

## Album Review: Brandon Flowers – The Desired Effect

The Killers' frontman is back with his second solo effort – [Jamie Summers](#) weighs up The Desired Effect alongside 2010's Flamingo

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Rating: ★★★★★☆

We've heard very little from The Killers in the 18 months since they released their compilation album *Direct Hits*, featuring the elegant, fantastic single 'Shot at The Night'. In the time that they've been away, frontman Brandon Flowers has been busy polishing off his second solo album, *The Desired Effect*.

Before I get into this, I'll lay my cards on the table; not only am I a massive Killers fan, but Flowers is probably my favourite musician, full stop. When the news came through that this album was due, I awaited with eager anticipation, but also with the fear that I'd really want to like it and end up being disappointed. In the end, I've come to the conclusion that it's brilliant.

Flowers teamed up with respected producer Ariel Rechtshaid to put it together and the result is a collection of big songs with bold choruses. It's more pop-orientated than usual for the rocker from Nevada, but the two styles are skilfully synthesised. Synth is the crucial word, too - the same kinds of influences that have had a bearing on The Killers are rehashed here; Bruce Springsteen, Bono, Peter Gabriel. The list goes on, but *The Desired Effect* is incredibly 80s in style, with an abundance of synthesised sounds and harmonies. If 80s music is your thing (and let's be honest, why wouldn't it be?) then this is a superb album.

Before it hit the market, the single 'Can't Deny My Love' was released in April and I took an instant liking to it. It flows brilliantly, with a bold chorus that you can't help but admire. Flowers shows off his incredible vocal range here, as he does throughout the album. I can't put my finger on exactly what makes 'Can't Deny My Love' so brilliant, but it just is. There's a charm and likeability about it which genuinely makes it one of the greatest songs Flowers has ever written, including with The Killers.

Flowers stated when it was released that he was unsure whether 'Can't Deny My Love' should have been the single, or the infectious and lively 'Still Want You'. He was right to choose the former and on first hearing, I didn't like the latter, but it has since really grown on me. The Killers' supremo's first foray into a solo career five years ago with *Flamingo* was ambitious, but ultimately a bit hit-and-miss. There were some great works on there, but then the odd song that sounded like it was produced on a regrettable Saturday night at the top of Blackpool Tower. In contrast, this flows excellently.

Having heard 'Can't Deny My Love', I was convinced that it would comfortably be the highlight of the album. However, that was before hearing 'I Can Change', which is based on a sample from Bronski Beat's 1984 hit, 'Smalltown Boy'. It even features a line in the middle from the Pet Shop Boys' Neil Tennant. It's catchy, upbeat and I can't decide which of these two songs is better.

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Another great thing about *The Desired Effect* is the lyrics. Flowers has consistently shown that he can write fantastically clever lyrics in the past, especially with The Killers drummer Ronnie Vannucci, Jr. (Just have a listen to 'Miss Atomic Bomb' or the lyrically-perfect 'Sam's Town' for evidence of that). He's done it again here, too. *Flamingo* was very much about celebrating Flowers' hometown, Las Vegas. *The Desired Effect* seems to take a look at the darker side of life in Nevada, and he even challenges his hugely influential Mormon faith through his lyrics. There's also the Springsteen-esque 'Diggin' Up the Heart' in the middle, which breaks up the tone of the album.

All of that said, this album isn't perfect. I'm no big fan of Bruce Springsteen by any means, and as such the above song doesn't really suit. Flowers has his own distinctive identity as a musician, and is more than talented enough to pull it off, so shouldn't mimic others. Also, one of Flowers' greatest qualities is that fact that he's a great live performer, and this album seems almost over-produced in places. That's a by-product of its 80s influence though, and can be forgiven. Overall, the whole work is characterised by the flair and flamboyance which Flowers carries so well.

This album demonstrates that we can now take Flowers' solo career seriously, and I really like it. It has been described elsewhere as Flowers' best since *Sam's Town*. That's a bold claim (and I'm not sure I'd go that far) but it's certainly a success. Hopefully it doesn't do too well, because it's whet my appetite for The Killers to end their hiatus and come back with another barnstorming album that shows they've still got what some people unfairly suggest they've lost. But whatever the 'desired effect' of *The Desired Effect* was, I can't stop listening to it. Brandon Flowers really has delivered once again.



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