

Pinkerton vs Blue:

A dissection of Weezer's Most Popular Albums

By Christopher Pickhardt

The backstory

Unlike a majority of my generation, I largely missed the Weezer boat in my travels along the rock n roll tributary. Sure I was familiar with their hit songs from the radio, but I was not a devoted listener, nor was I familiar with their entire discography. In fact, the only Weezer album I actually owned (and listened to from start to finish) was 2001's self-titled "Green" album – a record I am still rather fond of to this day. It was part of the soundtrack to my summer that year; with songs like Hash Pipe, Island in the Sun and Photograph playing on a consistent loop in my car. But we are not here to discuss that album's assortment of catchy songs - we have other matters to address. I was open-minded and eager to explore Weezer's freshman and sophomore albums. I wanted to in essence, *see what all the fuss was about*. Part of me figured I would probably enjoy them, given how much affection I held for Green. The other part of me was nervous, which was common whenever I listened to a record for the first time.

The Process

In reality, the first listen is generally rather sterile for me. The second, I begin to find songs or moments that I like. By the third time around, I am defining favorite tunes and with each successive spin, I am usually cementing my love of those songs via the repeat button. This process very much applied to my Weezer experiment.

As I listened to "Blue," I was struck by just how many of the songs I knew already. I did not realize that there were SO MANY hit songs on that one record! Usually you figure a band's "greatest hits" would be spread along several albums, but with Weezer, almost their entire first album was populated by greatest hits. That is a monumental achievement for a young group; an accomplishment that must have been a challenge to follow up. Many bands have a hard time topping or even coming close to duplicating the success that comes from a smash debut album. That is why there is the expression "sophomore slump," a fate that many an artist dreads and will probably succumb to – not necessarily as a result of a lack of talent or effort, but often from the pressure and potential lack of confidence or even magic, that can ensue in the wake of going from obscurity to household name.

But how do we decide whether or not an album (regardless of what number it is in an artist's repertoire) is good? Do we judge it based on the number of catchy songs it contains? Are we

inclined to give a work a higher rating based on the depth of the lyrics or by the message the album as a whole conveys to the listener? Or is our affinity for a record based on something immeasurable and highly subjective? Whatever criteria we use to reach our inevitable conclusion, the end result is always one of two things: we either love something or we dislike it to some degree.

Taking all of these criteria into consideration, it would be dishonest of me to pretend that I do not gravitate towards catchier songs with choruses that stay ear-wormed in my head for days at a time. As I write this, I have Pinkerton's gem Pink Triangle rattling in my brain. To be sure, I can respect the poetry of artists like Bob Dylan, who was a voice of his generation. But however talented he is lyrically, the harsh tone of his voice did no favors to my ears and therefore contributed to my lack of interest in his catalog. But if an artist or group can produce memorable songs that also serve to make a statement; all the better for people like me who are simply suckers for a good hook.

The Verdict

So, it is for this simple reason listed above that I contend that indeed, Blue is Weezer's best and most memorable album. With a stack of hit songs that stay with you long after you have listened to the album as a whole, Blue accomplishes to be both entertaining and yet significant, for it is definitely a record that is a staple among an entire generation. Along with Green Day's Dookie, Nirvana's Nevermind, Pearl Jam's Ten and many other iconic albums, Weezer's Blue can comfortably hold its own among the classics of the early-mid 1990's.

It should almost be of no surprise that their follow up, Pinkerton would find it hard to compete with songs like My Name is Jonas, Undone (the Sweater Song), Say it Aint So and especially Buddy Holly, my personal favorite. However, that is not to say that Pinkerton on its own is not a great album; quite the contrary. In many ways it is a maturation from Blue - with many interesting musical interludes and vast experimentation. As stated above, Pink Triangle especially seemed to have resonance with me. But the album as a whole, as unique as it is, does not offer the plethora of catchy tunes I crave. Artistically I admire Pinkerton quite a bit, and one can clearly experience a band just coming into their own. Weezer's second effort is an album that comfortably rises above the label of "sophomore slump" even with the lack of multiple hit singles. If Pinkerton had been released PRIOR to Blue, I imagine many people would potentially claim that Blue and its pile of classic tunes was a betrayal to the artistry of Pinkerton.

Final Thoughts

Regardless, once you factor in their third effort Green, you can really sit back with respect for a band that knows how to deliver records that can satisfy both those who love hooks and those that seek out experimentation and lyrical poignancy. I imagine there are people out there that tend to shun overly-poppy albums such as Green, who believe if a song is too catchy that it is therefore not good or in some way abandons the artist's integrity. I never could relate to those

types of people who consider themselves 'purists' or who proudly wear the term music snob on their sleeves as a badge of honor. Their hierarchical notion of superiority speaks to pretentiousness. Music's sole purpose is to MOVE us and to inspire us and rarely can that be accomplished with a lack of melody. The most poignant lyrics in the world won't get a stadium of fans on their feet dancing. And message songs that serve to protest a cause have their time and place, which is great, but sadly that place is not on the airwaves of mainstream radio if said song does not contain some semblance of catchiness. In the end, my love of a band is determined by my desire to continually listen to their albums and it is a testament to a great artist, like Weezer, when you play a majority of their work on the regular basis and not just one or two songs. To get poetic myself, in an ocean of one-hit wonders and single-album successes, Weezer comfortably sails past many of their peers carrying with them a rich catalog of memorable songs, while joining the ranks of the other musical vessels of their generation.