

STREET SCENE

Metallica makes a melodic change in style

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

In pop and rock music, a revamping of style is necessary sometimes to resuscitate a career or to renew the band's interest in itself.

U2 jumped from Bible-belt earnestness of "Joshua Tree" to the jaded, leather-clad sloe merchants on "Achtung Baby." The harmonies that inundated "Pop Smear" were stripped out when The Verve Pipe recorded "Villains." Then there's always the physical makeover that singers like Madonna and Hole's Courtney Love go through.

Metallica's metamorphosis from a heavy, dirgy sound to a more listenable melodic rock on its latest album "Load" (Elektra) did more than reinvent the band. It — not to mention the haircuts and body piercings — ticked off plenty of fans. And bassist Jason Newsted has heard all about it.

"If kids want to sell us so short and not want to be involved in this record, there's a lot of good heavy, heavy bands out there like Sepultura that need people's support too. I think it's silly to throw stones at the guys that invented the music," Newsted said during a recent phone interview from his Chicago hotel room.

The complaints, which include accusations of selling out to sound more like trendy alternative rock bands, present a Catch-22 situation, Newsted said.

"A lot of these people liked us and joined our ranks because we did whatever we wanted to. They dug that attitude. Now that we continue to do what we want, they're mad because we don't do what they want us to do. It's a chasing your own tail sort of



Dedicated band: Metallica — from left, vocalist/guitarist James Hetfield, drummer Lars Ulrich, guitarist Kirk Hammett, and bassist Jason Newsted — has earned a reputation for its dedication to its fans.

thing. In order to make ourselves happy with the music, we want to create something new and different and fresh for us."

"It has the most input from all four members which makes it kind of a more reflective, personal kind of record. It's also the most listenable to a large amount of people," Newsted said. The proof, he added, is in album sales.

"The bottom line is more people have come on to listen to Metallica than have left. Times have to change, people have to change."

Various Influences

Metallica's influences have

never been as obvious as they are on "Load," according to Newsted.

Black Sabbath and Jimi Hendrix are collective favorites of Metallica. Drummer Lars Ulrich favors Brit pop bands like Kula Shaker while guitarist Kirk Hammett prefers industrial music as well as sitarist Ravi Shankar. Singer/guitarist James Hetfield listens to Lynyrd Skynyrd, The Allman Brothers Band, and upstarts like the Mighty Mighty Bosstones and Rocket. From The Crypt, Newsted likes a lot of hip-hop music, metal groups Napalm Death, Cannibal Corpse and Sepultura, and soul and Motown music.

"We take our influences and spit them back out as a bouncy and groovy and Motown and Sabbath kind of thing. You hear so much Southern-flavored licks and riffs coming out of James because that is his real true self. That is all showing its face now. It makes it a bit more comfortable not having to work up to something else and really letting yourself go instead."

That freedom is best represented in the groove-laden song "The Outlaw Torn," and the Southern-flavored acoustic-based "Mama Said," Newsted explained.

"The Outlaw Torn" is very epic sounding and James's singing, he really outdid himself on that. I think that's a wonderful, wonderful composition. To be able to put something on tape and make it sound like that is an incredible feat. It sounds so grandiose and huge," he said.

"I also like 'Mama Said' for its diversity. It's very close to the heart of James."

Michigan native

Born in Battle Creek March 4, 1963, Newsted lived in western Michigan until his 18th birthday when he moved out west with the hopes of joining a rock band.

"It worked out," Newsted said with a laugh.

He began his career with the Phoenix-based band Plotsman and Jettam. After five years with the band, he left to replace Metallica bassist Cliff Burton who was instantly killed Sept. 27, 1986, in a tour bus accident in Sweden.

Newsted said his climb to fame wasn't as easy as it looked.

"It's a lot of hard work. There were times, you know, when I did

not have a job and lived on the street, like the stories you hear all the time. There were times I got rid of everything except my bass and my amp — and a piece of cheese," Newsted said.

When Metallica plays The Palace of Auburn Hills Saturday, March 22-Sunday, March 23, you can bet Newsted's family will be there. So will some of his "close friends."

"A lot of folks kind of just show up and say, 'We were best buddies in the third grade and went to different high schools.' Then there's the people who come up to me who were real (jerks) to me when I was in high school because I was always a little bit different than everybody else. (I tell them) 'I remember who you were and how you were. Go back to your pig farm.' It feels good to do that."

Dedication to fans

Since Metallica's inception in 1981 in California, the band has earned a reputation for spoiling its fans.

"That's why we are where we are. There's no question that we are still really big fans of music — so many different kinds of music. Everybody is still a big fan in that way. It's always been a priority of Metallica to keep in that touch with our own fans. There's no us without them," Newsted said.

As a sign of Metallica's dedication to its fans, the band has designed a stage that will give every fan a good seat during the tour for "Load."

"It's kind of in the round plus. It's the biggest production we've ever taken out or any heavy band has ever taken out in the history of concerts. The stage

takes up the same amount of room on the arena floor that a basketball court would."

"Even if people aren't into heavy music, it's something to see just for the production. It takes 100 crew people to make it run every day. We have 19 40-foot semis full of equipment, and seven buses that carry 100 people."

During the show, Hetfield, Ulrich, Hammett and Newsted will move around the two stages shaped like a figure eight.

"It's always changing. It's never going to be the same. There's no broken right line. There's no bad seat. All the fans are down. All the lighting rigs are flown. There's 16 mics on two stages."

"We're constantly moving so there's never any stagnation. The crowd moves with the band as the band moves around the floor. The cool thing is that it's always different for us, the players, and there's a different crowd every night. It makes for a very exciting show for everybody. It might be the 3,000th time I'm playing 'Seek and Destroy' but it's in a new spot from a different part of the stage. I could be singing into 60 kids' faces, head butting them or sweating on them. It's the closest we've ever been to you and you've ever been to us."

Metallica with *Corrosion of Conformity*, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 22, and 7 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 23, at The Palace of Auburn Hills, 2 Championship Dr. 17-75 and Lapeer Road, Auburn Hills. Tickets are \$35.50 and \$25.50 for the second show. The first show sold out. For more information, call (810) 377-0100.

Wilco turns 'joke' into double album



CHRISTINA FUOCO

For its second album, the roots rock band Wilco underwent a rather ambitious project — following up its critically acclaimed debut "A.M." with a double album.

The idea was meant to be a joke, but as the recording process went on, the mood changed.

"There was some early talk about doing a rock record and then doing maybe an acoustic EP later in the year. That wasn't even something we talked to the label about. We wanted to be able to do both things but that idea was just forgotten about," said guitarist/keyboardist/backing vocalist Jay Bennett.

"When it came time to record we still had all the material that had been designated for those two projects. It started out as a bit of a joke, actually, but as we encountered not as much resistance from the record company as we thought, it became less of a joke."

The band-produced "Being

There" features 19 new songs ranging from the somber "Misunderstood" and angst-ridden "Sunken Treasure" to the pure straight-ahead rock of "Monday" and "I Got You (At The End of the Century)," to the country rock of "Forget the Flowers" to the Beach Boys-flavored "Outta Mind (Outta Sight)."

Bennett said that the album wouldn't have sounded complete as single albums.

"We wanted to get all the material out. If we had to trim some material out to make it a single album, a couple of those songs would have been lost forever. They could have come out as an EP, as b-sides or bonus tracks, but a lot of those songs would have been lost."

With "Being There," Wilco is hoping to make a statement.

"On the double album, you get to open and close it twice. You don't get that weird, bulky middle ground where all the songs blend together. You listen to 10 songs, close it up and reopen it and listen to nine more songs. That was pretty important to us."

Wilco and special guest Kinn As Prince (TAFKAP) and his wife Mayte spent their first wedding anniversary on Feb. 14, here you go. According to a press release sent out by NPG Records, "They will celebrate their first anniversary by revisiting the Hawaiian late site of their honeymoon. In honor of their marriage (TAFKAP) has created an orchestral-ballet interpretation of their love story entitled 'Kamasutra'."

"Kamasutra," composed by (TAFKAP), recorded by the 52-piece NPG Orchestra, details the origin of (TAFKAP)'s name, the meeting of (TAFKAP) and Mayte, and how he and she become one."

If you have a question or comment for Christina Fuoco, you can write to her in care of The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia, or you can leave her a message at (313) 953-2047, mailbox No. 2130, or via e-mail at CFuoco@aol.com

In case you were curious

about how The Artist Formerly Known As Prince (TAFKAP) and his wife Mayte spent their first wedding anniversary on Feb. 14, here you go. According to a press release sent out by NPG Records, "They will celebrate their first anniversary by revisiting the Hawaiian late site of their honeymoon. In honor of their marriage (TAFKAP) has created an orchestral-ballet interpretation of their love story entitled 'Kamasutra'."

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Coming to town: The roots rock band Wilco will perform songs of its double album "Being There."

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