

Review – Album “choke enough” by Oklou



I've known Oklou's music for, well, let's just say, a while (a vague but honest phrase, since memory here functions less like a database than a cloud of hazy images: a SoundCloud window, a too-narrow London bedroom, the bluish light of a summer 2015 that seemed to never end). I can't pinpoint the exact moment, but I think it all started around that year—summer 2015—when I stumbled, either by chance or through algorithmic osmosis, upon her Enya cover, *Caribbean Blue 2*, posted under the slightly enigmatic alias *avril23*.

That same July, I launched my label, Club Late Music, a gesture both naïve and programmatic, and six months later, I put out a Japan-themed compilation (because back then, every “underground” project had to have a Japan angle) featuring a track by Detente (*Adam’s Joint*) and, if memory serves, one of the very first by Miley Serious (*Miami Bump Raw Edit*).

Miley Serious was part of a radio crew called TGAF (“These Girls Are on Fyah,” I think), alongside Carin Kelly, DJ Ouai, Miley Serious, and Oklou. Detente, meanwhile, was (and still is) one of Oklou’s close collaborators, her live guitarist, a quietly brilliant presence whose naturalness can be disarming.

And despite this sense of proximity, as if our trajectories formed parallel constellations in the same cultural orbit, I never actually spoke with Oklou. Nor with Miley Serious, except for a brief chat in London with a photographer friend: fleeting, probably trivial, yet somehow still intact in my memory, proof that memory follows its own absurd hierarchies.

With Detente, we exchanged a few messages, too few to call it an acquaintance. Let’s just say we occupy the same social cloud, without ever really meeting in person (aside from a few vague nods at Paris parties).

Anyway.

In 2015 I was living in London, a city that at the time felt like both the center and the periphery of everything musical. That’s where I discovered Oklou’s music—alongside Malibu, Miley Serious, Detente, Coucou Chloé (met through friends), and a whole other world orbiting the rise of PC Music, the crowd that went to JACK nights at Powerlunches. Two scenes, or rather, one nebulous ecosystem of artists emerging around the same time, each finding their own orbit.

All of which is to say: I’ve followed Oklou’s evolution with a panoramic kind of attention, from her effervescent beginnings to her more defined structures. I still remember her first release on PERMALNK (run in part by Aprile, one of the Casual Gabberz old guard), her *Rite of Passage* EP on NUXXE (freshly founded by Sega Bodega), then *Galore*, that mixtape which already felt like a manifesto.

The singles that followed didn’t feel like teasers but like an appetite maintained. *Galore* was, to me, the album disguised as a mixtape, the raw diamond, the proof of Marylou’s potential. It dropped between two Covid waves; a month later I lost my grandmother, then a friend. And Oklou’s music, at that moment, played that strange role only music can play: to absorb pain without denying it. *Galore* became a time capsule, haunted by a nostalgia not only mine but collective, as if the mixtape contained the echo of a suspended world: mine (with everything left behind at first listen) and that of countless others.

When *choke enough* came out, I listened the very week it dropped. My first reaction was polite admiration, without the ignition. I liked it, yes—but not with the same intensity I saw glowing online. It was as if every listen led me back inexorably to *Galore*, and that emotional reference point prevented me from hearing *choke enough* for itself. That’s the cruel paradox of sonic memory: it colors everything it touches.

Then recently, my friend Maud asked me to review it. I went back, not out of duty, but with that mix of apprehension and curiosity you feel when reopening an old letter. And something shifted—subtly, like light moving across a wall. I felt something new, something I'll try (clumsily, perhaps) to describe: that when you listen to Oklou again, you're not just re-listening to an album, you're revisiting a fragment of yourself, a moment that hides somewhere deep inside, something you both miss and feel you're about to miss again.

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Listening to *choke enough* (1) requires a kind of discipline modern pop culture (with its ten-second playlists and endless notifications) simply hasn't planned for. It's not an album that lives on the surface, nor a collection of singles engineered for instant pleasure. It's not background music for when your brain wanders on Instagram.

(1) When I say “listening to” I don't mean the passive, distracted kind of listening most people associate with the word, but rather a mode of perception that demands something approaching, at least in spirit, what cognitive psychologists call “sustained attentive presence.”

No, it's a record that, almost literally (but I'll resist the temptation to make it too metaphoric), asks to be inhabited. Not just physically (which would already be something), but mentally, emotionally, with the kind of attention we usually reserve for experiences that truly matter, the ones that leave traces time doesn't easily erase.

choke enough, Oklou's first real studio album (2), belongs to that rare category of works that refuse immediate clarity. It doesn't unfold like a manual or a ready-made hit but installs a kind of deliberate haze, a tender opacity, if that combination of words can stand (3).

(2) When I say “real,” it's less about judging production quality than about marking a transition, from the experimental form of the “mixtape” to something coherent and fully realized.

(3) Bear with me, you'll see where I'm going with this. It's not easy to lay out my thoughts and feelings on paper.

Beneath its electronic dreamlike surface (and even “dream” isn't quite right), the album sketches the portrait of a post-digital subject: a self scattered between inner life, memory avatars, and the digital traces left behind with every gesture, every swipe, every post. Each song, taken alone, acts like a resonant chamber for contemporary affects, their memories, their highlights, but taken together, they map the state of modern attention: fragmented memory and the constant feeling of being both here and elsewhere.

With this album, Oklou chooses a form of sonic subduction: something slips beneath perception's surface, burrowing into an intimate and elusive space. *choke enough* becomes a work about self-erasure, but also about surrender, letting go of mastery, of control's illusion. Out of that disappearance emerges a broader perceptual state: that of *nostalgia and post-nostalgia*, the collective emotion haunting our era, oscillating between longing for what we truly lived and longing for what we never did, but were taught to desire by images, sounds, and mediated stories (4).

(4) That's going to be my main point, and I'm genuinely convinced by this idea of a double nostalgic space—I explain it in detail below, along with why I feel this way. For context, I recently read Grafton Tanner, but I haven't yet had time to read Valentina Tanni and her book *Vibes Lore Core*, which I'm sure would have helped me develop this idea further.

Classical nostalgia, as most literature defines it, rests on loss, the desire for a past gone, for a memory we wish to relive. Post-nostalgia, on the other hand, no longer targets a lived time but an *anticipated* feeling, a pre-mediated horizon. Our memories become manipulable objects : clips, digital archives, retro synth patches we recognize without ever having experienced them.



In *choke enough*, Oklou stages this condition almost clinically yet sensorially: her songs are reminiscences both with and without origin, images of a past lived and a past never lived. The textures hint at 2000s samples, but none can be placed; the harmonies recall the softness of '90s R&B, but their mix turns the experience almost hallucinatory. For those who lived those eras, nostalgia flows naturally; for those who didn't, the same effect works, but the lack is felt differently, abstracted, conceptual.

Post-nostalgia, far from mere revivalism, generates a paradoxical sensation: the familiarity of an impossible memory, a déjà vu of feeling in a world where time and memory are fractured. How could one *not* feel it in tracks like *endless*, *family and friends*, *ict*, or *harvest sky*?

Here, Oklou becomes a designer of sensitivity, a kind of guide standing behind (or before) us, exploring the textures of individual and collective memory through her own sensibility. She doesn't sing the past, nor tries to reconstruct it; she sings the *impression* of remembering itself, an affective echo without a referent, a texture of feeling existing only at the interface between perception, memory, and imagination.

Trained in cello and piano before turning to digital production, Oklou has always resisted binaries: acoustic/electronic, soft/strong, sincere/artificial. In *choke enough*, that refusal becomes embodied sonic awareness, every timbre, every pause, every reverb feels intentional yet elusive.

What we hear isn't "Oklou" as a fixed identity (if such a thing could exist) but a being in metamorphosis. The mix renders her presence translucent, often backgrounded, hovering between the tangible and the evanescent. The result is sonic disidentification: she disperses across the spectrum, only to reassemble, perhaps inviting us closer. This diffusion creates a sense of hyper-intimacy, where the listener loses the distance of mere listening and merges with the sound's texture.

Endless sounds like a memory turned into melody: suspended chords, rhythm barely breathing, the voice always just shy of resolution. The beauty lies in that perpetual openness.

In *thank you for recording*, Oklou makes the intimate and the digital literally converse. The song's title itself is paradoxical: you don't thank a listener, but a machine, upending affective hierarchy. "I always open windows at night," she sings, and here, "window" is double: computer screen and open air, the fragile border where inside and outside dissolve into emotional data. The refrain loops like a mantra or a poetic glitch: "*Thank you for recording / my little AV disaster.*" Recording becomes a gesture of care, a way of loving by preserving traces as everything fades.

This is Oklou's central gesture: to render catastrophe soft, to fold disaster, tenderness, glitch, and breath into one hypnotic spiral where technology ceases to be a tool and becomes an organ of feeling.

In *ict*, ritual enters, minimal UK garage pulses, fluid waves of sound, voice oscillating between autotuned and unfiltered, body and machine. With *harvest sky* (featuring underscores), Oklou explores a collective nostalgia for moments that never happened. "Under the harvest sky" doesn't describe a lived scene but a virtual festival, a simulation of togetherness. The music's organic pulse and diatonic simplicity feel both familiar and distant, as if heard through mist, like watching a memory that never existed.

The final sequence, *take me by the hand* and *want to wanna come back*, are the most overtly emotional. The former (featuring Bladee) evokes not the embrace but its virtual possibility; layers of processed voices suggest human warmth through their very artificiality. The latter crystallizes pure emotion, detached from any source: delicate guitar, sudden jungle drum rolls, contrasts between intimacy and expansion.

Then comes *blade bird*, a more folk-like closing track, acoustic guitar, simple yet sharp rhythm. Here, music becomes the site of an attachment conscious of its own loss: between

tenderness and destruction, between the impulse to love and the lucidity of knowing it will hurt. The bird, fragile, fleeting, embodies the loved other: free, destined to fly away. The “blade” laid upon it mirrors the tension of a bond that can’t survive without wounding. It’s real-time nostalgia: loving while already grieving.

To grasp *choke enough*, you have to read it within the lineage of music as an environment. Oklou builds emotionally contaminated spaces, haunted atmospheres filled with affective residues.

Mark Fisher, in *Ghosts of My Life*, spoke of “hauntology” as the nostalgia for lost futures. Here, it’s the regret of unrealized sonic utopias, of possible selves in possible worlds. Each track seems to emerge from a parallel universe where we lived differently. *choke enough* doesn’t look back, but toward a cancelled future, a future where we might have felt whole.

Post-nostalgia here becomes emotional survival. It allows us to keep feeling in an age of simulation. Oklou reintroduces sincerity into artifice, tenderness into glitch, touching us through melodies, harmonies, textures that echo a past we miss.

Fans often say they “feel safe in her music.” But that safety isn’t recognition : it’s the safety of getting lost without danger. In a world where identity is a constant stream of images, Oklou offers a de-narcissized listening space, a place to experience disappearance as empathy.

Her music feels like a collective withdrawal, a micro-community not built on expression but on gentle dissolution. We don’t “vibe” together; we fade together, in shared listening. A *post-affective sociability*: a community founded on the shared nostalgia for virtual feelings.

Thus, the album acts as a form of common solitude, a way to find each other through the same emotional frequency. Unlike classical pop structure (exposition, development, coda), *choke enough* moves in dynamic loops, where repetition equals transformation. Transitions are transparent, as if the tracks remember each other. Nothing jolts the ear; everything blends. It’s architecture as philosophy: *choke enough* isn’t a sum of songs, it’s navigation through emotional memory.

The title itself, *choke enough*, reads like a paradoxical injunction: choke, but not too much. It suggests measured suffocation, not really dying, but staying on the edge. That’s the album’s vital tension: to contain emotion’s excess, calibrate it so it remains audible. Maybe, too, it’s a metaphor for resistance to digital saturation: to choke as a way to stay alive, to still *feel*.

In the end, *choke enough* isn’t about sadness or nostalgia per se, but tenderness, as an act of resistance in a world devoid of it. In a time of constant flow and performance, Oklou creates a space where one can be vulnerable without exposure. She shows that sensitivity doesn’t need spectacle, it can be the slow dissolution of self into sound.

choke enough isn’t just confession; it’s the world heard through the fog of its collective memory, a mirror-album where our diffuse desires reflect: to be someone, elsewhere, once, maybe. That’s its strength, the ability to make the fragility of the present audible.

While pop today saturates itself with identity and self-image, Oklou offers another path: the music of detuning, of refusal, of the off-center. Through her, a generation searches in sound for what reality no longer grants: the feeling of having already loved, already lost, already been.

Listen to *choke enough* here : <https://www.deezer.com/en/album/664046321>