Culture



UK rapper performs "Sick," the second track on his 2022 rap album "Universal Credit." It is his debut studio album. (NCR screenshot/YouTube)



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Art's revelatory power has become more important than ever as the current state of the world resembles a disorienting spin. In times like these, art conveys our collective emotional state better than conversations can. Music — particularly conscious music — has been seen as the perfect way to discuss current affairs through a culturally relevant lens.

Most songs that proliferate this genre are sermons disguised as lyrics. Artists who are determined to raise their listeners' consciousness disregard the negative emotions that come through experiencing institutional decay at such a rapid pace. They take pride in authoritatively telling their listeners to persist and persevere.

Weirdly enough, their approach resembles a philosophy of toxic positivity that makes for a predictable experience. Nowadays, most artists are moving away from the "conscious" artist superlative. Instead, they aim to be empathetic scribes, poetically describing every little detail, regardless of its implications.

One such artist is Jeshi, a 27-year-old alternative rapper hailing from East London. He started establishing himself as an independent artist through touring with fellow English rapper Slowthai in 2019, appearing on R&B songstress Celeste's EP "Lately," and dropping his own body of work "Bad Taste" in 2020.

His newest project and debut studio album, "Universal Credit," is one of 2022's best contributions to rap. Jeshi's empathetic worldbuilding devices allow him to creatively discuss the emotional, physical and mental tools of austerity without sounding brash or disconnected.

Throughout the album, Jeshi embodies the exhaustion and frustration of trying to survive an austerity riddled England. Take for example, the second track, "Sick." He illustrates disappointment, as he's

> Sick of tryna sleep, close the blinds from the light
> Sick of seein' colours every time I close my eyes
> Sick of things goin' wrong and never goin' right.

Here, Jeshi acknowledges how the everyday disappointments plague his everyday life, causing restlessness and hyperactivity. Life's unrelenting harshness forces him into a corner he can't escape. Melodically, Jeshi conveys this untainted melancholy by utilizing distortion and chaos through manipulating his background vocals and

electronic instrumentation.

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"National lottery," arguably the best song on the album, showcases his ability as a descriptive and emotionally involved orator. In the song's first few seconds, Jeshi seems to show glimmers of optimism and confidence.

> Wish you were here
> I make ice caps disappear
> Watch the world burn at the bar sippin' beer
> How many units? Can I move whips?
> I'm a nuisance, stop actin' stupid.

A few moments later we realize that his attitude comes from his lottery addiction:

> National lottery every week (Every week)
> Itchy palms, can't get to sleep (Sleep)
> National lottery every week
> Itchy palms, can't get to sleep.

Instead of spelling out the subject matter quickly, he lets us sift through it ourselves. He trusts us enough to let us experience the emotional highs and lows he's going through, letting us decipher what this all means.

Despite the emotional turmoil, Jeshi acknowledges the relationships that have positively impacted him. "Two Mum's," is a joyful yet realistic dedication to his mother and grandmother.

Jeshi never feels ashamed of his familial situation and proudly enumerates it:

> Two mums
> Ain't got a dad
> Won't see me moan 'bout the cards in my hand
> Walkin' to school
> Holdin' my hand
> I'm happy that you never went back.

Jeshi succeeds where other artists fail because he immerses himself and the listener in emotions that are overwhelmingly unfavorable. Time and time again, Jeshi makes himself defenseless so we can exercise empathy for others and ourselves,

Humility is an integral part of storytelling and journalism because people often put their needs and wants at the behest of the story. Many journalists in the climate sector are trying to figure out better methods to report on issues such as global warming, unpredictable weather patterns and a climate migration crisis in order to increase direct action.

Statistics-focused reporting has piqued the public's interest, but hasn't spurred a wave of mobilization outside climate activist organizations. While it may seem surprising, statistical reporting is often devoid of emotion and personal connection. Information about the climate crisis effect can reach its liberatory potential only if we truly highlight its effects on the human psyche.

If we want to report on how weather patterns may make islands, forests, and coastlines disappear, we need to creatively display the emotions of those who occupy these spaces. Thankfully, we have bodies of work such as "Universal Credit" that illustrate moments of political and social instability through empathy and understanding.

The best art undoubtedly imparts new perspectives that seep into our everyday lives. Jeshi's "Universal Credit" is a masterclass in heartfelt and vulnerable social commentary that is full of creativity. Through this album, we see that telling the truth requires humility and compassion.