

Pop Evil – Onyx (2013)



1. *Goodbye My Friend* 2. *Deal with the Devil* 3. *Trenches* 4. *Torn to Pieces* 5. *Divide* 6. *Beautiful* 7. *Silence & Scars* 8. *Sick Sense* 9. *Fly Away* 10. *Behind Closed Doors* 11. *Welcome to Reality* 12. *Flawed* Musicians: Leigh Kakaty - lead vocals Nick Fuelling - lead and rhythm guitar Dave Grahs - rhythm and lead guitar, backing vocals Matt DiRito - bass, backing vocals Chachi Riot – drums

Pop Evil does a smart thing on *Onyx*. The Michiganders leave their acoustic guitars in their cases. Electric is always good, and on this 12 song collection electricity flows through more than just the power cords to the amps. Power chords need power cords and guitarists that don't mind scraping knuckles to make the songs rock. *Onyx* rocks. It's shinier than a new set of Tyfun chrome rims, if that vehicle needed twelve of them, and every lug nut is perfectly torqued. After Pop Evil's successful *War of Angels*, *Onyx* seems to find the boys in black pressing on the gas a little harder.

There's absolutely no way to deny the genetic code Pop Evil shares with Sevendust. They tour together, they appeal to similar fans and they're both found in the alternative metal section of whichever online vendor one prefers. Sevendust cast a heavy shadow over Pop Evil. *Onyx* lets Pop Evil step out of that shadow.

The ultra-processed bass guitar noodle that starts "Goodbye My Friend" is like a bright red road flare on the rock and roll highway. Pop Evil wants to grab serious attention. Listen up, top ten alt-metal hit ahead, watch for sliding guitars. The song does the necessary loud-and-soft thing and uses toss-away lyrics for the melody, but the rock quarry rhythm and the overall intensity of a band pushing hard to sell the track puts a knee in the groin of mediocrity.

“Deal with the Devil” is triple-filtered Alice in Chains as interpreted by Sevendust in their Seasons period. Toss in the Avenged Sevenfold setting on the echo unit and “Deal with the Devil” rates as filler until Onyx’s highlight “Trenches” shows up to make things right. Proud of its status as the album’s centerpiece, its ready to roar out of everyone’s Beats on the flight back home for summer vacation. Leigh Kakaty, in a sea of loc-tite background vocals, sings through every word that rhymes with the vowel ‘I’. The song is reportedly about overcoming addiction and abuse. It’s a feisty fist-pumper for the fans.

Power ballads “Torn to Pieces” and “Silence & Scars” pass by in their respective album slots, leaving their taillights to fade into the night. When Pop Evil keeps the guitars loud, hair flailing while their heads dive down on every backbeat and Chachi Riot’s drums blasting away, Onyx works to perfection. Pop Evil has achieved that rare balance between producing a metal album that doesn’t rely on horror- movie fright wig gimmickry while still bringing intensity, chops and emotion.

In the same way that Sevendust incorporated electronic doodads on Black Out the Sun, Pop Evil does the same on Onyx. Unlike their tour mates though, they make the electronica work for the songs. The blurps and hot chip beats don’t hang off Onyx’s songs like misplaced Christmas ornaments.

It all comes together on the album’s fine “Welcome to Reality,” which might be the better song than “Trenches.” The album flies out on “Flawed,” an unflawed number sprawled over a bed of sampled strings and lightly sprinkled with keyboard raindrops. It builds and builds, and then ends with the huffing noises of some musical engine running out of steam. It’s an appropriate finish considering how hard Pop Evil has stoked the machine to punch out Onyx. --- Todd Lyons, heavymetal.about.com

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