CD REVIEW

Refocused Metallica explodes with 'Anger'

By Steve Morse, Globe Staff, 6/5/2003

Finally, we can talk about Metallica's music, rather than its many other distractions. The news was bleak in recent years, as the heavy-metal icons tarnished their street credibility in a prolonged legal battle against Napster. Then came internal troubles, including the quitting of bassist Jason Newsted and a stay in a rehabilitation clinic by singer-guitarist James Hetfield.

No wonder Metallica's new album is called "St. Anger." It's a sandblasting return to form, as Metallica reclaims the street credibility that has helped it sell 80 million records during a 22-year career of ear-shattering guitar riffs and bellicose vocals that never endeared them to authorities.

The new CD was supposed to come out next Tuesday but was pushed up to today (and some copies were available at Newbury Comics and Tower stores yesterday) because of fears of CD burning. You just know there's lingering resentment from fans who didn't appreciate Metallica's stand against Napster (even though the band later dropped its case), so some will no doubt make a special effort to get this CD for free.

It is Metallica's first studio album in nearly six years and channels an explosiveness that should please longtime followers. The music is raw and recorded with no touchups, according to producer Bob Rock, who also played some of the bass before the addition of new member Robert Trujillo (formerly of Suicidal Tendencies and Ozzy Osbourne's band). There are 11 songs spanning 75 minutes (along with an added DVD of rehearsals) and a photo of the band up against a graffiti-splattered wall, which further suggests its return to street-cred.

The opening track, "Frantic," blisters out of the gate with Hetfield wailing, "If I could have my wasted days back, would I use them to get back on track?" That leads to "St. Anger," with deep, growling, low-tuned guitars and Hetfield's urging that "I want my anger to be healthy/ I want my anger to be my own ... And I need to set my anger free." The album accomplishes that by becoming one long catharsis. The machine-gun drum patterns from Lars Ulrich on "Dirty Window" are matched by Kirk Hammett's riff-heavy guitar slams.

The intensity is back - and so is Metallica's sympathy for the oppressed. The whomping "Invisible Kid" is about a youth who has "fallen through the grid," while the gnashing "My World" and "Shoot Me Again" are
defiant anthems that show that Metallica hasn't lost its touch.

Hopefully we'll feel the same way when they headline the "Summer Sanitarium Tour" at Gillette Stadium on July 6.

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