WEEKEND *SING-ALONG*

REVIEW

You Will Scream for Florence + The Machine

// BY ESMERALDA VASQUEZ-FERNANDEZ

What do you need to survive the hardest time in your life? Florence and The Machine answers with their sixth album "Everybody Scream." It was released on Halloween. It's jarring. And it's meant to be that way.

"Everybody Scream" was the first song released off of Florence and The Machine's sixth LP — also called "Everybody Scream." Released as a single in August, it started the very intimate journey Florence Welch would take her listeners on. The journey of the album uncovers aspects of her personal life and gifts listeners the opportunity to reflect on their own.

The album was released at the perfect time for my own journey of grief, change and loss. Welch doesn't paint working through trauma and hardship as a heroic arc. Instead, she focuses on the rawness of hitting a new low. When it feels like nobody is going to save you. When it becomes clear that some things can't be changed.

Welch has been public about the life-saving surgery she underwent and her miscarriage back in 2023 while touring "Dance Fever." During this time of hardship, she had to cancel scheduled shows. While recovering from her health struggles, she faced criticism and a lack of space from fans who wanted a clear explanation for the cancelations. The final stanza in the single, "Everybody Scream," leaves the audience curious of "oh what has it done" in contributing to their favorite artist's period of hardship.

Welch's lows were compounded by fan culture's bias. In the past, Welch has been critical of fan culture's parasocial relationships with male versus female celebrities. Where one relationship is based on the praise and approval of men, the other is rooted in a steadfast desire to disempower women. In the song, "One of the Greats," she's vulnerable about her treatment in both society and the industry who "burned [her] down at 36." The rawness in Welch's lyrics feels like an intimate window into her life.

This emphasis on what it means to be a woman is explored in her previous album "Dance Fever." When I feel like my career ambitions can be costly to my personal life, I play "King." I think Welch is unafraid of exploring and admitting feelings that most artists don't out of fear of being seen as cold. Welch's poetic lines are both strikingly beautiful and at times feel like an ugly gut-punch. She is a lyrical genius and a professional at crafting soul-crushing lyrics. The same heart-wrenchingly beautiful songwriting is portrayed in "Everybody Scream."

A big difference between the albums is that "Everybody Scream" sounds like a retelling of a horror story because, in some ways, it is. It also becomes clear that "Dance Fever" unintentionally shadowed the challenges Welch would soon face. It is strange how life can sometimes give glimpses of what is to come.

"Everybody Scream" is far more personal than Welch's previous work. The album reveals parts of Welch's life that are deeply personal and in no way should be expected to be shared to the entire world. She creates an album for women who have lived through similar physical experiences and illustrates strength to others who have felt that same agonizing emotional pain.

Like many, I would never want to be pitied, even in the worst chapters of my life. Welch agrees. She doesn't ask for insincere sympathy; instead, on "Sympathy Magic," she valiantly screams, "come on, tear me wide open," she "can take it."

The album centers on recovery from struggle. Welch depicts it as a solitary endeavor but also questions the role of the audience in the journey. "Everybody Scream" made me question how I can offer warmth in a society that is so cold. The album recognizes how human connection can strengthen people when they are at their lowest. But for some, the season of change must be endured alone. As Welch sings in "Buckle," people who claim to love you can sometimes "close the door and leave [you] screaming on the floor." But yet, with resilience you will "still be there." If I ever feel too weak to push forward, I know Welch's album can act as a burning drive to remain strong.



In all honesty, I wouldn't want to listen to the album when I am thriving in life. It's so emotionally heavy. It will likely remind me about darker chapters in my life. But, that is what makes this album so special: It has emotional depth that most pop-albums or mainstream music doesn't.

Despite trauma, hardships, mourning of relationships, you can find yourself again. The sad reality is that some people are sent challenges without reason that they must overcome. Sometimes a part of you dies through the process. The past can haunt you. But, you still remain. You can almost die like Welch but — in the words of the album — peace is coming.

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CULTURE

The untapped potential of "Springsteen: Deliver Me from Nowhere"

The Boss's biopic struggles to balance between Hollywood cliches and a near-groundbreaking portrayal of an artists pushed to his mental limit.

// BY CIELO GAZARD

"Springsteen: Deliver Me from Nowhere" juggles too many plotlines. The film, starring Jeremy Allen White, focuses on the making of Bruce Springsteen's 1982 album, "Nebraska," the relationship between a father and son and a fictional love affair with a hometown girl. The film explores a different side of Springsteen — not as "The Boss" but as Bruce the Jersey boy struggling to make the darkest and most personal record of his career. But its exploration covers too much ground and not enough depth.

This introspection is explored in the film through vignettes of Springsteen's childhood. Springsteen's relationship with his father is a highlight of the film, particularly the elder Springsteen's struggle with alcoholism and mental illness. The film opens with a flashback — 8-year-old Springsteen going into the bar to get his father to come home — before jumping ahead to 1981 for a triumphant live performance of "Born to Run" with the E Street Band. The black-and-white returns to childhood within the film fuel Springsteen's creativity when writing "Nebraska."

On the album's title track, originally called "Starkweather," Springsteen writes about a serial killer from Nebraska on death row. During the writing process, he remembers a moment in his childhood when he hit his father with a baseball bat to protect his mother. Springsteen crosses out the "he" and "him" references to the killer and replaces them with "I" and "me." Springsteen seemingly relates to real-life murderers and writes from their perspective throughout the album as a means of dissecting himself and his relationships. These moments in the film, where viewers see how Springsteen's mind works, are integral parts to the biopic.

Unfortunately, "Springsteen: Deliver Me from Nowhere" tells more than it shows. Bruce's childhood traumas and strained relationship with his father are not centered in the film. It tries to juggle three plotlines at once — including one of a fictitious woman named Faye who was meant to simultaneously represent Springsteen's relationship with women and his detachment from New Jersey after rising to fame. The inclusion of fictitious Faye would've been tolerable if it revealed something deeper about Springsteen's expression of masculinity.

Our usual image of Springsteen is a macho, rugged working man with an electric guitar strapped across his back. He's called "The Boss" afterall. However, the Springsteen we see in the movie is not a very tough guy. As a child, he is disinterested in his dad teaching him how to fight. In adulthood, he has commitment issues with Faye and spends his nights listening to music and composing acoustic songs in his bedroom alone. Creating a fictitious love interest has been explored in other biopics, but Faye's purpose in the film could have been improved to make her more than a shallow genre cliche.

Springsteen's relationship with his manager Jon Landau, played by Jeremy Strong '01, is where the movie seems most confined by tropes of the modern musician biopic. As Springsteen's manager, Landau's job is to defend "Nebraska" to the record executives. He defends Bruce wanting no singles, no tour and not wanting to appear on the album cover. Before we get to this scene, we see multiple moments of tension between Springsteen and Landau. Landau prefers the electric recordings to Springsteen's original acoustic recordings and urges him to release them first. Springsteen refuses, shelving the electric tracks for a later release which would eventually become the album "Born in the U.S.A."

Despite Landau's lukewarm support, the record executives remain unconvinced of its potential. As a track from the record plays, the record executive says "So are all of the tracks like this?" Landau responds in the affirmative. The record executive then replies, "So we don't have to listen to this anymore?" The album that is supposed to be the center of the film is made into a punching bag. I don't deny that a scene like that may have occurred in real life, but Landau's lackluster defense of "Nebraska" makes audiences unsure of who to side with: Springsteen or the suits.

If "Nebraska" was to be portrayed in such a way in this film, why not focus on the making of "Born in the U.S.A"? For a film that only takes place over two years of Springsteen's life, the overlapping yet shallow plotlines leave it unfocused. The most powerful parts of the film lie in the flashbacks to Springsteen's traumatic upbringing. They provide insight into his creative process in a way that other parts of the film fail to achieve. However, with a fictional romance subplot and a trite reliance on biopic tropes, the film wound up with more filler than needed.

I find it very brave of Springsteen to talk about his father's mental health struggles and tie it to his own struggles with depression and loneliness. Those moments were some of the most focused of the film. Allen White's performance as Springsteen is incredibly believable and raw. If the film was solely about this father-son dynamic, it could have been a much better, possibly groundbreaking biopic.

Many critics who've written about the film have asked: "Who is the intended audience?" The real question is: "What does this film want to be?" An exploration of a musician pushing himself to his mental limit? A father and son drama? A lament on the girl that got away? "Springsteen: Deliver Me from Nowhere" could have been so much more. "Nebraska" is an album worthy of more praise. Springsteen is an artist worthy of a better film.

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