Frank Ocean – channel ORANGE (2012)

01 – Start 02 – Thinkin Bout You 03 – Fertilizer 04 – Sierra Leone 05 – Sweet Life 06 – Not Just Money 07 – Super Rich Kids 08 – Pilot Jones 09 – Crack Rock 10 – Pyramids 11 – Lost 12 – White 13 – Monks 14 – Bad Religion 15 – Pink Matter 16 – Forrest Gump 17 – End

Frank Ocean isn't a household name yet, but there are a few things you should know about him. He's a member of one of hip-hop's hottest and most controversial collectives Odd Future Wolf Gang Kill Them All, also known as OFWGKTA or, more succinctly, Odd Future. He was featured on Kanye West and Jay-Z's critically acclaimed album Watch the Throne. He has written tracks for Justin Bieber, John Legend and Brandy under his given name of Christopher "Lonny" Breaux. He's a poster child of the free music generation—he gave away his impressive debut mixtape, Nostalgia, Ultra, via his Tumblr after feeling ignored by his label, Island Def Jam.

He is gay, or perhaps bisexual—which might seem irrelevant except that he just came out on July 4, via his Tumblr, telling the world that his first love was a man. Afterward, Jay-Z, Beyonce and Russell Simmons all voiced their encouragement of the young star; even Tyler the Creator, the notoriously ersatz leader of Odd Future, gave his friend a tweet of support. In a hip-hop world that is not known for being particularly inclusive of homosexuality, this is big news.

The highly anticipated new album features Ocean's emotionally rich, hook-filled tracks along with clever collaborations with Earl Sweatshirt, John Mayer and André 3000, all topped off with his ten-minute R&B opus "Pyramids." On Channel Orange Ocean crafts pure R&B, firmly distancing himself from the angry teenage hip-hop of Odd Future and even from his work on Watch the Throne. While R&B artists such as Usher and Chris Brown have started to incorporate the influence of electronic dance music into their songs, Ocean remains resolute in his idiosyncratic style, while still bringing to mind old Usher, The-Dream and even Maxwell.

---Melissa Locker, entertainment.time.com

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