

Melvins: A Walk with Love and Death

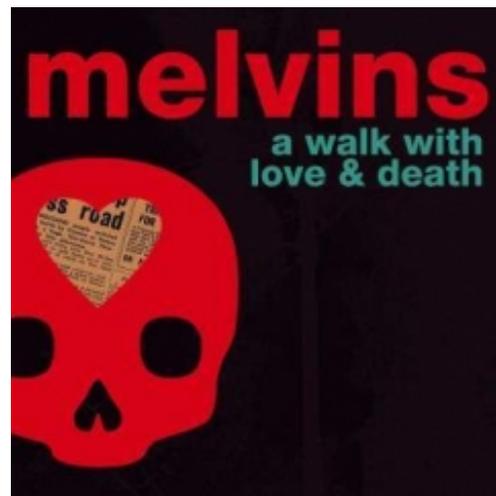
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It's inevitable the Melvins would arrive at a double album at this point in their career—the worst possible time they could make one. The group has long given up on making music for the sake of music. Every album has a gimmick: a lineup change, a hokey concept like the smirking cover album *Everybody Loves Sausages*. The double album is the kind of classic-rock cliché these KISS-loving pranksters can't resist. So here's *A Walk with Love and Death*, split into *Love* and *Death* discs.

Double albums can be a springboard for rock bands' wildest ideas, either showing off an impressive range or ending up bloated self-indulgence. The Melvins' entry is neither, and is really just two separate albums. *Death* is 39 minutes of the same sludge they've been churning out since they put their experimental period to bed with 2006's *A Senile Animal*, while *Love* is an ambient score to a film that, if the snippets of dialogue are any indication, is mostly about tough guys getting really, really mad. It's only a double album because cool, a double album.



The songs don't show any newfound ambition. The Melvins haven't switched up their sound much since *A Senile Animal*, and the differences are so infuriatingly subtle that you'll only notice them if you're looking for them. The mix is less murky than usual, and the bass has more room to breathe, leading to some beguiling textures on opener "Black Heath." Buzz Osbourne's echoing lead on "Sober-Delic" reminds us of the debt post-metal bands like Isis owe to the Melvins. But these differences aren't so substantial that you'd know right away what album these songs were on if you heard them out of context.

A few Eric Andre-tier guests show up. Teri Gender Bender from Le Butcherettes sings on "Cactus Party," and That Dog's Anna Waronker appears on the obligatory power-pop throwback "What's Wrong with You." The Pixies' Joey Santiago is apparently on this thing, too. But guests are so commonplace on Melvins albums these days that they don't allow the songs to stand out; instead, they blend into the monotony of latter-day Melvins.

Love is musique concrete in the vein of their great 1994 one-off *Prick*, though without the sense of humor. It barely registers while it's on. Though ambient music should be both ignorable and interesting, this stuff's really only the former, and it would be calming if not for all the yelling yahoos. That this is actually the *more* interesting half of the album should say just about everything you need to know about the Melvins in 2017.

Why do the Melvins sound so uninspired? They're still one of the best touring bands in America, playing shows relentlessly and culling gems from more than three decades of music. Melvins tickets are a reasonable investment even if their records aren't. It may not matter if their albums suck, and perhaps they know that and use studio appointments to toss off songs like so many beer cans.

It's possible the revulsion that greeted their late-'90s experimental period discouraged them from straying from their signature sound. This would be unfortunate. Their wilderness period was far from consistent, but it yielded wonderful music, especially on the underrated and immersive *Honky*—which, despite running only 45 minutes, is a better double album than this. For that matter, so is *Stag*. There's not much reason to listen to *A Walk with Love and Death*. It will be remembered mostly as their first double album—and what's worrying is that might be just how the Melvins want you to remember it.

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Ipecac
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