



RED (TAYLOR'S VERSION): SWIFT'S ARTISTIC REMEMBRANCE

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Taylor Swift's *Red (Taylor's Version)* feels like revisiting an old memory. Those who appreciated the 2012 version of *Red* will especially love this one, which is revised and features later developments in Swift's sound. Not only does the album represent the evolution of Swift's career—it represents a reclamation of her artistic voice, making peace with those who took it.

Much like Swift's *Folklore* (2020) and *Evermore* (2020), *Red (Taylor's Version)* (2021) includes powerful storytelling woven through each track. The album tells a universal story about love, loss, and memory—one that tugs at heart strings and inflicts nostalgia. Swift's decision to rerecord her albums has sent the internet into a frenzy, although her revised pieces have been widely acclaimed. According to *Time*, Swift's style has evolved, which shows in *Fearless (Taylor's Version)* and *Red (Taylor's Version)* alike, but so, too, has her artistic influence. *Time* writer Raisa Bruner discusses Swift's objective behind rerecording the albums: "But beneath those dreamy soundscapes is an artist who's been fighting for years to manage the means, method of production, and distribution of her work" (par. 2). Now, Swift finally has the chance to do so, and by reclaiming her power, she sets a precedent for other artists to follow.

The opening track of the album, "State of Grace," marks the restlessness of love, how it rushes in and changes us. For better or for worse is to be determined through the other tracks. Swift provides clear detail—"Just twin fire signs, four blue eyes"—throughout "State of Grace," as she deals with confusion in her relationship. In this way, the opening track carries a feeling of nostalgia, looking back on love and past connections.

On the previous *Red* album, some of the most popular tracks included "Red," "22," "I Knew You Were Trouble," "We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together," "Everything Has Changed," "Begin Again," and "All Too Well." These songs had some of the highest YouTube views of Swift's career. On *Taylor's Version*, Swift



recreates these songs with a mature sound, as she sings with more confidence and vocal range. There is also a cleanliness to her recording, with an added focus on her voice rather than background music. She also sounds happier, particularly in “We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together—or at least less angry and more at peace. Swift seems to be having fun with the song rather than pining over the breakup. Even her pronunciation of “We” is lighthearted and childlike, suggesting a satirical tone.

Perhaps Swift learned not to take life so seriously. There is something so empowering and celebratory about Swift “feeling 22,” even at 32. “Everything Has Changed,” a duo with Ed Sheeran, shows the development of their musical skills. It also offers an added layer to the song, which looks back on the past. Of the two, Sheeran’s voice has changed drastically since the previous recording. He demonstrates the honing of his craft, as he carries a newfound vocal depth. The bridge of “Everything Has Changed” still evokes strong emotion within the listener. It states, “Come back and tell me why/ I’m feeling like I’ve missed you all this time/And meet me there tonight/ And let me know that it’s not all in my mind.” The song speaks to the reconciliation between lovers, but also an acknowledgement of passed time.

Another emotional song is “Begin Again,” which deals with new beginnings. The song itself feels like a clean slate, a fresh start, for the singer and the listener alike. If anything, the *Taylor’s Version* of the song adds even more magic than the first. It carries a bittersweet tone, as Swift remembers the start of new love, of reciprocated love. The song shows the beginning of a crush: “And you throw your head back laughin’ like a little kid/ I think it’s strange that you think I’m funny ‘cause he never did.” Swift, in relaying this experience, has her eyes opened to a healthy relationship, what love should feel like. She also notices her own worth, as she develops self-esteem. It is a stark contrast to “Dear John” and “Innocent,” both from her album *Speak Now*.

Although *Red (Taylor’s Version)* offers revisions to previous pieces, it also features new songs, such as “Message in a Bottle” and a ten-minute version of “All Too Well.” These tracks are considered “from the vault,” or those cut from original release. In addition, the album adds Swift’s original pieces “Babe” and “Better Man,” which were previously recorded by Sugarland and Little Big Town, respectively. These pieces offer a new take and mature sound to songs Swift wrote ten years ago. After releasing *Folklore* and *Evermore*, widely considered her best albums, Swift reinvents *Red* with more experience and vocal depth.

“Babe,” “Forever Winter,” “Nothing New,” “Ronan,” and “All Too Well (Ten-Minute Version)” are the most powerful exemplars of Swift’s creative spirit.

“Babe,” in particular, emphasizes the pain of being forgotten, of not being chosen. It shows how a relationship disintegrates—and just how devastating this is for the storyteller. She writes about taking pictures down, despite the memories and despite the love. Swift sings, “Since you admitted it, I keep picturing/Her lips on your neck, I can’t unsee it/ I hate that because of you I can’t love you, babe.” Unlike in Swift’s other



tracks, Swift does not sound healed from this experience. She exposes raw emotions and vulnerability, which attests to her strength.

“Forever Winter” is believed to paint a picture of mental illness and depression, particularly within a relationship. Here, Swift uses her platform as a musical artist to discuss mental health, and this is commendable. It contains an upbeat tempo, which is an interesting choice, considering the content. Swift writes, “I call just checkin’ up on him/ He’s up, 3 AM just pacin’/ He says, ‘It’s not just a phase I’m in’/ My voice comes out beggin’.” Like many of her lines, Swift capitalizes here off rhyme scheme and melody. These lyrics are critical, as they counter the stigma of depression, particularly when others suggest it to be a phase. They highlight the way depression trickles from the mind and filters into everyday life.

“Nothing New” consists of a duet with Phoebe Bridgers. Much like the other tracks, “Nothing New” explores the passing of time, as they reflect on their youth. Swift remembers being eighteen while she is twenty-two, recognizing the effects of time and experience.

I’ve had too much to drink tonight/ And I know it’s sad, but this is what I think about/
And I wake up in the middle of the night/ It’s like I can feel time moving/ How can a
person know everything at 18 but nothing at 22?/ And will you still want me when
I’m nothing new?

Although singing about being twenty-two, Swift acknowledges how little she knows—and how time has shaped her experience. She worries about being forgotten, or overlooked, as she ages.

Another selection from the vault is “Ronan,” the tragic real-life account of a young boy who died of cancer. Yet Swift immortalizes his legacy by giving him such a special place on the album. She takes a snapshot of Ronan’s four years and how he changed lives and inspired people. Out of all the tracks, “Ronan” remains the most powerful, both in lyricism and emotion. The following lines capture the essence of the song: “And what if I’m standing in your closet/ trying to talk to you? / And what if I kept the hand-me-downs/ you won’t grow into?” This song shows the heartbreak of losing a child, but also the hope and comfort brought by their memory.

And last on the album is Swift’s ten-minute version of “All Too Well,” which set the record for longest number-one track on the US Billboard Hot 100 on November 22, 2021. The highly anticipated song beat the record previously set by Don McLean with “American Pie” (1972). This review would be incomplete without addressing its presence. The first half of the track captures the love between two lovers, the beauty of their relationship. Her chorus includes the following lines: “Cause there we are again in the middle of the night/ We’re dancin’ round the kitchen in the refrigerator light/ Down the stairs, I was there/ I remember it all too well.” There is a clarity to her remembrance, and Swift can visualize herself back in that setting.



This version of “All Too Well” gives detail of flashbacks of piercing memory. It also adds the pain of their relationship and why it ended. In the fourth verse, Swift describes the agonizing feeling of the breakup. She writes, “You said if we had been closer in age, maybe it would’ve been fine/ And that made me want to die.” Much like “Ronan,” “All Too Well (Ten-Minute Version)” shows the vulnerability of Swift’s creative spirit. It shows how she strings these stories together, patched from her pain.

Above all, Taylor Swift’s album inspires listeners to write a story of their own—to make peace with their forgotten feelings.

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