One Direction - Four (2014)



01. Steal My Girl 02. Ready to Run 03. Where Do Broken Hearts Go 04. 18 05. Girl Almighty 06. Fool's Gold 07. Night Changes 08. No Control 09. Fireproof 10. Spaces 11. Stockholm Syndrome 12. Clouds One Direction members: Niall Horan Zayn Malik Liam Payne Harry Styles Louis Tomlinson

There are lots of people who would like to see One Direction fail. Namely those who believe they have superior music taste because they listen to music in a less radio-friendly genre, or created by bands old enough to be their grandparents. And yes, it is easy to hate the popular boy band, especially if you believe they are riding on their good looks to get them plays. (At least, we'd assume it'd be easy, we wouldn't know.) So, yeah, we mean it when we say One Direction had something to prove with their fourth studio album, aptly titled FOUR. Not only did they need an album to shut those boy band critics up, but they also needed to release something their longtime fans knew they were capable of. FOUR is exactly that.

While 2013's Midnight Memories hinted to the direction the quintet was leaning towards, it wasn't as coherent of a piece, genre jumping with each track. What makes FOUR so wonderful is the fact that it actually sounds like what the One Direction guys would wont to release. It fits them, and it fits with their growth. That isn't to diminish any of their previous works, mind you. They were all good in their own rights, but listeners will be hard pressed to find much wrong with this album.

Notably, opening track 'Steal My Girl' is a lackluster, overproduced attempt to hold onto the vestiges of the sugar coated boy band 1D started as. As the first single, it is very misleading to what actually follows, and in a perfect world, it would have been left off the release completely. The following songs, however, are a wonderful amalgamation of rock, folk and boy band harmonies written with the stadiums the band will be touring in the upcoming year.

It’s tough to choose a favorite track amongst the 12, all of them bring something to the album, making it quite hard to skip any of them-- save the aforementioned single. ‘Where Do Broken Hearts Go’ is, however, a personal favorite. Full to the brim with stadium ready guitars and drums, it could be all the band plays on their next tour and we would probably be just fine with that. ‘Girl Almighty’, ‘No Control’ and ‘Stockholm Syndrome’ will also undoubtedly be favorites on the album, and hopefully the set list.

Closing track ‘Clouds’ is also a standout as it has what is certainly the best guitar licks on any One Direction track. It is the perfect ending to the album and will definitely be a perfect closer to their shows. (We can practically see the fireworks and hear the crowd screaming when we listen to it.)

What is most notable about the release, is that there are only two songs that weren’t written with the help of a member of the band-- ‘18’ and ‘Girl Almighty’-- which is probably why every song seems to fit together so well. Even the lyricism has taken a step upwards, proving that not only has the quintet grown in their vocal talent but also in their songwriting skills. Add that to the fact that each and every member is showcased throughout the release, a major turnaround from their first release, and you have an amazingly put together piece of pop that will not only please old fans, but bring aboard a slew of new ones.

We aren’t saying you have to love boy bands now, or even that you have to love anything else this boy band has put out, but we are saying you are missing out if you write off this release based on personal biases against genres and band types. FOUR is not just another release from One Direction, but it may very well be their magnum opus. Listening to it is listening to a band discovering themselves, and there is nothing like the feeling of hearing a band finally find their sound. We aren’t sure where else they can go from here, or how they can top it, but given their timeline we have a year before we have to cross that bridge. ---Victoria Patneaude, alterthepress.com

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