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# Promise That You Will Sing About Me: Kendrick Lamar and Posterity

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Sometimes the quietest moments turn out to have the loudest repercussions. This is true of twenty-eight-year-old rapper Kendrick Lamar, whose musical career has been defined by subtle surprise and incredible reception. Kendrick Lamar's music makes headlines. Of his three studio albums, one received an unanticipated Grammy nomination, one leaked a week ahead of schedule (and brought Kendrick five Grammys), and one released with no warning. . But the musing Kendrick poses is this: "I hope that at least one of you sing about me when I'm gone; Am I worth it? Did I put enough work in?"<sup>1</sup> Kendrick Lamar deserves long-term academic respect, admiration, and investigation because of his performance abilities, lyrical complexity, musical innovation within the rap genre, and his recognition by both critics and fans.

Kendrick Lamar Duckworth has been rapping since he was thirteen years old.<sup>2</sup> Born in Compton, California in 1987, Kendrick was raised by parents who moved to Los Angeles to escape gang-oriented neighborhoods in their native Chicago. Unfortunately, shortly afterwards, Compton turned into one of the most violent neighborhoods in North America, forcing Kendrick to grow up in that environment. At school in Los Angeles, Kendrick discovered poetry in seventh grade, thanks to an English teacher.<sup>3</sup> He began writing profusely, and discovered he was good at it. As a rapper, he was good enough to get signed to a record label at the age of sixteen under the moniker "K-Dot." He began working with Top Dawg Entertainment in Los Angeles, producing music himself and rapping over tracks produced by Top Dawg Entertainment's in-house production team, Tha Bizness. He remained

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<sup>1</sup> Duckworth, Kendrick Lamar, writer. *Sing About Me/Dying of Thirst*. Kendrick Lamar. Dr. Dre, 2012, MP3.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmed, Insanul. "Kendrick Lamar Interview: Turn the Page 2014 Cover Story | Complex." *Complex.com*. August/September 2014. Accessed February 17, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Eels, Josh. "The Trials of Kendrick Lamar. (cover story)." *Rolling Stone* no. 1231 (March 26, 2015): 40.

unknown to the public at large for a while afterwards until 2012, when he released his platinum-selling album *Good Kid, m.A.A.d City* with Aftermath and Interscope Records.<sup>4</sup> It was for this album that Kendrick was first known, but since then, Kendrick has become known as a performer as well. He has toured with a variety of other large artists before headlining his own. Kendrick has shown up on a variety of stages since the release of *To Pimp A Butterfly*, including performances on *The Colbert Report*, *Saturday Night Live!*, the *Ellen* show, *Jimmy Fallon*, the BET Awards, and the Grammy Awards. Complex Magazine considers him to be one of the “Greatest of All Time”.<sup>5</sup> He is one of the top ten rappers of all time, according to Billboard<sup>6</sup> and Best Rapper Alive according to Complex in 2016.<sup>7</sup>

In performances, audiences know Kendrick as an individual with a message. For example, in his 2015 BET Awards performance, he performed his Grammy-Award winning single, “Alright,” live on television. While the lyrics of the song are a cultural statement all by themselves, he performed atop a damaged police car. The statement was not, as *Fox News* anchor Geraldo Rivera stated, to “incite violence” but to draw attention to systemic racism and police brutality.<sup>8</sup> In 2016, at the annual Grammy Awards Show, Kendrick showed up on stage dressed in prison clothes with handcuffs on and performed one of his untitled tracks from March’s *untitled.unmastered*.<sup>9</sup> The goal was to expose cultural bias and fight against systemic racism.

Within hip hop, Kendrick is associated with his lyrical prowess and depth in reflecting his daily life experiences in a relatable, yet poetic way. Moreover, Kendrick has broken out of the hip hop world into the

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<sup>4</sup> "Kendrick Lamar." Interscope Records. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://www.interscope.com/kendricklamar/videos>.

<sup>5</sup> Ahmed, Insanul. "The Best Rapper Alive, Every Year Since 1979." Complex. January 5, 2016. Accessed April 25, 2016. <http://www.complex.com/music/2016/01/the-best-rapper-alive-every-year-since-1979/>.

<sup>6</sup> Billboard Staff. "Best Rappers List | Greatest of All Time | Billboard." Billboard. December 11, 2015. Accessed April 25, 2016. <http://www.billboard.com/photos/6723017/the-10-best-rappers-of-all-time/1>.

<sup>7</sup> Ahmed, Insanul. "The Best Rapper Alive, Every Year Since 1979."

<sup>8</sup> Minsker, Evan. "Fox News Pundits Claim Kendrick Lamar's BET Awards Performance 'Incites Violence'" Pitchfork. June 30, 2015. Accessed March 21, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> NPR Staff. "Kendrick Lamar: 'I Can't Change The World Until I Change Myself First'" NPR. December 29, 2015. Accessed February 17, 2016.

mainstream in a way that other rappers haven't, due to his lyrical capacities. Some colleges even offer classes to study 2012's *Good Kid, m.A.A.d City* as a literary work, such as "Good Kids, Mad Cities" at Georgia Regent University.<sup>10</sup> The classes analyze his lyrics and compare them to literary works by James Joyce and James Baldwin.<sup>11</sup> Kendrick is operating on a different level of poetic composition than his peers. This allows audiences to handle his lyrics as poetry; beginning with his much less known debut *Section.80* from 2011, Kendrick Lamar has been making concept albums—each record is a full piece of art that tells a story. Kendrick is far from the first to make concept albums. The Beatles were one of the first rock groups to do so, followed by Pink Floyd (and preceded by every program symphony and opera before it). But no concept album since the 1980s has done as well as *Good Kid, m.A.A.d City*.

All Kendrick's music is autobiographical—his music not only reflects his life experience and philosophy, but is his life experience and philosophy. Kendrick's *Good Kid, m.A.A.d City* tells the story of his coming of age. The album contains numerous themes and stories interwoven into a single metanarrative. According to Vice.com, *Good Kid, m.A.A.d City* is the story of how "K-Dot" grew up into Kendrick Lamar.<sup>12</sup> The acronym "m.A.A.d" stands for "my angry adolescence divided," as well as "my angel on angel dust." The first acronym refers to Kendrick's coming of age and the turmoil involved; the second refers to a bad drug trip Kendrick had (which he narrates in the album), leading to his disdain for and abstinence from drugs to this day.<sup>13</sup>

*Good Kid, m.A.A.d City* isn't in perfect chronological order. It starts with an introduction and some backstory in *Sherane (Master Splinter's*

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<sup>10</sup> Jones, Jaleesa. "Georgia Students Study Kendrick Lamar for Class." USA TODAY College. September 01, 2014. Accessed February 17, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Stutz, Colin. "Kendrick Lamar Is Now the Subject of a College Course | SPIN." Spin. September 04, 2014. Accessed April 25, 2016.  
<http://www.spin.com/2014/09/kendrick-lamar-good-kid-maad-city-college-course/>.

<sup>12</sup> Bassil, Ryan. "The Narrative Guide To Kendrick Lamar's 'good Kid, m.A.A.d City'." Noisey.Vice. April 27, 2013. Accessed April 05, 2016.  
[http://noisey.vice.com/en\\_uk/blog/the-narrative-guide-to-kendrick-lamars-good-kid-mad-city](http://noisey.vice.com/en_uk/blog/the-narrative-guide-to-kendrick-lamars-good-kid-mad-city).

<sup>13</sup> Martins, Chris. "Kendrick Lamar: 'm.A.A.d.' Stands For 'Me, an Angel on Angel Dust' | SPIN." Spin. October 19, 2012. Accessed April 05, 2016.  
<http://www.spin.com/2012/10/kendrick-lamar-maad-stands-for-angel-dust/>.

*Daughter*), but begins to tell the backstory of where Kendrick grew up and how he lived with his friends in *Don't Kill My Vibe* and *Backseat Freestyle*. After that, it introduces the inciting event and begins the story with *The Art of Peer Pressure*. Along with that piece, *Compton* and *Sherane* are the real beginnings of the story, which adds to the confusion as they are the last and first respective tracks on the record. K-Dot transitions to Kendrick through *Poetic Justice*, *Good Kid*, and *m.A.A.D City*. Kendrick completes the transition to adulthood through *Money Trees*, *Swimming Pools*, and *Sing About Me/Dying of Thirst*. He looks back on what's occurred in *Real* and *Compton*, which has audio from a skit at the end of it that chronologically occurs before anything else in the entire album (allowing listeners to put the album on loop and listen over and over again).

*Good Kid, m.A.A.d City* is an autobiographical concept album. The plot of the album proceeds as follows: young "K-Dot," as Kendrick is nicknamed as an adolescent, wants to have sex with a girl named Sherane. Sherane's cousins run in one of the two major Compton gangs, the Bloods or the Crips. When he arrives, the cousins shove K-Dot around and send him away humiliated. After he meets his friends later, they rob a house, get intoxicated, and decide to get revenge with a drive-by shooting. At the shooting, the cousins shoot back, killing one of Kendrick's friends. The boys drive away and begin to try and cope. At this point, Kendrick's mental processes move from boy to man. As they deal with the loss of a brother, a woman (voiced by Maya Angelou, internationally acclaimed author and civil rights activist)<sup>14</sup> who is one of Kendrick's wise neighbors tells the boys they need "holy water," and prays the sinner's prayer with them.<sup>15</sup> As a man, Kendrick reflects on everything and decides that he's going to give back to the community of Compton with what he accomplishes as a rap artist, be it financially or with wisdom.<sup>16</sup>

When put in chronological order, the album follows the lyrical content in terms of musical color. The tracks *Compton* and *Sherane* are much lighter than much of the rest of the album, though *Sherane* is in a minor key, foreshadowing what is to come while nodding to Kendrick's past.

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<sup>14</sup>Duckworth, Kendrick Lamar. "[Skit/Outro] Sing About Me/I'm Dying of Thirst." Genius. Accessed April 05, 2016. <http://genius.com/1147929>.

<sup>15</sup>Duckworth, Kendrick Lamar, writer. *Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst*. Kendrick Lamar. Sounwave, THC, Terrace Martin, 2012, MP3.

<sup>16</sup>Duckworth, Kendrick Lamar. *Good Kid, m.A.A.d City*. Los Angeles: Interscope & Aftermath, 2012.

The two tracks are both more upbeat with Kendrick using mellow vocal inflection. *Don't Kill My Vibe* and *Backseat Freestyle* reflect a high school lightheartedness and naïveté with their simpler, repetitive beats and catchy, singable hooks (the most memorable part of a song). Things start darkening in *The Art of Peer Pressure* and intensify in *Good Kid* and *m.A.A.d City*, which include more aggressive vocals. Those songs have some of the darkest sounds on the album, using minor keys and heavy percussion. Perhaps the darkest part of the record is *Swimming Pools*, where intoxicated Kendrick muses consequences of his actions on the way to the drive-by shooting. Particularly interesting is the ending on the album version of the song; the extended version includes an extra verse. The transition to that verse includes a chaotic, drunken, interrupted interlude. A disjointed effeminate voice recites the name "Sherane," several times, embodying everything young Kendrick wrongly desires as the hook of *Swimming Pools* restarts without completion. The problems in Kendrick's life are about to wake him up. It is at the end of this verse that the drive-by shooting occurs and Kendrick's friend is shot.<sup>17</sup>

Kendrick has reached a great deal of critical success. A variety of sources have called both *Good Kid, m.A.A.d City* and *To Pimp A Butterfly* instant classics,<sup>18</sup> and he's performed on a host of shows and stages. The Recording Industry Association of America certified Kendrick platinum for both *Good Kid, m.A.A.d City* and *To Pimp A Butterfly*, making him one of few rappers to go platinum in the last 15 years.

It is too soon to see what posterity will make of Kendrick's music, but current culture can be observed, and culture has embraced his art. Several recent examples are notable, in particular since Kendrick has grown increasingly political with his lyrical content throughout his life. One of Kendrick's first concrete memories about growing up was the Rodney King riots of spring 1992.<sup>19</sup> Young Kendrick grew up in a city that was filled with chaos because of police brutality, and those are the lenses he sees the police through. His lyrics have been political for a long time on a variety of levels because he's seen so much of the consequences and repercussions of political decisions firsthand.

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<sup>17</sup> Duckworth, Kendrick Lamar. *Good Kid, m.A.A.d City*.

<sup>18</sup> Ahmed, Insanul. "The Making of Kendrick Lamar's "good Kid, m.A.A.d City"" Complex. October 23, 2012. Accessed March 14, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Eells, Josh. "The Trials of Kendrick Lamar. (cover story)." Rolling Stone no. 1231 (March 26, 2015): 40. MasterFILE Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed February 17, 2016).

The first example of his cultural commentary began in 2011's *Section.80*, continued in *Good Kid, m.A.A.d City* and blossomed in 2015's *To Pimp A Butterfly*. Among others, *Section.80* included a track entitled "#@\$% Your Ethnicity," which opened with this lyric: "I recognize all of you. Every creed and color. With that being said... #@\$% your ethnicity. You understand that? We gon' talk about a lot of stuff that concerns you. All of you." Kendrick has extensively discussed race and politics throughout his career. On *To Pimp a Butterfly*, the track entitled *The Blacker the Berry* was the first deeply political piece of Kendrick's, as it was Kendrick's response and reflection on the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012.<sup>20</sup> Released ahead of *To Pimp A Butterfly* as a single, the song, like many of his culturally oriented commentaries, engages his personal interaction with topics such as racism and injustice.

Two months later, in March, the entirety of *To Pimp A Butterfly* was released a week before the scheduled release date due to an error on the part of popular music-streaming service Spotify. On that record, Kendrick released *Alright*, a song about hope amidst negative circumstances. It was released later for radio play on June 30, 2015, and ultimately was the most successful of any of Kendrick's singles from the album. The lyrics of the hook to the song declares, "I'm messed up / Homie you messed up / But if God got us we then gon' be alright / we gon' be alright." This particular lyric has since been used in a variety of situations and locales as an anthem of hope and overcoming: the first example of this occurred in late July of 2015.<sup>21</sup> At a Black Lives Matter event in Cleveland, Ohio, policemen removed a 14-year old boy from a bus and forced him into a police vehicle. The crowd surrounded the car and prevented the police from leaving. As they surrounded the vehicle, however, the crowd began to chant, "We gon' be alright, we gon' be alright, we gon' be alright..."<sup>22</sup> A similar event transpired in Washington,

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<sup>20</sup>Duckworth, Kendrick Lamar, writer. *The Blacker the Berry*. Kendrick Lamar. Dr. Dre, 2015, MP3.

<sup>21</sup> Haltiwanger, John. "How Kendrick Lamar Is Proof Hip-Hop Can Influence Society In Big Ways." *Elite Daily How Kendrick Lamar Is Proof HipHop Can Influence Society In Big Ways Comments*. August 03, 2015. Accessed April 05, 2016. <http://elitedaily.com/news/politics/kendrick-lamar-hip-hop-black-lives-matter/1156751/>.

<sup>22</sup> Piffin, Blake. "Police Harassment Leads to Crowd Singing Kendrick Lamar's 'Alright'" YouTube. July 28, 2015. Accessed April 05, 2016. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUC\\_DOhfzwQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUC_DOhfzwQ).

D.C. at the 20th anniversary of the Million Man March. A crowd marching to make a political statement for racial equality chanted the lines, "We gon' be alright," as they marched.<sup>23</sup> Most recently, protesters at a 2015 Donald Trump rally in Chicago, Illinois repeated the lyrics, using them to make a statement about the character of Trump as well as those he represents.<sup>24</sup> To amplify the substantial cultural interaction between Kendrick and his audiences, United States president Barack Obama stated in December 2015 that Kendrick's *How Much A Dollar Cost?* was his favorite song of 2015.<sup>25</sup> The song also made the White House annual Spotify playlist.<sup>26</sup> Ironically, Kendrick called Obama out in his song *Hood Politics*, claiming that Obama was ineffectual while comparing the Compton gangs to Washington's political parties.<sup>27</sup>

Beyond a staunch published artifact, Kendrick's writing process for rap is different than other rappers. As a general studio rule, rappers compose what they are going to record, write it down, and then record it. If they do not write it down, it is called "freestyling," and they make it up as they go along. Kendrick is different, though. While recording a concept album, Kendrick Lamar composes each verse as a whole, raps the whole thing, and doesn't write any of it down.<sup>28</sup> His live performance often includes freestyling. Kendrick's first record label signed him after he

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<sup>23</sup> Rossignol, Derrick. "Crowd Chants Kendrick Lamar's 'Alright' At D.C. Million Man March." Pigeons Planes. October 10, 2015. Accessed April 05, 2016. <http://pigeonsandplanes.com/2015/10/kendrick-lamar-alright-million-man-march/>.

<sup>24</sup> Brown, Harley. "Protesters at Chicago Donald Trump Rally Chant Kendrick Lamar's 'Alright' | SPIN." Spin. March 12, 2016. Accessed March 14, 2016. <http://www.spin.com/2016/03/donald-trump-rally-chicago-kendrick-lamar-alright-video-watch/>.

<sup>25</sup> Gordon, Jeremy. "President Obama Says Kendrick Lamar's 'How Much a Dollar Cost' Was His Favorite Song of 2015." Pitchfork. December 9, 2015. Accessed April 05, 2016. <http://pitchfork.com/news/62469-president-obama-says-kendrick-lamars-how-much-a-dollar-cost-was-his-favorite-song-of-2015/>.

<sup>26</sup> Gordon, Jeremy. "President Obama Says Kendrick Lamar's 'How Much a Dollar Cost' Was His Favorite Song of 2015." Pitchfork. December 9, 2015. Accessed April 05, 2016. <http://pitchfork.com/news/62469-president-obama-says-kendrick-lamars-how-much-a-dollar-cost-was-his-favorite-song-of-2015/>.

<sup>27</sup> Duckworth, Kendrick Lamar, writer. *Hood Politics*. Kendrick Lamar. Tae Beast, Sounwave, Thundercat, 2015, MP3.

<sup>28</sup> Ahmed, Insanul. "Kendrick Lamar Interview: Turn the Page 2014 Cover Story | Complex." Complex.com. August/September 2014. Accessed February 17, 2016.

walked into the studio and freestyled for two full hours at the age of sixteen.<sup>29</sup> Kendrick's ability to compose in a manner that ties in with his theme, message, concept, or story while rhyming and fitting the music rhythmically is a similar action in terms of complexity, musicality, and art. The closest comparable musical composition would be an improvised Bach organ fugue, where multiple threads of an idea exist in a variety of forms simultaneously and end regularly and cadentially.

Next to his lyrics, Kendrick's musical capacities are truly what make him unique amongst rappers. Insanul Ahmed, journalist and editor for Complex Magazine and Genius.com, states in an interview:

“I think it's important to note that great rappers tend to have the worst influence. Kendrick—just like Jay Z and Kanye and Eminem and all the greats—is a gifted artist...for Kendrick, I think that's much harder because he's not really known for any gimmicks—he's all about the music and nothing else. Rapping like Kendrick? You have to be an A+ talent to get to his level, and even then it's hard..I think Kendrick falls into that category where it's just hard to be like him.”<sup>30</sup>

Mr. Ahmed is claiming that while these other artists are all incredible rappers, they all also have some sort of quirk or style that rappers can look up to and imitate. For example, Kanye is a multifaceted public figure; he is known not only as a producer and rapper, but also has a huge social media presence, clothing line, and is married to actress and model Kim Kardashian. Eminem was the first great rapper who was white; after he went big, a host of other white rappers tried their hand. Ahmed is saying that Kendrick is different because he does not have personal quirks or cultural phenomena that contribute to his musical success like the other names listed do. Kendrick's success is founded on his music alone.

Labelmate and fellow rapper Ab-Soul remarks of Kendrick's early projects: “[Kendrick] was recording full songs with hooks and bridges and melodies and things to keep the crowd. He was not just interested in

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<sup>29</sup> Hopper, Jessica. "Kendrick Lamar: Not Your Average Everyday Rap Savior | SPIN - Page 3." Spin. October 09, 2012. Accessed March 19, 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Insanul Ahmed, e-mail message to author, April 13, 2016.

being the best rapper, he was making songs that the world could sing.”<sup>31</sup> Kendrick’s music has grown with him, reflecting his maturing as both a rapper and human being. On *Section.80*, Kendrick’s music follows much more regular schematics and structures, often consisting of an introduction of some sort, a rapped verse, a hook, another verse, a revisiting of the hook, a third verse, and a final reiteration of the hook. *Good Kid, m.A.A.D City* began visiting more of his now signature style, where a variety of style changes, instrumentational rearrangements, subtle jazz influences, and multimovement tracks appear. On *To Pimp A Butterfly*, these stylistic aspects become further developed, as Kendrick employs swung rhythms, extraneous jazz instrumentation, augmented song structures with a mosaic of multiple tempo and style changes in each piece, and spoken word sections. He also samples (reuses partial recordings of other artists) substantially less on *To Pimp A Butterfly* than he does on either of his previous records, and doesn’t sample at all on *untitled.unmastered*.

One reason Kendrick doesn’t sample as much on newer recordings is because he relies more heavily on his personal producers and musicians to write music, who include Sounwave (whom Kendrick has worked with for years and has been part of Kendrick’s label’s core group of producers since Kendrick first signed with Top Dawg Entertainment), Flying Lotus (Alice Coltrane’s grand-nephew), and even young Egypt, the five-year-old son of Alicia Keys and Swizz Beats.<sup>32</sup> In fact, the production crew for *To Pimp A Butterfly* includes a host of producers; the aforementioned Sounwave, Flying Lotus, saxophonist Terrace Martin, Columbus Smith, Pharrell Williams, Taz Arnold, Thundercat, Tae Beast, and LoveDragon.<sup>33</sup> On top of this, a variety of musicians were hired for the jazz sections; tenor sax star Kamasi Washington, bassist Thundercat, funk legend George Clinton, Grammy-award winning jazz pianist Robert Glasper, and drummer Robert “Sput” Searight of Snarky Puppy all make appearances across the album. Producer and creative contributor Terrace Martin contributes multiple strata of horns and alto saxophone. It is worthwhile to note that, perhaps symbiotically, Kamasi

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<sup>31</sup> Hopper, Jessica. "Kendrick Lamar: Not Your Average Everyday Rap Savior | SPIN - Page 3." Spin. October 09, 2012. Accessed March 19, 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Genius. "Untitled Unmastered. by Kendrick Lamar." Genius. 2016. Accessed April 25, 2016. <http://genius.com/albums/Kendrick-lamar/Untitled-unmastered>.

<sup>33</sup> Genius. "Kendrick Lamar – To Pimp a Butterfly [Credits]." Genius. 2015. Accessed April 25, 2016. <http://genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-to-pimp-a-butterfly-credits-lyrics>.

Washington, Thundercat, and Flying Lotus have all garnered national attention as neo-jazz artists since 2013.<sup>34</sup> Kendrick's success has certainly helped launch their careers to new levels; for example, Kamasi Washington was a relatively unknown saxophone player in urban Los Angeles until he played with Kendrick Lamar, and his triple-record *The Epic* was NPR's top jazz album of 2015.<sup>35</sup> Flying Lotus already had a successful career as a producer, but his collaboration with Kendrick on 2014's *You're Dead!* led to generous industry attention.<sup>36</sup> Kendrick is unique, fluid, independent, and selects session musicians who are cutting edge composers in their own respective genres. Insanul Ahmed states that "After *good kid* came out, every time a rapper would come to the Complex office to play me their album, for a while they'd ALWAYS mention *good kid*."<sup>37</sup> Kendrick is clearly musically influencing his posterity and building a legacy for himself.

Kendrick engages his producers uniquely and personally. In an interview with Insanul Ahmed, Kendrick Lamar reveals of his writing process and involvement with producing tracks: "I'm very hands-on [with producers] and that's why my projects come out so cohesive. I don't just go out there and just find a bunch of instrumentals and rap over them. I have a specific sound in my head I want to convey. I really sit down with producers, I come up with ideas, and give them ideas. Truthfully, I should get some co-production on these tracks."<sup>38</sup> Kendrick is known to work abnormally closely with his musicians and producers and draw musical inspiration from a variety of locations when sampling. According to Top Dawg Entertainment's in-house producer J-Hen,

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<sup>34</sup> Weiner, Natalie. "Way Out West: How Flying Lotus, Kamasi Washington, and Brainfeeder Are Bringing Jazz Back to the People." NOISEY. July 29, 2015. Accessed April 25, 2016. <http://noisey.vice.com/blog/brainfeeder-jazz-flying-lotus-kamasi-washington-thundercat>.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.npr.org/sections/world-cafe/2015/12/14/459356360/david-dyes-top-10-albums-of-2015>

<sup>36</sup> Weiner, Natalie. "Way Out West: How Flying Lotus, Kamasi Washington, and Brainfeeder Are Bringing Jazz Back to the People." NOISEY. July 29, 2015. Accessed April 25, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Insanul Ahmed, e-mail message to author, April 13, 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Ahmed, Insanul. "The Making of Kendrick Lamar's "good Kid, M.A.A.d City"" Complex. October 23, 2012. Accessed March 14, 2016. <http://www.complex.com/music/2012/10/the-making-of-kendrick-lamars-good-kid-maad-city/>.

“Kendrick started out in the background working with producers and doing hooks so he already developed himself as a producer in his own right. When we get with him, he’ll tell you what sounds he likes, what vibe he’s looking for. That’s what inevitably made him so big. The fact that he’s been able to create his own sound even with all the producers that he has worked with, he’s been able to get his sound out of them. With us, with some of the songs we worked on prior to having this one selected for the album—they’re all across the board. He’s starting to nitpick exactly what he wanted from us so we gave it to him.”<sup>39</sup>

Recently, Kendrick Lamar released *untitled.unmastered*, a surprise 8-song extended play album. In this compilation of unpublished compositions from the recording sessions for *To Pimp A Butterfly*, Kendrick expands stylistically. Similarly to Stravinski, Handel, and other great composers, Kendrick has a way of ingesting musical styles and making them his own, constantly pushing the envelope of sound. On *To Pimp A Butterfly*, Kendrick Lamar displayed propensities for both free-jazz and funk on *For Free? (Interlude)* and *King Kunta*, as well as conventional hip-hop styles on *The Blacker the Berry* and *Alright*. On *untitled.unmastered*, Kendrick covers a blend of soul and bossa nova (*untitled.06*), funk (*untitled.04*), trap (*untitled.02*), and the unique groove young Egypt came up with on *untitled.07*. *untitled.07* rings of contemporary classical style as well. Such fluidity between styles of music is rare even for instrumental composers; talent like that of Kendrick is a rarity in the rap world.

Kendrick Lamar deserves the respect of musical academics because of his capacities as a performer, his concept albums and the depth with which he tells his story, his impact on culture, and his proven ability to push the sounds of a genre. Kendrick is exploring the boundaries of hip hop in a host of ways; culturally, he is being absorbed and engaged by political and social movements in incredible ways. Musically, he is influencing those who come after, as rappers are looking up to *good kid, m.A.A.d City* as the new record to beat and *To Pimp A Butterfly* as line-defying. Additionally, he has brought neo-jazz to a podium it hasn’t previously seen, sending careers of individuals such as Kamasi

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<sup>39</sup> Ahmed, Insanul. “The Making of Kendrick Lamar’s “good Kid, M.A.A.d City.”

Washington into the stratosphere. His performance capacities have earned him international stages, television appearances, and arena-filling tours. And as a rapper, Kendrick's concept albums are reaching unparalleled popularity, the sweetheart of critics and fans alike; he's gone platinum and reached status with critics as the greatest. His influence, as presented here, will surely continue to push those who come after to fight for creativity within the vein he has created for himself.

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