

## Review: Newcomer Juni Ata delivers urgent, passionate debut

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Juni Ata, “Saudade” (Flying on Fire)

Breaking through in the music industry isn’t easy under the best of circumstances. Doing so as a newcomer in the midst of a pandemic multiplies the challenge exponentially.

But here comes Juni Ata, the debut project of Jesse Daniel Edwards, singing with the kind of passion that demands attention. His new album, “Saudade,” sets Edwards’ urgent vocals against a backdrop of soaring, multi-layered arrangements in an adventurous set that sounds pretty darn polished for a first-timer.

There’s some inconsistency here, and the style is a throwback to emo-rock from the 90’s or the early 2000’s. Some songs seem like they’d fit right in on the soundtrack of romantic comedies from that period, the kind where Adam Sandler and Drew Barrymore finally work things out in the end, predictable crescendo and all.

The producers of “The O.C.” would’ve worn this album out if it had only come out in time.

But there’s too much heft here to dismiss it out of hand. Songs like “Philadelphia” and “Fight Hard, Run Fast” are well-crafted and melodic songs with lush arrangements that use horns to majestic effect. Edwards has a lot of help here, including Memphis guitar legend Steve Cropper, and the sound has real sophistication.

There’s also substance to the lyrics, with intriguing character development and clever, surprising turns of phrase. “No Reply,” one of the album’s best songs, is built around authentic-sounding conversations fraught with meaning.

“Mina swears one day she’ll leave La Casona, she’s allergic to the sun, so she lives in the shadows on the edge of border towns/She works hard through the long night, makes it look easy, and she asks me if I think she’d like Tennessee.”

That’s the kind of thing that makes this an intriguing debut, and Juni Ata an artist to watch.