

Intro

In 1987, a band called Nirvana formed in Aberdeen, Washington. It consisted of guitarist and vocalist Kurt Cobain, bassist Krist Noveselic, and a rotating lineup of drummers, the most notable being Dave Grohl. They were part of the grunge movement forming in the Pacific Northwest. While there were many artists that could have broken into the mainstream from grunge, in 1991, Nirvana did it. And they did it so spectacularly that they ended the backwash of hair metal from the 80s, and put grunge into the spotlight for the next 3 years. Nirvana's "Nevermind" is insanely strong, with 13 tracks in total. A rare gem, there are no one or two songs on the album that are weak, all of them hold their ground. That being said, some of this album's songs are better than others. So today I will be giving my thoughts on the alt-rock classic, "Nevermind."

The Bad

Like I said before, "Nevermind" has no weak songs. All of them are grunge classics, and add something unique. However, there are a few songs that are subpar to the rest. "Endless, Nameless" is the last track on the album, and can only be heard after waiting 10 minutes from the end of the 12th song. And while I do like the softer melody in the song, the other half of the song sounds like pure noise. And not in a good, experimental way. The distortion has heavy usage throughout the track, and is more reminiscent of Nirvana's other albums. The songs "Polly" and "Something In The Way" are next. Both are slower, and feature acoustic guitar. Nirvana is many things, but they are not an acoustic band. Their MTV Unplugged show, while legendary, features many cover songs, and the songs that are from their catalog are usually slowed down for acoustic. That is the exception, not the rule. Because both these songs are dull. While the lyrics in both are deep, Cobain's voice and Nirvana's sound as a whole are not built for a slowed down, monotonous song. If these tracks were to be covered by a band better suited for such things, these songs may have more of an impact.

The Good

The next songs are the backbone of this record. The ones you won't hear on the radio, but give this album its sustainability. These tracks all have a similar sound and style, but make up for it in terms of detail and craft. A prime example of this is "Breed" which features a truly impressive drum intro and performance by Grohl. A high paced track, its catchy riff and unusual guitar solo make it memorable. But what keeps it from being truly great is the fact that Nirvana has so many catchy, fast paced riffs on the album. Tracks like "Territorial Pissings," "Stay Away," and "On A Plain" exhibit this. And when all of these fast, catchy riffs are on an album, a song must distinguish itself to not get lumped in with the rest. And these songs do, but not enough for the casual listener to hear. "Territorial Pissings" uses great guitar distortion. "Stay Away" holds another great drum intro by Grohl, with noteworthy bass by Krist. "On A Plain" has a likeable chorus, and a mini bass solo at the end of the bridge. But they all lack that extra something to pull away from the others.

The Great

That extra something is Kurt Cobain's vocals. His singing not only separates good tracks from better ones, but also distinguishes Nirvana as a whole from other bands. Not to say other tracks didn't have impressive vocals, but the tracks that are the best are the ones that showcase them. Suspiciously, "Lounge Act" and "Drain You" may have gotten bunched in with other songs like it, but avoid so with the vocal talent of Cobain. "Lounge Act" has another quality bass riff from Noveselic, but builds up to Kurt doing his trademark style of mixing screaming and singing. It puts a lot more feeling behind it. "Drain You" has a smaller guitar hook at the beginning, and features another great riff. But the bridge, longer than most on the album, builds up to a great scream by Cobain that leaves its mark. "Lithium," while not showing any exclusive vocal performances, has an excellent hook to start. It builds on that with a quiet

verse, and then switches on and off between that, and another catchy, fast paced chorus. The difference here is that the contrast between loud and quiet is so stark, you can't forget it. But it will always be remembered as the 3rd most popular song on "Nevermind," and in my opinion, the 4th greatest song. Numbers 3, 2, and 1 are all in a class by themselves.

The Excellent

When talking about Nirvana, you can have 2 different conversations. One about the songs that are favorites among the most dedicated of fans, and one about the songs that everyone knows, the ones that changed the world forever. These next 3 songs managed to do both. "In Bloom," while not as well known as "Lithium" is the better song. Out of the 3 songs here, "In Bloom" is the most true to Nirvana's sound as a whole. The verses are quieter and follow a steady beat, building up an amazing chorus, which features a different style of Cobain singing. The only thing off putting about the song is the solo which is not everyone's cup of tea. Personally, I like the use of a slower, really heavy distortion on it, but I can see why not everyone would like it. "Come As You Are," the next song is unusual as it features a very cleaned up guitar riff. Nirvana doesn't typically include these types of riffs on an album, but it alone is catchy to make it an instant classic. Nothing else really stands out on the song, but the slowness offers a nice change of pace to the headbanging before and after.

And finally, the big one. "Smells Like Teen Spirit." First, I need to talk about the beauty of the song. The opening notes are instantly recognizable, and when the drums kick in, it prepares you for a verse like no other. The chorus is such an earworm, the solo is simple, and the energy is off the charts. The music video would come to represent grunge in its full, with constant MTV rotation, and being one of 2 songs from the 90's to reach 1 billion views. The song went to #1, knocking off King Of Pop, Michael Jackson. And the cultural impact is undeniable. Overnight it killed hair metal, brought Grunge and Alternative to the mainstream, and defined the 90's as a whole. Gen X, who was sick of the 80's and the lack of substance, clung to the authenticity of these anti-rock stars. Its lyrics meant nothing, they didn't need to. The song was one of the easiest to play. Even the title was based off of misinterpreted graffiti. It doesn't get more real than that.

Overall

"Nevermind" will forever go down in history as one of the best albums of the 90's, if not all time. Its cultural impact alone cements its legacy in rock forever. That's why I would give this album a 9 out of 10. The only thing keeping it from a perfect score would be the 2 acoustic tracks and the chaos that is "Endless, Nameless." Even if they had kept those, they probably could have been better diversifying their sound on some more repetitive tracks. But other than that, the album is perfect. The fast tracks make you headbang, the steady tracks have great hooks, the drums are powerful, the bass adds diversity, the guitar chords are intriguing, the vocals are passionate, and of course, it changed the world. Nirvana created something wonderful, and is recommended for anyone interested in alternative, grunge, or rockers in general.