

Introduction

After three years of no new music, Katy Perry recently released a new song titled “Chained to the Rhythm” featuring reggae artist Skip Marley. The single initially comes off as another one of Perry’s dance ballads with a disco pop beat, but as you continue to listen a deeper message shows through. The song was released February 10, 2017, less than a month after Donald Trump’s presidential inauguration. The lyrics reference a “happily numb” society unaware that life’s trivial distractions are deterring their focus away from critical issues. The music video, released a few days later depicts Perry as a guest in the theme park “Oblivia,” a futuristic, 50’s style amusement park plagued with pastels and overly ecstatic visitors. With attractions modeled after serious problems occurring today, such as “No Place Like Home.” A ride that flings you over a fence after your day at the park, this is referring to Trump’s wall and the controversy surrounding immigration policy. There’s also a stand selling “Inferno H2O,” a blue beverage served in a beaker and lit on fire. This represents America’s dependency on oil and its tendency to risk water as a resource to produce more. Through lyrical metaphors, ironic visual imagery and organizational emphasis the song, as well as the music video, communicate the intended message of a need for greater societal awareness.

About the Author

The song is performed by Katy Perry and features Skip Marley but they did not write the lyrics by themselves. They had help from fellow singer/songwriter Sia, as well as producers Max Martin and Ali Payami. Although the song was written by a select few, Perry is the implied author of the piece. She takes responsibility for the final product. Given the political nature of the song, it is bound to receive praise and criticism with both being directed at Perry.

Perry has a history of being politically involved. Her twitter bio reads “Artist. Activist. Conscious.” She has been an advocate for LGBTQ rights, she publicly supported Hillary Clinton’s run for presidency and took part in the Women’s March after Trump took office. She often uses her fame to bring attention to issues she believes are important. This song is no different. Many have credited this song as Perry’s response to Trump’s presidency and some of the decisions his administration has been making. She has never outright said that this was an anti-Trump song; however, she has used the term “purposeful pop” when referring to the track. The idea of “purposeful pop” is creating music that can be related to relevant topics and motivates listeners to get involved. Katy Perry is using this song as a political call to action, a message to the masses to break out of their hazy obliviousness and take action.

The Sound of Obliviousness

The lyrics within the song reinforce Perry’s message of the need to become socially aware. The use of metaphors is significant in the explanation of society’s current impartialness to political and social issues. Perry sings “Are we tone deaf? Keep sweeping it under the mat, Thought we could do better than that.” This expresses her distaste for when people disregard societal issues by “sweeping them under the mat” and blindly ignoring them. She references the people who chose to only acknowledge the good and overlook serious issues when she sings the line, “So put your rose-colored glasses on, And party on.” Rose-colored glasses are typically used when referring to ignorant optimism. She also discusses how people’s privilege can cause them to become unsympathetic to others problems because the issues do not involve them directly, “So comfortable we’re living in a bubble, bubble, So comfortable we cannot see the trouble, trouble.” Perry is using the symbolism of a bubble to represent a world

protected from any problems, and if you live in this bubble it may be difficult to see that others around you are struggling. Furthermore, just because you may not notice certain issues going on in your world it does not mean they should not be addressed. The different levels of ignorance Perry addresses in the lyrics stress her point of just how oblivious people have become and how important it is for them to increase their social awareness.

Welcome to Oblivia

Throughout the video, there is a constant irony of having a theme park modeled off the nation's issues. For example, the ride labeled "The Great American Dream Drop" is a metaphor for the housing crisis. Heterosexual couples step into suburb-style mini houses, the houses then get pulled up in the air and dropped back down again. The housing crisis left many families in debt and the US in an unstable economic condition; nevertheless, the couples are seen giggling as they step into their house. This selective absurdity is shown to emphasize the idea that people are becoming numb to societal issues. The ride "Bombs Away" shows roller coaster cars shaped like nuclear bombs shooting straight up into the air. Earlier on in the video Perry gets offered a large mass of cotton candy shaped like a mushroom cloud. These images of bombs and nuclear clouds are usually seen in a negative light; in Oblivia however, nuclear warfare is trivialized and guests seem apathetic to the danger. This visual irony enhances the song's message of societal unawareness, and the inherent threat that it creates.

Let Freedom Ring

Perry makes another political statement by alluding to our society's idea of freedom. The title of the song references chains, which traditionally symbolize a lack of freedom or the absence of individualism. This creates a paradoxical situation because America as a country has always prided itself on being the "home of the free". During the chorus, she repeats the line "We think we're free," further emphasizing the contradiction. As a listener, you begin to analyze your liberties and question if we have a distorted idea of freedom. The music video also pays homage to George Orwell's novel *1984*. While the camera pans through a line of eager Oblivia guests waiting for the Greatest Ride in the World, we get a glimpse of the wait time and it is 1,984 hours. This subtle hint persuades the audience to further evaluate if today's society has taken part in a collective ignorance and blissfully chosen to ignore serious issues.

Conclusion

Katy Perry's song "Chained to the Rhythm" encompasses the notion of a socially unaware population. She uses her position as a political activist and philanthropist to spread her belief in the need for stronger awareness as a society. After listening to the song for the first time, I felt as though Perry was urging her audience to question their routine and think critically about how much of an impact we have in this world. Through metaphors in the lyrics, Perry emphasizes the importance of becoming perceptive to current issues, regardless if they involve you directly or not. Without watching the music video, it seems that her message is simply critiquing society's superficial diversions and many who have not seen the video may not pick up on her political undertones. However, the video plays a crucial role in helping her audience understand her true meaning. She uses visual irony by creating paradoxical situations referencing freedom and political controversies. The overall exhibition of Katy Perry's song "Chained to the Rhythm" is meant to start conversations. Its design concepts display a

society stuck in its blissful ignorance, naively ignoring major issues and its' urgent need for consciousness.