For Mykki Blanco, HIV Is in the Mix Tapes

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After releasing several EPs and mix tapes over the past five years, the gender-bending, genre-hopping recording artist Michael Quattlebaum a.k.a. Mykki Blanco recently released his first full-length album, Mykki.

The self-described “HIV-positive drag-rap showgirl” disclosed his status publicly in a Facebook post last year, writing: “I’ve been HIV Positive since 2011, my entire career. F--- stigma and hiding in the dark, this is my real life.”

Known primarily for rapping, Blanco does his share of gritty-yet-sweet singing on the album, including on the song “You Don’t Know Me,” which he told The Fader “is directly about me coming out as HIV-positive and about the fallout, too, and all the articles.” He sings, “All in my head all in my mind these voices screaming / Gimme the strength I’m coming clean with all my demons.”

The decision to disclose was a difficult one. Last month, he told The Huffington Post: “I don’t think people could understand what that felt like.” But, he pointed out, all the support he received encouraged him to continue doing what he was doing and gave him hope: “It made me have more faith in humanity. I didn’t realize people could be so good.”

Although “You Don’t Know Me” may be the only song about HIV, a couple of spoken-word interludes and other confessional songs, like “Loner,” another track on which Blanco sings and details feelings of loneliness and isolation, reveal the artist to be more open and mature—both musically and personally—than earlier efforts might have suggested.

But fans of Blanco’s harder beats and playful side need not fear. The battle rap “Fendi Band” showcases Blanco’s tough, tongue-in-cheek flow, and “For the Cunts” is a straight-up party jam written as a goofy ode to hanging out in clubs with his dishy gay friends. Blanco may have matured, but he still knows how to have a good time.

Mykki is available on iTunes.

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