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Metal Machine Music: Nine Inch Nails And The Industrial Uprising

[Video Watchdog](#) // Unrated // April 7, 2009

List Price: \$19.95 [Buy now and save at [Amazon](#)]

Review by [Bill Gibron](#) | posted June 30, 2009 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

The Product:

Somewhere between the underground and the pop charts, the industrial surge in the '70s - '90s and the megaton media stardom of the last ten years sits Trent Reznor and his surrogate band, Nine Inch Nails. Like Prince, another multitalented hyphenate who practices one genre (soul) while exploring the rest of the musical medium, the dishy doom and gloom poster boy with a penchant for melody mixed with noise has always been enigmatic and hard to define. One moment he's pumping out atonal tributes to bondage and blood rituals. The next, he's crafting classic ballads and full blown dance trance tracks. In an attempt to decode this seemingly undecipherable personality, Sexy Intellectual Home Video has released a two hour plus take on Reznor, his career, and the creative forces that came before, setting the stage for the movement and the musician's eventual rise to late 20th century prominence. For the most part, this talking head trip back through the whole Nine Inch Nails phenomenon is very entertaining. It even manages to avoid one of the biggest pitfalls of recent "unauthorized" DVD bios - it has the actual artist's



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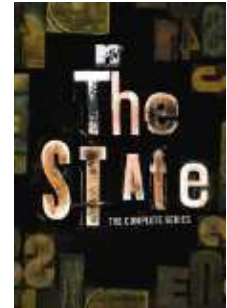
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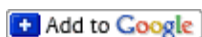
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music as part of its production value.

The Plot:

As part of the post-punk movement in the '70s, the DIY ("do it yourself") spirit invading music found safe harbor in areas beyond the howl and shriek of a three chord crunch. There was the synth-pop wave in the North of England, and with it, a love of all things Kraftwerk and Can. Jumping off from this equally rebellious viewpoint were bands like Cabaret Voltaire and Throbbing Gristle. Reimagining the aural output from electronic devices as the beginning of the end for man's place among the technological soundscape, these imperfect pioneers rewrote the rulebook on what constituted "rock", meshing an old world, almost Victorian mannerism to their muse while taking the Industrial Revolution as a symbiotic co-conspirator.

All throughout the '80s, acts like Depeche Mode, Gary Numan, Ministry, and Skinny Puppy pushed the boundaries of electronics and environment, moving away from pop and more toward a prolonged assault on the audience's already raw senses. Enter Trent Reznor, a young man with a massive talent and a need to apply it. Using everything that came before as a basis, he picked through the pile and drew out the elements he felt would best represent his sizable sonic ideals. He founded Nine Inch Nails, released *Pretty Hate Machine*, and the rest as they say is over two and a quarter hours of shorthand history.

The DVD:

There's an inherent fallacy at the core of **Metal Machine Music: Nine Inch Nails and the Industrial Uprising**, a flaw that's far from fatal, but still fairly obvious. No matter how long the discussion, no matter how detailed or in-depth the overview truly is, the whole story of this genre and the many divergent acts that flew under its formative flag cannot be accurately discussed in a mere 136 minutes. Hell, the magnificent Genesis P-orrige deserves a multi-volume set all his own. His work is so revolutionary, as are the efforts of other mentioned members of the fold like Gary Numan, Al Jourgensen, and many foreign acts, that to try and boil it all down into a digestible bit of solo star-tracking seems unfair. After all, Throbbing Gristle were a major part of the foundation of Industrial. After a couple of minutes (and mentions) they are passed over. Similarly, the oddball reach of a connection to Depeche Mode is given much more play than necessary. While the scholars make their point effortlessly, it still seems several steps away from being a truly viable argument.

Of course, the makers of this otherwise marvelous biography can (and will) explain that the background is just that - a light overview of the origins of Industrial before getting into the meat of Reznor's meteoric rise. And you know what? They have a point. Once we get into the behind the scenes stuff, the making-of indomitable albums like *The Downward Spiral* and *The*

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Fragile, **Metal Machine Music** really picks up. We get lots of insights, anecdotes as to the meanings of certain songs, and even Reznor's reaction to Johnny Cash's emotional reading of *Spiral's* seminal last track. The music business material is also interesting, since the path from indie to major label to self distributed seems to fit the Nine Inch Nails mentality perfectly. Of course, things get rushed toward the end, unusual releases like *Ghosts Vol. I - IV* and *The Slip* getting much less coverage than, say, the *Broken/Fixed* EPs. And as with any current career, there is much less perspective about the future as there is in digging through all that's come before. **Metal Machine Music** also skips around somewhat, treating Marilyn Manson as an "oops" afterthought though he is also visible in several of the clips.

But the biggest drawback here - in fact, it's the typical complaint regarding all these homemade histories - is the lack of participation from Reznor himself. On the plus side, his music is plentiful, as are video and concert clips. But aside from a few stock footage interviews with the incredibly private performer, we have to rely on second hand information and basic hearsay to learn his thoughts. While the sources seem credible (especially when you consider that two of them are easily recognizable members of the earliest incarnations of NIN), it would be amazing to hear Reznor reflect in such a detailed manner. Like those amazing *Classic Albums* specials where the band sits down and goes over the best records track by track, it would be fun to hear the man himself dish on such forgotten faves as "Ruiner", "Something I Can Never Have", "Perfect Drug" or all of *Year Zero*. While he reaches out to fans through his various online outlets and continues to carve a memorable musical legacy for himself, the lack of any real current Reznor feedback fails **Metal Machine Music**. This is still a wonderful primer for the entire Industrial movement. Here's hoping it sparks even more discussion. As a statement, it satisfies. As a documentary, it's not definitive.

The Video:

Offered in a decent 1.33:1 full screen transfer, **Metal Machine Music** looks like your standard made for TV special. The video is clean and sharp and there are no major defects to contend with. The incorporation of older footage is seamless and the resulting look is very polished and professional.

The Audio:

As for the aural aspects of this release, there is really nothing special about the Stereo 2.0 mix. The interviews are always easy to understand and the music is given a solid sonic presentation. Anyone coming to this kind of title for something aurally definitive is definitely barking up the wrong entertainment tree.

The Extras:

Anything that gives us more Genesis P-Orridge is a very

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good bit of added context indeed, and the DVD of **Metal Machine Music** offers a wonderful featurette on the anarchic artist. There is also a collection of contributor biographies, and some corporate ads. That's it. Still, with P-Orridge as a subject, there's not much need for additional bonus material.

Final Thoughts:

As a huge fan of Throbbing Gristle, Ministry, Gary Numan, and Reznor himself, this critic was really looking forward to this documentary - and in truth, he wasn't disappointed. While he could recite most of the pre-history offered regarding the foundations of Nine Inch Nails, the later day self-distribution phase of the band's latest releases contained some intriguing commercial truths. In a business model that's built around a weird "what have you done for me lately" ideal, Reznor is far more interested in the big picture. His career has been based on staying true to his art, not making whatever a corporate suit says will sell. As a result, **Metal Machine Music** earns an easy **Highly Recommended**. It is not definitive, but it's also not deflated by a lack of access. As we move through various phases of nostalgia, the music of the late '80s/early '90s will again come back into style, and with it, a supposed new appreciation for all things Industrial. Trent Reznor may have made it popular, but here's hoping **Metal Machine Music** aids in the re-evaluation of the oft-maligned genre.

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