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Album Review: Marilyn Manson – The Pale Emperor

Manson goes for evolution over revolution on his ninth studio effort and pulls it off with more than a little flair, says [Lara Shannon](#)

Friday 13 February 2015



Rating: ★★★☆☆

Marilyn Manson has been around for a while. He has broken down barriers and ignited controversy, started riots and been vilified both by the American public and the rest of the world. He has fearlessly preached his sermon through his eight previous albums and has unapologetically shone a light on the parts of American society that many have not wanted to see. Now, he has doggedly returned for the ninth time with another batch of classic Manson gems.

Each and every one of Manson's albums have all had a very different feel – same foundations, different tones, different intended effects, different lyrical themes. *The Pale Emperor* however is completely free of

affectations; it's Marilyn Manson through and through, stripped back, easy going. It feels like he is laying himself out for all to see, as if he's taken his trademark make-up off and walked out into the world as the man behind the mask. A straight-forward sample of Manson's talent and distinctive musical style, clearly it's gone down a treat, having quickly climbed to number one on the Top Hard Rock Albums chart and entered 8th in the Billboard 200. Whether this can be accredited to the album itself or more to Manson's unyielding reputation is debatable.

The album starts with 'Killing Strangers'. It clearly sets the scene for the rest of the album with simplistic vocals and his classic, dark bass-line; it's Marilyn Manson through and through – simple, effective and deadly.

The Pale Emperor differs to Manson's previous albums in that it seems to lack the lyrics charged with controversy that made Manson a hero in the eyes of some and a villain in the eyes of others. His words at times seem a lot more introspective and pensive than his past works – "I don't know if I can open up, I've been opened too much", he sings. If we take a look at the bitterly aggressive (and, some might even say, misogynist) themes featured in previous album *Born Villain* and the deeply unhappy writings of *The High End of Low* then it's easy to be perfectly at ease with our aging Manson's new-found lyrical wisdom.

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The voice behind those lyrics however is unarguably beginning to wane. Be that through age or through years of straining to create his distorted sound, the result is the same – *The Pale Emperor*'s stripped back and near-monotonous melodies shine perhaps too much light on clean vocals that might have been better off masked by more complex lead guitar or upbeat drums. At points, it's easy to start worrying that Marilyn Manson is switching from vocalist to spoken word artist.

It can't be denied though that despite this album's differences to its predecessors, it really isn't anything new. Each and every song here displays Manson's iconic sound with a wonderful injection of blues-rock, and, despite the complete lack of technical complexity (which some would say could be accredited to the lack of comrade Twiggy's distinctly hyperactive contribution to the writing process), it still manages to convey the dark and twisted vibe that Manson calls upon so effortlessly. Perhaps though, because of its glaring simplicity, this collection of Manson tunes would better serve as atmospheric background music instead of a focal point. Picturing this album being performed live can only lead us to imagine a dozing audience and a skeleton where there once was a guitarist, unless Manson and his band were able to pull off a near-superhuman feat of showmanship.

Overall though, *The Pale Emperor* is irrefutable evidence that Marilyn Manson is aging with grace. The lack of charade and considerably less controversial lyrics shout out that Manson still means business and has no intentions of stopping, even if he is slowing down a little. Pure and unadulterated Manson, this is definitely an album to check out, especially if you're a lover of hard rock who has at times struggled with Manson's previous works. This may not be a revolutionary effort, but it certainly shows the graceful evolution of an artist who has incessantly carried on creating music despite so many critics suggesting he shouldn't.



One comment

pillis

13 Feb '15 at 10:45 pm

Best review of this album I've read. Whenever a new Marilyn Manson's album comes out all the press says it's resurrection. It happened with the high end of low and more evidently with Born Villain (which is his best work of the last 15 year).

Now this pale emperor is scoring amazing reviews, too good in my opinion. Despite not being a bad album at all, I clearly hear many recycled ideas from previous songs. And with just 10 tracks I was excepting just killers and no fillers but most of the songs are weak and just...so so while the best ones don't scream resurrection to me.

Deep six = no reflection and hey cruel work

Birds of the hell awaiting = I want to kill you like they do in the movies

Third day of a seven day binge = leave a scar

Cupid carries a gun = personal Jesus and beautiful people

Devil beneath my feet = you and me and the devil makes three

The mephistopheles of Los Angeles = evidence

Clearly they're not the same but production wise they are very similar indeed so I'm not that impressed with this album. Especially after the mind blowing born villain.

Best songs: the mephistopheles of Los Angeles, devil beneath my feet, warship my wreck, odds of even, day 3.

Worst song: birds of hell awaiting

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