

The Number of The Beast

Iron Maiden's Metal Masterpiece

Metal is considered a meta genre because of its ever changing sound as well as the many sub-genres that exist under the umbrella of metal. From one generation to the next, bands are always influencing one another. These bands are either popular bands that are so famous that everyone in the world has heard of them or they can be small garage bands that influence even greater bands. It can be argued that Iron Maiden is one of the most influential bands of modern heavy metal, and that their album *The Number of the Beast* is one of the most important and influential metal album to have been produced.

Iron Maiden released their third studio album *The Number of the Beast* in March 1982. This was perhaps at the height of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal, or NWOBHM. This movement started in the late 70's but carried over into the eighties. It should be noted that at this time thrash metal was gaining popularity in the San Francisco area in the early eighties. Many of the bands that came out of the bay area cite Iron Maiden as an early influence of their music. It was on this album that current Iron Maiden singer, Bruce Dickinson, joined the band to replace the original singer, Paul Di'Anno. Dickinson's addition to the band slingshot, not only his own career, but the career of Iron Maiden into superstardom. It's quite easy to speculate that this is perhaps Iron Maiden's most well known album to date.

The album's cover art is unmistakable, with the band's mascot, Eddie the Head or Eddie for short, standing in hell controlling the devil like a marionette puppet. The cover art alone drew a lot of controversy, but it was the title track, "The Number of the

Beast” that drew the most attention. The song’s lyrics were based on a nightmare that bassist Steve Harris had after watching a horror movie (Huey, 2015). The lyrics to this song, which involved references to Satan and hell, led to accusations against the band that they were into Satan worship. Although, in this case, the band was not breaking any new ground since bands such as AC/DC and Black Sabbath had similar accusations against them. The concept of Satan worship was still quite shocking to the world and helped boost Iron Maiden’s record sales partly because it garnered interest but also because many religious groups in the United States purchased records to burn or destroy them. This greatly benefitted the band as it gave them plenty of free publicity (Huey, 2015).

The Number of the Beast contains many songs that have the Iron Maiden signature sound. On tracks such as “Run to the Hills” the listener can hear the unique style guitarists Adrian Smith and Dave Murray create in the “galloping” guitar rhythm that can also be heard on other famous Iron Maiden tracks such as “The Trooper” on their fourth studio album *Piece of Mind*. Compared to previous albums, *The Number of the Beast* was much closer to being the Iron Maiden sound of metal that most know today. This album was produced at an important time in their history. Their other two albums were made with Paul Di’Anno as their frontman and lead singer and their material was more punk inspired, although the band often does not like that comparison (Dunn, 2011). The replacement of Di’Anno seemed like a risky move for the band but in fact became their best decision. The music that was written for the album *The Number of the Beast* included a higher vocal range that could only be reached by Bruce Dickinson.

Some of Iron Maiden's songs on this album have become timeless classics. The title track "The Number of the Beast" is no doubt a metal anthem and a song that is easily associated with Iron Maiden. The track that caused so much controversy started with English actor Barry Clayton reciting Revelations verses 12:12 and 13:18 (NME Blog, 11). The song then carries into one of the most memorable guitar riffs, not only in metal, but rock as well. The song mainly revolves around the fast riff that starts the song off. The guitar solos, of which there are two, are both very fast and very high, which is a characteristic that Iron Maiden and many of their successors such as Slayer and Megadeth use in their songs. The song ends the way it started using the riff from the beginning.

The other song that is uniquely Iron Maiden on this album is "Run to the Hills". This was the first song in Iron Maiden's repertoire to use the galloping rhythm guitar that is heard in many of their other later songs, most notably "The Trooper". This song also covered a political and historical topic. The topic being the Europeans settling and killing many of the Natives upon their arrival to North America (Stagano, 2006). This subject matter was perhaps the influence of later bands such as Megadeth and Slayer to talk about political history. "Run to the Hills" starts with a steady drum beat laid down by Clive Burr, the guitars are introduced soon after with a high riff that is played by both guitarists until they both go into the galloping rhythm section. The song includes not only a guitar solo, but a bass solo after it and a vocal solo after that performed by Steve Harris and Bruce Dickinson respectively. The song ends with a grand finale of a short drum solo and with Dickinson showing off his vocal range once again.

Both of these two tracks have left quite a legacy for the band. Both “The Number of the Beast” and “Run to the Hills” have been covered by several different bands, such as Iced Earth and The Iron Maidens(), and both songs have made appearances in the popular Guitar Hero and Rockband video games. The title track “The Number of the Beast” was such a hit for the band that it garnered the nickname The Beast for the band. Both songs have reached high on top rock song lists. The album itself reached number 1 on the Official UK charts (Official Charts, 2015), thirty-third on the US Billboard 300 (AllMusic, 2015), and eleventh on the Canadian charts (Library and Archives Canada, 2004). I think this was one of the most important albums to be produced for Iron Maiden and with the legacy that it has left behind I’m sure many would concur.

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