

## Puluche Album Review Rubric ©

**Artist: St. Vincent**

**Album Title: St. Vincent (2014) – Loma Vista/Republic**

Categories	Criteria				Rating
	4 - Exemplary	3 - Proficient	2 - Developing	1 - Underdeveloped	
<b><u>Compositions</u></b>	Every song is quality and has a distinctive appeal of its own. Tracks have a perfect flow and continuity that enhance the album's overall appeal.	<b>Many quality songs with some distinctive appeal. Tracks have a good flow and continuity that enhance the album's overall appeal.</b>	Some quality songs with distinctive appeal but not sustained. Track flow and continuity have little effect on album's overall appeal.	Few to no quality songs lacking any distinctive appeal. Track flow and continuity have little/poor effect on album's overall appeal.	<b>15</b>
<b><u>Breaking Ground</u></b>	<b>Has impressive elements of high creativity and is experimentally innovative. Developing own signature sound.</b> Shows extreme growth and/or potential as a substantial and influential artist.	Features elements of creativity and uniqueness. <b>Shows growth and/or potential as a developing and influential artist.</b>	Has very few moments of creativity and uniqueness. Shows a little growth and/or some potential as a developing artist Displays some stagnation or notable regression as an established artist.	Has no creativity and uniqueness. Shows no growth and/or little potential as a developing or established artist.	<b>17.5</b>
<b><u>Engagement</u></b>	Music has a transcending quality with numerous songs that grab the listener on respective emotional/social levels. Many songs have an addictive effect and memorable quality.	<b>Music has transcending qualities with some songs that grab the listener on respective emotional/social levels. Some songs have an addictive effect and memorable quality.</b>	Music has some transcending qualities with few songs that appeal on respective emotional/social levels, as well as having any addictive or memorable qualities.	Music has minimal transcending qualities and few to no songs that appeal on respective emotional/social levels. No positive memorable qualities.	<b>15</b>
<b><u>Lyrics</u></b>	<b>Has a strong lyrical voice with multiple thought-provoking messages with clear and/or possible meanings and depth.</b>	Has notable lyrical voice with some thought-provoking messages and/or possible meanings and depth.	Has limited lyrical voice with few-to-no thought-provoking messages, meanings and depth.	Has a weak lyrical voice with no thought-provoking messages or meanings and seriously lacks any depth.	<b>20</b>
<b><u>Production</u></b>	<b>Masterful sound quality with noticeable studio techniques employed that demand headphone inquiry. Vision flawlessly executed. Overall packaging and artwork effectively compliments and enhances album enjoyment.</b>	Very good sound quality with some noticeable studio techniques that demand headphone inquiry. Vision is acceptable. Overall packaging and artwork compliments album enjoyment.	Inconsistent sound quality with questionable studio techniques employed. Vision is questionable. Overall packaging and artwork fails to compliment album.	Questionable to poor sound quality. Lacks vision. Overall packaging and artwork fails to compliment album.	<b>20</b>

Comments

Wide doe eyes and an endearing crop of mussed black curls adorned the covers of Annie Clark's (St. Vincent) first two albums. Her soft, measured voice, as tender and unassuming as her undeniably pretty face, floated weightlessly over dense layers of tones and textures. It was quintessential art rock — her songs read like an abstract painting, jumbled assortments of sounds that were pleasing on the surface, but often lacked structure. Her music was intricate, ornate, surprising in its nebulousness; she diverged from conventional song structure whenever possible, and was successful... mostly. She didn't instantly snag you with hooks and poppy choruses, but her songs had depth and an uncanny eloquence, and her pure voice led you unhesitatingly through her wavering melodies.

Clark and her music embody the same quirkiness as like-minded art rockers of the late 2000's, but to simply say she "sounds like" anyone else is a discredit to her unique style. She produces a sound all her own, with a keen ear for texture and snappy, sophisticated guitar skills that only come with years of experience.

On her new self-titled album *St. Vincent*, Clark returns with more confidence and conviction than ever before. Gone are the ambiguous close-ups of her expressionless face — the cover to *St. Vincent* features Clark on her rightful throne, an intimidating figure of power and allure. Her songs are tighter, more controlled, and although their melodies are easier to track she still leaves plenty of room for hidden surprises, like the grungy, inscrutable guitar noise which emerges in the opener "Rattlesnake."

What Clark needed to cross over into mainstream was a point of accessibility, a recognizable element to ease listeners into her sometimes impenetrable songs. With this goal in mind, she's taken steps on this album to reach out to that mainstream audience.

The jazzy horn section, for example, from Clark's 2012 collaboration with David Byrne *Love This Giant*, makes a return in the single "Digital Witness." Its familiar R&B undertones provide a surface listeners can easily latch onto even as she bemoans the shortcomings of our egocentric, hyper-tech society: "Digital witness/What's the point of even sleeping?/If I can't show it you can't see me/What's the point of doing anything?" The song is so caught up in its own driving beats that you're caught breathless when it cuts suddenly short at the end.

Clark displays in full-force the peculiar gloom only hinted at on her previous albums. The gospel choir from Hell makes a cameo in the spectacular "Huey Newton" before the song finishes with crunchy, headstrong guitar strumming. She shows she isn't afraid of harshness or dissonance, and often distorts the sounds of her guitar so radically that you can hardly tell what instrument she's playing — but *damn*, whatever it is, it sounds good.

This album proves also that she knows how to manufacture a catchy tune when she really wants to. "Bring Me Your Loves" swaggers over an R&B techno-groove, supported by a syncopated percussion backbeat as she spits her lyrics with the kind of chutzpah I've only ever seen from hip-hop artists like M.I.A.

The glammy "Birth in Reverse" is perhaps less immediately catchy, but it's not like you'll notice anyway while stupefied by her unreal ability to shred a guitar. Her fingers work a similar magic near the end of the opener "Rattlesnake," and also in spastic bursts in "Digital Witness" and "Regret."

Annie Clark placing herself on a queenly pedestal is by no means a pretentious front. Her unnerving stoicism and coolness belie the intensity of her lyrics, but it only takes one listen to understand that Clark is very

87.5

	<p>serious about her music. She said in a recent interview, "...The hardest thing for a musician to do is to sound like yourself – and I think that's true. That's really the end goal, to have a voice that's purely your own." Without doubt Annie Clark has established herself as a voice like no other. Whether her songs are always palatable or not, there's no denying that she's carved out her own small niche in the rock world, and for that she deserves credit.</p>	
<p><b><u>Commendations</u></b></p>	<p>Any fan of St. Vincent knows her songs flirt with experimentation. On her older albums and this newer one both, there are songs that frankly you shouldn't like — but do anyway. She has this queer way of manipulating harsh, raw sounds into very listenable material, and in doing so she demonstrates what makes her such an intriguing artist. "Digital Witness" and "Bring Me Your Loves" are the album's most accessible highlights, encapsulating the tension between digital and funk with sparkling production. "Severed Crossed Fingers" is another standout, a poignant ballad that proves she doesn't need electronic flourish to compose a wonderful song.</p>	
<p><b><u>Next Steps</u></b></p>	<p>Clark is still riding the momentum following her fantastic collaboration with David Byrne, and so it's no coincidence that the album's most successful songs are the ones that take cues from their previous work. When she delves too deeply into the strange, sometimes uncomfortable world of art rock, she risks limiting the scope of her audience. For Clark, though, this is a risk worth taking every time. It's certain that her next album as will be just as good, if not better, because this sort of innate musicianship doesn't just disappear overnight. If St. Vincent will continue to push her way into the mainstream airwaves... well, that's another question entirely. She already has her foot in the door of pop-accessibility, but she doesn't seem like the type to sacrifice her artistic integrity to sell a few more records. In the end though, no matter which path she decides to take, Annie Clark's future is surely a bright one.</p>	
<p><b><u>Reviewer</u></b></p>	<p>Kendall Russell</p>	<p><b>IRC:</b> Bill Pulice</p>