

Stryper's Latest LP: Is God in It?

Christian rockers Stryper are offering fans a head-banging view of who their influences were early on, with the arrival of an almost entire album's worth of cover songs titled *The Covering*. Big3 Records released the album on Feb. 15 with about a dozen covers and the all-new original tune, "God."

Words could not adequately describe the rush of memories from my teenage and young adult years as I played the first song from the new album. Back then I was a dedicated church-goer, serving on the intercessory prayer team and the worship band, all while pulling decent grades in school. I was a virgin. I had never used drugs. I didn't drink alcohol.

Thinking back to high school, I remember the harsh, often judgmental words that were spoken to me concerning the way I dressed, how long my hair was, and the music I listened to. If I hadn't known that God is the Judge, I would surely have thought I was headed straight for hell! What does a Christian look like anyway? I clung to what Christian rock music I could find. Stryper was one of the few Christian bands back in the day, and I thank them and love them. They understood me and their music carried me through many difficult times turning my focus to God.

According to Stryper vocalist Michael Sweet, the impetus for putting out a mostly covers set with the new album was a simple one: "Every Stryper album is pretty serious and pretty bold in the lyrical faith sense of the word. We just wanted to roll our sleeves up, cut loose and have some fun."

Looking at the cover art work, my first thought was, "Who is that?" and then I realized that was me or one of many like me! The once glam rock superstars are now taking an illustrated

profile of a longhaired person with an obviously beaten but determined face. The artwork subtly maintains Stryper's previous imagery with the angel wings and the yellow and black logo as a patch. The art alone speaks volumes to one familiar with their plight from breaking through into the secular market early in their career, to their fall with *Against the Law* to long road of restoration as our brothers in the Lord.

Stryper broke onto the scene in 1984 with its debut EP *The Yellow and Black Attack*, and have since gone on to sell over 8 million albums and tour the world spreading an inspirational message through their branded sound of rock songs, heavy guitars and pristine harmony vocals. The group's unprecedented 1986 album *To Hell with the Devil* was the first Christian album to go platinum and was named one of the "100 Greatest Albums in Christian Music" by *CCM Magazine*. Stryper was also the first Christian band to get airplay on MTV, where they had several hit videos, including the #1 "Most Requested" videos "Free" and "Honestly." The band supported their 2009 release *Murder by Pride* with a year-long 25th Anniversary World Tour which took them throughout North America, South America, Europe and Australia.

"A few things we set out to do on this album was to stay true to the original—we didn't want to disrespect the original versions," explains Sweet. "I'm never going to sound like Bruce Dickinson or Ronnie James Dio, nor would I ever try to. And having me sing the song puts our own spin on it. We just all did our own thing and with our own touches and feel—Robert, Tim, Oz and myself—it has that Stryper feel to it as well."

While covering songs from the likes of Iron Maiden, Ozzy Osbourne, Judas Priest, our brothers in yellow and black are speaking to more than just their fans who, along with them, have suffered much judgment and ridicule from the Church. I believe they are speaking to that religious spirit that once had beaten them—that religious spirit that is still around

today that would judge another based upon their looks, wealth, or lack of conformity to the nice church-going type.

Stryper is back because of the love of God, and because of the love of their fans. They are fighting for the lost, the outcast, the down trodden—those that aren't hearing or receiving the Gospel. And that's what its about right?

After listening to a dozen cover songs from familiar artists, Stryper stayed true to the original and added their own touch for sure, and if you have a guarded acceptance of Stryper's new album, don't worry their message comes through on the last entitled, 'God'

The lyrics speak for themselves:

God

Written by Michael Sweet

Hearts are weeping, soul's are keeping on ice
Spirits dying, wickedness won't suffice
Those who cared, they stop and stare at the wall
Doing nothing, watching prisoners fall

The sun is falling from the sky
The earth is cold and still

God – have mercy on us
For we know not what we do
God dark and blinded, we are burning
Without You God!

Without conscience, without warning at all
We kill the wounded, crushing those who crawl
Can't we see that life, is hung by a thread
In the end our flesh is buried and dead

Mountains crumble, rivers swell
The tide is taking all

"Something that I was concerned about doing a covers album was the backlash," says Sweet. "Being a Christian band, I was afraid we would get beat up pretty good. And sure enough, people in the press were saying early on, 'What are they doing? Are they Christian still?' All this nonsense. I just felt like, 'We really should put a song on there that solidifies our faith.' And that tells everyone questioning our faith, 'No, we haven't turned our back on God, we're still serious about it.'"

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