

Ard Matthews' solo album: Do you seriously care?

 By [Johann M. Smith](#)

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Pop music works because of a dull human truth: your heartbreak and joy isn't more special than anybody else's - and, thus, it has to be bland enough to become universal (Exhibit A: Coldplay). The general feelings that we all experience is the global language on which pop solely rests. Success depends on how well it can define the same old familiar tears. Those who get it right are gods. The problem nowadays: we've heard it all before. A vulnerable singer behind a guitar taking stabs at life just doesn't work anymore (Exhibit B: Lady Gaga). So, our good 'ol pop rocker Ard Matthews has to dig really deep if he wants to raise any heartbeats. Or make any sense (or money) for that matter.

Enter "First Offerings", Ard's first solo effort in 16 years since forming Just Jinjer - like them, and the first wave of South African alternative rock bands, the sound and the accent employed is very American. That aside, the problem with any solo effort is comparison to the originating band, which is always difficult. All things considered, the first line is a double dose of ironic ambition:

"I want to rise above conditioning ... I'm alone in a world of strangers/ I've got to learn to make it on my own ... "



Nowadays people don't care

Sadly, dearest Ard, nowadays people don't care about what your plans with the world are or what's ticking inside your soul - they just want to know what fashion label you're sporting and if you've been in any scandals of late. Long gone are the days when Dawson's Greek and movie montages did the trick. But you're still here friend - and if your first fans could look into the future that is now, they would be more than just proud.

Naturally, the overall theme that Ard has employed is very self-indulgent. Therefore, the experience is either perceived as intimate or cringe-worthy (depending on the company you keep and the social status they prefer). But as any Ard fan will tell you, he doesn't really care, and neither should you - if there's a moral to be learned in this album, it's no doubt that. Failing that, just fake it - because, who's to know if your soul will fade at all? Popular household name indie bands can start taking notes from uncle Ard: You too will one day also be considered the kitsch R29.95 option in your local music store.

A bit different in a very good way

This is what rock 'n' roll sounds like when you're so-called "over the hill" and people forget your band pulled a Platinum. I refuse to say more, we should all just give this album a go on merit and moral alone. But no doubt you will either love it or hate it. Why try and persuade you otherwise? Just give it a listen, if you don't, so what? If you do, you'll be surprised. "First Offerings" is a bit different in a very good way that doesn't mirror Just Jinjer as much as it's just humble and soulful music (Exhibit C: John Lennon in the 1970s). And that's what missing in the 21st century, something to lift the spirits.

The song writing really shines through - I daresay it resembles early Red Hot Chilli Peppers with a bit of post-2003 influence to boot. He's caught up with the times and so should all of us. The overall impression you get is a man with nothing to lose. And it shows. He'd be the first to admit that his career was in need of a revival - and this could be it. In conclusion: don't expect a Just Jinjer reunion soon. Nonetheless, you are what you are, and Ard is only himself.

Here's proof from the horse's mouth: museonline.co.za/featured/ard-matthews

Johann MSmith is a music journalist turned content hacker. Known as the IDMMAG launch designer, Johann specialises in entertainment, travel and social commentary. Or as he puts it: "I speak as and for companies through social and design."
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