

Scattering Brilliance Amid Mediocrity

Luca Gett, staff writer

One morning after class, I made my way to the lower floor of the Keats Science Building and to my usual spot. I opened YouTube and found my way to a clip of Anthony Fantano, a popular music critic, reviewing *Kick III*, the third installment of Arca's serial *Kick* albums. He had almost finished the album and played its ninth track. "Señorita" hit me like a ton of bricks. What would follow would be my discovery and eventual liking of Arca but an overall dissatisfaction with the *Kick* series.

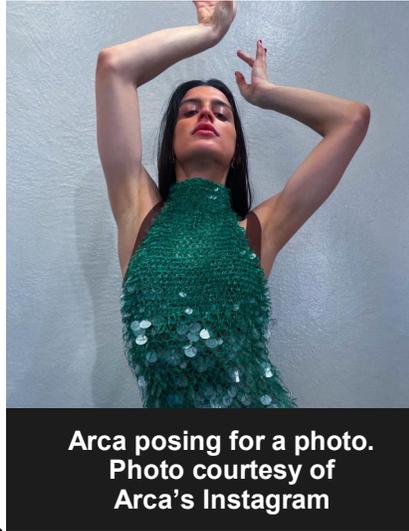
Alejandra Ghersi Rodríguez, known professionally as Arca, is an artist from Caracas, Venezuela, with an extensive skill set and an impressive résumé. She attended the Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music at New York University and has had collaborations ranging from Kanye West to Björk.

The *Kick* series is a quintet of albums, with *Kick I* being released on June 26, 2020, and *Kick IIII* being released on Dec. 3, 2021. Upon researching her biography, I decided that her music was worth my attention.

Kick I, *Kick II*, and *Kick III* were all multigenre. Arca incorporated elements of experimental, electronic, industrial, pop, and reggaeton. Still, each album held a consistent focus. *Kick I* centered all of its components around electronic music. *Kick II* reimaged reggaeton, a form of Latin music with Puerto Rican origins. *Kick III* was confrontational with its mostly industrial sound. The three albums featured performances and production from Shygirl, Rosalía Vila Tobella, Björk, Sia, Machinedrum, Cardopusher, and the late Sophie Xeon.

I have to make a point. *Kick IIII* and *Kick IIII* are in my way. Let me put them aside by saying that they were both very subtle in sound. *Kick IIII* was more electronic, and *Kick IIII* was an orchestral album. Altogether, the two works left me unimpressed.

Above everything else, "KLK" from *Kick I*



Arca posing for a photo.
Photo courtesy of
Arca's Instagram

and "Señorita" from *Kick III* impressed me the most. Let me be clearer in saying that the beginning portion of "KLK" and concluding portion of "Señorita" were jaw dropping. It was in these two songs that Arca demonstrated a rare ability; She was able to make her music, no matter how unique and experimental, instantly likable. "KLK" held an air of unpredictability. The voice of the featured performer, Rosalía, was treated indifferently among the lovably inconsistent metallic percussion in the song.

"Señorita," with production from Machinedrum, employed outstandingly harsh compression noises. In doing so, the subtlety of the outro was made even more impactful.

So, having described what I liked best, can it be said that the first three *Kick* albums were masterpieces? No. They did well to demonstrate Arca's existing talents. However, they revealed that she needs to develop. I only really liked two songs on these albums. It would be more correct to say that I only liked portions of these two songs.

Arca's expertise could not be found in every song. She could not even present it consistently throughout the entirety of a given song. The brilliantly engineered "KLK" and "Señorita" were almost ruined by unbearably bland pop tracks such as "Born Yesterday."

I underestimated Arca. After discovering her, I have come to like her older work more than anything. In its entirety, her *Kick* series felt like a waste of brilliance. Some moments would leave me excitedly shocked and others would bore me. At first, this inconsistency confused me.

Why would Arca scatter her genius among forgettable pop songs and dully produced experimental tracks? Because, for now, it is all she knows how to do. Intelligently embellishing songs such as "Hold My Liquor," by Kanye West, among many others, is fragmental work.

Arca needs to learn to be consistent and thorough in her music and I trust that she can. I am rooting for her; I want more songs to jolt me awake after math class.