CALL ME BY YOUR NAME (2017) (DIR. LUCA GUADAGNINO)

I've come to this classic extremely late, so it's incredibly difficult to say much that hasn't been said about Guadagnino's breakout. The way he shoots anywhere in northern Italy shows such a tenderness for his home, and thanks to the grounding nature of the story, you can easily tell how much he cherishes his own growth as a late teenager.

While I'm not a fan of actor Armie Hammer's extracurricular activities, his Oliver pairs excellently alongside actor Timotheé Chalamet's Elio, who is just coming into his own as an adult. For me, the age gap is what makes their character dynamic, and how it nails the coming-of-age theme.

"Call Me By Your Name" is about bodies clashing against bodies, and the symbolism between the fruit, water and ancient art makes this film explode with life. Not to mention an all-time score and soundtrack fronted by the legendary songwriter Sufjan Stevens, to witness this in theaters was a gift I'll never take for granted.

Is it better to speak or to die? I'm excited to continue finding out.

2. THE DOOM GENERATION (1995) (DIR. GREGG ARAKI)

After tearing through all the heavy hitters of Araki's filmography this summer, "The Doom Generation" has barely edged out the competition as my favorite.

Amy (Rose McGowan) and her boyfriend Jordan (James Duval) pick up a drifter named Xavier (Johnathon Schaech) after a night at the club. After accidentally killing a convenience store clerk, the three dip away to a motel until things smooth over. What ensues is a wild ride of sex, violence and fleeing the scene until the three are jumped by a gang and the movie ends. I really don't want to reveal much of the plot because this was such a mind-bending experience going in blind.

Araki's soundtracks are a masterclass in '90s alt rock, his scripts are so unapologetically campy, and the production design is quite dreamlike. I loved the outrageous signs in every shop the crew enters (worth looking up yourself), and how insane the interiors are in every motel they step into. "The Doom Generation" is a truly singular type of mess that I am already absolutely itching to revisit.

1. THE ODYSSEY (2026) (DIR. CHRISTOPHER NOLAN)

Why be a contrarian? As a big fan of Greek mythology since the ripe age of 10, I always knew Nolan's "The Odyssey" was going to be right up my alley; I just didn't realize how much.

I saw it first on 70mm film and decided to double dip a few weeks later for the true IMAX 70mm experience, and I can say for certain that the bigger screen made the difference.

I loved how Nolan integrated his staple non-linear storytelling format through Odysseus' interactions with Calypso. The feats in practical filmmaking were also such a delight to discover through the weeks that passed after seeing it the first time, and I appreciated them even more on the rewatch.

The performances were great, especially from the less talked-about ensemble, like actor John Leguizamo (Emaeus), actor Himesh Patel (Eurylochus), actress Samantha Morton (Circe) and even actress Lupita Nyong'o (Helen/Clytemnestra).

Where I think the movie really shines is in the themes and the questions it asks of Odysseus. In "Oppenheimer," Nolan does a great job of exploring accountability, and he hits another home run in that department in his latest work. The rape of Troy in the last stretch of the movie was by far the best part for me, and seeing actress Zendaya's horrified face instantly made the previous two and a half hours click.

If you somehow haven't gotten to this one already, can you even call yourself a fan of movies?