

3D WORLD ALBUM OF THE YEAR

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**KANYE
WEST**

*My
Beautiful
Dark
Twisted
Fantasy*

PARENTAL
ADVISORY
EXPLICIT CONTENT

FREE

ALBUM OF THE YEAR

KANYE WEST

My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy

(Roc-A-Fella Records/Universal)



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It's often bandied about that The Beatles' *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and Nirvana's *Nevermind* are the only two albums of the "rock'n'roll" age to put a full stop on their respective musical eras and change the game entirely. Just a month after its release it's perhaps too early to call whether Kanye West's *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* will inspire a whole new generation of musicians to self-righteously invade stages at awards ceremonies, open a Twitter account for stream-of-consciousness ramblings and spend a year of their lives crafting some of the most progressive, self-confessional hip hop jams ever made, but one thing is certain – not since Radiohead's *OK Computer* in 1997, or at a stretch its still mystifying 2000 successor *Kid A*, have so many overwhelmingly fawning column inches been dedicated to one body of work.

"This stuff really is Picasso-like, fulfilling the Cubist mandate of rearranging form, texture, color and space to suggest new ways of viewing things," *Los Angeles Times*' Ann Powers gushed. *Pitchfork*'s Ryan Dombal called it "a blast of surreal pop excess that few artists are capable of creating, or even willing to attempt" on the way to handing out the hipster portal's first 10/10 review for a new release since Wilco's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* in 2002. Even *3D World*'s own Cyclone got in on the act, declaring "West articulates an existentialist hip hop. Obama's 'jackass', and Dubya's nemesis, authors a meta-commentary – he's a hip hop Borges." US Presidents and obscure Argentinean writers aside, what West was able to do was combine widescreen ambition with pop accessibility, call in a top-heavy guest cast of producers and voices which never feels over-stuffed and throw it all at a wall stuck together with glue labeled "Important".

"Could we get much higher?" coos Yes frontman Jon Anderson (sampled from Mike Oldfield's *In High Places*) on opener *Dark Fantasy*'s hook, and over the ensuing 68-plus minutes the sky is, indeed, the limit. West's choice of samples aren't just there to serve the songs (which they do superbly) but also appear to signpost where he's positioning himself as an artist – swiping ideas from iconoclasts like King Crimson, Gil Scott-Heron and Richard James (aka Aphex Twin) can't just be pure coincidence, nor can recontextualising the vocal hook from Black Sabbath's paranoia-heavy *Iron Man* into a refrain of "No more drugs for me, pussy and religion is all I need" on *Hell Of A Life*.

But lofty goals and weighty themes would count for nothing if the songs weren't up to scratch, and *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* delivers at every turn. Nicki Minaj steals not just the show but the entire album with her electrifying star maker minute on *Monster* (no mean feat given Jay-Z and Rick Ross also unleash hell on the same cut), Rihanna's triumphant chorus on *All Of The Lights* (that's Elton John you'll hear tinkling the ivories) is the lighter/mobile phone-waving *Empire State Of Mind* of 2010, West alongside Swizz Beatz, Jay-Z, Pusha T, Prynce Cy Hi and The RZA comprise one of hip hop's most formidable posesses ever on *So Appalled* – hell, even Chris Rock and Salma Kenas' two-and-a-half minute phone conversation about, umm, pussy reupholstering at the tail-end of *Blame Game* sounds like genius.

But it's Kanye West conducting this grand affair and *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* certainly is a grand statement. Only time will tell whether it's a full stop on popular music, but as it stands it's one impressive exclamation mark.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS



2. LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

This Is Happening (DFA/EMI)

"A song like *I Can Change* [is] not about thinking you can change, it's more about being pathetic, being sung from the position of what you do and how you act when you feel desperate." James Murphy (LCD Soundsystem), *3D World* #1042.

"...oozes with timely modernism that falls well short of hipster bandwagon jumping." Chris Yates, *3D World* #1011.



3. MOUNT KIMBIE

Crooks And Lovers
(Hotflush Recordings/Inertia)

"For those unfamiliar with the pair's sound, it's all about the texture and ambience. Far from the cold, precise and clinical high-impact assault of dubstep, the tracks across this album have much

more in common with Boards Of Canada, Fennesz, Four Tet or Burial." Brad Swob, *3D World* #1032.