



Electric Ladyland

John M. Perry

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Electric Ladyland is one of the greatest guitar albums ever made. During the recording process, Jimi Hendrix at last had time and creative freedom to pursue the sounds he was looking for. In this remarkable and entertaining book, John Perry gets to the heart of Hendrix's unique talent - guiding the reader through each song on the album, writing vividly about Hendrix's live performances, and talking to several of Hendrix's peers and contemporaries.

Excerpt

Natural wit, sharpness of ear and a pervasive sense of fun prevented Hendrix from sticking just to the wah-wah pedal's literal use (and it's worth remembering that Hendrix off-stage was a natural mimic, whose imitations of Little Richard or of Harlem drag-queens made his friends howl). In fact, he found a use for the pedal without even using guitar. By turning his amp up high and treading the pedal he found he could modulate the natural hiss of amplifier valves, producing sounds of gentle breezes, howling storms or the susurruration of waves on a beach; sounds that are all over "1983" and "Moon Turn The Tides." Hendrix had an ear and (though it's often overlooked) he also had a fine, sly sense of humour that - with characteristic lightness of touch - he was able to express in music.

Electric Ladyland Details

Date : Published March 31st 2004 by Continuum

ISBN : 9780826415714

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Format : Paperback 132 pages

Genre : Music, Nonfiction, History

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From Reader Review Electric Ladyland for online ebook

Edward Sullivan says

First title I have read in the 33 1/3 series. Somewhat revealing but not enough focus or depth for me on the creation of the album.

Eddie Watkins says

Some decent personal accounts of seeing early Jimi live, and I respected his theory that Jimi might've been played-out by the time of his death; but most of the track by track analysis was a snoozefest for me (except for *All Along the Watchtower*), probably because most of it is written in guitar-geek-speak. Can't say the book enhanced my understanding of the album, or even encouraged me to give it a listen, but then again I don't need any encouragement to listen to Hendrix.

Nathan says

I enjoyed this one, as usual. It gives a great back story into the world of pre-70s rock n roll, not to mention the production of the great album. I could have done without a lot of the discussion on feedback sorts, etc, but every book has its faults.

Sandy says

As I have said elsewhere, Continuum Publishing has a wonderful thing going with its 33 1/3 series of minibooks, each one a small treatise of sorts regarding one of the legendary rock/pop albums of the past 45 years. I had previously enjoyed Sean Nelson's book on Joni Mitchell's "Court and Spark" (number 40 in the series, which series is now nudging toward the 100 mark), and decided to give number 8, John Perry's book on Jimi Hendrix' third album, "Electric Ladyland," a try. In a recent issue of "Mojo" magazine, this album was not only selected as one of the Top 40 psychedelic records of all time, but received the exalted No. 1 spot. ("Sgt. Pepper's," by the way, came in at No. 5.) A longtime personal favorite of mine, Hendrix' most ambitious recording has been blowing aging hippies' minds ever since its release in the autumn of 1968. Perry's book, to its credit, not only gives us a capsule biography of Hendrix, but recounts the author's experiences seeing him live in England (the lucky so-and-so!) and gives us a track-by-track analysis of all 16 songs on the record. Perry writes well, and his love and enthusiasm for his subject are both obvious and contagious.

I must admit that I, a fan of "Electric Ladyland" since its release 43 years ago (there are times when I honestly believe it to be the most imaginative, mind-blowing and orgasmic record ever made), learned an awful lot from Perry's work. Apparently a musician himself (he tells us that he "played the Trentishoe festival" in 1973, and has been involved in all kinds of studio work, but leaves his exact musical niche quite vague), Perry has a keen ear for detail, and points out facets of the music that this listener had never noticed before (such as Hendrix' piano accents at the 0:30 mark of "Crosstown Traffic"). I must also confess that

much of what Perry discusses is a bit over my head. As a person who does NOT read musical notations or play an instrument, I found his numerous discussions of fingering technique, pentatonic scales and various chords a bit perplexing. Honestly, what is a NONmusician to make of this sentence: "The main sequence, in the key of A major, steps through C# minor 7, Bmin7, F# min7--and their respective relative majors"? These instances of musical technobabble aside, Perry's book should certainly please all fans of Jimi and his third great work. It has given me a deeper appreciation of this beloved piece of music, which I would not have thought possible after four-plus decades, even as it demystifies some of the legends surrounding its creation. It is certainly a worthwhile purchase for all fans (although, at \$14.95 for a small 132-page book, an overpriced one, as are all the 33 1/3 volumes).

Having said this, I must also add that the book comes with a number of problems. Like "Court and Spark," this volume has its fair share of typos and faulty punctuation; a good copy editor really needs to be brought in for this series! Perry is often guilty of bad grammar, too, as when he writes "there's hardly a band from that era who weren't robbed blind," instead of "that wasn't." He also gets his facts wrong on occasion. For example, he tells us that he first saw Hendrix play at the Locarno club in Bristol on February 9, 1967, on a Monday night. Well, Hendrix did indeed play at the club on that date...except that that date was a Thursday. He talks about London's Marquee club on Wardour Street, but as far as I can make out, the Marquee was on Oxford Street; the Flamingo club was on Wardour. Perry mentions that on the song "Gypsy Eyes," the bass enters at the 0:28 mark; that should be 0:35. I could also have done without his gratuitous put-down of Grand Funk Railroad, a group that I feel has been needlessly maligned by critics who are largely unfamiliar with the band's 13 very solid studio albums. (Indeed, even Hendrix was a fan of Mark Farner; as the story goes, at a GFR concert at Madison Square Garden, Jimi was heard to have exclaimed, "Man, that guy can PLAY!") Quibbles aside, however, I am indebted to Perry for his loving, clear-eyed and (for the most part) lucid piece of work.

I would like to add one personal anecdote regarding "Electric Ladyland." During the last days of Tower Records, when I purchased the CD to replace my superworn vinyl, the young cashier girl asked me, "Who's Jimi Hendrix?" When I told her that he was a very popular guitarist in the '60s and had even played at the original Woodstock, she blithely asked, "What's Woodstock?" I just sighed, picked up my precious CD and walked out....

Tom says

This excellent little book is a detailed appreciation of a classic LP. Hendrix fans can learn a lot about the making of the album song-for-song as well as a great deal of the history of the Jimi Hendrix Experience and the milieu in which the album was produced. Any rock fan will be pleased with this read.

Lee says

Got this at the Strand while walking around super-hungover in the rain. Glad to have it in my pocket the next morning at the American Writing Programs book fair in NYC -- for some reason, it gave me hope, like a talisman against academic press books titled "Indian Summer" with pictures of bubbly streams and wheat and silos on the cover. This little book is worth reading if you, like me, were a white suburban youth who thought you'd one day grow up to be a black guitarist who very much resembled Jimi Hendrix. Enjoyable tidbits in here about how Keith Richards' girlfriend gave him a Strat, a fancy hotel room, and suckled him etc

when he was no one, about how Jimi and Mick Jagger constantly stole each other's lovers, about how Dylan was familiar with Jimi from the Greenwich Village scene. An easy enjoyable read that made me go back and listen to Electric Ladyland a few times, which I suggest you do whether or not you read this book. My fave part was relistening to "House Burning Down" from the perspective of riots burning ghettos at the time -- how even when Jimi tries to write a topical song, by the third verse he can't constrain his sci-fi instinct: "a giant boat from space lands with eerie grace" . . .

pianogal says

I really enjoyed the historical portion of this. However, all the song construction and music theory drove me nuts. Partially b/c some of it was wrong. If you detune your guitar a half step, so you play in E, but it sounds in E flat, then if you play your guitar in C sharp, it will sound in C, not D. D is up a half step, not down. This kinda bugged me for the rest of the book.

Good album, but not my favorite Hendrix record.

Leah W says

Yet another 33 1/3 book down! I'm in the process of catching up on any titles in the first 20 I didn't have/haven't read.

This is one of the straight non-fiction descriptions of an album, the making of the album, and the environment just before and after the making of the album (see also: Exile on Main Street). Its structure strongly resembles a lab report; to wit, the Table of Contents:

Introduction

1. Instrumentation
2. Chronology
3. Live
4. The Cover
5. Track by Track
6. Reviews
7. Aftermath

The structure may seem a bit dry, but the straightforward telling works well for an album made during fairly tumultuous times.

Also, this book covers a great deal more of the musical production and guitar tunings used than any other 33 1/3 I've read (at least that I can recall). I am very glad I at least have a little bit of guitar experience, so this came across as at least vaguely interesting. If you're a music fan who has no interest whatsoever in the process of playing music, all talk of E7#9 chords and whatnot might be dull.

Glynn says

Though an enjoyable and generally well written book, benefiting enormously from the author's knowledge of guitar playing and musical theory, it does however suffer from a few annoying problems.

The book's structure is a little muddled and confusing, leaping from subject to subject without building a coherent narrative, and there are some annoying, simple errors, too. For example Vox guitar amplifiers are described as "American" (they're *very* British, and famously used by lots of "British invasion" bands like the Beatles, and it surprises me that an author who seems to be a professional guitarist could make this mistake).

Still, overall, a fun, quick read for anyone with even a passing interest in Hendrix.

Boz Reacher says

Ah, this one's actually good, lots of nuts-and-bolts recording/guitar stuff. Author does not attempt to suffocate the reader with a lot of crap about actually being there - just sprinkles enough crap in there to fertilize some credibility. I got a little exasperated when Perry argues that Hendrix had likely burned up all his inspiration by the time he died - as if inspiration was a non-renewable resource. Mostly good stuff, you just ultimately cannot help these British guys as they try to understand American music. God bless 'em, they'll never stop trying.

Paul Bryant says

This is a very decent account of Hendrix's last completed album.

I think the worst rock death was Buddy Holly, when the 60s were just dawning and he was 22. He would have danced all over the pre-Beatle years and then been thrilled and re-energised by the exciting uprush of mid-sixties superpop, all those Yardbirds and Beach Boys and Kinks and so forth, and he would have done some really special stuff. You just know it. The second worst rock death surely has to be Hendrix. Second, because although he was a great musician, he'd already showed us in the three completed albums what he could do – what electric music could do, too – and I can only see him doing more of the same (obviously that wouldn't have been bad), but then getting fed up with what blues-based rock became (Led Zep, Black Sabbath) and fleeing into jazz. I could be wrong. I really only love his pretty stuff, which is, really, very gorgeous – Little Wing, The Burning of the Midnight Lamp, The Wind Cries Mary, 1983, May this be Love, One Rainy Wish – that's about it for me. Okay, I'll take Voodoo Child too.

Electric Ladyland is a double album filled with real poor flimsy songs like Cross Town Traffic, House Burning Down, Little Miss Strange and the title track, none of which you can remember, and a lot of jams like Voodoo Chile (16 minutes!) & Rainy Day Dream Away, but it has this lovely long melodic wonderfully exciting thing called "1983" buried in the middle of all the tedium, which is worth instantly spotifying if you don't know it, it's full of silly effects and sillier lyrics ("right this way smiles a mermaid") but I don't mind about that. Best thing he ever did.

I was very surprised to find that the initial reviews in 1968/beginning of 69 were fairly hostile – "mixed up and muddled"... "the sort of jam you'd hear in any club". Even more surprised to read Robert Christgau's

first impression of seeing Hendrix at the Monterey festival :

“He was terrible... Hendrix is a psychedelic Uncle Tom...Hendrix’s act can be seen as a consistently vulgar parody of rock theatrics but I don’t feel I have to like it. Anyway he can’t sing”

Turns out that after getting instant praise and adulation in Britain & Europe, when JH returned to the USA the critics didn’t see what all the fuss was about. They wised up later, of course.

Tobin Elliott says

Not a bad entry, not a great one. The author's love of Jimi is obvious and he does shed some interesting light on how Jimi played and how he got some of the sounds he achieved, but, I don't know...I was hoping for more insight, I guess.

Jamison Spencer says

Another strong 33 1/3. Stays mostly focused on this one period in Jimi's life, but does refer to his path getting there. Nice spots of actual music theory when discussing specific musical passages.

Robert says

An informative book - I learnt a lot of new things about Hendrix so I guess that makes the book a good one.

Tom says

Great explanation of the impact Jimi had on Swinging London as he merged on the scene. The coverage of the album itself was quite insightful.
