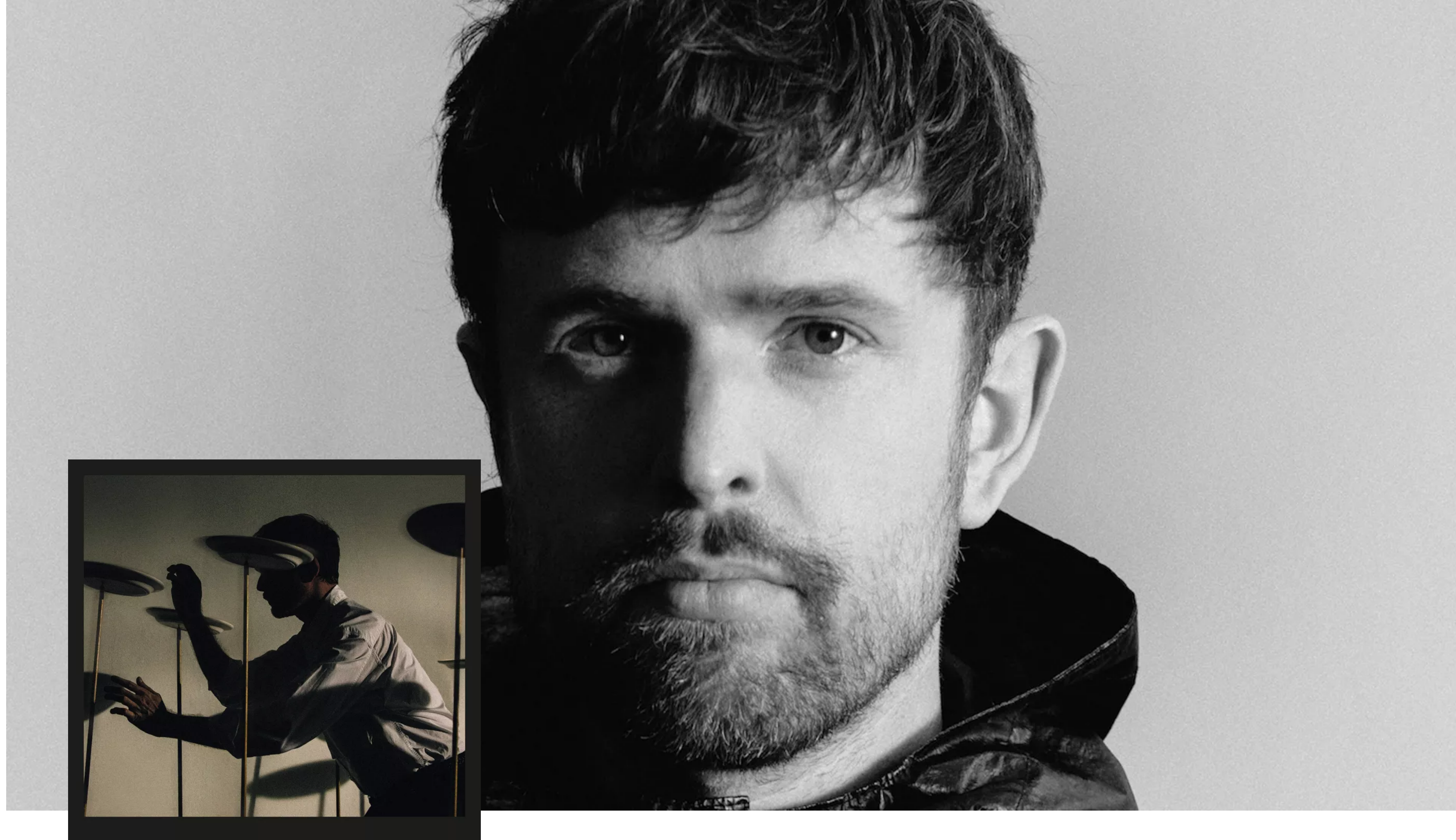


ALBUM REVIEW

# One of electronic music's great iconoclasts suddenly sounds like everyone else



## JAMES BLAKE Trying Times

/ STELLAR RECORDS / GOOD BOY RECORDS  
RELEASE 13.03.2026

There is something distinctly dispiriting about hearing a musician like James Blake – the architect of so much that once felt radical, disruptive, and faintly dangerous – slam on the brakes.

BY NICOLAJ ROOS / PHOTO: HARRISON & ADAIR  
13.03.2026 / 00:00 / Reading time: 2 min

Blake has long inhabited that liminal space between electronic extremity and raw human frailty. On *Trying Times*, however, that delicate boundary feels less like a meeting point and more like a chasm.

The record cleaves itself into two divergent impulses: on one side, the shadow-drenched, hip-hop-inflected productions that remind us of Blake's singular ability to conjure a sound both alien and intimately tactile; on the other, a procession of tracks that lean heavily on well-worn soul and gospel tropes without troubling to reconfigure them

None of this is actively poor – it is simply predictable. And predictability is the last quality one associates with an artist who once seemed to be sketching the contours of the future. This is, after all, a musician who dared to let his compositions feel abrasive, unresolved, even faintly disquieting – and all the more vital for it

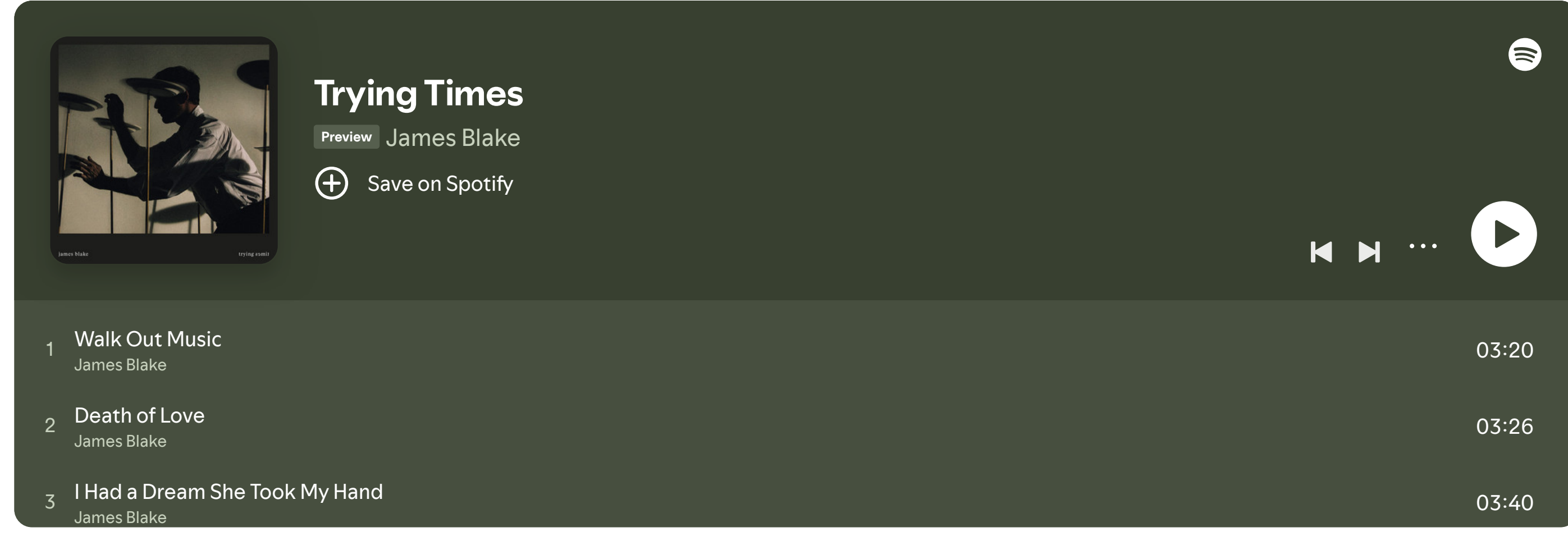
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To be clear, this is not a question of craft. Cuts like the superb "Death of Love", with its improbably taut glitch-electronica, and "Doesn't Just Happen" (featuring the ever-reliable Dave) demonstrate that Blake remains capable of producing work that is both intricate and absorbing. Yet when he veers toward more orthodox terrain – most egregiously on the anaemic "Rest of Your Life" – cause for concern begins to creep in. Competence alone is not enough; one expects intent, urgency, a sense of necessity.

Recorded over the course of two and a half years, split between Blake's home studio and Peter Gabriel's Real World Studios, *Trying Times* is not a title chosen lightly. It gestures towards a world in flux - but also towards an artist seemingly poised at a crossroads.

This time, Blake has elected to operate without the scaffolding of major-label machinery, a decision that may account for the album's tentative flirtations with form and genre. Yet it also invites a more unsettling question: what does it mean to be James Blake when one is no longer defined in opposition to anything?

I want - perhaps more than I should - to admire this record. For years, Blake has commanded a rare kind of respect: for rendering the electronic uncannily human, and the human condition something approaching the universal. But *Trying Times* is not a record that provokes or unsettles. It is, instead, one that retreats into the consolations of the familiar. And therein lies the problem. We do not need a James Blake who is easy to absorb. We need one who is impossible to ignore.

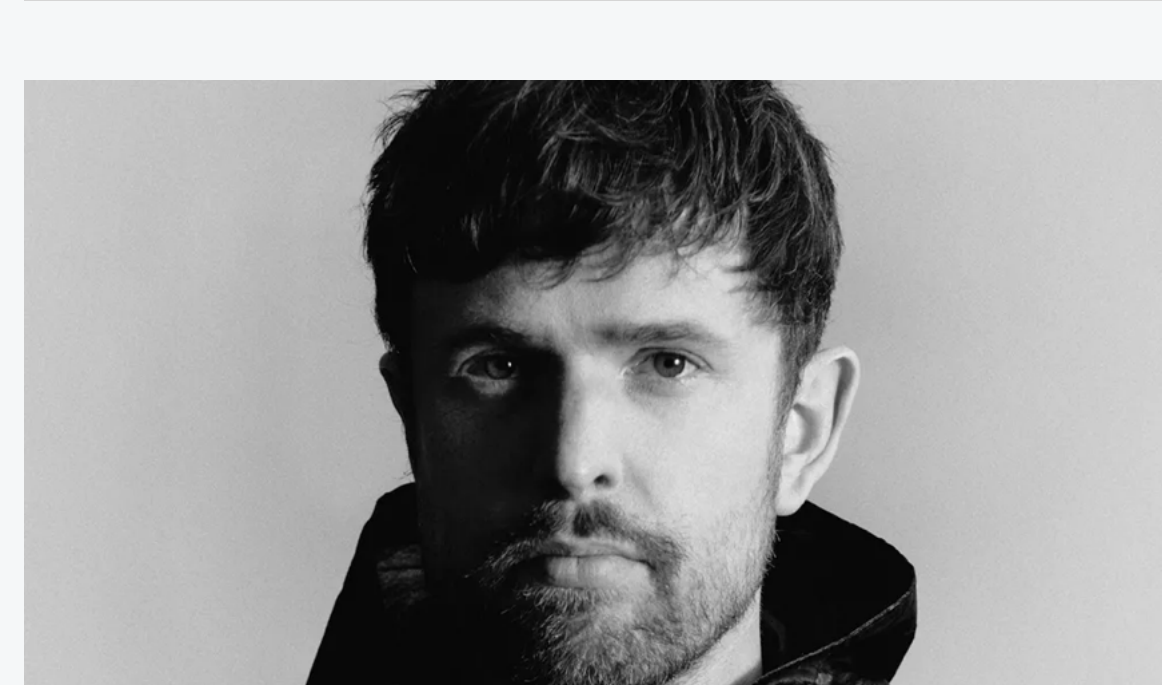


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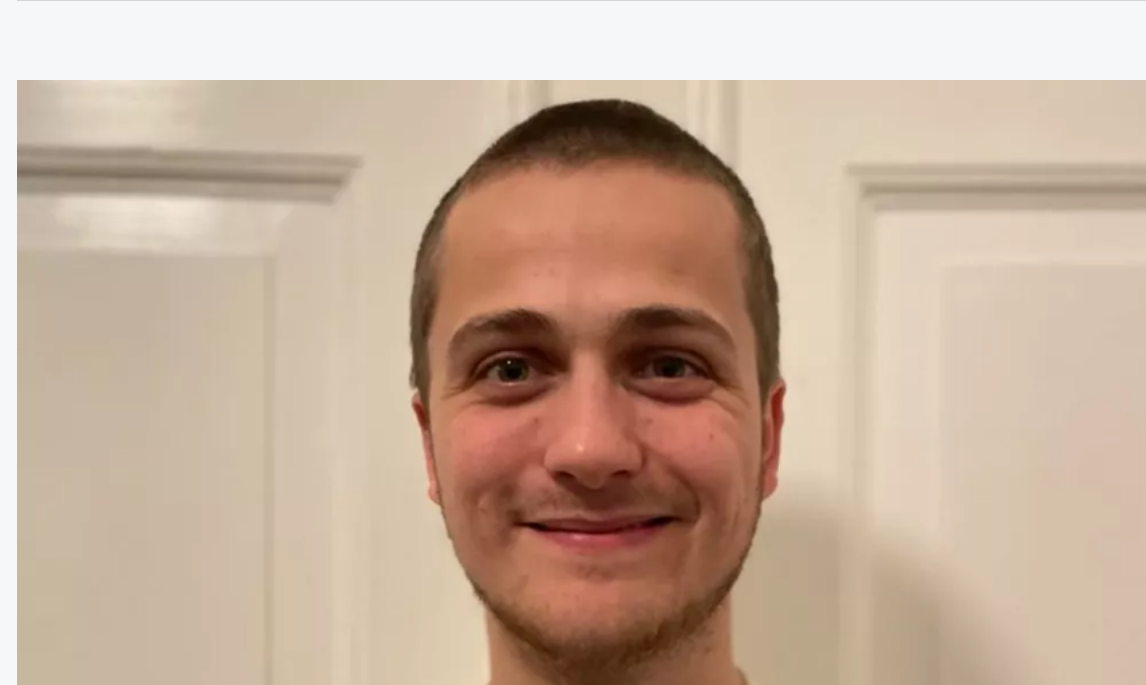
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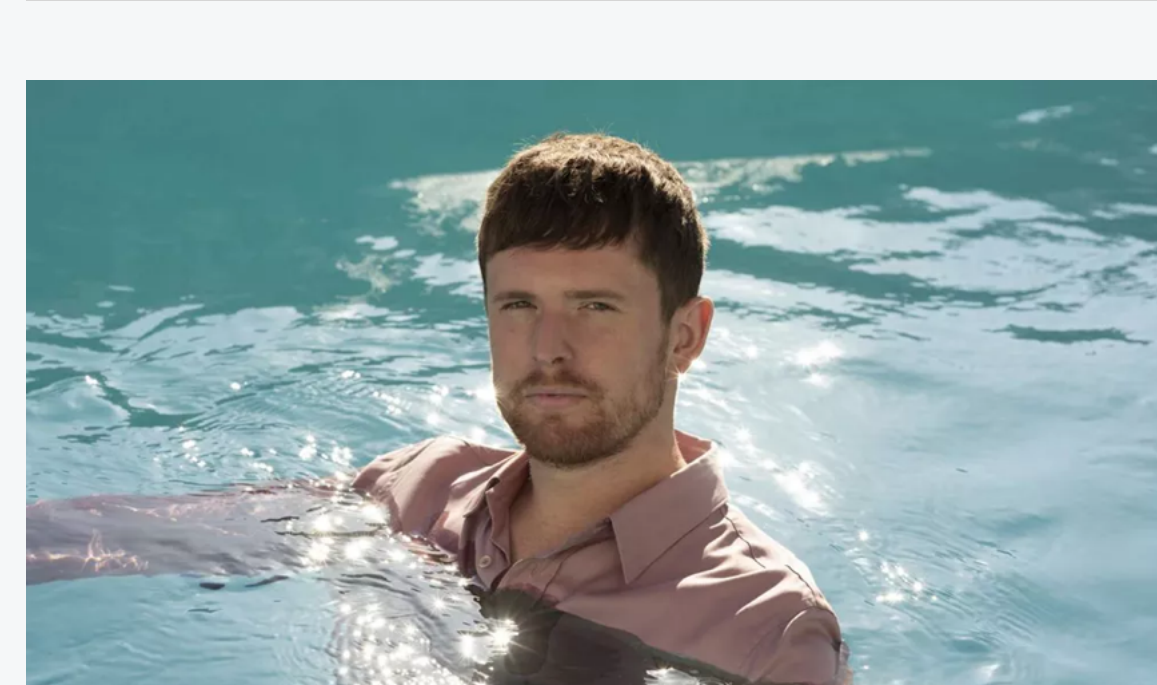
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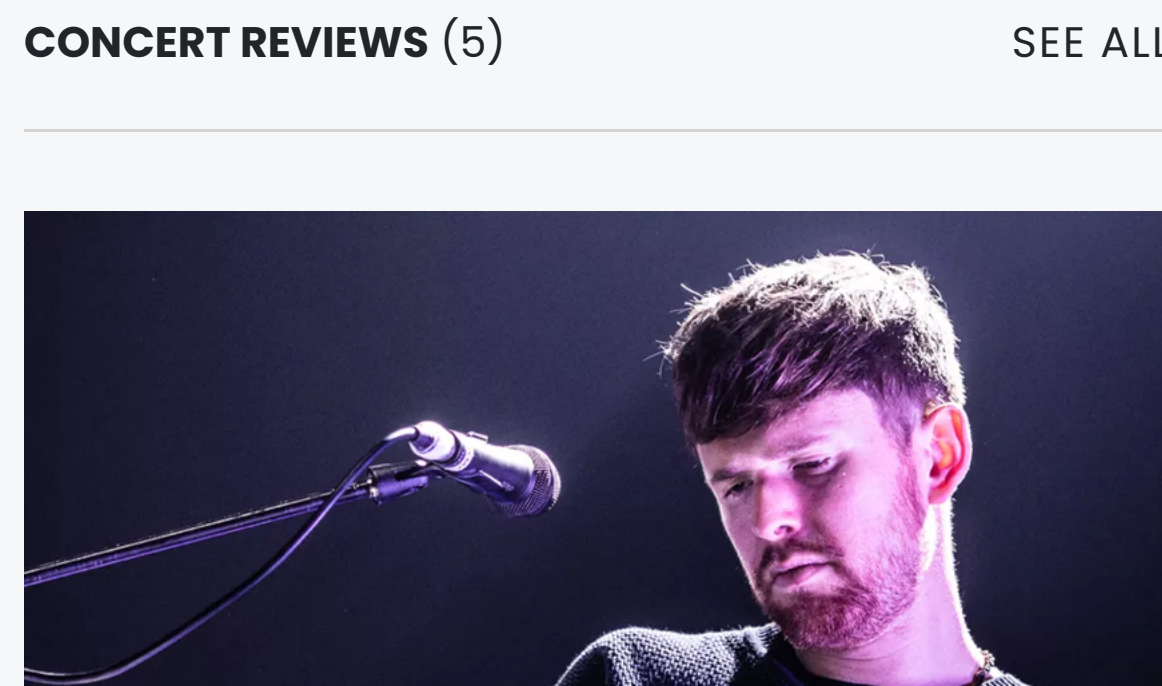
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