

Nirvana - Sliver: The Best Of The Box (2005)

Written by bluesever

Monday, 08 March 2010 19:56 - Last Updated Saturday, 22 September 2018 08:34

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1. "Spank Thru"
2. "Heartbreaker"
3. "Mrs. Butterworth"
4. "Floyd the Barber"
5. "Clean Up Before She Comes"
6. "About a Girl"
7. "Blandest"
8. "Ain't It a Shame"
9. "Sappy"
10. "Opinion" - 1:35
11. "Lithium"
12. "Sliver"
13. "Smells Like Teen Spirit"
14. "Come as You Are"
15. "Old Age"
16. "Oh, the Guilt"
17. "Rape Me"
18. "Rape Me"
19. "Heart-Shaped Box"
20. "Do Re Mi"
21. "You Know You're Right"
22. "All Apologies"

In May 2002, Courtney Love bragged to Rolling Stone: "I have the Holy Grail of rock and roll," referencing the already-legendary box of 109 unreleased Nirvana and Kurt Cobain demos, outtakes, and experiments. "Not all of it's great," she admitted. "On those tapes are everything from shitty collages to some pretty stunning, awe-inspiring acoustic songs to stupid, fucked-up shit." In 2004, just in time for Christmas, bits from Love's infamous cache of cassettes appeared

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on the With the Lights Out box set, a collection of 61 tracks with a list price of \$60-- the supposedly definitive postscript to Kurt Cobain's April 1994 suicide.

Sliver: The Best of the Box is a pared-down version of With the Lights Out, adding three tracks that didn't appear on that set. Without getting too deep into shifty-eyed corporate conspiracy theories (the previously unreleased demos included here are said to be "freshly" unearthed), it's difficult to see Sliver as anything more than a sneaky swindle designed to aggravate Nirvana completists who already own the box set and don't otherwise require another non-self-compiled best-of. But no matter how much slack you're willing to cut Geffen, Sliver reeks of manipulative marketing. Granted, posthumous releases are always delicate ground-- publishing Cobain's private journals, for instance, made plenty of his followers squirm-- but this is excessive.

What's worse, none of Sliver's three new songs are particularly revelatory or dynamic: The long-sought-after rendition of "Spank Thru"-- which, strikingly, has never even been available on bootlegs-- is pure artifact, hinting at an embryonic Nirvana. While diehard fans are no strangers to the song itself (a later version appeared on the legendary Sub Pop 200 compilation, while 1996's From the Muddy Banks of the Wishkah-- already the second posthumous Nirvana release-- featured a live cut), Sliver's version appeared on 1985's infamous "Fecal Matter" demo tape, and features a throaty, 18-year-old Cobain on guitar and vocals, backed by the Melvins' Dale Crover on drums and bass. Oddly, the quality of the recording is stellar in contrast to the rest of the album's material, and every vocal tic and nuance is instantly palpable. Still, complete with mid-song coughs and ridiculous electric guitar wrestling, "Spank Thru" was obviously never destined to hit record stores, and while it's an interesting anthropological bit (and a charming ode to jerking off), Sliver's melodramatic unveiling of the track is somewhat insulting to Nirvana's devoted legions.

Sliver also offers a demo of "Come as You Are", supposedly recorded for Butch Vig in 1991 before he began working on Nevermind. Unsurprisingly, it sounds shitty, and nothing new or particularly interesting transpires in its four minutes. The most worthwhile of the three bonus tracks is a 1990 studio demo of "Sappy", a version of which appeared as an unlisted track on the 1993 charity compilation No Alternative. (The song, which had no official title on that disc, was often referred to as "Verse Chorus Verse"-- even now, dissenters wrestle over which version of the song deserves which title). Here, it's studio-quality, and, though slightly more plodding than the No Alternative version, still a great track.

Chances are, most Nirvana fans are hungry for rare and unreleased songs, not scrappy demos of singles or semi-absurd teenage wankery. Still, there is a bit of good news. As plenty of critics and fans agreed in 2004, With the Lights Out was overstuffed, curated without care, and bloated

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by poorly recorded, destined-for-the-recycling-bin demos and unflattering vocal portraits. Sliver fulfils its promise to cull "The Best of the Box" (see: "Do Re Mi", "Old Age", and a live "Floyd the Barber"), and though it may be irritatingly superfluous, as a collection of B-sides, demos, and outtakes, it lives up to its subtitle. --- Amanda Petrusich, pitchfork.com

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