

Lenny Kravitz - Baptism (2004)

Written by bluesever

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1. "Minister of Rock 'n Roll"
2. "I Don't Want to Be a Star"
3. "Lady"
4. "Calling All Angels"
5. "California"
6. "Sistamamalover"
7. "Where Are We Runnin'?"
8. "Baptized"
9. "Flash"
10. "What Did I Do With My Life?"
11. "Storm" (featuring Jay-Z)
12. "The Other Side"
13. "Destiny"
14. "Uncharted Terrain" (Japanese bonus track)

Lenny Kravitz - Arranger, Art Direction, Audio Production, Bass, Composer, Drums, Guitar (Acoustic), Guitar (Electric), Handclapping, Mellotron, Mixing, Moog Synthesizer, Organ (Hammond), Piano, Producer, Soloist, String Arrangements, Synthesizer, Timpani, Vocals, Wood Block + Bass – Henry Hirsch Electric Guitar, Drums, Piano – Craig Ross Saxophone [Baritone] – David Baron Saxophone – David Sanborn Piano – Henry Hirsch Backing Vocals – Tawatha Agee

To some, listening to Lenny Kravitz was always a bit of a guilty pleasure, but rarely has listening to one of his albums induced overwhelming feelings of guilt, as does his seventh album, Baptism. Guilt that you took him for granted, not acknowledging the craft behind his best singles. Guilt that you thought he couldn't be as nondescript as he was on "Fly." Guilt that you thought he couldn't sink lower than Circus. Or maybe it will just be a flush of angry guilt that you've wasted 55 minutes of precious time listening to an album that betrays all faith you've had in Kravitz as a retro-rock revivalist. Since 1993's Are You Gonna Go My Way? he'd been erratic, stumbling on the doggedly rock-oriented Circus and only gathering his full strength on 2001's

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Lenny, which may have been a good record but failed to sell. Perhaps maintaining a balance of sales, craft, and fame had exhausted Kravitz, but he sounds worn down to the bone throughout Baptism. He may claim that he "can save your soul" on the opener, "Minister of Rock 'n Roll" (which bears unfortunate similarities in tone and theme to Circus' dud opening salvo, "Rock and Roll Is Dead"), but on the rest of the album he sounds anxious to quit the business, wondering whether he would have been better off if he were a simple man and living off the land. These themes are commonplace in rock & roll, but most rockers have better sense than to air their concerns in the first person, whining that "I'm internationally known...I've got millions sold/But after the party, I'm left standing in the cold," which engenders little sympathy since he could, after all, pull a Bobbie Gentry and quit the business and not make any more records. But he doesn't really want to do that since he's too enamored with the spoils of fame and all of its trapping, complaining "I Don't Want to Be a Star" in the same song where he exults "I got high with Jagger/It was really cool." Such shallow sentiments could be excused if the music worked, but it's as thin as his words and stultifying lethargic, to the point that he doesn't bother to disguise how he cops ZZ Top on "Where Are We Runnin'?" or Sly Stone on "Sistamamalover." It's such a drag that it's a real shock when a song pierces through the murk, as it does on the addictive rush of "California" or the fuzzy glam of "Flash" -- these are the songs that remind you that Kravitz can fuse familiar sounds into something that giddily celebrates his love of music. While these are fine individual moments, they wind up being a bit dispiriting since they're surrounded by lazy, exhausted retreads where it sounds as if the act of making music is a chore to Kravitz -- something that he nearly admits in his lyrics. It's a shame and embarrassment, and hopefully it will be a temporary slump like Circus -- unless he really does want to quit this business called show, since it would be better for him to stop making records than to crank out depressing sludge like this. ---Stephen Thomas Erlewine, AllMusic Review

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