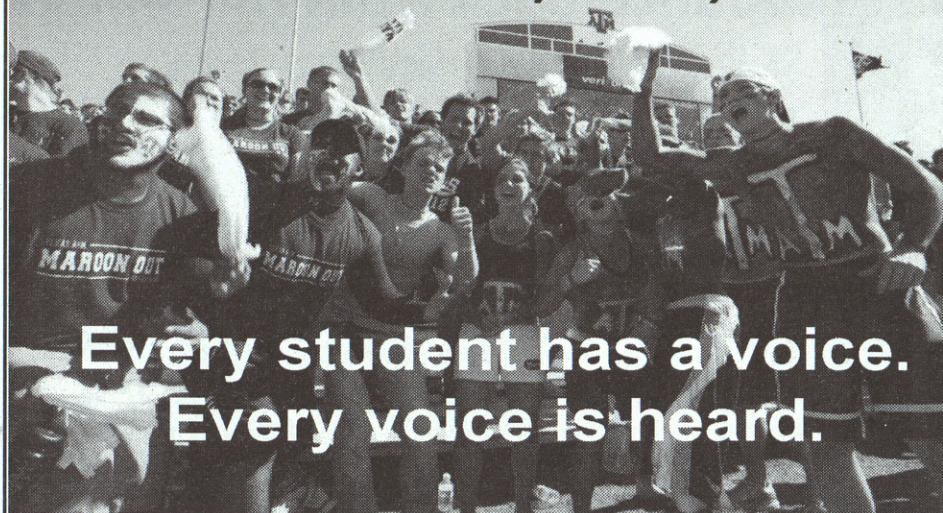


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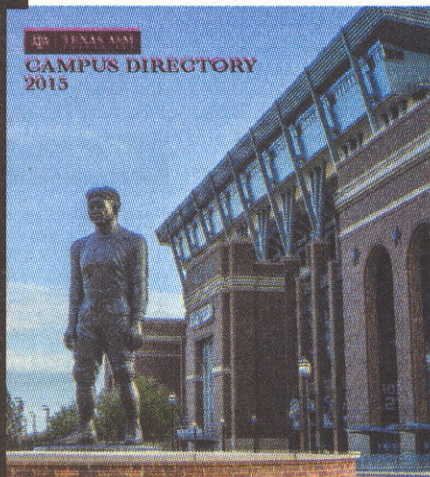
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REVIEW

Imagine Dragons challenges itself

'Smoke + Mirrors' another move by band to conform to nonconformity



Jennifer Reiley
@jreiley1

In a music world of blatant sexual messages or songs reliant on a catchy chorus, Imagine Dragons continues to write narratives. The band's second album, "Smoke + Mirrors," hit shelves and iTunes early Tuesday morning.

I fell in love with Imagine Dragons from the moment I heard "It's Time" on the way to school my junior year of high school. From then, I've listened to and bought most of their songs and seen them once in concert.

In a word, the new album is experimental. The first three songs test a new, more tribal style. "Gold" especially uses a distinctly uneven rhythm and accompanies the customary drums with heavier guitar chords. Even so, the album carries the intensity Imagine Dragons has had since its EP came out in 2010.

Like the first album, there aren't a ton of songs that I could see becoming radio hits. "I Bet My Life," which was released as a single back in December, "I'm So Sorry" and "Polaroid" all have the most potential. For casual



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fans, the album may come as a disappointment. It's a bit all over the place. Ranging from heavier tones that echo "Radioactive" to songs with a lighter edge, there is no clear narrative to the album. But each song is a narrative on its own.

Outside of the experimentation, Imagine Dragons needs to be given some points for its nonconformity in today's pop mainstream. The band has been producing music officially for five years, and so far I haven't heard a song that falls outside its style or quirks. And the songs mean something. "I Bet My Life" is an ode to lead singer Dan Reynolds's parents. The band writes about struggles of life, of finding oneself. As college students, this message can resonate.

SCIENCE

Symposium sprouts at A&M

By Connor Paetzold

People around the world will be exposed to new plant breeding techniques, thanks to the efforts of several Texas A&M graduate students.

The Texas A&M Plant Breeding Symposium will be at the MSC Thursday to educate people on new and modern plant breeding technologies. Five guest speakers will complement a student research poster contest. The symposium will also be streamed online, and organizers say a sizeable audience is registered to tune in from as far as South America, Canada and Europe.

Brian Pfeiffer, plant breeding doctoral student and symposium committee member, said attendees will have the chance to hear about plant breeding knowledge that is too new for textbooks.

"Plant breeding is a dynamic field," Pfeiffer said. "The toolbox or the technologies that we'll be able to use are changing rapidly, so we wanted to bring people in

that we thought were working on some pretty cutting edge stuff, cutting edge techniques."

The symposium will cover a broad range of topics to cater to a wider audience. Laura Masor, molecular and environmental plant sciences doctoral student and symposium committee member, said one of the benefits of having a wide audience is the exposure for the students who will showcase their research. The online webinar will feature information about the student researchers and their work, which could help them network and find jobs with people in the plant breeding field, Masor said.

Although the students' research will mostly be specific to Texas agriculture, the technology and science behind their work can be applied to many crops.

"I think everybody, even if they're not from Texas or not from the United States, will think it's still very relevant to the direction plant breeding is going," Laura Ann McCloud, a doctoral student in plant

breeding and an organizing committee member, said.

This is the first year and the organizing committee members are optimistic.

"I think we've probably outdone ourselves, we've gone above and beyond the minimum trying to make our school look good, trying to make our department look good, trying to make our sponsors proud," Masor said.

As of Monday the symposium had around 300 people registered to attend, Masor said, and that number should continue to go up as the event gets closer. The uniqueness of the event should also help to increase the number of attendees.

"We're lucky that we're in a huge geographic area and we're not next to anything like this," Masor said.

The event runs from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the MSC Bethancourt Grand Ballroom. To register for the online webinar, go to pbsymposium.tamu.edu.

MONARCH CONTINUED

monarch's population surge might be premature.

"The increase from the previous year sounds like a lot, but it was of a population of only 33 million last winter to about 56 million this winter," Wilson said. "The number has to get much larger to sustain a recovery."

The monarch's journey from Mexico to Canada takes six months to complete. The butterflies take pit stops along the way to birth an entirely new generation that will complete the journey. Bryan-College Station falls right on their route.

"About 50 percent of monarchs take this route," Wilson said. "The others move further to the east but all funnel through Texas first."

Wilson said weather conditions had improved from last year and allowed the butterflies to migrate south successfully. A typical monarch migration spans three to four generations annually.

"Migratory monarchs live up to nine months while non-migratory monarchs live up to two to three weeks," Wilson said. "During the spring equinox, monarchs leave their warmer haven in Mexico and begin migrating north to Canada. Along the way, they lay their eggs on milkweed and then die. The third generation of monarchs makes it all the way up north to Canada."

The existence of milkweed — a plant integral to the monarch's reproduction and survival — has been threatened for many years now. Monarchs depend on milkweed to rest, birth and dine upon, but extensive pesticide use by the farming community turns milkweed into a toxic breeding ground for the monarch and renders it inhabitable.

Matthew Markert, a biology graduate student researching migratory monarch populations, said Midwestern farmers have been indiscriminately treating their crops with toxic weed killer, causing a drastic decline in milkweed. Another factor responsible for the declining monarchs is climate change.

"Climate change is beginning to shift and

shrink environments capable of supporting milkweed," Markert said. "The increasing urbanization of rural environments, such as mowing and real estate development, contribute to reducing the viable areas that still exist."

Wilson said an initiative overseen by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will facilitate the monarch's migration.

"[The initiative] proposes planting about 200,000 acres of Interstate-35 North from Texas to Minnesota with milkweeds to act as a food source and corridor for the migrating monarchs," Wilson said.

Andrew Payne, history senior, is the founder of the Aggeland Monarch Project. The organization works to encourage Texas A&M to incorporate milkweed and other

native pollen-friendly plants into landscape designs. Because B-CS is a through route for the monarchs, Payne said it is imperative for the community to plant milkweed in gardens where the plant is safe from pesticides and landscaping efforts. An abundance of milkweed will yield greater survival rates for the monarch.

"We plan to plant a butterfly garden with lots of milkweed in the plaza between Cushing Library and the Academic Building," Payne said.

Payne said viewing the monarch population's decrease as a national issue is accurate, but futile. He said imagining the crisis in such broad terms shifts the responsibility from individual action to national or global powers.

"Instead, let us be concerned with Texas, with the Brazos Valley, with Aggeland," Payne said. "What can we, Aggies, do to responsibly steward our corner of creation?"

Wilson and his team have been working on planting healthy milkweed and eliminating the spores from parasitic plants, which transfer disease onto an otherwise healthy monarch. Although dangers for the butterfly's population are imminent, Wilson said he believes the species will not be endangered and, with proper care and attention, could flourish once again.

"[The population surge] is a step, one small step, in the right direction," Wilson said. "There is a very long, long, long way to go, but it is a positive step."

What can we,
Aggies, do to
responsibly
steward our
corner of
creation?

ANDREW PAYNE,
Aggeland Monarch Project