

This is Good



This is Acting

Sia

★★★★

Sia set the bar high last year with her hit “Chandelier.” A top-10 single, it peaked at number eight on the Billboard Hot 100 and dominated the airwaves in late 2014 to early 2015.

So you’ve probably heard of Sia – but you may not know that Sia was initially known for her songwriting rather than her singing.

Although she had released songs prior to “Chandelier,” it wasn’t until last year that she established herself as a singer as well as a songwriter. Her powerful lyricism and her unique vocals are both showcased in her latest album, “This is Acting,” released on Jan. 29.

In an interview with New Musical Express, Sia revealed that she called the album “This is Acting” because “they are songs I was writing for other people... I didn’t go in thinking ‘this is something I would say.’ It’s more like play-acting.”

But that’s not to say that the music is not genuine. With her instantly recognizable voice, Sia adds her own unique twist to the album. Just as her previous album “1,000 Forms of Fear” focused on Sia’s struggles with alcoholism and bipolar disorder, there is an obvious theme with “This is Acting.” That theme – liberation from fear and insecurity – resounds in each and every song.

The first two songs on the album, “Bird Set Free” and “Alive,” were supposed to be for Adele. It’s a fact made obvious from the first listen; the opening piano notes in “Bird Set Free” sound eerily similar to Adele’s hit “Someone Like You,” and the steady background tempo in “Alive” parallels “Rolling in the Deep.” Nonetheless, Sia makes the songs her own with her raspy timbre and strangely appealing voice cracks. Along with the songs “Unstoppable,” “Cheap Thrills,” “Reaper” and “Fist Fighting a Sandstorm,” the theme of confidence rings loud and clear. In “Unstoppable,” Sia describes herself as “a Porsche with no brakes,” and in “Reaper,” she sings to Death, “no baby, not today.”

The album mainly deals with Sia regaining confidence, but those who enjoyed her previous tracks about depression and harmful love will still find something to enjoy. The songs “House on Fire,” “Broken Glass” and “Space Between” are more similar to the songs on “1,000 Forms of Fear” and speak of breakdowns due to toxic relationships.

Although some songs tell depressing stories of unhealthy relationships, listeners will be uplifted by the tracks “One Million Bullets,” “Footprints” and “Summer Rain,” all of which are significant departures from Sia’s usual tunes about abuse. Sia sings about separating herself from toxicity and finding herself through healthier love. Her vocal fry – that trademark croakiness of her voice – comes through strongly on “One Million Bullets,” but not annoyingly so. It’s the only song on the album that was not written for another artist.

“Move Your Body” and “Sweet Design,” on the other hand, were clearly written for different singers (Shakira and Jennifer Lopez, respectively). Their fast-paced tempos and Latin dance rhythms contrast sharply with the rest of the album, making them seem out of place. It’s perhaps my only criticism for “This is Acting,” as the rest of the songs tie in nicely together to form a cohesive work of art.

Sia’s strong delivery and powerful lyrics provide listeners with a triumphant experience – as I listened to Sia describe herself overcoming insecurity and finding freedom, I felt liberated as well. If you enjoy intense vocals and well-written songs, “This is Acting” is definitely for you.

The album is available on iTunes for \$9.99.

AMANDA KIM

STAFF WRITER

Land of the Free, Home of the Strange



Junior Amanda Kim

When I stepped on American soil three years ago, I figured I was in for a little culture shock because I had lived in Hong Kong my whole life; however, America was far more different than I had first expected.

Sometimes it seems like you guys (or should I say “y’all?”) do everything differently; from your food to your measuring system to even the

way you talk – seriously, what is soccer? I love it here, but you have to admit... Americans are really weird. Guys: what’s so hard about using the metric system? Everyone else does it. Why do you feel the need to be so special?

But America’s a big place, and I don’t have time to talk about everything wrong with it. Today I’m going to focus in on a place closer to all of us: Hockaday.

If you think American culture is weird, then Hockaday culture is even stranger. There’s one thing I’ll never understand about it, no matter how long I live here. Girls in Dallas spend hours putting on their makeup and straightening their hair and making sure they look pretty, but then they just go ahead and throw on a big T-shirt and some Nike shorts and trainers and leave the house.

Why? Why is this your

outfit of choice, Hockaday girls? See, where I come from, you dress up even if you’re going outside for only a few minutes. I know for certain Hong Kong isn’t unique in that aspect—even in New York, people wear nice clothing to go out. My sister goes to a university in New York and can verify this information. Really, it’s just a part of being a self-sufficient human being. Why is this such a hard concept for Hockaday girls to grasp?

Just when I think I’ve assimilated nicely into Hockaday culture, I have to return home for the summer and reunite with my Hong Kong friends. In Hong Kong, I’m constantly reminded of how odd Hockaday culture is. One time, I forgot that I wasn’t in Dallas, and I wore shorts and a T-shirt to go meet up with my friends. This is how that

fateful encounter went down:
Me: Hey guys! I’ve missed you! How is everyone?

My friends: Amanda. What are you wearing. You look homeless.

Me: Now I remember why I left Hong Kong.

Okay, but all joking aside, I really want to be a part of American society, but I’m not sure if I’ll ever fit in properly (hyphenated American, anyone?). I wish I could wave

around the American flag and chant USA! with frat bros and follow the @SorryIm-Texan twitter account, but alas, I cannot.

To be fair, I’m sure I seem plenty different to Americans. I say “trainers” instead of “sneakers” and I call it “football” not “soccer,” and I still don’t understand why hamburgers are called hamburgers (seriously—where is the ham?).

Maybe someday, 20 years from now, I’ll be able to sit back in my American chair in my American home and tell my future American child about whether or not Johnny Appleseed was a real person (I am still unsure of his existence), but for now I’ll have to be content with feeling out of place.



ILLUSTRATION BY LILY SUMROW

A ca-Awful



Pitch Perfect 2 Elizabeth Banks

★☆☆☆

Making a good sequel is difficult—especially for a comedy. The director has to find a way to make it as funny, if not funnier, than its prequel; the plot has to have the same kind of appeal without making it an exact copy and there needs to be a good balance between story and jokes.

All of these things are still no excuse for making a movie as terrible as “Pitch Perfect 2.”

Walking into the theater, I was prepared for the side-splitting laughs that the first movie gave me. Walking out, all I could think was, “I kind of hated that.”

The plot was cheesy, and if you lay it out, it’s hard to ignore the fact that “Pitch Perfect 2” has basically the same story as the original “Pitch Perfect”—the Barden Bellas suffer some kind of embarrassing performance and then have to repair their reputation by going against the odds and challenging a much better group in a big competition. The story is stunningly predictable yet still manages to not be as bad as the humor. Seriously: the whole thing where they put “a ca-” in front of other words has gotten old. It was funny in the original, but I was done hearing it by the sequel. Most of the other jokes felt immature and too forced, and it seemed like they were going for more gag humor than real jokes.

However, it wasn’t just the “a ca-” jokes that made me cringe. There’s a huge difference between being offensive and being funny, and it’s a difference that this movie fails to recognize. Sexist jokes are made constantly throughout, and every minority in the film is heavily stereotyped. The Latina girl, at one point, reveals herself to be an illegal immigrant, with multiple references to a troubled, terrifying childhood filled with drug-related crimes. The lesbian character is overtly sexual and seems to be physically incapable of looking at another girl without making a crude comment, and when the Indian a cappella group puts on an incredible show (performed by real-life a cappella group Penn Masala), the only thing the performance commentators have to say is a derogatory comment concerning Indian immigrants in the United States and how many jobs they supposedly steal. Note to Universal Studios: if the audience is groaning in unison every time you try to be funny, you’re failing.

Along with these distasteful “jokes” comes a plethora of celebrity cameos, including Barack and Michelle Obama, Snoop Dogg, the Green Bay Packers and Pentatonix. Unfortunately for Elizabeth Banks, putting cool people in your movie doesn’t make your movie cool.

The film’s soundtrack is catchy and upbeat, with the perfect blend of easily recognizable pop classics and everyone’s favorite recent chart-toppers. The soundtrack is responsible for the only star I’ve given the movie. But not even the greatest of mash-ups could make this movie more than a money-hungry bigot that left me feeling exhausted and almost physically ill after nearly two hours of subpar plot lines and juvenile jokes.

There are a lot of bad comedy sequels: “Mean Girls 2,” “Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel” and “Evan Almighty,” to name a few. “Pitch Perfect 2” fits perfectly on that list. **F**

AMANDA KIM
STAFF WRITER