

Kanye West-led 'Cruel Summer' underwhelms

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(AP)-The putting-on-my-crew album has long been a rite of passage —and stumbling block— for rap stars.

Kanye West's G.O.O.D. Music compilation Cruel Summer fails in the same way most do: It's a disjointed assemblage of rhyme styles and perspectives with no overarching musical direction. In short, a mixtape.

Not that there's anything wrong with mixtapes. They're the buzz-building lifeblood of the rap game. But they've got an intentionally short shelf life, forgotten after a few weeks.

Coherence

And despite West's oversight, Cruel Summer is utterly disposable — one-liners and posturing, beat switches and orchestral flourishes that are momentarily entertaining but don't cohere.

The thing is, West knows how to surround himself with talent: John Legend backed his very first tour. He flirted with a supergroup featuring Lupe

Fiasco and Pharrell and famously paired with Jay-Z last year for Watch The Throne.

And there is plenty of potential on display here. Producer Hit-Boy lends his signature martial drums and throbbing bass to Clique, Cold and Higher, all standouts. Coke rap veteran Pusha T is at his snarling best trading bars with West on New God Flow and R. Kelly lifts opener To The World with exuberant arrogance.

West offers a few fascinating, self-conscious peeks inside his bubble — \$6,000 shoes! Tax worries! Kim K love! — but none of the introspection that leavened the braggadocio in Watch The Throne. And the rappers around him — including Kid Cudi, 2 Chainz, Big Sean and Cyhi the Prince — simply don't find much to say.

They circle the tired topic of the Illuminati in The Morning, bask in their own glory on The One and match Chicago teen Chief Keef's rude immaturity on I Don't Like (Remix).

Repetition

There's more repetition than you would expect for an album with only a dozen songs (including five that had been either

released or leaked online during the actual summer). West again quotes a Notorious B.I.G. line about three Mikes: Tyson, Jackson, Jordan.

Only this time he lumps in Michael Phelps with the above group, saying he “had to take it to another realm. Because everything around me got me underwhelmed.” Unfortunately for hip-hop fans, it’s Cruel Summer itself that underwhelms.