

Nirvana - Bleach (1989)

Written by bluesever

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01. Blew 02. Floyd The Barber 03. About A Girl 04. School 05. Love Buzz 06. Paper Cuts 07. Negative Creep 08. Scoff 09. Swap Meet 10. Mr. Moustache 11. Sifting 12. Big Cheese 13. Downer Personnel: Kurt Cobain – vocals, guitar (credited as "Kurt Kobain") Krist Novoselic – bass (credited as "Chris Novoselic") Chad Channing – drums

When Bleach was released in 1989, few could've suspected it would be the album to define the entire decade of the '90s, imminent though it was. The debut album by Nirvana captured a time and place (turn-of-the-decade Seattle), in the form of energetic, propulsive rock'n'roll that seemed a culmination of the ten preceding years. Nirvana were clearly operating under the influence of so much of angry, anti-establishment '80s American underground music; displaying confessed debts to Scratch Acid, Big Black, Butthole Surfers, Black Flag, The Wipers. Their real stroke of genius was to mix such all-out aggression with the high-wire dynamics and unabashed pop licks pitched by contemporary Bostonian bands The Pixies and The Breeders.

Playing a particularly charismatic kind of sludgy, down-tuned garage-rock, Nirvana quickly became the smiling face of the grunge movement, earning the accolades of elder statesman like Sonic Youth, Dinosaur Jr, and Mudhoney. Issued on Sub Pop when the fledgling label's resources were limited, Bleach became a slow grower, earning a reputation via word-of-mouth and the outfit's intense live shows.

Yet, when Nirvana's second album, Nevermind, went multi-multi-multi-platinum upon its 1991 release, historical hindsight dealt Bleach an unfortunate fate. Now, their pre-major-label record was a minor footnote that, via the success of its successor, went retroactive platinum. It was seen as a kind of rough model, unfinished and unpolished, it having no value unto itself, only as a portent of greater things to come.

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20 years later, and this perception couldn't be more off-the-mark. Bleach is, clearly, the better record; even if it isn't the record housing the Seattle trio's generation-defining single, "Smells Like Teen Spirit." Recorded for a scant \$606.17 —a total that would barely match the catering budget on future music-videos— Bleach catches the nascent combo in a kind of unadulterated purity; there no commercial-rock sheen to their sludgy riffing.

Home to the generation-defining anthem "Negative Creep," Nirvana's nasty debut bleeds abhorrent attitude; its ragged, tortured tunes amount to a monument to the monumental angst of infamous frontman Kurt Cobain. The frontman's every sandpaper gasp, every strangulated yelp sounds alive and untamed, the hoarseness of his voice suggesting a lifetime spent screaming in frustration.

Of course, Cobain also had quite an ear for a tune; and cuts like "About a Girl" and "Sifting" display the 'pop' sensibility that would, eventually, take Nirvana from band-with-a-cult-following to band-who-became-globe-conquering. Subsequent Nirvana albums were more widely acclaimed, caused a bigger cultural impact, and were generally more accomplished, but the band's essence was at its most essential on their debut. --- Anthony Carew, About.com Guide

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