Review Of The Deftones White Pony Essay, Research Paper

The Deftones are a Sacramento, California based heavy/alternative metal band.

The band consists of Chino Moreno (vocals), Stephen Carpenter (guitar), Chi Cheng (bass) and Abe Cunningham (drums). The Deftones have built a reputation on their unique sound, which combines elements of punk, hardcore, hip hop, and heavy metal.

Being the huge Deftones fan that I am, and after being subjected to the impressive media blitz preceding the release of their third album White Pony, I just had to purchase it the day of it’s release. Upon first listening to the cd I was a little disappointed with the band’s effort. This new cd was nothing like their previous two releases. The Sacramento based band has built a reputation since the release of their first album Adrenaline in 1996 of being an aggressive “new” metal band. However, their style has shifted steadily from riff-based thrasher type songs to more melodic songs that find themselves being aggressive and strangely tender at the same time. In the previous album, Around the Fur, that shift was apparent in songs such as “Be quite and drive”, “mx”, and “dai the flu”. White Pony finds the Deftones toning down the pace a little more and Chino Moreno screaming and howling in a less threatening way. His eerie animalistic voice is put to great use on this record. It accompanies the melody on “Change (in the house of flies)” excellently and adds a different dynamic to the song. An interesting vocal sound results when Chino and Perfect Circle/Tool lead singer Maynard Keenan. The two voices come together to create a haunting overall effect. Often the listener cannot determine who is actually singing; that’s how well their voices compliment each other.

While the new record was a slight disappointment to hardcore old school Deftones fans, like myself, it does have some heavier songs on the record. Unfortunately these two tracks – “elite” and “Korea”- seem to be less creative and thought out than the other songs on the record. This leads one to conclude that perhaps the band added those songs as appeasement to its record label and its hardcore fans. Elite does have an interesting wrinkle to it with the vocal distortion and unforgettable mind-searing hook created by Stephen Carpenter. Korea on the other hand is one of the weakest songs on the track. There is no new wrinkle here and the song sounds like a cut from a recording session for one of the earlier albums that wasn’t good enough to make the final version. Another disappointing track (in my opinion) yet critically acclaimed for some reason is the stunningly out place track “teenager”. The track is totally nothing like what the Deftones have done in the past. It is entirely acoustic and has a soft tender feel to it. This sort of material, in my opinion, should have absolutely no place on a Deftones record. If the Deftones wish to pursue this avenue of music then they might as well change their name.

Despite the few disappointments, there are more than enough good tracks on this record to make it an overall success. The most impressive track on the record is “Passenger” which pairs Chino with Maynard of Tool. The song has a dark overtone and menacing feel to it, which is accentuated with the brooding voices of Chino and Maynard. A very emotional track both vocally and musically. Another standout on the record is the first single and radio hit “Change (in the house of flies)”. This song embodies where the Deftones are going with their sound- a precious blend of heavy melodies and tender vocals that fall somehow between the realm of hard and soft music. Other standouts on the record include “Digital Bath”, “Knife Party” and “Pink Maggit”. Digital Bath has an eerie, hollow, detached feeling to it. The song draws the listener into the song with its mesmerizing hook and “digital” sounds in the background. Most people either hate or love this song, but one thing most people can agree on is that it’s strangely compelling and hard to tune out. “Knife Party” reveals the darker side the Deftones have, in particular Chino Moreno’s infatuation with the dark underworld of drugs, prostitution and crime. The song’s brooding sound is established early by an eerie guitar hook followed by a thunderous wall of distortion. Chino’s melodious voice floats above the churning sonic fray till he lets out an animalistic screech that lasts for a good portion of the song. Finally, the record closes with the slow developing, yet stellar “Pink Maggit”. The first minute of the song is a slow brooding vocal exercise of Chino’s voice as he mumbles unintelligible phrases and words over the backdrop of sampled noises and a very distorted chord progression by Stephen Carpenter. The song’s lethargic start soon comes to an abrupt end with the sudden outburst of heavy guitar and bass distortion in addition to Cunningham’s crashing drums that absolutely destroys the listener and overwhelms the senses. The song is very cathartic. The atmosphere starts of slow and introspective and eventually builds the mood to one of barely in-control insanity (if there is such a thing) and then finally degenerates once again into a slow heavily distorted guitar solo much like the beginning. The song is a very fitting closer to the album since it leaves the listener exhausted from the roller coaster of emotion one experiences by listening to the record.

While the new record has it’s disappointing moments, it does have several instances where it shows what great promise the Deftones have as a band further progressing and creating their own version of music. In light of the fact that they could have enjoyed much greater commercial success by releasing a “hip hop metal” record much like Limp Bizkit or Korn (bands to whom they are compared with by totally ignorant critics who do not know their music), it is refreshing to see them stay the course of their artistic development and progression regardless of how much money they could make by selling out. I give the record 4 out of 5 stars.