

Nicki Minaj Reclaims Her Throne On 'Queen'

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Nicki Minaj attends the Heavenly Bodies: Fashion & The Catholic Imagination Costume Institute Gala at The Metropolitan Museum of Art on May 7, 2018 in New York City.

For practically a decade, [Nicki Minaj](#) has existed on an island. Many felt it was one of her own making. On the contrary, it was merely a reflection of the on-goings of male-driven hip-hop in the early Aughts where women were celebrated yet hardly given ample room to grow.

Minaj's second mixtape, 2008's *Sucka Free*, set a subtle tone for what her future would bring, and with the blink of an eye it was 2010 and she was a full-fledged Young Money star with debut album *Pink Friday*. In the midst of the Barbie madness, the barriers to entry were still unusually high for women at the time, planting Nicki on that aforementioned island. Sure, we had a number of prominent female rappers swimming in hip-hop's undercurrent, yet at the mainstream level it was just Nicki wading along. She paddled right into the pop space, hanging with Madonna, Beyoncé, and later

Ariana Grande. Yet by the time she turned back around to see what hip-hop was doing in her absence, a new crop of female talent was growing in the space, arguably eclipsing at times what she thought she had a firm grasp on.

It's a harsh reality to face, though her fifth studio album *Queen* reinforces exactly what it is that Minaj uniquely brings to the table that no other rapper, male or female, can touch.



Earlier in the year, Minaj dropped off tracks ["Chun-Li"](#) and ["Barbie Tingz,"](#) yet only the former made the cut on *Queen*. It was a wise decision, as "Chun-Li" was clearly the stronger of the two, and the very obvious ethos of the project is to show Nicki's undeniable rap capabilities while still proving she's a pop princess. She succeeds at both fairly seamlessly.

The opener "Ganja Burns" exemplifies this return to form, where Minaj drops lines like "all my power's back, now I'm scary to zombies" on the rhythmic track, highlighting that she's here to reclaim her spot. It's a prevalent theme on *Queen*, as other cuts like "Hard White" show Nicki sending subliminal messages like "I'm who they wishin' to be / These hoes is on the 'gram, Nicki pitchin' the ki / 'Bout to cop Neverland, Michael up in the tree / You got bars and still broke? You might as well took the plea" and "I ain't ever have to strip to get the pole position" over a menacing Boi-1da and !llmind beat. It doesn't take a rap genius to know who she's referencing within those lines, but challenging her opponents, both real and theoretical, has been something Minaj been doing for years.

Major standout "Barbie Dreams" flips the Notorious B.I.G.'s "Dreams" with rappers and athletes and no one is safe --not even Drake. Of course Nicki also reps for the pop constituent, bringing Ariana Grande into "Bed" and The Weeknd on "Thought You Knew" while punctuating her rapping with singing on "Nip Tuck" and "Come See About Me."



Minaj also enlists Foxy Brown for some gruffly patois-tinged bars on “Coco Chanel.” It’s not an unlikely pairing considering the two only really cosign each other, but the power of that cameo may fly over younger artists’ heads who aren’t hip to the legendary Brown or even the legacy of Biggie. A nod to the late Prodigy of Mobb Deep on “Hard White” may also slip under the radar, subtly proving that maybe Nicki didn’t release this album for a fair-weather millennial crowd.

Keeping the trap happy on “Sir” with Future and “Chun Swae” with Swae Lee -- as well as “LLC” and “Miami” -- Minaj leaves no stone unturned in showcasing every one of her strengths.

Queen arguably runs a little long: its 17 tracks (plus an interlude and outro) feel like a lot in the midst of Kanye West’s newly adopted 21-minute album business model. But for an artist like Minaj, who had the top spot locked for years, it’s only right that she would serve numerous examples of her skills on her theoretical comeback project.

You can’t really call this a comeback, though. Nicki Minaj has been and will continue to be omnipresent, yet in an age where someone new enters the space and social media opts to “cancel” the predecessor (almost always involving two women), an album like *Queen* is necessary. This isn’t a project to annihilate the competition since the island is now well-occupied. *Queen* exists to exemplify Nicki’s proven longevity, which is enough of a rarity to finally declare her as well-deserved rap royalty.