

Y.B.A.L.A. ALBUM DESCRIPTION:

OVERVIEW:

Y.B.A.L.A. is an album by American rapper Erinem. This is her second studio album, although she has been releasing music for the last seven years. Her first studio album was called *The Gambit*, which dropped in February 2021. This year, Erinem is releasing Y.B.A.L.A. on March 25th. Y.B.A.L.A. is an acronym, which stands for “*You Bitches Ain’t Listening Anyway*” which is technically the full title of the album (though it will appear on streaming platforms as “Y.B.A.L.A.”). The album was first conceived by Erinem when she thought of the title and then decided she wanted each track on the five-song project to carry one of the words from the album’s title. This way, you could call the album either by its acronym, Y.B.A.L.A., (pronounced Why-Ballah), or you could call it by its full name, “*You Bitches Aint Listening Anyway*” which is derived by reading the track-list in descending order. The track-list looks like this:

Track 1: **YOU**

Track 2: **BITCHES** (feat. Bizarre)

Track 3: **AIN’T**

Track 4: **LISTENING**

Track 5: **ANYWAY**

Notice how it reads with the album’s full title, going down the track list (*You Bitches Ain’t Listening Anyway*). This was the concept from the very beginning, even before the tracks were written. So, the challenge became writing each song in a way that it somehow fit the necessary one-word title it was already assigned. Erinem found this to be a fun creative challenge. In the end, each song took on it’s own life and easily carried the theme of its pre-determined title.

CONCEPT:

The concept behind Y.B.A.L.A. lies in the full album title: *You Bitches Aint Listening Anyway*. In an age where our attention span is shorter than ever, and everything on our phones is vying for a moment of that attention, the album speaks to the problematic place an artist is now in, where they have to grab the attention of the listener who very often has better things to do than to give an unheard-of artist their time of day. It can often feel like nobody is listening, or that you’re being ignored. It feels like you’re screaming but no one can hear you, in a time in our world where we have to use stickers to beg our audience on social media to please put their “sound on!” And this plea for hollow recognition is not something that Erinem enjoys pursuing. Especially when it comes to social media (which she’s not a huge fan of) and when it comes to the purported need to “brand” herself.

Feeling like authenticity is everything, Erinem bristles at these music career requisites. She doesn’t want to fit the mold that other female hip hop artists have created before her. She doesn’t lean much into sexuality, nor does her brand come off as particularly feminine. She clearly wants you to notice her lyrics first, her vocals second, and her appearance is pretty much at the very bottom of the list that follows those things. She wants the fact that she’s a girl, or that she’s white, to be secondary to the way she crafts her lyrics and styles her rap vocals. She feels like we have become so complacent these days, that social media and targeted ads *tell us* what we want and what we like; we have stopped making those types of

decisions for ourselves. And when we do make decisions for ourselves, we make them based on preconceived notions and preset ideas about what a rapper should look like, where they should be from, who they should sound like. We decide we hate many artists without even having to hear their music. Or, perhaps we listen to a song or two, but we had already decided how we felt about them, on some level, before we ever hit play.

Erinem has trouble being ok with the whole image-first approach to getting traction in this industry. The need to put out a perfectly crafted image of yourself in order to get ahead in the music business feels, to Erinem, like a shallow and disingenuous attempt at a cash grab, or just another plea for attention. Whether its a female artist who does more twerking than actual rapping, or a male artist who has built up his fame and popularity through instagram antics and the constant flexing about how much money he can spend... it all feels like a departure from what makes hip hop so special in the first place. She echoes several of her contemporaries, including J. Cole and Eminem, who have taken a similar stance on these issues, seen in both song lyrics and interviews.

This album is a way of saying “I’m done trying to please the industry, to please the audience, to please the people. I’m done pursuing popularity and pleading with people to listen to what I have to say. Instead, I’m just going to say it. Why should you care that I’m not what you want me to be? You’re not listening anyway.” Y.B.A.L.A. is a sort of “I give up” attitude towards commercial appeal. Ironically, this album has the most commercial appeal of any of her albums, mixtapes and previous projects.

TRACK DESCRIPTIONS:

1). YOU

“You” is the first song on this five-track EP. It shows the subtle way Erinem has learned to weave complicated punchlines and multisyllabic rhyme schemes into a coherent narrative. It’s lyricism at its most complex, and story telling at its finest. In this song, the hook sets up the title of the track by repeating “You you you you” and then saying, “You don’t really know me, you did not just ‘bro’ me, you are not my homie, you gon’ meet the old me” and then the verse begins. The verses tell the story of a couple who are fighting; in the verses, the narrator antagonizes their partner and describes their physical altercations, but it somehow comes off as benign and relatively playful. At the end of the song, the verse states “Fuck around and show you at your worst/I could clap and collapse your universe/but I’d rather stack up a track with all this crap/then put you in a verse” — which is a way of saying “I *could* tell everyone how messed up you are, right here in this song. But you’re not worth wasting lyrics on, so even though I could ruin your life in doing so, I’d rather have a bunch of lines that don’t reveal you than to waste a whole song on you.” Which gives a comical, and almost ironic slant to the song being called “You.”

2). BITCHES (Feat. Bizarre)

“Bitches” is a song that harkens back to the golden era of hip hop. Echoed in the song’s chorus, which says, “I miss when rap was bout/ drugs and bitches/ not fashion

brands, or the gram/ or your riches/ back to when thugs/ was givin' hugs in the club/ bout to show you all how/to give bitches some love” it’s clear that Erinem is longing for hip hop’s golden era. The song does further justice to this concept by featuring Bizarre, who was best known for his time in the rap group, D12 — fronted by legendary rapper Eminem. Erinem thought Bizarre would be a natural fit for this kind of song, so she decided to feature him on it. Erinem and Bizarre have known each other for years now, after an earlier song they did together back in 2017. After meeting up again by chance at a studio in Atlanta, Erinem realized he’d be perfect on this track. “Bitches” details a semi-true detailing of the party Erinem went to at Bizarre’s house, which he was throwing for his birthday while Erinem was in Detroit shooting a music video. She was invited to the party, and details it in this song. Though, some details have obviously been exaggerated for pure shock value. The track also features what Erinem considers to be one of her “favorite punchlines” she’s ever written: “Bitch is doing side-kicks, spastic/ In skin tight elastics/ Acting like it’s magic/ Bitch you’re like the title of M*A*S*H/ All ass-tricks! (Asterix).” Punchlines are something this album certainly isn’t short on.

3). AIN’T

“Ain’t” is based on a true story; something that actually happened to Erinem in 2021. It details a run in with a music consultant, who was A&R for a major record label. This is very much a cautionary tale, but it is also a story of triumph over yet another adversity. Erinem is not one to be backed into a corner, and when pushed, she comes back at you with everything she has. This narrative is told through negating statements like, “I ain’t the one with the problem/you’re the one hollerin’/I’m bullshit intolerant” and “ask you for my split/and accuse me of entitlement/ but I ain’t the one with the loft/ this is kick off...” Each verse starts out with a negating statement like this. It’s the crux of so many arguments, these negating statements that go something like: “I ain’t that, but *you’re* this.” A clever tie-in to the pre-titled track, “Ain’t” manages to tell the story of a fallout with a record executive once major money had been exchanged, and it does this by repeating the “I ain’t” statements throughout the verses and in the hook. This is very much a *Snakes in the Grass* story; one every up and coming hip hop artist is bound to have become familiar with. The intro and outro of the song are real voice recordings, taken from the fallout between Erinem and the music executive who crossed her.

4). LISTENING

“Listening” is a song about someone who can’t seem to do just that. It’s a song about feeling like no one is listening, or, more specifically, like your significant other isn’t listening. It’s told through dual perspectives, as if two people who are in a relationship together are both telling their story in the song; of these two people in a relationship, one gives their perspective in the hook, and one gives their perspective in the verses. It becomes clear to the audience that, while both parties accuse the other of not listening to them, neither one are actually very good at listening. There’s definitely fault on both

sides, it would appear. The perspective given in the verses tells the story of someone who is done with their partner's probable-cheating, constant distraction, and insistence on being glued to their phone screen. This is exemplified in the line from verse one, "won't throw me a bone/ again on your phone/ like we live alone/ a couple of strangers, sharing a home." And then later the story fleshes out further, with the verse going on to complain that they are seen as a "disciplinarian" and then goes on to assure the other person that they are not interested in ever marrying, or being a pair again. The chorus reflects the opposite story, with the partner who is accused of doing all the ignoring taking the lead to tell their side of things. The chorus complains, "so I was speaking/ all freaking evening/ you didn't hear a damn thing today/ you were daydreaming/ and missed the meaning/ you don't hear a damn thing I say..." Leaving us to wonder who is to blame here, and eventually we conclude, probably both parties are to blame. It's this dynamic narrative that plays at the duality inherent in any argument, or any story. Because, there's always two sides to it. On a more general note, this narrative touches back on one of the album's central themes, which is mainly the frustration of not being heard or understood when trying to communicate with someone.

5). ANYWAY

"Anyway" is a song for anyone who has ever been brave enough to chase their dreams. The hook embodies the angst we felt as teenagers, which is never really lost to us entirely. It's that feeling of wanting so badly to break free of all authority, and to seek our own path and to conquer our own destiny. The hook states, "I have heard so many say/ they don't think there's any way/ dreams that we just throw away/ feelings I can't downplay/ feeling like a runaway/ in my room I hideaway/ hoping for some better days/ I go on anyway" and then repeats the central theme of the song, "I go on anyway" several more times. When we are young, people tell us that we can be whatever we want to be. But when we grow up, they change the story on us. Clearly, this song is about all the naysayers who tell you along the way that you can't achieve your dreams, or that you shouldn't even try; this is an anthem for those who persist, chasing their dreams anyway. The verse seems to capture modern-day Erinem, who is still chasing her dream all these years later. It reflects on the sometimes hard, sometimes triumphant moments involved in the pursuit of greatness. She says "Sometimes I don't know/ how I'll even get by/ on my wits I rely/ it's a wonder why I try/ when it didn't work the first/ or the nine-hundredth time/ let's just call it well-rehearsed/ guess conviction is a crime" and that really describes the feeling of futility that often comes along with working towards a big goal. Erinem goes on to talk about the cost of pursuing music so blind-sightedly, saying that she has "lost every friend" she had and then even her enemies. She talks about not getting paid to do this work, and in fact, having to pay to do it. She discusses making only a fraction of a cent per spin, but doesn't seem deterred by that. She does, however, say poignantly, "It don't pay these past-due bills/ getting traction costs more than an addict/ pays to use pills" but then goes on to explain that if she couldn't do this she would "crack" and expresses how she's devoted to this pursuit, regardless of what the cost of that choice might ultimately be. A perfect way to round out the project, "Anyway" is a bittersweet

testament to fortitude and persistence, and to following your dreams regardless. To go on, and on, and on, anyway.