

“THE ART OF LOVING”: OLIVIA DEAN’S ALBUM APPRECIATES “ORDINARY LOVE”

Hannah Gross, Reporter

Any form of art is meant to tell a story. Just like writing a book or painting on a fresh canvas, albums can take years to finish and publish. Olivia Dean was able to lock herself in a rental home for eight weeks and write every song on her sophomore album, *The Art of Loving*, in its entirety. Armed with nothing more than a piano and her two co-writers, Dean was able to compile everything she knows about love.

The Art of Loving isn’t supposed to be a continuation of her first album: *Messy*. It’s meant to cover Dean’s furtherance in her pursuit of self love over the past two years since she released *Messy*. Instead of relying on a direct storyline to define the album’s theme, Dean chooses to share experiences that encompass every single form of love she has seen, received, and given over the past few years.

The opening self-titled track establishes the lesson that Dean hopes to get across to her audience within the first few verses.

“Something lost and something gained / In the art of loving”.

“The Art of Loving (Intro)” offers an already removed point of view to its listener. It establishes that Dean is already emotionally detached from the situations she will go on to recount in the songs that follow. With birds chirping and layered harmonies in the background of this simple song, the opening track is nothing short of ethereal.

To further separate this album from her debut, she introduces a new theme of radical acceptance straight away. “Lady Lady” is written from the perspective of the universe. Instead of Dean choosing to deal with change via anxiety or spiraling, like she had previously, she welcomes it with open arms. Essentially, she deduces that nothing the universe could take from her was ever worth keeping.

As the album approaches its midpoint, Dean immediately announces that the second act of her album will be more vulnerable than its predecessor. “Close Up”, “Let Alone the One You Love”, and “Loud” are all intertwined and chronologically introduced, detailing how her relationship ended.

In “Close Up”, Dean faces the same anxieties she had in *Messy*. She recognizes that there are problems within her relationship, but is too insecure to address them. Now she has noticed her partner’s faults, she can’t stop noticing them. The faults continue to plague her, as if they have become a wound that won’t close up.

At the end of “Close Up” she comes to the epiphany that what she’s experiencing with her partner *isn’t* love. “Let Alone the One You Love” furthers this realization. As the song progresses, Dean’s lyrics are almost angry; a stark contrast from her usual lighthearted and playful nature. She’s defeated, because she cannot believe she allowed herself to be treated like that by someone. Going as far to say that no one should treat a friend like she’s been treated, let alone, your partner. Even though she’s still bargaining within the song, she’s acknowledged platonic or romantic love that keeps her personality stifled isn’t a love she needs anymore.



Photo taken from Olivia Dean official website.

“Loud” serves as Dean’s verbal confrontation towards her partner. After gaining the courage, she faces the one she loves and explains that their relationship cannot continue. Within the song, Dean makes use of a string ensemble that represents her once stifled feelings. As Dean finds her courage, so do the strings. When the music swells, Dean confronts her lover. The relationship is finally over, and the strings settle. Dean is finally completely on own.

Likening herself to a baby taking its first steps, Dean explores her newfound singleness in “Baby Steps”. Much like a newborn finding its footing, everything she will experience post-breakup is new. Instead of crumbling at this realization, like her past self would’ve, Dean treats herself to flowers and learns to take care of herself after a night out.

However, healing never comes without an eventual relapse. In “A Couple Minutes”, Dean finds herself on her ex-lover’s couch, reminiscing. Unlike her past *Messy* self, who would’ve stayed in the comfort of familiarity, Dean decides to leave once and for all. Nevertheless, she doesn’t leave without demonstrating her newfound maturity. Dean tells her lover that although their relationship has ended, there is no need for the love they shared to go to waste. A part of her will still always care for that person because she knew them so intimately, and there’s nothing wrong with that love and appreciation still existing.

“So Easy (To Fall in Love)”, “Man I Need”, and “Nice to Each Other” share the Dean’s new mature, yet emotionally removed, point of view. She unabashedly knows what she wants from her new relationships, and isn’t afraid to ask for it. These songs, while not complex in their musicality, show how relationships can truly be simplified. These songs are used to show that dating should be fun, but it needs to be severely simplified and lighthearted in order to make it fun.

The album’s finale, “I’ve Seen It”, recounts all the simplistic ways that everyday love is tossed around, ignored, and reciprocated. Instead of ending the album with a cliché fairytale ending, in which, after all of her trials and tribulations, she finds true love after all; she chooses to highlight the platonic love in her life instead. Dean shares that love exists in all forms, and it’s important to appreciate it in any way you can, even if you’re just observing.

Though the album was curated quickly, it doesn’t show in the writing. *The Art of Loving* effectively teaches its listener to appreciate love- in all its forms. In a day and age so infatuated with giving and receiving romantic love, *The Art of Loving*’s overarching message becomes even more important. Platonic, romantic, familial, it’s all love, and should hold the same weight and be appreciated all the same. Olivia Dean describes this sentiment best in “I’ve Seen It”: “The more you look, the more you find / It’s all around you all the time”.