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ALBUM PICK OF THE MONTH: PHOENIX'S BANKRUPT!

 Written by [fmicadmin](#) on April 8, 2013


From the opening chords of "Entertainment," the lead single from Phoenix's fifth studio album *Bankrupt!* (out April 22), it's evident that the French pop rockers are expanding their sound.

Members of the band have said that their follow-up to the 2009 blockbuster *Wolfgang Amadeus Phoenix* would be more experimental, and *Bankrupt!*'s 10 tracks provide ample support for that notion.

As "Entertainment" kicks in, there is an East Asian riff that fans might recognize from songs like Carl Douglas' "Kung Fu Fighting," "China Girl" from David Bowie and, perhaps most-notably, The Vapors' "Turning Japanese." It's unmistakable.

With a punch-up from heavy use of synthesizers, the single takes the listener on an exotic journey through lands unknown, helped along the way by singer Thomas Mars' trademark falsetto.

Still, while the upbeat nature of "Entertainment" might seem to set the stage for an entirely uplifting record, a look at the lyrics suggest otherwise.

Winning a 2009 Grammy for Best Alternative Music Album was all well and good, but that also brings a lot of pressure and status changes.

"Entertainment / Show them what you do with me / When everyone here knows better / What I once refused to be / Is everything they long together / I'd rather be alone," sings Mars on the track, commenting on the meteoric rise of Phoenix with *Wolfgang* and what that success means.

That theme continues with the excellent "S.O.S. in Bel Air," as Mars croons, "You can't cross the line / But you can't stop trying," layering it with the word "Alone" over and over again.

Listening to other song with titles like "Trying to Be Cool" and "Bourgeois," the point of *Bankrupt!* becomes clearer and clearer. This is a band examining the trappings of their meteoric rise to fame.

Musically, the use of electronic instruments is prevalent throughout the album, but it wouldn't be a Phoenix album without guitarists Laurent Brancowitz and Christian Mazzalai, and bassist (and keyboardist) Deck d'Arcy.

With their solid stringwork providing the framework, the synths add an ethereal spirit to the album, no matter the tone. You can hear it in the insanely catchy and upbeat "Drakkar Noir," or the ominously plodding "Bankrupt," which features a dark extended intro that would be at home on the next *Tron* soundtrack.

Phoenix gets their funkiest with a disco-tinged "Trying to Be Cool," with Mars noting that he's just trying to be cool because of an unnamed love interest. It would not be a surprise to hear remixes of this one hit clubs soon.

Finally, "Bourgeois" is especially poignant and most-definitely a highlight.

The band lulls the listener into a slumber with the light strumming of an acoustic guitar over a dreamy electro beat, but at the 2:06 mark, a jangly electric guitar kicks in, leading to the chorus of "Bourgeois, why would you care for more? / They give you almost anything / You believed almost anything."

It's clear that Phoenix put a lot of thought into *Bankrupt!*

After all, it had been four years since *Wolfgang Amadeus Phoenix* came out, and the guys toured hard to support that smash for at least two years after it came out.

A lot of soul-searching went on during the making of *Bankrupt!* When asked about the album's themes, Mars talked about the dilemma of following what is popular and what is actually good.

"For some reason I think we were really drawn to themes that seemed really unusual or overlooked somehow," [Mars recently told Stereogum](#). "There was a real fascination for things that were unused or mediocre or cheap. There was this fantasy to give beauty to things that might not usually be celebrated. I became interested in the distinction between things that are either very beautiful or very trashy ... and everything in the middle. I remember being on tour and trying to, you know, watch good movies — going through all of the Ingmar Bergman movies while reading Borges or something — while also being unable to stop watching trashy YouTube videos constantly. Being constantly inundated with both the high and the low ... a lot of the lyrics for this record came out of that idea, I guess."

Considering the lush electronic arrangements and thoughtful lyricism, about it seems that there is no worry about going *Bankrupt!* Phoenix is going for broke with what should be another hit in their catalog.

For more information, visit Phoenix's [official website](#).



Bankrupt! drops on April 23.

[Phoenix performing "Entertainment" on *Saturday Night Live* over the weekend.](#)



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