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Essay on Pink Floyd's Meddle

Pink Floyd, one of the most popular and progressive rock music groups in the history of music, achieved its popularity because of the psychedelic musical pieces they created. The characteristics of Pink Floyd music are the meaningful lyrics, experimentation with sound and the wonderful live shows they conducted. Meddle is the sixth album by the group, and released in the year 1971. It gained immense popularity, and is in fact, one of the most popular music albums ever. Etched in the minds of the listeners, Meddle has a quality of experimenting with various sounds and creating a new effect altogether. The group actually had nothing to start with and toyed around with sounds. Finally the whole group wrote the lyrics for the album, and released the album successfully. It received positive reviews from critics, and turned out to be a feather in the cap for Pink Floyd.

The recording for the album began early 1971 at the Abbey Road Studios, London. The studio wasn't well equipped at that point of time, and had just eight multitrack recording facilities. 1

Mason, *Inside Out – A Personal History of Pink Floyd*, 2005, pp. 152–153. A book containing much information about the band at all as well as the period of Meddle.

Thus, the group started visiting smaller studios in London and recorded the title track. Since they didn't have any particular theme in mind, the group started experimenting. One of these experiments was each of the members playing a track, and not bothering about what the others were playing. This impromptu exercise opened new avenues, even though nothing concrete came out as a result. The group worked relentlessly, and from morning to

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night. Their only breaks were the meal breaks. They played the guitar and also tried creating music with regular household objects. The band named these exercises as Nothings. The first working title of the album was thus kept as Son of Nothings. Richard Wright, one of the prolific members of Pink Floyd, worked on a piano jingle. This later became the source of the title track, Echoes. David Gilmour's guitar added further to the music, and created the track successfully. It is 23 minutes long and a wonderful piece of music with super experimentation effects. One of These Days, the next track, is a mixture of two bass guitars. The band started recording Meddle from April 1971 and worked on it through May too. They finished the post production work between June and December, between their busy rock show schedules.

The music of Meddle is a sign of the band's transition from psychedelic to progressive rock. One of the tracks, "A Pillow of Winds", is a slow love song that grows on the listeners. The music written by Gilmour and Waters gives an effect of the wind whooshing past with its acoustic theme. The other song, "Fearless", employs heavy reverberated tune. "San Tropez" is a typical jazz, that cuts off at intervals. The other track, "Seamus", is a pseudo blue track, collective creation of all four members of the band. There is a dog's howling in the song, adding a novelty to it. Even though this particular song was panned, the animal sound was a novel concept indeed. "Echoes" is a beautiful track, and grows on the audience slowly. It is a conjunction of the piano and the guitar.

The album released on 30th October, 1971 in the USA and on 13th November in the UK. However, the promotional campaign was poorly

designed and the album couldn't attract buyers initially in the US. Capitol Records is considered to be guilty in bad publicity in US. In UK, the marketing was done better and thus, the album reached No. 3 spot within a week of its release. One of the weak sides in the album's marketing was its design: the album's symbol was an ear underwater. The ear is trying to catch the sounds of the waves of water. Firstly, Storm Thorgerson suggested for the cover a close-up shot of a baboon's anus, but the band rejected this idea and demanded a shot of an ear underwater. The publicists and the other people in the contemporary music world did not like the cover. There was a general opinion that the songs were so good, that the album cover brought down the album image. The cover pic was designed by bob Dowling. The cover received lots of flak, even though the music didn't. The US position of the album was pathetically low at No. 70. The track "One of these days" was released as a seven inch single in the US, and was performed live by the band at a BBC concert. This helped the song, and gradually the other tracks in the album to gain more popularity. Gradually Meddle started growing on the listeners, and won over the US audience too. The best advertising for the album was a large amount of positive critics in different magazines. Meddle was then certified gold by the RIAA and subsequently as double platinum too. Thus, Meddle was popularized more in both US and UK by later promotional strategies. 2

Information retrieved from Allmusic. com on June 16, 2015.

Gilmour's guitar tunes came across really well and that his presence in the album's each and every track was apparent. 3

The album was also claimed to be a huge growth for Pink Floyd as a band from their previous work. Top music critics claimed that the music album was fearless, as well as pristinely beautiful. The title track Echoes received unprecedented applause from all sections of critics and many claimed that this song was Pink Floyd's masterpiece creation. The critics commented that each of the four lead members of the band had left their distinctive mark on the title track. However, some critics complained that the lyrics of a few songs weren't up to the mark. But it was overridden by the music itself. The music was so good that even if a few words of the lyrics weren't as good, it hardly made a difference to the brilliancy of the music. The album was a breakthrough in the world of rock music. As a genre progressive rock was a new development still. Meddle was a positive step towards development of the same.

"Echoes" is a landmark song in many ways. Firstly it is 23 minutes long, a feat in itself. Besides, the tuning between piano and guitar fits in beautifully to make those 23 minutes worth it. "Echoes" was so good that it gave its name to the compilation album Echoes: The Best of Pink Floyd. The other songs have their share of novelty too. "One of these days" has just one sentence in it. The line is "One of these days I am going to cut you up into little pieces", and it was not really sung. Instead, it was repeated in loops with the music in background. "San Tropez" is a reference to eating peaches while sitting on a sofa and playing the guitar in a typical country style. It is the only song in the album the music for which was written by Waters alone, and where Waters has lead vocals. The album is truly a masterpiece with all its subtle characteristics.

Trying something new was the sole aim of the group but in the process they created a mixture of several different styles, each distinctive as well as an innovation. The album is truly a creative piece of musical genius. It contributed significantly to the appreciation of progressive rock by listeners worldwide and started a wave of experiments in music of many other bands of its time.

Progressive rock music is a fascinating genre in itself. Its characteristics are experimentation with sound, and a conjunction of various sounds together. There is a higher level of skill with the instruments and often blurring of all the instruments together. The overlap is seamless and songs are often replaced by musical suites. Musical suites are typically 20 to 40 minutes long and often contained high orchestration, philosophical lyrics and extended themes. Progressive rock began its advent from UK and America and then gradually spread its wings across the world. Meddle, though on its release took time to grow on the listeners, has since then become a legend due to its contribution in progressive rock. 4

Meddle has all that it takes to create successful progressive rock. It has an acoustic love song, it has a completely out-of-the-box approach in the use of howling of a dog in a song, and finally “ echoes”, which in itself a novelty in the concept of music all add to the development of progressive rock. With a brand name as successful as Pink Floyd approaching towards this genre, people automatically decided to switch to this genre too. They decided to give progressive rock a try, and slowly its creativity won them over. Even though the genre has lost its sheen compared to the mass fan following it had created in the 1970s, Meddle and in turn Pink Floyd’s contribution to the

world of music is applause worthy. There is an inherent charm in the album

4. From the book *Rock Albums of the '70s: A Critical Guide* by Robert Christgau. The book contains lots of information on the most important rock albums of that time and their critics.

Meddle that transcends across time and makes people appreciate good music even today. Therein lies the success of Meddle and its relevance in the world of music even today, after almost 3 decades.

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