

By **Stephanie King**

Nah nah nah nah, Nah nah nah nah! Ariel Pink's [Round and Round](#) grooves into being with squelchy synths and a decadent disco sound worthy of a Studio 54 mirrorball while channelling the richness of [My Cherie](#)

[Amour](#)

But this is no party track. As with everything Ariel Pink does, something is off kilter.

Whispered voices usher in layered male vocals; the lead is mellow and a little bit wrecked; beneath him are deeper murmurs; above these a creepy voice teases out a hypnotic "merry-go-round" refrain. A stuttering parody of the ubiquitous dance music imperative to enjoy yourself transforms into something more sinister - *break down, break break down, bre-break down*. Every gasp and exhalation is caught by the microphone. The effect is as claustrophobic as a sweaty nightclub.

The lyrics are downbeat, evoking images of hundreds of identical dance-floors, spanning four decades and all populated by the lonely - *It's always the same, same as always/Sad and tongue-tied, it's got a memory/You're afraid/I'm afraid /You're afraid/And we die and we're born and we live again*. This is a discarded, dusty track, haunted by spectres, playing to a deserted light-up dance-floor long after closing time.

Pitchfork's Ryan Schreiber describes the chorus as "John Hughes prom", the song leaping a decade via a yelping late 70s/early 80s bridge. As the chorus plays out, I can see Molly Ringwald and Andrew McCarthy, she in an 80s taffeta confection, he in a silver-grey suit, leaning in for a kiss as streamers tumble around them. This is the soundtrack for all the things which only happen in the movies, music for all the things you longed for which passed you by.

The fuzzy, woozy production recalls that peculiar sound a cassette makes, pulled from its casing and desperately spooled back, but irrevocably damaged into a warped, wobbly reflection of the original. As the chorus's uplifting opening line, *Hold on, I'm calling!* blasts in with all the faux-optimism of [Britis](#)

[h 80s adult pop](#)

, Ariel Pink's intelligent, distressed production reverberates with nostalgia and melancholy.

Round and Round

is an undiscovered song, once full of promise but heard for the first time 20 years too late and now sounding tragically naive.

It segues into a series of playful imitations of pop ephemera, with lyrics ranging from the desperate (*Pick up the phone, and I want to go home now*) to the cheesy (*Lady, come on and set me free*) to the alienated

(*Sentimental, heartbreaking, everything is my fault*)

. It becomes a dreamy patchwork of references, stitched together to create a pseudo-pop song, always returning to that ambiguous, irresistible chorus. Closing with a lush *a cappella*

reprise of the chorus, a poignant anti-anthem, you can imagine the closing credits to the John Hughes film, flickering on playback from an ancient VHS tape.

And yet, like all idealised false memories, there is something strangely comforting about *Round and Round*

. It's a track that, in 20 twenty years time, you'll hear again and remember your experience of listening to it – the shadowy half-memories it created – and feel a weird nostalgia for both. It brings to mind that Suicide Girls tagline: Someday you will be nostalgic for now.

Ariel Pink plays with the manipulative, emotive power of pop music to create an affecting dream which muses on the way the past continually warps our experience of the present. Outstanding.