

Does David Bowie's ★ Album Have An Alternate Cover?



In a BBC6 Music interview with Mary Anne Hobbs on Sunday, graphic designer Jonathan Barnbrook stated there were further secrets still hidden within the ★ album design. One of them may be an alternate way of arranging the booklet and record in the vinyl version of the album so that Bowie appears on the cover.

The ★ design for the vinyl version of the album has a gatefold sleeve with a cutaway ★ shape on the cover, packaged so that the record is visible through the star shape as part of the design. As Barnbrook has suggested, this makes a subtle comment about mortality because the vinyl record inevitably starts to degrade as soon as it is taken out of the sleeve to listen to the music. In the other half of the gatefold there is a beautifully designed booklet featuring a series of black-on-black star motifs, song lyrics, space-time graphics and images of Bowie - including a portrait of Bowie, as the 'Button Eyes' character from the ★ single, on the front of the booklet.

If you take the booklet out and swap it with the record, sliding the booklet into the front cover sleeve, then the Bowie 'Button Eyes' portrait is perfectly framed by the cutaway star. By arranging the booklet within the front sleeve in this way, Bowie and the ★ concept are symbolically combined in what could be seen as an alternate cover for the album.



This is clearly a deliberate part of the meticulously detailed graphic design of ★ and it offers a fitting tribute to Bowie's ongoing legacy as the 'starman' - a creative visionary of British music.

The alternate cover for ★ also neatly refers back to Barnbrook's bold cover design for Bowie's 2013 album *The Next Day*, which caused controversy because it blocked out Bowie's face from the iconic cover of *Heroes* using a solid white square with the album title written across the centre in black. It was noted at the time that *The Next Day* was the only Bowie studio album that did not feature a portrait of Bowie on the cover.

The ★ cover with the vinyl record integrated into the design places the essence of the music and the symbolic ★ theme at the heart of the design, whilst the alternate cover gives fans the option to put Bowie's portrait in the centre of the ★.

Whichever way it is arranged ★ is a classic piece of album design and it may have further secrets still to reveal.

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