

Stryper - God Damn Evil (2018)

Written by bluesever

Monday, 04 February 2019 16:03 -

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1 Take It To The Cross 4:56 2 Sorry 3:56 3 Lost 3:44 4 God Damn Evil 4:06 5 You Don't Even Know Me 4:10 6 The Valley 4:14 7 Sea Of Thieves 3:41 8 Beautiful 4:02 9 Can't Live Without Your Love 4:44 10 Own Up 3:43 11 The Devil Doesn't Live Here 3:25
Bass, Backing Vocals – Perry Richardson Drums – Robert Sweet Lead Guitar, Backing Vocals – Oz Fox Lead Vocals, Lead Guitar – Michael Sweet + Backing Vocals – Charles Foley, Paul McNamara, Robert Sweet, Tyler Murello Bass – John O'Boyle Keyboards, Synthesizer [Moog] – Paul McNamara Percussion – Danny Bernini Vocals – Matthew Bachand

Before we dive into this, I'd like to make something clear. I'm a total glam-head, and I'm a huge fan of Stryper. I like everything that they've ever done to some degree. That is, until 2018. Their previous album *Fallen* was one of the best they'd ever put out. Instead of giving an almost power metal like, killer follow up to it, we were given this train wreck known as *God Damn Evil*. When it was being talked about, I was very excited to give this disc a spin. The word "disappointed" isn't a good enough word to describe how I felt about this.

To get the little bit of good out of the way, Michael Sweet's voice is still clear, concise, and he can still carry a tune and hit the high notes very well despite getting up there in age. Secondly, there's some clear strength in playing that the band possesses, even though the writing is anything but strong. Unfortunately, this camel isn't enough to carry the negative weight that drags this deep into the sand. Not one track stands out on in any positive, attention-grabbing way. The songs themselves are boring, even after a couple listens (which was tough to do).

On the other hand, there are some negative attention grabbers; they lie in the very beginning of the album. Record opener "Take It To The Cross" is comprised of riffs that are borderline ripped from Black Sabbath, and tied together by a horrid vocal delivery in the chorus that is legitimately laughable. The next track "Sorry" has some of the most awful lyrics ever written by the band,

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and as a Christian I'll still admit that even their classics have hokey lyrics. But I'll be damned, if it doesn't get far worse. The title track captures almost everything that poorly written glam songs did into one track, which I don't think I need to elaborate on. So yeah, there's quite a few glaring flaws here.

What God Damn Evil boils down to is one main thing: trying too hard. It tries too hard to be vicious by dropping the guitars but delivering them horribly. It tries to be harsher by using edgier singing tactics and sped up screams. It tries too hard to throwback to their old sound, but filtered out the good parts. What it doesn't try to do is implement the power metal driven formula that's packed with riffs for days that we got with Fallen. I love Stryper, and I love what they've done, but this album really let me down. ---SweetLeaf95, metal-archives.com

In a world where Christianity has become a four letter word, Stryper are kicking against the pricks with their new record God Damn Evil out 4/20/18 via Frontiers Music s.r.l. The funny title should serve the dual purpose of pissing off the more pious contingent of their fan base, while reaffirming a commitment to stand true to their moral convictions. While the infamous "J" word only explicitly finds its way into 1 of the LP's 11 tracks, the group continues to espouse their Christian convictions, albeit with a slightly subtler message. More importantly, they remain true to their own musical vision with a collection of middling to great songs rooted in melodic metal with nods to both old school metal and more modern influences.

In the press release for God Damn Evil, the band alludes to this being their heaviest LP to date. While this is highly debatable, I will concede that with a few exceptions, the best songs on here are the heavier and darker ones. "Lost" with its driving rhythm, symphonic falsetto-laced chorus and trademark harmonized leads is an early standout—also, bonus points for the word "tonightmare." "You Don't Even Know," a condemnation of condemnation, begins with a throwback riff that wouldn't be out of place on 1986's seminal To Hell with the Devil, before morphing into an effective melodic, alternative rocker. On "The Valley," one of the best things here, the group steers directly into classic metal territory to excellent effect with a riff that takes inspiration from Black Sabbath's "Heaven and Hell"—which they covered on 2015's The Covering. These weightier tracks benefit from a bass heavy mix which punctuates the interplay between drummer Robert Sweet and very capable newcomer Perry Richardson (Firehouse) on bass, and succeeds in spite of its modern-metal dynamics-starved bent.

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While the band's willingness to try new things is admirable, some of these experiments fall flat. "Take it to the Cross," is probably the heaviest thing here, but it is also the biggest misstep. inclusion of some completely out of place death growls by Matt Bachand (Shadows Fall), comes across as forced, and while I don't doubt the sincerity of the lyrics, the "Take it to the cross! Take it to the cross!" chorus is a little tacky.

Elsewhere, Stryper channels AC/DC via hair-metal on the title track. With its shout along chorus and extended lead break, it's a reminder of how fun hard-rock was in the 80s; however, like "Take it to the Cross," it suffers from some (likely intentional) over-the-top lyrics.

It's no secret that singer/guitarist Michael Sweet and co-guitarist Oz Fox are talented guitarists. Nowhere is that more apparent than on "Can't Live Without," a ballad that taps into the bands inner adult contemporary, in which they choose the most unlikely of places to double-down on their virtuosity. On paper, Stryper's take on a modern love song replete with extended solo breaks sounds disastrous, but in reality, the straightforward and subtle nature of the song really allows their attention to detail in song-craft and musicianship to shine through.

Stryper's 'God Damn Evil' is the restless sound of a band in the midst of a minor musical identity crisis. The record is at its best when the band filters their back catalog through a slightly modern metallic alternative-rock lens, but overall it suffers from overreach. Despite these shortcomings, it succeeds in making a joyful noise, as its majestic melodies, divine musicianship and righteous guitar playing pull the set heavenwards.

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