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BY I SEE YOU FAMILY MEDIA

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Good Music: My Review — Westside Whimsy

Jhéné Aiko · 2026 · 20 Tracks

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Cut Times · A Music Education Editorial

Jhéné Aiko's new album *Westside Whimsy* is an incredible album that is no skips from start to finish. This is notably her first full length project since 2020's *Chilombo*. It's characterized as something that describes her heartbreak journey, but honestly I look at this as a healing journey. The lyrics recognize the phases of grief, loss, lessons learned, progression, and ultimately her perspective now. Through music, therapy and healing can come through many venues.

Track 1 — Wild Cat(s)

The lyrics speak for themselves. "I'm adapting, emotionally detaching / I guess that is just what happens / When you're raised by a brave Aquarian woman / Married to a Sage / And when I say Sage, I really mean Sag' / Unhinged like my dad is, if anyone asks / I speak my mind, it's only a matter of time, if / You decide to cross the line, it won't be safe / 'Cause I was raised in a pack of wildcats / Who couldn't be tamed." Now within this I look at this from many lenses and perspectives and the lines that stick out are "I'm adapting, emotionally detaching" and "Unhinged like my dad is, if anyone asks I speak my mind, it's only a matter of time, if you decide to cross the line, it won't be safe" — lyrics that speak for themselves, raw, real, and authentic towards the vulnerable space we hear as the radio turns between frequencies through the entire track, another metaphor of the changing and adapting channels. From this opening track, I knew this would be something special.

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Track 2 — Ghost

This album has lots of intentional space in the mixes, reverb, delays that give it depth and for intentional reasons that I cannot wait to learn more about for myself as a fan and listener to this music. *Ghost* is filled with authentic

guitar, minor melodic progression, lots of space in the mix, intentional octaves, simplistic arrangement. Lyrics speak of things like this — “I’m going ninety on the 90 / I’m tryna leave the past behind me / Not tryna let the pain define me, but it always find me / It’s all that I know, all that I know / All that I know, now I am a ghost / It’s all that I knew, it’s all that I knew / It’s all that I knew, I’m stuck in a loop (Stuck in a loop)” — the repeat, the echo, it’s impressive to talk about the growth from the lyrics of the second verse that talk about her handling grief, problems, reflection, and solutions herself — “I got a vision for myself / I gotta get it for myself / I gotta listen to myself / In competition with myself / This is between me and myself / I don’t need help, I need myself / I take my L’s all by myself / Nobody else, it’s just myself / I gotta handle it myself / I’ve been mishandling myself” — who are we, where are we going, what did we learn. This album is a journey to itself.

Track 3 — Break

“I can’t escape the heartbreak, break, break / I can’t explain the way I’ve been made to feel / It’s an immeasurable pain, pain, pain / And I’m not even sure any of it’s real.” This describes the progression from how Wild Cat(s) started to identify where we started, to Ghost speaking on the cycles of being stuck, now the facing of reality — heartbreak has happened and I cannot escape the feelings I feel. Verse 2 speaks of the cycle of thought we have in this phase of the journey — “Take your space, take your sweet time / Make me wait, make up your mind / If it’s fate, if it’s in our design / I’ll be yours and you’ll be mine” — where things are now, isn’t it, but if it’s fate, it will happen. But right now I definitely need my space, the break is needed, where we are now I need to escape how I feel in this. Lyrically this album is progressing through very complex feelings that from reading initial posts and threads, I’m uncertain if fans are consuming the depth of this journey Jhéné is showing us.

Track 4 — Love Bomb

“I ain’t even like you, put you in the friendzone / You stood on your ten toes, now you in the endzone / That wasn’t the end goal, I had to respect that / Startin’ to regret that, damn.” The cadence of this song featuring Ab-Soul is quite indicative of the emotions behind love bombing — the timing of the singing is actually placed in front of the beat. I’m certain it is intentional to show the tension of the feeling. Love bombing does not always feel comfortable — often times it can come from an anxious place to get someone in your life, or so I have been told. The musicality of it all, adlibs of the boom boom in the background, the pulling of tension from the lyricism being on the front end of the music is quite genius and beautifully produced.

Track 5 — Ceiling (freestyle)

“The only way to fix it is to end it / But I don’t know if you can comprehend it / I can’t spend another day pretending / No, I don’t got no business with you / You’d rather ask forgiveness than permission / I’d rather be with someone who just gets it / ‘Cause you told me that this time, it’d be different / But I ain’t see no difference in you, uh.” Verse one speaks of the reality of what we need to do, face, to tell the truth about how we feel. The pre-chorus speaks to this as well — “That isn’t right, I step aside, I let it slide / I dim my light so that you can shine brighter, ooh.” The realities of dimming one’s light to allow another to shine is one that’s resonated with many, especially talking about the relationship space. This is powerful, and so many great gems from this song speak to her journey of what she feels. Like stated, this freestyle is a journal. The last line is a statement, a jab, a harder hitting truth many won’t understand — “But you the type of (expletive) only a mother can make / When they daddy don’t stay.” This speaks to so much more than who the person is, but how they were raised, their values played out in real time and how it affected her direct relationship.

Track 6 — Nothing Nice to Say

What I love about this track is it shows the restraint that we often have at the end of relationships where the chorus says, gotta let this fade away. Gotta let this fade away, so I’ve been slipping. Where this track points to a lot

of growth as we navigate on the other side of relationships is — I have been thinking about a lot of things that I could say, choosing not to say them. I know enough information about you to end you, but I'm going to be quiet. I don't want to lose my mind. I've given more than I can afford. And now I'm running out of reasons to believe in something I cannot endure. Gotta let this fade away. This song truly takes a look at how you can choose to have the energy to do something to them. You could choose to have the energy to get your revenge. You could choose to have the energy to say the things that you know will truly be impactful in a negative way towards them. And you absolutely choose not to, to protect yourself, keep your energy together. Gotta let this feeling flee because it's emotions. And that is what Nothing Nice to Say means to me.

Track 7 — He Belongs

Lyrics talk about he belongs to the streets, he belongs to every woman he meets, he belongs to the people, but he don't belong to me. A lot of people listening to this song would think that she is specifically talking about her last heartbreak. In examining this entire album, I truly do believe that this song talks about another layer of the grief, another layer of fleeting emotions that we may feel in the midst of heartbreak — going from the very beginning of this is how I'm feeling, this is raw emotion, to that anger, that resentment, that hey, when I reflect on everything, when I take a look at the totality of it, everybody had them, they don't belong to nobody, this person lacks loyalty. This person is not to be taken seriously. "Can't turn a fling into a real thing. Can't turn a promise to a wedding ring. Can't turn a hoe into a husband. Yeah, I know you thought it, but he wasn't. Can't turn a nice guy into a good guy. Can't turn a liar to a good man. Get another man, maybe f his friend. Baby, understand that he belongs to the streets." I truly take a look at this song to characterize emotions that we have oftentimes when we're going through the grief of getting over things, when we're getting over people and having the understanding of, yeah, they no longer belong to me. They belong to the streets. This is how I honestly feel in this moment. I truly believe that every single track on this album had to do with a different type of emotion that she went through, not only through this relationship, but in many others. And it's a reflection of how she's expressing her feelings and getting over this particular relationship.

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Track 8 — Like Whatever ft. Tyga

What I love about how she started this song is the lyrics — "I'm carrying on like I can't do wrong because I can't do no wrong. Been staying at home and laying alone and making my drink too strong. Bridges were burned, but lessons were learned, so I'm still grateful. It's just whatever, like whatever, yeah." This is the stage where you mope. This is the stage where you are feeling through your feelings. You've gotten past the point of resentment. You've gotten past the point of initial hurt. You've gotten past the point of initial pain. And you're just like, hey, it's whatever. I'm here, I'm chilling. I may be thinking through a lot of things. I'm not gonna say anything. I'm not in the anger point. I'm more so in a different point of grief where you don't really have much to say, but you're just chilling. I've been out the way, I've been MIA, mi casa su casa, I don't want no problems. Please only bring positive vibes. She's talking about within this song, I want the peace, I wanna chill, I'm not going anywhere, I'm not doing anything, I'm chilling by myself and it's like whatever. This talks about the moping, the feeling of heartbreak, like a part of you is gone, but you have no idea what to do with it. This is truly where she's examining her feelings, like I'm not celebrating anything, I'm just chilling back. It is like whatever. I'm just doing me.

Track 9 — You

This track goes through a lot of the feelings that we may feel. You've gotten past the numbness and now you're like, okay, is this who I want? Is it you? Is it me? You're reflecting on all the different things. "I find it really strange how you always complain. When I do my thing, then accept it when you do the same. What kind of backwards thing? You don't live what you're preaching. I got a million reasons why you're not that guy. Gotta say goodbye. And I know you know why, exactly why it's you. It ain't me, it's you, you. Damn fool, it's you." She's pointing to, there are so many things I've thought through in this time. And these are the particular reasons why. And they have to do with how I'm feeling, how you're making me feel, how you've made me feel. And I have clarity that it is you that is making me feel this particular way.

Track 10 — Don't Be That Guy

This track is very different. It reminds me of a drum backbeat, a I-VI-II-V. It's very interesting. Within the production of it, it's different than the other ones where it seemed very West Coast. It would remind me more so of something like a Summer Walker, even taking it way back more so to a Corinne Bailey Rae. Of course, the drums would be very different, but it's a chord progression similar to "Call Me When You Get This." The lyrics — "I see you watching from the trees. Who are you? I know the leaves fall in October. I couldn't let this fall on my shoulders. You know that I'm the one. You can't get over till it'll make more sense when you're sober. Well, I got you walking on a leash while your dogs are tapping in with me. It was barely a fling, so I'm asking you, please, don't be that guy." When I look at this track, it specifically looks at people that are lurking from the background. They're checking on social media. They're seeing what you're doing. They may be engaging to kind of check your stories. They may be looking in the distance and are constantly trying to have reminders of like, hey, I messed up. Hey, I'm sorry. Trying to work their way back into your life. And you're like, hey, I'm not crying over you. Your friends are checking in on me, but I'm good. Don't be that guy who is continuously trying to come back. You knew what you had. You knew you messed up. And now I'm moving on. This is a huge step in the album. It's a huge stepping stone that really looks at where we get to beyond that point. Don't be that person that's continuing to lurk. Don't be that person that's continuing to look over my shoulder to see what I'm doing. I'm living my life. Don't be the guy who's continuing to try and be here in my face and looking from the trees or the distance or through other people because I'm moving on. We had an understanding of exactly what we're doing, but don't be that guy. I'm good and I'm moving on.

Side B — The Exhale

Track 11 — Lullaby

"Love is a sinking ship. It's a deep decision. It's an inevitable collision. It's a curse. And it hurts even worse when you're not in it. Don't fall in it, lullaby. Rather close my eyes than see you leave my side, lullaby. Oh, I love you, goodbye, lullaby." I think this is beautiful because it's the recognition of you're telling me what you need. I know what love is and what it can be. I tried to downplay even more the way that it was, but "I'd rather close my eyes than see you leave my side" is probably the line that sticks out to me the most within this. The way that she is singing on this track, there is no beat. We got a low synth bass, more like an 808 bass, and we got pads that she's singing over. And it is very, very laid back. I love the lo-fi feel to this track. The album itself is very eclectic in every single aspect of how it is produced. The way that she'll sing la la la la la la bye. Last line, oh I love you, goodbye. I think these tracks are really moving towards the healing, towards where she's truly desiring to be and where she ultimately gets in the end of the album. Beautiful track.

Track 12 — Neighbors ft. Larry June

Very jazzy. Another lo-fi type beat. You got drums, side stick, very, very laid back. The bass, drums, keys. The keys are tuned down. It's beautiful. She's singing very jazzy, moving melismatically with the piano. "You know it is just the way I like. I could tell your mama raised you right. All I feel is love at first sight. I can't lie though, I try to fight. I can't deny the butterflies. It's too late, my mind's made up." What I like about this track is it gives the feeling that we have as we're getting over somebody to then meet somebody new and find that new exciting feeling. What does that feel like when, whether they're a neighbor literal or figurative, you find somebody and then you're thinking through things like, all I feel is love at first sight. I can't lie, though I try to fight it. I can't deny these butterflies. It's too late. My mind's made up. The feeling of knowing that your emotions are now conflicted because you're getting over somebody and now being at a point where you're like, oh, dang, I'm seeing something new and this feels good. I wouldn't even be surprised if she eventually would change this song name to Butterflies instead of Neighbors, but I love the song. She sang very well on this track. You're seeing even more opening up than you typically would see her. Usually Jhéné opens up more so like this live than on the track, but seeing her move in the jazzy way, melismatically with the piano sample is incredible.

Track 13 — Mine

Very simple. Starts off with guitar, just a very major IV, major I progression. Nothing crazy. "Head down, bon appétit. I know you're hungry for me. I've been what you wanted, what you need." This track goes beyond the innuendos of what the beginning could be and what it infers. But I think it goes beyond to now it's like, man, I met somebody from the last track. I got the butterflies. And then now, dang, you are somebody that I am bonding with. I see it. I'm not going anywhere. It's long distance, yeah. But the lines that really stick out for me are — you're the type of guy my mama would love, my babies would like, I think we're supposed to spend life. It could be, like towards the end, glad you're mine. And the way that I think about it is I think this is the beginning of the exhale and to be on the other side of the heartbreak. I'm glad that it's a 20 track album because it feels like a double album where the first 10 tracks were, hey, these are all my heartbreaks and the things that I'm getting over. And then we switch up and go from there to track 11, where we get to Lullaby, where it is very much, I'm on the other side of this. I've grieved the first 10 tracks. Don't be that guy, track number 10, where you are continuing to lurk because I'm trying to move on. And now this whole other side is completely, I am moving on, on the other side of everything that I need to be. At first when I examined and saw that it was 20 tracks before hearing it, I was excited. I hoped that it was not excessive. And I've seen many artists have 20 track albums that seem very excessive. And I'm glad that she made this in a way that was very much needed. It shows the progression and journey of what she's doing.

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Track 14 — So Good ft. Kendrick Lamar

This next track is of course one of my favorites because Kendrick Lamar is one of my favorite artists of all time. I will say that unbiasedly. From the very beginning, you got Kendrick Lamar singing and sounding similar to a lot of work that he's done, but very much resembling a lot of work that he did with GNX. "Face stupid, body stupid, hottie stupid, got me stupid. Beauty and the brains, hey, what we doing? Money out here, baby, you look so good. Sinful but godly, I got you, you got me. I want you, you look so good." I think this song really talked about, similar to the last track, all of the different things that people could say when you're trying to move on and go with somebody else, things that people could have rumors and lies and spread on. But now So Good is like, hey, forget anybody else. I'm

out here. I look good. I'm doing this. I'm out here and truly moving in a way where I look good. I know that I'm good. I'm out here. Let's get it. It is the confidence building that I truly believe changes the tide of where she's at. Hey, I've moved on, I found somebody else, I'm doing my thing. Now I look so good. I'm out here, let's make it happen. I truly believe that this is the track that points to where the rest of the album is gonna go. And that is a beautiful thing.

Track 15 — Beach Boy

She starts with lyrics like, it's talking about going to the island. "Island hop away, oh yeah. We could just pack our bags and go on cruise control because I need me a beach boy who knows how to ride when the tide is too high at night. And I need you to teach me, boy, how to ride it at night with a groove under the moonlight. I hope it's okay that I've been watching you all day. I really just had to say, your drop-in's crazy. I've been here since five, just wanted to catch the sunrise. But now I think we're synchronized, synchronizing good vibrations." The song is talking about finding that person that is obviously talking about water, but having so many different innuendos on what this could mean. Someone that you can teach, someone that is like, hey, you're gonna ride with me when the tide is high, when we're going through stuff. You with me, you going through things, but also you can teach me some things. I can teach you some things. The song is filled with innuendos on what a beach boy means. Having somebody new, having somebody that is, hey, I'm watching you, you're watching me, but also you can ride with me. The innuendos will tell even more with the song as well.

Track 16 — Unicorn

"I don't want to wait, no way. I ain't got the time to waste. Trying to let you ride my wave. Gotta get you on my wave. Let's go slow. We'll find a way to make a great escape. Let's go low. Unicorn lover, only you and I know. If love is an island, only you and I can go. And wouldn't it be nice in our very own paradise, like la di da di da forever, whatever we want." This song is continuing on from Beach Boy, but talking about even more specifically the unicorn. Within the context of dating and relationships, a lot of people talk about unicorn people being somebody that is very unique. You have these characteristics, these stylings, this personality, this style and how you carry yourself. People will say, hey, that is a unicorn. So this unicorn person is the person that she wants specifically for herself. Unicorn lover, only you and I know. Only you and I know how I desire to be loved. Only you and I know how you desire to be seen, heard, felt, and in all these particular ways. This song continues to talk about the second half of her finding that love, but also this song is specifically talking about finding that unicorn, finding that person that is specifically, this is what I want, this is exactly how I want it, this is the type of person that I want and how I'm going to be dealing with my life, or at least for right now.

Track 17 — I Don't Mind

"You flew here, we grew here, you're new here. Be cool here, you're too weird, don't do that here. You don't have to make your way out. I don't know what else to say, all that sucker stuff, stay out the way. I got my whole crew here sipping on some soju. Got something to show you. Don't move. I just got an old school writing in my old school. Please don't mention old dude, old news. So I'm liable to pop out. I don't mention when you ride. I'm down to drive. I don't mind when you drive. I'm down to ride. Westside whimsy in me. I can feel the envy when I step inside a room." This song is truly her stepping into her confidence. Hey, I'm out here. If I decide to step out, this is exactly what I'm on. If this is the stylings of how I wanna move, that's exactly how I'm going to move. Don't mention my past, because everything's about my future. This is who I am. This is all the stuff that I'm doing. I love it.

Track 18 — Nami's Haiku

“Daughter of the wave, crash against my shore and then carry me away. Carry me through, carry me through all my lonely days, clearer than any mirror with beauty that makes me tear up. You’re my child, but still remember the mistakes that I have made should not get in your way. They’re not your way to carry. And even when it’s scary, know that I’ll always be here flowing through your veins.” I love this because it’s truly reflective in talking about what she’s going through, her relationships, what her daughter may have seen, anything that is going on. It’s beautiful because it truly encapsulates what we miss. The unintended consequences of failed relationships are the effects of how it makes the child feel. Hey, child of mine, this is how I view you. This is how I love you. This is how I carry you. Don’t look at this failed relationship as an indictment upon this. Don’t carry this. This is how I view my life. This is how I want you to look at me. Let’s continue on. Let’s move forward. I love it. It brings true value and reflection, not only on her, not only on her failed relationship, but also on how she believes and knows that it affected her child as well. Beautiful.

Track 19 — A Living Light

“Every night I die, every morning born again. Through the day I try to remember who I am. I am a living light, a dying star, the everlasting word of God, all the embracing love, the all embracing love for all, with open arms and open heart. I can see my reflection and I hope you can see it too. Look into my eyes. Can you see the light coming from inside? It’s awfully bright. We can share the light.” This is beautiful, it’s very poetic, and another song just like after Nami’s Haiku, where it is truly reflective, talking about her dying, being born again, reflecting on her faith, reflecting on her journey, talking about where she is, how it’s helping her to grow, and what is next. As consumers, we may look at this song and truly think that it’s just about one relationship, but I truly believe it is her being reflective on relationships that she continues to carry, both failed and successful, and how she may view them, how it affects her child, and how it affects her life moving forward. This is a beautiful journey from the first half being about the heartbreak and the reflection of how it truly carried her, but then also the healing journey over the next 11 tracks. Beautiful message, beautiful music. Lyrics like, I can see my reflection in you and I hope you can see it too. Look into my eyes. She is looking at her future. She’s looking at her legacy, looking at her family, looking at anybody around them. I can see you. I can see the reflection of how you are living your life and I’m letting you know that you are a living light. It is in me, it is in you too because I’m not who I was yesterday. I’m born again. Beautiful.

Track 20 — Golden Coast ft. OHMA

Last track, starting with guitar. It’s only a minute and 30 seconds long. We have the radio in the background, just like how we started. Very simple, no beat, singing over it. “I still think you’re beautiful, even though your golden coast is filled with ashes. I don’t think the people know how deep down the spirit’s flowing through your canyons. Wonderful and wonderlust, you still got a lot of love. Angels still get lost from time to time, shining through your darkest nights. You still got a lot of light. You’re still a classic, magic every time. Girl, you know it still. Still got it, still got it, oh, you still got it. Girl, you know you still got it.” The reason why I truly love this track is it wraps up what is an emotion-filled journey of Jhéné Aiko on this album. But most importantly, it shows exactly where she’s been and exactly where she’s going. Her ending the album with the radio sounds and frequencies, just like how it started, it shows the completion of the journey. But not the completion of the journey to say that the journey is ended, but that it is continuing. The completion of the journey is the project. It is, hey, this is where I am right now. But as anyone who has gone through relationships, heartbreaks, relationship failures, and lessons learned, she’s reflective and saying, through everything, I still got it. I’m still going to be all right, and I’m still going to be exactly where I need to be.

And that is the message I take away as I listen to Westside Whimsy. I take a listen to someone who is so reflective within their journey that they go through the process of all of the different aspects of grieving, emotions, overcoming heartbreak, turmoil, the thoughts and feelings of crashing out, what to do in the midst of it. And then once you get to that wit's end and you get to the end of you, finding your place of rebuilding yourself, having that confidence, the track with Kendrick Lamar, going through so many aspects of finding you, meeting somebody new, wanting to make sure that it's not what it was, trusting in the spark. Can you trust in this? Riding the wave. We're going to the beach. The next track, the lullaby. So many aspects of this album show the range of emotion that was put into the writing, the production, and the artistry.

I love this album because it is a complete work from start to finish. 20 tracks that truly encapsulate what many fail to articulate within the genre of R&B.; We are really great about talking about heartbreak. We're really great about talking about love. I do not believe that as a whole, R&B; does a great job talking about the totality of the journey — from when we fall in love, we fall out of love, and what happens in between. We are great about writing songs about the extremes on one or the other, but Jhéné Aiko has put together a complete work that needs to be studied and truly examined even the more because it is more than just about her relationship with Big Sean. It is about how she views relationships moving forward, and it's a reflective tool that many can study on how Jhéné Aiko truly examined her journey.

And just like Kendrick Lamar's work, Mr. Morale & The Big Steppers, I truly believe this is Jhéné Aiko's work that encapsulates this is my heart, this is my vulnerability, this is my journey, because she did not have to bring us in it, but I'm glad that she did.



Daniel James Felton

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