Harry Styles is the moment

By Mackenzie Byerlee
Copy Editor

After nearly four years, the long awaited return of Harry Styles did not disappoint. "Kiss All the Time. Disco, Occasionally" blends pop with disco undertones in a way that combines his usual musical style with something new.

While Styles was off selling nail polish for the last few years with his brand, Pleasing, I was impatiently waiting for him to get back to the recording studio.

What he finally released was a masterpiece that showcased his ability to pair meaningful lyrics with a catchy beat. It was very much worth the wait.

Songs such as "Pop" and "American Girls" reminded me why I fell in love with Styles' music in the first place. I have been playing this whimsical album on repeat, and it will certainly be making its way into my Spotify Wrapped.

I would argue, however, that despite the marketing revolving around a specific genre, the disco was definitely occasional. I was anticipating more of an ABBA feel, but at the end of the day, what he gave us made more sense because he is still a pop singer.

While the album was everything I could have dreamed of and more, I was surprised by the number of slower songs. Going into the album, I thought the songs were going to be upbeat and have the same vibe as the lead single, "Aperture."

As a long-time fan, his approach to music is something that has always fascinated me. He writes music that creates community, which was especially apparent when he announced his "Together, Together" tour.

With the announcement of the tour came the realization that the ticket prices were going to be astronomical.

So, the community that comes with seeing his music live comes at an extreme cost. As much as I love the guy, I would not be spending $800 for anyone, no matter how good their music was.

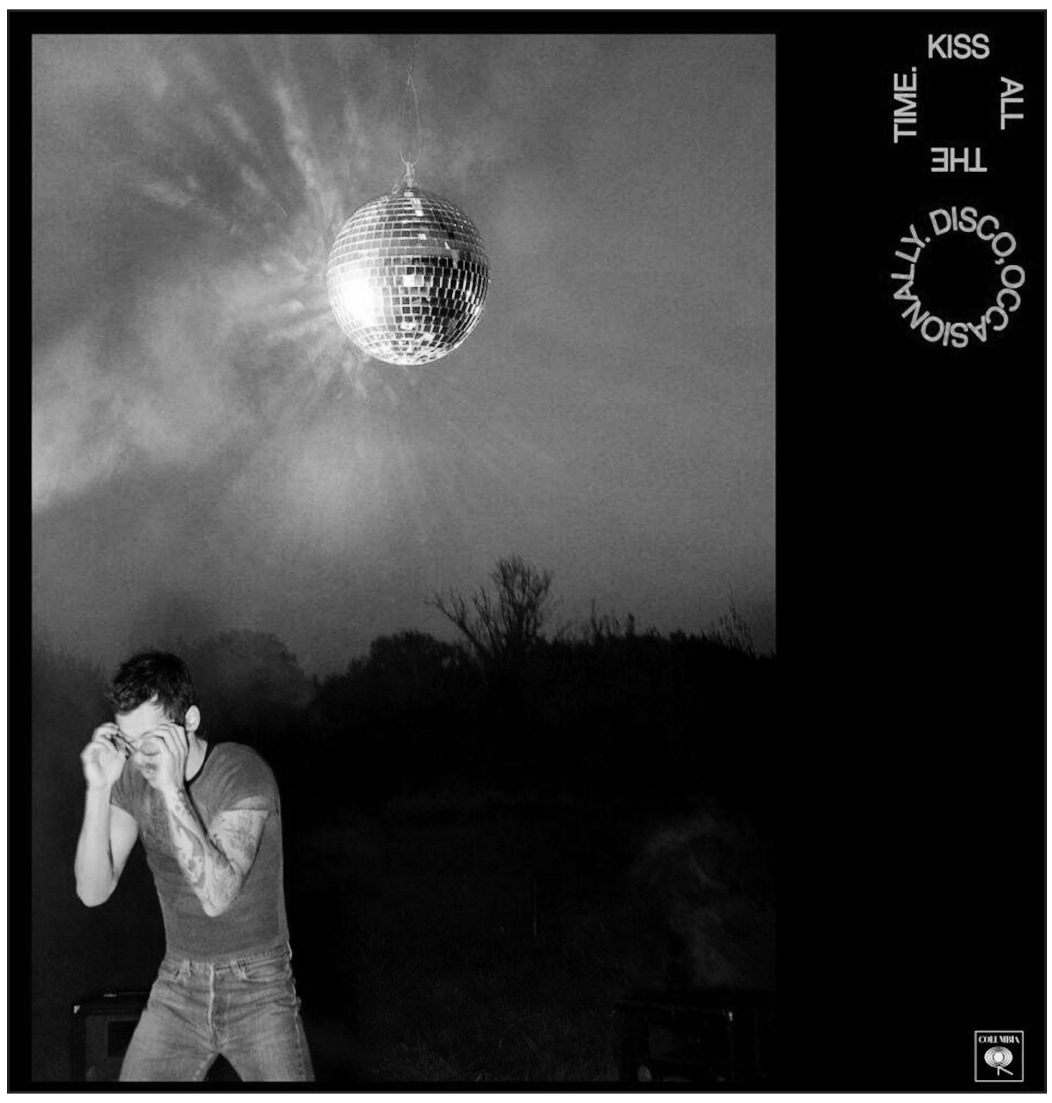
With that being said, I do wish that I could hear these songs live, as he is a great performer. His Netflix special "One Night in Manchester," which was released on March 6, proves his abilities.

From this performance, it is clear how naturally this comes to Styles, as well as how much of an impact he has on his fans' lives.

This album came out that day, and the crowd already knew an impressive amount of the lyrics.

"Kiss All the Time. Disco, Occasionally" encapsulated all that Styles stands for: spreading love and having fun. As someone who is such a positive light, it was no surprise that these were the main messages he wanted to convey in his work.

As of now, it is unclear whether or not Styles will continue with music or pursue other things like he has in the past. But what I do know is that this album was much needed for fans like me who appreciate the variation from previous albums.



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The cover art for Harry Styles' new album, "Kiss All the Time. Disco, Occasionally."

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Jack Harlow's album 'Monica' feels empty



PHOTO | GENIUS

American rapper and singer Jack Harlow.

By Jay'Mi Vazquez
Managing Editor

Jack Harlow's latest album, titled "Monica," felt like a turning point in his career, but not in the way I had hoped.

Instead of building on what made him stand out, the project drifted into a space that sounded polished on the surface yet left me uninterested and disconnected.

Released on March 13, his fourth studio album marked a shift away from the confident, witty rap style that defined earlier projects like "Jackman."

His earlier work carried a clear sense of identity and purpose, but on this album, Harlow appeared more focused on mood than message.

He leaned into R&B and neo-soul influences, trading punchlines for softer vocals and mellow instrumentation.

Artistic growth often benefits an artist, but this shift felt less like progress and more like a loss of identity. The qualities that once made his music engaging felt muted, replaced by a sound that lacked the same presence.

One of the album's main issues was how emotionally flat it felt.

Songs like "All Of My Friends" and "Trade Places" aimed for vulnerability but came across as surface-level and overly safe. There was little urgency in either the writing or delivery.

Even when Harlow explored themes like love or heartbreak, the emotions did not fully connect.

Instead of drawing the listener in, those moments faded quickly, leaving no impression once the tracks ended. That lack of memorability stood out, especially compared to how engaging his previous work has been.

The production also struggled to leave a strong impact.

On paper, the album had the right elements. It featured contributions from skilled musicians, and the instrumentals were clean, jazzy and well-constructed.

Rather than elevating the music, though, the production felt too controlled. Everything seemed smoothed out to the point where few moments stood apart.

At times, the album leaned so heavily into a mellow tone that it felt closer to background music than a project meant to hold the audience's attention.

There were brief moments that hinted at something more. Tracks like "Prague" and "Say Hello" showed flashes of rhythm and personality, suggesting a stronger direction.

Those moments, however, were short-lived and often lost within a project that blended together into a single, indistinct sound.

Harlow's vocals added to this issue, as they often came across as restrained and low-energy.

What made "Monica" more frustrating was that its direction felt deliberate.

Harlow had spoken about wanting to mature and explore new sounds, especially through leaning into R&B influences.

However, growth does not require losing what makes an artist unique. In this case, it felt like he adapted to a style instead of shaping it to fit his strengths.

The result was an album that sounded refined but lacked the spark that once defined his music.

SOUTHERN NEWS

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