

Confessions of a Teenage Girl:



Olivia Rodrigo's *GUTS*

Story by Anthony Chiu


RODRIGO'S SOPHOMORE RECORD UNAPOLOGETICALLY CAPTURES HER INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF HER COMFORT ZONE.

Olivia Rodrigo's second studio album, *GUTS*, was easily one of the best pop albums of 2023. Following Rodrigo's record-setting debut album *SOUR*, *GUTS* did

not disappoint, featuring more punk-inspired tracks, such as "bad idea right?" and "ballad of a homeschool girl," that contrast well with the more traditionally melodic tracks in the

album. The record feels gritty and organic, as Rodrigo experiments with different instrumentals and lyrical styles across its runtime.

A few tracks certainly set



themselves apart: “all-american bitch,” Rodrigo’s unfiltered and genuine outcry against the societal criticism she receives; “lacy,” a song centered around her jealousy, rather than her usual themes of disastrous romance; and, of course, the album’s singles, “bad idea right?,” “vampire,” and “get him back.”

The intro “all-american bitch” sets the tone for the rest of *GUTS*, with Rodrigo letting out her frustration all in one go. Rodrigo sings about the struggles of being a young woman, always doubted by society. However, within her lyrics, Rodrigo proudly embodies her youthfulness, unafraid to complain and accept her shortcomings. She plants her flag as a rebel, expressing all her bitterness and annoyances without care. Her usage of obscenity is also incredibly “appropriate,” squeezed in here and there through the verses, conveying her underlying turmoil, while still maintaining her innocent facade. What truly makes this song stand out, though, is how the verses and choruses compliment each other, with the verses gradually contextualizing Rodrigo’s internal tension line by line until it explodes in

the choruses, where her frustrations truly pour out. The sharp transition between the soft acoustic arpeggios of the verses and the power chords of the chorus is completely unexpected and perhaps even a touch too aggressive. Nonetheless, the track successfully encapsulates Rodrigo’s uphill battle against society, working tirelessly to craft her path and personality.

“Lacy” listens like one of Rodrigo’s typical songs: soft, yet pain-inducing. However, unlike her other tracks, this one is centered around a girl named Lacy. Rodrigo simultaneously admires and resents the beauty of Lacy, gradually revealing her obsession with Lacy’s perfection. The pleasant imagery through the track sets up the later irony, with Rodrigo threatened by her “skin like puff pastry” and her “eyes white as daisies.” Here, she speaks to the destructive nature of the never-ending pursuit of beauty and status in society, as we’re inevitably wrapped up in constant comparison with others.

The most adventurous cut on the album, “bad idea right?,” incorporates many new stylistic choices from Rodrigo, as she recounts her impulsive decision to see an ex again. The track contextualizes Rodrigo’s struggle to stay away, starting with clear hesitation, but eventually giving way to temptation. We’re listening to Rodrigo’s stream of consciousness and shifting



perspectives with each verse, just like how one’s thoughts on ex can suddenly shift from positive to negative. The gossipy tone of the choruses further sell the realism and authentic-

ty of her storytelling. Rodrigo also often speaks to herself and questions her own decisions, which further contributes to the chaotic flow of the verses. In contrast, the chorus is simple—maybe even a little too simple—but is undeniably catchy.

This multitude of stylistic and structural elements develops an immersive narrative out of a simple premise: the temptation of getting back with your ex.

As for “vampire,” Rodrigo really showcases her songwriting and vocal chops here. It’s similar to “traitor” from *SOUR*, with a similar lyrical structure that allows Rodrigo to draw upon imagery to paint her ex as either a “traitor” or a “vampire.” However, relative to the flowery flow of “traitor,” “vampire” boasts a much fuller sound, due to its accentuated piano chords. Indeed, the piano-led instrumental places far more emphasis on her vocals than we’re used to, with her

bright voice in sharp contrast with the bass piano chords. The passion within Rodrigo’s voice on this track certainly sticks out, and it drives one of her most heartfelt tracks. “Vampire” is a fantastic song and was a perfect lead single to kick off her sophomore era.

One of my personal favorites on *GUTS* is “get him back,” which centers around a double entendre in both its lyrics and title. The track unpacks Rodrigo’s conflicting feelings after a break up: she misses and despises her ex at the same time. The title of the song perfectly embodies this predicament, with “get him back” referring to both Rodrigo getting back and getting even with her ex. She employs a storytelling structure similar to “bad idea right?,” employing the same perspective-flipping and gossipy voice. The chorus reinforces this conflicted perspective, both madly in love and deeply in anger with her ex. Moreover, Rodrigo takes big risks on this track, simultaneously expressing vulnerability while also subtly revealing her toxicity. She showcases her indifference to external opinions, prioritizing the expression of her genuine feelings and emotions. Ultimately, Rodrigo does a fantastic job of presenting a complex yet relatable theme in a fun and unfiltered manner.

While the tracks from *SOUR* were almost entirely written about Rodrigo’s past relationships, her sophomore record covers a wider variety of themes, expanding on additional coming-of-age struggles. On *GUTS*, Rodrigo most defi-

nately takes a more care-free approach, expressing her genuine emotions through her lyrics. The album speaks from the heart, with Rodrigo’s rebellious character at the center of each track. While the combination of songs might seem quite miscellaneous, with some being more folk inspired and others more punk rock-esque, Rodrigo, without a doubt, delivers on her second studio album. Ultimately, Rodrigo does a fantastic job of presenting a complex, yet relatable, theme in a fun and unfiltered manner.

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