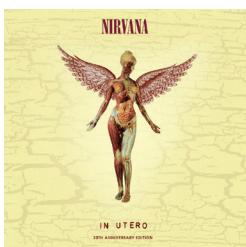


REVIEWS**REISSUE****NIRVANA*****In Utero: 20th Anniversary Edition***

[Geffen]

The final chapter of the thrillingly messy and complex story that was Nirvana is thrilling, messy and complex. Following up their 1991 breakout *Nevermind*—the record history tells us revived punk, killed hair metal, and marked a return of honest guitar music to the airwaves—the Seattle trio made an ugly and difficult album indicative of singer Kurt Cobain’s struggles with drugs and stardom. Or did they? As this retrospective suggests, *In Utero* isn’t so easy to peg.

The *20th Anniversary Edition* comes in numerous formats, all of which include a remastered version of the original 1993 album. Fancier packages add demos, B-sides, a newly remixed version by producer Steve Albini, and two unheard nuggets: “Jam,” a snip of inspired studio noodling cut the same day as the other included demos, and “Forgotten Tune,” a recently discovered, reasonably intriguing rehearsal blueprint for what likely would have been a memorable album track. Albini’s punchier and more abrasive new mix highlights the pop appeal of the original, and for every scraping “Scentless Apprentice” or “Milk It,” there’s a hooky “Pennyroyal Tea” or “Frances Farmer Will Have Her Revenge on Seattle.” If Nirvana set out to sabotage their career, they only sort of followed through.

Versions including *Live and Loud*, a concert filmed by MTV in 1993, only muddy the waters further, as even a quick glance reveals Cobain—months away from committing suicide—to be fully engaged and far from despondent. *In Utero* raises many questions, and in its most brilliant moments—presented here in a manner that hardly smacks of cash-in—it’s a sad reminder this vital band still had places to go. —Kenneth Partridge

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