Ne-Yo opens his fifth studio album, “R.E.D” (Realizing Every Dream), by immediately being brutally honest with his audience. While not to be confused with Taylor Swift’s “Red”, Ne-Yo’s new album does compare to that of Swift’s when it comes to lyrical honesty. The album eloquently bares his feelings about love, loss, and the downsides of fame and all three of these elements are shown in the opening track “Cracks in Mr. Perfect”. Right off the bat Ne-Yo states, “After this song you’re gonna love me for my honesty or you’re gonna hate me for being me”. Ne-Yo even delves into dealing with issues with his fame in the lyric “20k on champagne in the club, then 20k more just because, that’s 40k in just three hours”. This may initially come across as boasting, but in reality he is admitting shame over his lack of self control. This honesty brings out a new side of Ne-Yo that is almost hard to believe is genuine. The commitment by Ne-Yo to connect with his audience on a completely new level is refreshing. At the end
of the track Ne-Yo says “In reality, it’s the imperfections that truly make us perfect” and he then encourages his fans to embrace and love their imperfections, and to enjoy the album.

One of the best tracks on the album as far as pure honesty goes is “Carry On” (Letter to Him). This song describes a personal low in Ne-Yo’s life with infidelity. It tells the story from the woman’s perspective who felt Ne-Yo was being unfaithful and goes about writing a letter to Ne-Yo telling him that the relationship is over and that he should “Carry On”. Ne-Yo talks about how he isn’t proud of some of the decisions he has made in his personal and love life, but as we found out earlier, there are cracks in Mr. Perfect.

The startling honesty continues throughout the album on tracks such as “Miss Right” and “Lazy Love” which also showcase different aspects of Ne-Yo’s personality and character. Of course there are a few club boppin’ songs on the album too with “Let Me Love You (Until You Learn to Love Yourself)”, “Forever Now”, and Ne-Yo’s fast paced collaboration with Calvin Harris on “Let’s Go”. These songs are definitely radio-ready and will continue to land Ne-Yo at the top of the charts. However, Ne-Yo continues to still catch some flack on turning to some of the dance and pop hits. Many fans are frustrated with Ne-Yo and accuse him of moving away from his R&B roots in order to make a quick buck on the radio.

On the track “She is”, Ne-Yo collaborates with country superstar, Tim McGraw, to produce a unique sound. The whole process changed how Ne-Yo looks at music production. In an interview with HipHopWired.com, Ne-Yo describes the process of working with Tim McGraw as a great experience and different from what he is used to. Ne-Yo showed up to Tim McGraw’s ranch expecting to go right into the studio to work on the track. Instead, McGraw sat with Ne-Yo in his living room and started off with playing some simple guitar. Apparently Faith Hill came in to check on the two of them and even cooked them some chicken! I’d say that’s a pretty sweet recording session.

The album doesn’t stop there as far as the collaborations go. On the song “Should Be You” Ne-Yo collaborates with Diddy and Fabulous to tell the story of being with a woman when you know you shouldn’t be and the sound appeals a bit more to the fans of old-school Ne-Yo.

Ne-Yo reveals that this is as honest as an album that he's ever made. He goes on to elaborate, “This album is about doing what felt good to me. Not the music that I needed to do, not the music the record label was telling me I need to do”. “It was just like, look I'm going to go into the studio every day, and where the vibe takes me is where I'm going to go”.

Overall this album is incredibly well done and is quite versatile. The different genres and styles that Ne-Yo is able to incorporate into one album is pretty impressive. Yet even though Ne-Yo is experimenting with different sounds and production styles, his smooth tenor glides transition us easily from track to track. The best feature of this album is that pure honesty that Ne-Yo worked so hard to convey. That is what makes this album different. While some may argue that this is a different Ne-Yo than what we originally heard in previous albums such as Year of the Gentleman, this side to Ne-Yo is a nice evolution of his sound and style. Ne-Yo has done a great job connecting with his audience on “R.E.D” and has put out another great album.
**Top Tracks:** “Carry On”, “Lazy Love”, “Cracks in Mr. Perfect”, “Forever Now”

**Rating:** 4 out of 5 stars

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