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## Review: "Metal Machine Music -- Nine Inch Nails And The Industrial..."



Let's get the amusing part out of the way, because -- really -- there is little amusing to be said about the powerfully negative and defiantly humorless music of Trent Reznor's **Nine Inch Nails**. So: it is funny that in the archival interview footage in "Metal Machine Music: Nine Inch Nails And The Industrial Uprising" depicting Mr. Reznor at the turn of the 1990s, the visionary artist looks and speaks a lot like the character "Jess" from the now defunct, wordy tele-dramedy "Gilmore Girls."

*Metal Machine Music*, of course, is the title of Lou Reed's experimental noise record from 1973 that this new documentary pegs as the genesis of what would shortly thereafter -- through no small effort by **Throbbing Gristle**, **Cabaret Voltaire** and **Einsturzende Neubaten** among others -- become Industrial music. But we have to fast-forward about 17 years from then to the time when we were just of driving age in the U.S., and when acts including

**Nine Inch Nails** and **Ministry** were splashing huge into the underground (and to a lesser extent into the mainstream on the back of the miraculous Lollapalooza festival masterminded by **Jane's Addiction's** Perry Farrel and a nice fellow named Marc Geiger), before the movement began to have impact outside of its insular scene.

Between 1988 and 1990 things were happening in the American underground, and many of these things -- electro, hardcore, house, goth, techno and even hip-hop to a certain extent -- started to assume collective sonic signifiers. As a result, we can attest to the fact that at the time youthful and disaffected East Coast suburbanites patrolled the four-lanes in cars booming **Doo Doo Brown (!!!!)**, **Revolting Cocks**, **Lords Of Acid**, **Public Enemy** and so forth. Nowadays Industrial music has finite connotations of canned beats and metal guitars, a perception firmed up by the success of Nine Inch Nails and **Ministry** and the albums that made them famous. But, as we stated above, at the dawn of the '90s there seemed to be a shared aesthetic forming around certain disparate sounds and scenes. The tag "Industrial" became something of a catch-all to describe the lot of this, just as previously "hardcore" seemed the most easy way to explain the underground to people who didn't know **The Cure** from **Stormtroopers Of Death**. And so, roughly between the September 1989 release of the debut Nine Inch Nails single "Down In It" and the 1991 release of Ministry's earth-shaking and triumphant single "Jesus Built My Hotrod," it seemed like the future of music was absolutely Industrial.

Of course, things didn't exactly turn out that way. The story is tired, so we won't detail how the release of

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"Smells Like Teen Spirit" and *Nevermind* re-calibrated reality. But needless to say, all of sudden instead of talking about the Chicago scene and Wax Trax, everyone began talking about Seattle and Sub Pop. And while Nine Inch Nails and Ministry rode the wave of the newly christened Alternative scene and benefitted from the temporary enthusiastic embrace of the underground by the overground, Industrial music did not transform popular music wholesale. "Metal Machine Music" curiously chooses to begin at what, at the time, seemed like the end of the story: Nine Inch Nails' mud-encrusted performance at the cynically commercialized re-hashing of Woodstock in 1994 (too predictably, NME reported late yesterday/early today that [a 40th anniversary cash-grab](#) is a possibility). The narrator of "Metal Machine Music" states that it is here that Industrial was thrust into the mainstream. In our opinion this performance is a eulogy for the style. While the Woodstock '94 appearance may or may not be the zenith of Nine Inch Nails' popularity with mainstream music fans -- this is questionable in light of the renaissance Reznor has been experiencing creatively since 2005, not to mention Reznor's consistent ability to top album charts (*The Downward Spiral* debuted at No. 2; *The Fragile* at No. 1 -- even so it seems appropriate to insert here the narrator's summarizing, DVD-ending quote: "In many ways, Nine Inch Nails represent the end of Industrial music." Critic Tom Udo agrees: "By the mid-'90s, Industrial was more or less washed up."

"Metal Machine Music" at first seems overly reliant on the musings of music critics including the always likable Ned Raggett. But the video succeeds in providing a watchable and thorough investigation of Nine Inch Nails and Reznor without actually providing us with Reznor himself (except via a smattering of archival interviews) to opine on the proceedings. Fortunately, there is extensive interview footage with longtime Reznor collaborator Chris Vrenna, who offers enough in the way of details and insight to make the DVD more credible than a bull session among the various critics assembled. Indeed, Mr. Vrenna is a very useful and informative proxy that is able to relay his impressions of Reznor's mindset at certain times. Reznor's influences and early history as a new waver, epic struggles withTVT Records and personal demons are all given ample airing as the narrator, critics, Vrenna and a small number of additional scene peers walk viewers through a single by single by EP by album history of Nine Inch Nails.

With Reznor's recent announcement of a possible end to Nine Inch Nails after a summer tour with [Jane's Addiction](#), "Metal Machine Music" offers a tidy assessment of Reznor's band and his importance to contemporary popular music. Nine Inch Nails' *Ghosts I-IV*, released last April to the Internet and through special promotions directly to fans, is perhaps Reznor's most intriguing work to date, and his likely post-Nine Inch Nails output is sure to be exciting. Shedding the Nine Inch Nails name may signal that Reznor's greatest experimentation has yet to be realized and recorded. MVD Video Distribution releases "Metal Machine Music" April 7, and you can pre-order the DVD [right here](#).

Nine Inch Nails -- "[1,000,000](#)" -- The Slip

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