

Stryper - No More Hell To Pay [Japanese Edition] (2013)

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1 *Revelation* 4:31 2 *No More Hell To Pay* 4:53 3 *Saved By Love* 3:07 4 *Jesus Is Just Alright* 5:10 5 *The One* 4:11 6 *Legacy* 4:15 7 *Marching Into Battle* 4:45 8 *Te Amo* 4:06 9 *Sticks & Stones* 4:10 10 *Water Into Wine* 3:42 11 *Sympathy* 4:02 12 *Renewed* 4:21 13 *First Love (Orchestral version)* 4:20 Michael Sweet (vocals) Oz Fox (guitars) Timothy Gaines (bass) Robert Sweet (drums) + Paul McNamara – keyboards

Being a Christian metal band, Stryper undoubtedly eschews lying, so when they claim *No More Hell To Pay* is their best album ever, you want to believe they aren't selling you a barrel of bullshit. Luckily, opinions are subjective, so any statement proclaiming "this is the best" cannot actually be proven to be true or false. So whether or not Stryper's pre-release hype is accurate will be up to individual listeners to decide.

Now, had they claimed that *No More Hell To Pay* is ONE of the best albums they have ever recorded ... well, that is something we could all agree on.

With thundering drums and a crushingly powerful production, plus slamming guitar hooks and solos with more sizzle than ice cubes dropped on a hot griddle, this is a surprisingly heavy album for a band so often associated with the '80s hair-metal heyday. While there are a few nods to the style of *To Hell With the Devil* and *In God We Trust*, most of this release is reminiscent of the more metallic days of *The Yellow* and *Black Attack* and *Soldiers Under Command*. Less concerned about commercial hooks—though they are also here in abundance—and more interested in just rocking the hell out of you.

Michael Sweet's high octave—er, octave—vocals sound as good now as they did in '84. You

are advised not to drink anything out of a glass container when listening to this album because when Michael hits those high screams, you'll be wearing the contents. The rest of the yellow-and-black pack is in equally fine form. Robert Sweet absolutely punishes the drums and resisting the urge to head-bang to the beats is futile. Oz Fox is a rock 'n' roll animal (to borrow a phrase from Keel) on the guitar, slinging the axe like a man on fire. And it's great to hear Tim Gaines' bass given prominence in the mix for a change, providing the beefy backbone upon which all great metal thrives.

As with all Stryper efforts, there are a couple of skip-worthy songs, but the bulk of the album consists of keepers. The cover of the Art Reynolds tune "Jesus is Just Alright" is one of the highlights, taking a dust-and-mothballs pop ditty and completely Stryper-izing it with pounding rhythms, tear-it-up guitars, slick harmonies, and the kind of catchiness most bands would kill for. "Sticks and Stones" is a heavy-rocking commercial track with a big, polished chorus that would have been right at home on In God We Trust. Your head will bang, your body will move, and you will sing along ... everything you want from a Stryper tune. And then there is "Water Into Wine," one of the best songs the band has ever recorded. A heavy riff, ripping guitars, gut-punch drums, huge hooks, soaring chorus ... yeah, hard to imagine any Stryper fan not getting excited by this one.

The band promised one hell of an album (not their words exactly, but you get the point) and they have kept their word, cranking on all cylinders once again and delivering an excellent love-letter to their fans. Some of those fans have given Stryper hell for some of their past decisions, but with this top-notch album, the band should have no more hell to pay. ---Mark Allen, hardrockhaven.net

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