

Xue: Swift's Speak Now (Taylor's Version) enchants with its mature hindsight

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Taylor Swift reasserted her grasp on the music industry by releasing *Speak Now (Taylor's Version)* on July 7, during the first leg of her Eras Tour in the U.S. Though the re-release still vividly portrays the original record's essence of hardship and heartbreak in Swift's teenage years and early 20s, its new version highlights her mature hindsight on her past naïveté.

Swift announced *Speak Now (Taylor's Version)* on May 5 at the first Nashville performance of the Eras Tour. Like her other albums, though, Swift teased its release much earlier than the official announcement. Since *Speak Now*, her third album, is often recognized by its signature deep purple color, Swift led fans to anticipate the latest re-recording after infusing many scenes of her "Bejeweled" music video with purple symbols and the number three.

Speak Now (Taylor's Version) is the third album Swift has re-recorded. After her previous label, Big Machine Records, sold its masters to music executive Scooter Braun, Swift embarked on a quest to reclaim ownership over her first six records. Though some critics found the re-recordings "wearying and pointless," when she first announced the project, her latest installment's popularity proves otherwise. *Speak Now (Taylor's Version)* debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard Album Chart, and all of its 22 songs reached the Billboard Hot 100, seizing the admiration of fans and new listeners alike.

As for the record itself, *Speak Now (Taylor's Version)* sounds much like the original, except for the tone and quality of Swift's older voice, which results in some of the re-recordings drowning out her young, vulnerable emotions. For instance, fan-favorite "Mean (Taylor's Version)" lacks the country twang and scathing bite of her younger voice. When Swift throws insults at the subject of the song, singing, "All you are is mean / And a liar, and pathetic, and alone in life," the accusations are less harsh coupled with her smoother vocals.

In addition, Swift's raspier tone in the title track sacrifices the power of her original song's desperate proclamation before the altar. Even "Dear John (Taylor's Version)," the most gut-wrenching track on the album, showcases Swift's musical growth with rounder vowels and stronger breath support; however, these qualities ultimately discount from the original track's raw account of young heartbreak.

In her re-recordings, Swift typically adheres to the tone and lyrics of her previous albums, but *Speak Now (Taylor's Version)*'s major difference from the original record is the new lyrics in "Better Than Revenge (Taylor's Version)." In the original track, Swift flamed another woman involved in her romantic relationship, declaring "She's better known for the things that she does on the mattress." However, in a 2014 interview with *The Guardian*, Swift explained, "I was 18 when I wrote that. That's the age you are when you think someone can actually take your boyfriend. Then you grow up and realize no one can take someone from you if they don't want to leave."



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Taylor Swift performed songs from *Speak Now (Taylor's Version)* at her Eras Tour stop in Inglewood, California, on Aug. 9. Swift's latest release, *Speak Now (Taylor's Version)*, is now her most popular re-recorded album.

In light of her revelation, Swift changed the verse to “He was a moth to the flame / She was holding the matches.” While the new lyrics are more metaphorical, highlighting her growth in lyricism in conjunction with past albums folklore and evermore, she lost much of the previous lyrics’ passionate punch of vengeance.

Though Swift’s re-recordings primarily serve to reclaim her songs’ rights, Swift retains her fans’ interest by adding From the Vault tracks – previously unreleased songs from each album – to the new albums. The From the Vault tracks on *Speak Now (Taylor’s Version)* make an eclectic mix, ranging from a lyrical love letter to a partner who transcends time and place in “Timeless (Taylor’s Version)” to a metaphorical analysis of one girl’s charisma in “When Emma Falls in Love (Taylor’s Version).” After delivering recklessly sensual images in “I Can See You (Taylor’s Version),” she easily transitions to lush, hopelessly romantic vignettes in “Foolish One (Taylor’s Version).”

The most memorable From the Vault track is “Castles Crumbling (Taylor’s Version),” her collaboration with Hayley Williams, lead vocalist of the band Paramore. The song explores one of Swift’s familiar themes of falling from grace and the public’s spotlight, but the pure vulnerability of the lyrics sets it apart from her other tracks. Two lines from the chorus, “And you don’t want to know me / I will just let you down,” encapsulate the track’s disarming honesty.

Speak Now (Taylor’s Version) is not only an expansive musical masterpiece, but also an effective marketing boost. By releasing the re-recording amidst her worldwide, career-spanning Eras Tour, the record refocuses the music industry’s eyes on her. Not only does the re-recording let fans stream her new songs and revisit old favorites, but it also boosts the performance of other tracks on different albums and entices fans to purchase tickets for future tour dates to hear the songs live.

Though she lost some of her youth’s innocence by reclaiming her own story, Swift still made sparks fly among fans with *Speak Now (Taylor’s Version)*. As Swift begins traveling to her international tour stops, listeners can continue to stream *Speak Now (Taylor’s Version)* from home, all while anticipating her next re-recording, *1989 (Taylor’s Version)*, set to release on Oct. 27.