

UNCHAINED MELODIES



BENDING THE BARS TRACK 5 & 6: “Barbie Rockstar” & “PTSD”

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

- We will look at two songs from the album Bending the Bars
- First, we will explore the artists of the songs and the song lyrics
- Then, we will take a moment to understand the songs' meanings
- Finally, we will take a moment to pause and reflect on the songs

MEET THE ARTIST

CHUCKIE LEE

“I’m a black trans woman who just wants to be heard,” declares Chuckie Lee. Fighting against discrimination, invalidation, and violence in the system, she was isolated and “I never felt that I was worthy.” Music became her lifeline, because when she writes she becomes another person and lives a different life. “It just released a lot of freedom within me, deep down inside,” and that freedom includes the personality of her alter ego, the Bride of Chuckie. “When I’m rapping I’m just a different person, I no longer have any struggles, I no longer have any pain,” she says, describing how these “Chuckie moments” bring her joy and relief even amid the ongoing trauma of incarceration in a men’s jail. An activist and long-time advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, Chuckie Lee dreams about queer and trans liberation for herself and for her chosen family. “I want to be loved for once through something I can share with the world. And I want every person that’s a part of my community to feel that same way, like we’re heard, and people hear us, no matter how different they think we are.” BARBIE ROCKSTAR is her gift to her community, and her way of inviting queer and trans folks to embrace their own beauty and power. “When I’m Chuckie, I feel I’m all those things,” she says. “I’m worthy, I’m amazing, I’m beautiful. When I’m Chuckie I’m like ‘that girl,’ like I’m on top of the world.”



THE SONG

BARBIE ROCKSTAR

Party Rockstar...Barbie,
everybody movin' like a fast car...Zoom
Swerving in and out of lanes that part
I came from nothing now I'm shooting to the stars
(Got it got it good)

I am the queen b**** (my year)
I keep my shake on brrrr (my year)
I take off for the throne (flight gear)
I own the pedestal (psych here)
I go insane...punch line nightmare
I am the Chuck Lee...mama bear
And if I said it then it's up...in the air
I got a rainbow crew...everywhere
Talk slick out your mouth...I'm a carry there
Ima battle any b****...anywhere
I spit music...I never care
Transformer on the glee...scarier
I rock a bend shade bendy...double dare
Keep my bag on glee...fairy tales
I do this s*** on three...camera stare
Paparazzi scream...everywhere
All my ChuckLee fans...buried here
All my ChuckLee fans...buried here

I been a ChuckLee panda, move propaganda
I beat a b**** in a phantom, I been a ruler with an answer
I got inches to my a** on santa phantom
I'm the party rockstar...you cancel
I am the next anthem
I keep whip flash on sample
Now you hoes want beef...scandal
I make hits...wave trample
Keep my wrist on flex...cancel
You got nerve b****...it's a gamble
I'm the boss ho... you cancelled
Cuz the Chuck never lost

Party Rockstar...Barbie,
everybody movin' like a fast car...Zoom
Swerving in and out of lanes that part
I came from nothing now I'm shooting to the stars
(Got it got it good)

I'm the first and the last b****
The alpha and the omega
Yall better tighten the f*** up, for real
Yeah I did it, got it, good.

WHAT'S THE SONG ABOUT?

BARBIE ROCKSTAR is a pop-infused girl power anthem featuring Chuckie Lee's rapidfire flow and her signature no-holds-barred attitude. Inspired by Chuckie Lee's prison abolitionist work with the Community Hotline for Incarcerated People (CHIP), the track shatters expectations around the kind of music Black trans women prisoners can create. "We're not just serious about business and go through all this heartache and pain that we hear from people," Chuckie Lee says. "We also have a party rockstar side, and I can have fun with my CHIPmonsters," she adds, channeling Lady Gaga's queer embrace of the title "monster." Perfect for blasting on the stereo while driving down the highway in search of adventure, BARBIE ROCKSTAR is a tribute to femme empowerment, pop culture, and trans joy.

MEET THE ARTIST

LARRYPAK

Larrypak is a musician, lyricist, and singer who is motivated by a deep faith in God. Committed to using music to foster connection, community, and healing, he crafts songs that spread a positive message. He wants to inspire his listeners to believe in themselves and in their divine purpose. As a young child, Larrypak didn't realize that he had a remarkable talent for singing, but he loved to imitate his favorite singers, including Mary J. Blige. As he tells it, one day his aunts overheard him singing and called his mother home from work to listen: "Oh my gosh," he says they told her on the phone, "you gotta hear your baby right now." Larrypak's family was too poor for him to take lessons or travel for auditions, but they believed in him as he worked on his own to develop his unique sound. A blend of warm R&B melodies with reverb based on Chris Brown and passion inspired by R. Kelly, Larrypak had established his style by his mid-teens and was building beats and recording his own music whenever he could. Amid his early struggles with mental illness, music was therapeutic for the young artist. Now a doting father himself, Larrypak uses music to communicate what he can't express otherwise. "A lot of people, they only see the shell, they only see that exterior," he says. "Like, man, I work out real hard, I'm kind of big, I'm kind of stocky, so people think I'm in a gang." Music allows him to tell another story: "I always want to make people smile, and I just want to have this good energy that just is infectious. Even if I make pain music and struggle music, I always come back to God in the end to heal whatever I'm going through."



THE SONG

PTSD

Feels like these walls are closing in
Feels like I'm running from my shadow
So I just fight and try again
Feels like a never ending battle

Who turned this nightmare to reality
Where I can't get but sleepless night
This ain't the way it has to be
PTSD seems like my life

Who turned this nightmare to reality
Where I can't get but restless nights
This ain't the way it has to be
PTSD seems like my life

I close my eyes and the tears start rolling in
Tryna change my life cuz I'm tired of the sin
I'm saying God don't let this devil win
Oh God don't let this devil win

You have a collect call from SaulPaul
It's me God, I'm back again cuz I couldn't be a fraud
Life is up and down like some see-saw
Jail's a fail, I'm in a cell
And life, it be hard
I'm a hothead, they poppin' shots that heat, seek, and destroy
Might as well keep it real, no need for no decoy
You know me, ay, you know me hard
I'm tired, I tried, no longer can I play the part
I wanna be an instrument, tune me to B sharp
I wanna shine bright but if I'm honest, I be dark
They finesse me instead of bless me, told me pain is the art
If that's a lie then tell me why they lyin' though
Oh I know, cuz I got the heart of a lion though
Cuz I'm a leader, young thundercat lion-o
Don't want me got no vision, they know I get what I'm grinding for
So what I'm cryin' for?
Now is not the time for show
Now's the time to go, to find goals, to shine bold

WHAT'S THE SONG ABOUT?

"I want to reach out and touch people," Larrypak says, emphasizing how important human connection is to his musical practice. With this song, he shares about his own battles with mental illness in order to connect with others who can see their lives reflected in his lyrics. "Sharing personal struggles makes me feel like I'm finally telling somebody a secret," he says, describing the sense of relief he feels when he realizes that other people have had similar experiences. In PTSD, Larrypak evokes the fear and pain of post-traumatic stress disorder, a condition that is even more challenging to navigate amid the ongoing trauma of incarceration. This struggle is something shared by so many people behind bars, as well as many people who are not incarcerated. By telling his story and having it understood by others, Larrypak says "it's like I told a secret that everybody had."

TAKE A MOMENT TO REFLECT

1. What words or images stood out most to you in these songs?
2. How do the artists use rhythm or repetition to make a point?

