

POP FLASH.



Between the looming election, a global pandemic, growing recognition and reform of continued racism in America, and the collective grief of no end in sight for extended quarantine, what place does a pop record have in the cultural discourse? Single-minded devotion to the most pressing concerns of the day seems logical when the stakes are so high, but mental and psychological respite is still necessary to survive an era of stress and revolution. In that case, consider *Positions* an emotional oasis in this otherwise dark(est) timeline. On her sixth full-length album, Ariana Grande returns to the campiness and joy that were a hallmark of her first three offerings, updating the grand piano and slow strings with twitchy beats and explicit lyrics that unravel with a narrative precision her early work consistently lacked. Unlike the scattershot nature of *Yours Truly*, *My Everything*, and *Dangerous Woman*, *Positions* is laser-focused on one thing — her current sex life. Maybe the brevity of *Thank U, Next* helped her learn to self-edit, because this new record is as polished and nimble as that one.

Let's contextualize Ariana writing an entire album about getting railed for a quick second. Recovering from trauma is a nearly superhuman feat, as is self-directing a new narrative about your life during the healing process. After facing down terrorism, losing a loved one to addiction, living with grief, and extracting herself from a toxic rebound relationship, the emotional fodder for [some of the most impactful albums of Ariana's career has been dense and dramatic](#). And, the universal popularity of her last two back-to-back releases only added to the pressure of an inevitable follow-up. So *Positions* was tasked with a difficult task from the start: Update the public on Ari's healing, build upon the gargantuan commercial success she established in 2019, and usher in a new phase of her life. Considered through that lens, this record is just as consequential as the

last two, giving us a view of Grande as the most sex-positive, happy, and in love as she's ever been.

— Caitlin White, Uproxx Pop Critic, [on Ariana Grande's sixth album, *Positions*](#)

NUMBER ONE STUNNERS



ARIANA GRANDE

Well, speak of the devil — when Ariana returns from whatever (brief) hiatus she's been on, the charts respond immediately. Though “Positions” might not have the massive cultural impact that her last title track, “Thank U, Next,” had, it still easily slid into the No. 1 spot for this week, clinching the win for Ari while the rest of the world hopes for another kind of victory on election day in America. In the overtly politicized video, Ari imagines herself in the highest offices of the land, sporting Jackie O fashion choices and a firm grip on ruling the land, and the man she's lately set her sights on. It's not a perfect song, but it's a slinky bop and a welcome distraction from just how bizarre our own position has been this year.

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BUBBLING UNDER



BABY FUZZ

Baby Fuzz aka Sterling Fox aka Brandon Lowry is probably best-known for producing Lana Del Rey's breakout hit "Video Games," but she's not the only pop star Lowry has been quietly writing and producing with behind-the-scenes. Building up a massive list of collaborations after Trump won the election in 2016, Lowry split for Canada for a year – who can blame him? Now, he's back in full musician mode with the new moniker, Baby Fuzz, a project that will pique the interest of Flaming Lips fans and glam-rock listeners alike. "Acid Night" is the third single off his new album, a gently apocalyptic reflection on a world that continually looks darker and more absurd. His new album, *Welcome To The Future*, is a concept record due out later this year, and if "Acid Night" is any indication, it will be richly layered, vividly imaginative, and weird as hell.

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REMEMBER TO

VOTE!!



Instead of talking about something historical from the past, today I'm here to remind you that it is election day. The day when American citizens have the right to cast their vote and select who will run the country they live in, what values and rules they want to uphold. If you haven't embraced the privilege of voting before, or yet today, please consider that all the artistic freedom we enjoy in this country, that allows our musicians to be so powerful and creative, is due, in some small part, to this simple act of voting. Consider making history today by voting to protect values like democracy, feminism, civil rights, and common decency. Learn more about getting registered and going out to vote below.

MAKE SURE YOUR VOICE IS HEARD

LOVE LETTERS



WIZKID

After major feature placement on the Beyoncé-curated *The Lion King: The Gift* soundtrack, WizKid's profile in America has picked up considerably. Well, now that he's released his new album, *Made In Lagos*, that profile is going to explode. Easily one of the best pop albums of the year, and packed with superstar features, WizKid's sunny, effortless beats and languid yet powerful vocals feel like sunlight in a bottle, lightning up your car stereo, headphones, or living room with a lurch of sonic joy. My current favorite on the record is his collaboration with H.E.R., dubbed "Smile," a love song that sees itself in the easy ability to make a partner do just that. Whether you're currently in love or desperately searching, this song is a reminder of what a powerful bit of happiness a loved one's smile can be. It sounds simple, but it's everything.

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