

Nirvana – Nevermind (1991)

Written by bluesever

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01. *Smells Like Teen Spirit*
02. *In Bloom*
03. *Come As You Are*
04. *Breed*
05. *Lithium*
06. *Polly*
07. *Territorial Pissings*
08. *Drain You*
09. *Lounge Act*
10. *Stay Away*
11. *On A Plain*
12. *Something In The Way*

Nirvana Kurt Cobain – lead vocals, guitar, backing vocals Krist Novoselic – bass, voice (intro "Territorial Pissings") Dave Grohl – drums, backing vocals + Chad Channing – cymbals on "Polly" Kirk Canning – cello on "Something in the Way"

Before its September 1991 release, Geffen Records were hoping to sell 250,000 copies of Nevermind. But Nirvana's second album went on to shift 100 times that amount; and, since the suicide of frontman Kurt Cobain in April 1994, its surprise success has been acknowledged as a factor in its primary songwriter's tragic demise.

With hindsight it is easy to work out why Cobain struggled with the LP after its completion and release. In Utero, Nirvana's third and final studio album of 1993, was a difficult, abrasive record; compared to its predecessor, it's clearly the product of a mind pushed beyond its limit. Cobain would dismiss Nevermind, the follow-up to 1989's scrappy debut Bleach, as "a Motley Crue record" rather than the punk album that may have been initially intended.

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The tunes are still ace, but there is an unquestionable MTV sheen plastered over the bulk of them. The band enlisted Butch Vig to produce the record and trusted him behind the desk. But when mixing went awry, Slayer mixer Andy Wallace was brought in to tweak the final mixes. While Wallace used less studio trickery than the average pop producer, Kurt was right: what now sits on 26 million shelves is definitely not punk.

Instead, it's an awesome mainstream rock record. Its four standalone cuts, including Smells Like Teen Spirit and Come As You Are are exemplary, soaring rock singles which quickly became angst-ridden anthems for disaffected teens across the world. The quiet/loud formula that Nirvana made their own was stolen from the Pixies, as Kurt freely admitted; but Frank Black's merry crew never managed to hook listeners like Nevermind did.

The guitars are all crunched, phased and compressed to within an inch of their six strings, and the drum sounds are predictably accountant-tight and brickie-tough. Lyrically, aside from Polly, Nevermind rarely goes beyond woe-is-me or the cryptic: witness On A Plain's "The black sheep got / blackmailed again / forgot to put / on a zip code".

But even the occasional piece of nonsensical wordplay couldn't hide the beguiling, revelatory side of Cobain's writing. The aforementioned Polly is about a rapist, while Kurt said Something in the Way was about sleeping rough - although friends of his have since denied he ever did.

And there were Kurt's vocals. By turns haunted and hurting, caged and desperate, it's his scuffed, torn diary of a voice that you remember after the guitars have faded. Ultimately it's his fraying presence that ensures that Nevermind is a flawed classic, but a classic just the same.
---Lou Thomas, BBC Review

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