

A Case Study of Bob Rock and his Influence on the Music of Metallica

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Abstract

The career of Canadian producer Bob Rock has seen him work with a variety of big name artists, with a large degree of commercial success, as well as some degree of critical acclaim. After producing bands like Motley Crue and Bon Jovi throughout the Eighties, Bob Rock was then recruited by Metallica for their eponymous 1991 album, which is widely acknowledged for bringing Metallica to the mainstream. I intend to look at how he impacted the sound of Metallica, and also the musical format, compared with the four albums released prior to *'Metallica'*, and also the events that led to his departure as Metallica's producer in 2006.

Bob's early career

Bob Rock's musical career began in the late 1970s performing as a guitarist playing in various bands.

playing career , discography , achievements , 'trademark sound'?

Bob starts working with Metallica

With an already impressive CV to his name, Bob Rock was considered by Metallica to work on what would be their fifth studio album – the eponymous '*Metallica*' , but commonly referred to as 'The Black Album' due to its monochrome cover art (see Figure 1).

Metallica's first four albums had earned them a following as a thrash metal band. Their first full length studio album '*Kill 'Em All*' in 1983, produced by Paul Curcio, The band gained increasing success, both in record sales and critical acclaim with the following two albums, *Ride The Lightning* (1984) and *Master Of Puppets* (1986), both produced by Flemming Rasmussen.



Figure 1: Cover art for 'Metallica'

justice – hints of breaking through to the mainstream – radio airplay , first video.

but the harsh production possibly just held them back from that

The production sound on the '*...And Justice For All*' album came under scrutiny for the lack of bottom end, and the change of personnel on Bass Guitar clearly had an

impact on this. With Hetfield and Ulrich heavily involved as producers, the domination of the guitars and drums in the mix lacks bottom end – domination of James and Lars.

'The Black Album' therefore marked a turning point in Metallica's career, working with a producer who had a reputation for producing sonically pleasing, radio friendly records. Initially Rock was approached only to mix the album, but after seeing the band play live on a number of occasions he decided he wanted to take up full production duties on the project. He felt that the band had not yet captured their live energy/sound on record.

Following the tragic death of Burton in a tour bus crash in 1986, he was replaced by Jason Newsted on Bass Guitar. In 1988 Metallica released '*...And Justice For All*', the first album to feature Newsted on bass.

In preparation for the next album, Metallica were aware of the need for some guidance in terms of the production. They also felt that they wanted to produce simpler songs than they had done before. In particular, that the increasingly complex arrangements of the songs '*...An Justice For All*' had proven difficult to reproduce in the live environment.

Bob Rock brought some radical changes to Metallica's approach to recording. It took several months for the band to get used to their new producer, and for the producer to get used to working with the band.

The band's previous recording experience had been to record each person separately, and to concentrate on

specific changes/suggestions made by Bob

- recorded live – everyone playing at the same time
- shorten songs – one riff etc..

SOUND

big sounds

bass was back in the picture

drums – 30–40 takes per song – cutting together to get perfect take
lots of room mics – lot of eq

James' voice

'use it as an instrument' – Bob. more melodic

James had singing lessons – simplicity of songs allowed the vocals to be more important

more attention to detail on vocals – different mics – emotion etc.

harmonies for the first time.

orchestra

JASON – my friend of misery – writing credit.

***** *****

commercial success of the black album – all down to sounding more accessible?
glossy? track length. (averages? radio airplay?) – facts again, record sales....

LOAD AND RELOAD

rock continues to work with metallica on some more albums. sound gets glossier.
covers. different styles

TROUBLES

departure of newsted – although he gave other reasons, the musical differences could have been a factor.

james' REHAB

St. Anger

Metallica's 2003 album *St. Anger* represented yet another change of direction for the band. The production sound was raw and dry, and in stark contrast to the highly polished sound of previous albums *Load* (1996) and *Reload* (1997). *St. Anger* smacked of a band over compensating against the 'sellout' claims coming from their hardcore metal fan base, but ultimately failing.

Whilst the songs were certainly louder, longer and arguably less radio-friendly, they lacked the sophistication and intelligent arrangements of the band's earlier work. It appeared they were sticking to the Bob Rock philosophies of 'one riff per song' and 'keep it simple' but just adding the element of repetition.

no guitar solos – dated – we find that this is something Kirk argued against. obviously he was overruled eventually.

Following Jason Newsted's departure in 2001, Bob Rock also took up the role of Bass Guitarist for the *St. Anger* sessions. This inevitably led to him having an even greater influence on the music, and he receives writing credits for all eleven songs on the album. Following the completion of *St. Anger* recording sessions, the band recruited Robert Trujillo as their new permanent bass player.

Fans want change

The years of fans' criticism came to a head after *St. Anger*, with an online petition lobbying for an end to Bob Rock's work with Metallica.

We, the longtime loyal fans and friends of Metallica and their music would like to see a major change with the upcoming album. I know it will be a hard thing to do, but we feel it is time to sever your working relationship with Bob Rock.

To date the petition has received over 20,000 signatures.

In 2006 it was announced that Metallica would not be working with Bob Rock on their next studio album, and it would instead be produced by Rick Rubin. Much of Rubin's work is notable for its 'stripped down' production sound, something which perhaps Rock was aiming for with *St. Anger*, but ultimately failed to achieve. Yet to be released, it remains to be seen whether Rubin will try to improve on the *St. Anger* formula, or use a different approach entirely.

The Cliff Factor

Whilst the influence and input of Bob Rock was an important reason for Metallica's transition from the underground to the mainstream, it was by no means the only significant factor. The band's original bass guitarist, the late Cliff Burton, was seen by many as the most profound influence on Metallica's music and ??ethos?? during their early career.

would Metallica's musical direction have been allowed to change if Cliff was still around? would it need to? indirectly it was the lack of bass on Justice which led to the drastic change of direction for Black. would they have had such commercial success?

It is debatable that the absence of Cliff Burton in the Metallica camp has been just as important as the presence of Bob Rock.

Conclusion

Clearly this represents a new chapter in the career of Metallica, but Bob Rock's influence on their music over the years

regardless of your opinion of the music, the criticisms from the original fanbase, and (decreased album sales?) can ultimately be taken as a negative effect on their career.

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Discography

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