

# pitchspork



Lana Del  
Rey- 9.4

**Next best  
American  
songwriter,  
period.**

Syracuse  
to studio:  
Clairo

Player  
series:  
Snail  
Mail



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november 2019

issue no. 182

1.



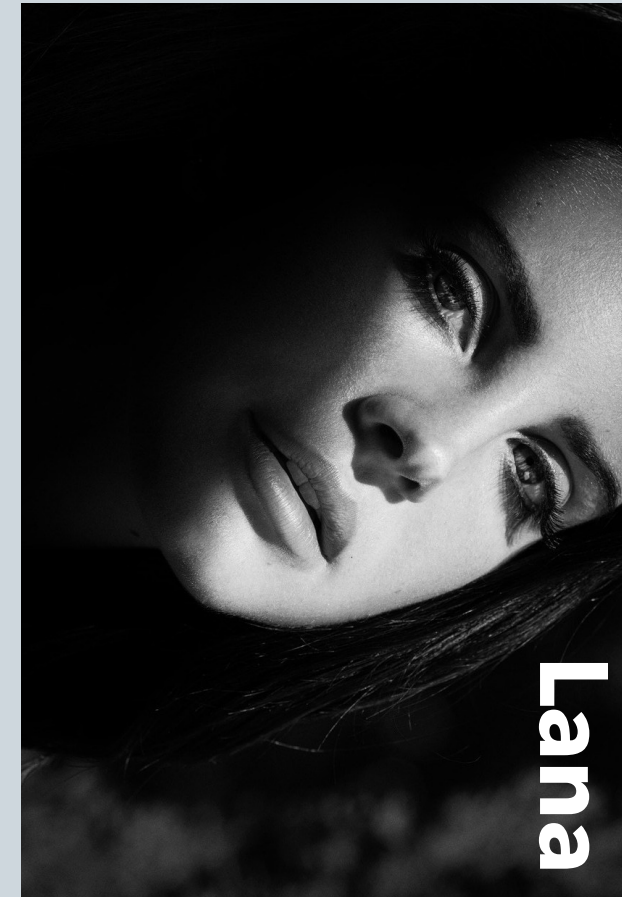
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Syracuse to studio

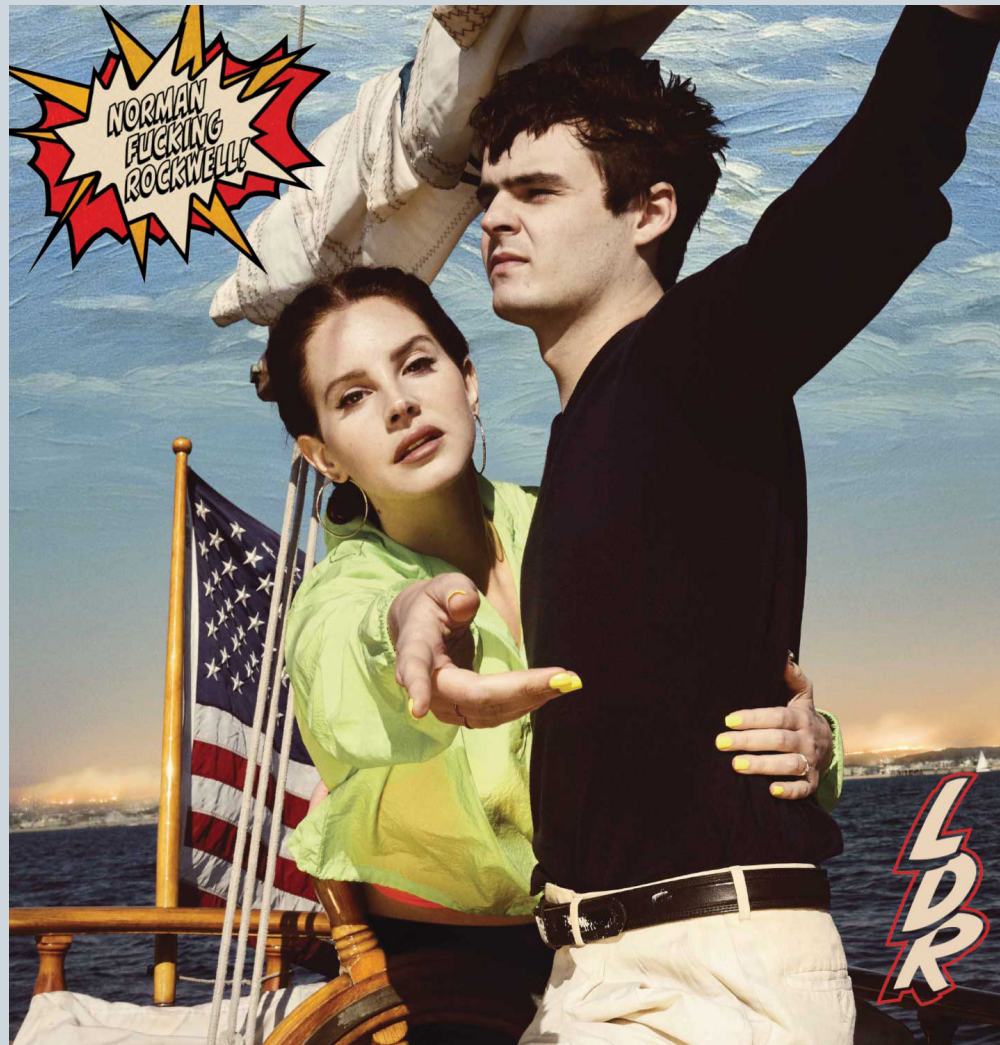
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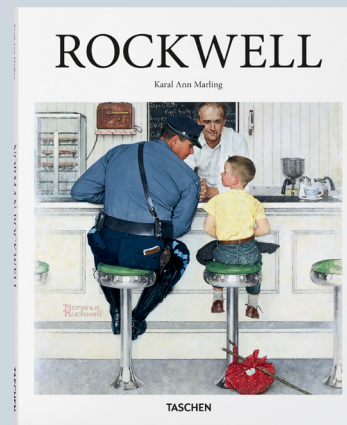
# Del Rey- 9.4

## BEST NEW MUSIC

On her elegant and complex fifth album, Lana Del Rey sings exquisitely of freedom and transformation and the wreckage of being alive. It establishes her as one of America's greatest living songwriters.



Norman Fucking Rockwell! is Lana at her deepest, and it arrives at a time when the history of America as we know it is being rewritten. Norman Rockwell himself illustrated idyllic images of American life and its history, spending 50 years with the Americana propagandists at the weekly Saturday Evening Post. His best-known works used a wondrous narrative style to center comfort and simplicity: A pastoral idea, painted and personified, of the American Dream. Lana neatly cuts through that outmoded fantasy with an emphatic fucking hyphen mark of irreverence, or enthusiasm, or both. As Lana revives American myths, with an empty deadpan that would make Lou Reed proud, she also exposes them. Like the Beach Boys, she's looking for America; like Elvis, she's discomfiting; like Dylan, she's a trickster, and we are all potentially fooled.



Lana is one of our most complicated stars, a constantly unresolvable puzzle—someone who once called her own work “more of a psychological music endeavor” than pop. But on Norman Fucking Rockwell! that ground-swelling complexity coheres to reveal an indisputable fact: She is the next best American songwriter, period.



Trading much of her hardboiled trap-pop and trip-hop malaise for baroque piano ballads and dazzling folk—Lana has begun a dynamic second act in profundity. “I really do believe that words are one of the last forms of magic,” Lana once said. Where her elegant wordplay once made her the Patron Saint of Internet Feelings, she now sounds like a millennial troubadour—singing tales of beloved bartenders and broken men, of fast cars and all of the senses, of freedom and transformation and the wreckage of being alive. **The stakes have never been higher.**

**“I really do believe that words are one of the last forms of magic.”**

Above all, Norman Fucking Rockwell! is the sound of a heart shattering and reforming just to shatter again—of troubled people attempting to navigate the mess of love. Her ache is from empathy: for our crumbling world, for the down and out, for lovers at war with their minds. Many of these exquisitely narrated songs contain reminders that the trappings of masculinity—breaches in communication,

emotional stiltedness, fear of vulnerability—come from the same toxic status quo as systemic patriarchy. On the wrenching “California,” Lana processes as much: “You don’t ever have to be stronger than you really are.” Each word is on a pedestal.



But hope does not elude us yet. And Lana has an anthem for that, too. The title of the grand finale is itself a doomy 16-word poem called “Hope is a dangerous thing for a woman like me to have - but I have it.” Whatever it was that brought Joni Mitchell and Leonard Cohen together half a century ago, that middle ground is in the solemn mood, hollowed space, and spiritual fortitude of this haunting song. In the muted resignation of her voice you can see her “trust no one” tattoo. She rejects a world of luxury, rejects happiness and sadness both, calls herself “24/7 Sylvia Plath.” And in this slow, glowering procession, she points more directly to her own personal history than ever—“spilling my guts with the Bowery bums” as a volunteer, FaceTiming her father “from beyond the grave”—and soberly she sings: “Hope is a dangerous thing for a woman with my past.” In the vacant spaces between her dark phrases is the unassailable fact that people bury their pasts in order to endure them.

Norman Fucking Rockwell! is the apotheosis of Lana Del Rey, songs of curiosity and of consequence, darkness and light, a time capsule of 2019, proof that a person cannot escape herself but she can change. Lana has said hope is dangerous because of her own experience, because in Hollywood she “knows so much.” Hope is dangerous because women are rarely taken seriously, from matters of authenticity to cases of assault. Hope is dangerous because the world fails women, and the bigotry to which American power is currently pitched ensures it. Lana calls herself “a modern-day woman with a weak constitution,” witnessing “a new revolution,” with “monsters still under my bed that I never could fight off.” What makes this final song of survival so cutting is the palpable difficulty in her delivery. When she lands on “a gatekeeper carelessly dropping the keys on my nights off,” it sounds like an oblique image of corrupted power, as upsetting as it ought to be, one to finally drain her of hope. But she still has it. In a piercing falsetto we rarely if ever hear from Lana, perhaps saved for her most pressing truth, she touches the sky: “I have it, I have it, I have it.” And when she does, you believe her.

