

Metallica comes out with a new, but not so improved, recording

by Tricia Romano

Metallica's fifth album may be their best yet. Or their worst. It has a subtle balance of thrash, metal and commercialism.

The release shows a more diversified Metallica than any of the previous records. More than anything, it is a Metallica that has sold out.

Here's the catch: "sell-

ing out" (appealing to Top 40 radio and MTV) is not always a bad thing, given that the band does not compromise its artistic values. That Metallica does not do. They keep their heads held high through the ballad "Wherever I May Roam," and still manage to thrash up a scene in "Holier Than Thou."

Still, the signs of age are beginning to show. As a thrash band, they have re-

gressed: the songs are at their slowest, especially on "Sad But True." Ask any longtime Metallica fan and he will confirm it. The pace on the new disc is in slow motion in comparison to the classic *Kill 'em All*.

Drummer Lars Ulrich has slowed his tempo and does not keep up with guitarist Kirk Hammett and bassist Jason Newsted, a definite mark of pop-metal producer Bob Rock. Rock's

specialty is churning out commercial metal. He has done so for the likes of Bon Jovi, Aerosmith and Motley Crue, to name a few.

"Enter Sandman," the first single, is easily the most radio-ready song. It is a sort of twisted "Mr. Sandman," as singer James Hetfield shrieks, "Tuck you in, warm within/ Keep you free from sin/ Till the Sandman, he comes."

Rock does do some fa-

vors to the monster band. He makes them SOUND monstrous. This album is more heavily produced than any of the others. (Note how Hetfield's voice is dubbed on several tracks.) Every instrument and sound is more clearly defined.

Depending on who is asked, Rock also drastically changed their sound, for better or for worse.

Those who are just getting turned on to Metallica will probably find this release more to their liking more than the earlier albums. It is less threatening musically and lyrically. The attitude on *Metallica* is comparable to the new Skid Row album, "Slave to the Grind."

Old-timers reject the new stuff with disgust.

Tampering with the "Metallica sound" has the same effect on these die-hards as Coca-Cola's decision to change its formula

did on the American public. Messing with something as sacred as that is a definite no-no. They will then go on a fervent search for another band that flipped the finger at the world and plays just as fast as they please.

Critics, meanwhile, are hailing this as Metallica's best yet, gloating with glee over the "perfection" of the compact disc. *Rolling Stone*, usually tough on metal bands, gave *Metallica* a four- (out of five) star rating.

Of course, none of this will matter in a month or so. When *Billboard Magazine* is released this week, *Metallica* will have debuted at No. 1 on the Pop Album chart and 2 million metal-

hungry fans will have already bought the album.

Now, with nothing else to gobble up in sight, the only thing left to do is wait for another Guns N' Roses album to be released.



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