
Porcupine is unique

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This week I'm going to continue with another British band, but one that has been around for a little while. Porcupine Tree dates back to 1987 and has made a wide variety of music within that time, unfortunately most of what was released before the late '90s is difficult to enjoy without being under the influence of something.

Porcupine Tree is generally labelled as a progressive rock band, though the "rock" is somewhat more emphasized than the "progressive" – but I mean that in a good way (at least... after the late '90s). The band initially started almost as a joke. Lead singer and creator of the band, Steven Wilson, fabricated a history for the "band" (which in reality just consisted of him at the time) that involved the made-up members having met at a music festival in the '70s – and also that they had been in and out of prison several times. All of this was to initially make it seem as though he was not just another guy just messing around in his room for the record company – which he was.

It's amazing to take that into account and see how far this band has come now. Porcupine Tree now has some of the highest production values around. Even putting the quality of the instrumentation itself aside, I look forward to hearing new Porcupine Tree albums just to hear how great the music sounds on a decent set of speakers.

I'm going to suggest the same album that first got me interested in Porcupine Tree, *Deadwing*. *Absentia* and *Fear of a Blank Planet* are great albums as well but *Deadwing* is the best place to start. When *Deadwing* came out in 2005 it quickly became their best-selling album (though that has now been surpassed by their 2008 album *Fear of a Blank Planet*).

The album begins with an almost 10-minute track, named after the album, which is a great introduction to the variety that Porcupine Tree offers. This includes elements like heavy guitars, frequent changes, interesting lyrics and Steven Wilson's distinctive softer vocal style. Even on Porcupine Tree's heaviest songs, like "Open Car," the vocal style doesn't change much. You will never hear Wilson screaming or yelling, his singing always maintains a peaceful sort of feel that can go back and forth between quickly spoken lines to actual singing. A particularly interesting thing about the lyrics in Porcupine Tree is that they can sing lyrics that seem simplistic and still manage to have a power about them that resonates with the listener; a great example of this is "Shesmovedon" – the final song on the album.

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The second track of the album is much more of a standard rock track. It's a great place to start if long songs frighten you, but the lyrics don't have the same depth that the rest of the album does — though that seems apt in a song titled "Shallow." Every song certainly has its own sense of personality and for the most part they all feel quite distinct. The only negative thing I can say about this album is that the quieter songs "Mellotron Scratch" and "Glass Arm Shattering" felt a bit more vacant (they're still good, just not as good), but this is more than made up for with the song "Lazarus," one of the best songs ever. Yes, ever.

I can't finish without commenting on "Arriving Somewhere but Not Here" though, which takes up 12 minutes of the album. The problem with longer songs is that they have a habit of getting repetitive or simply boring, but Porcupine Tree has the amazing ability to avoid that. To have a song that lasts 12 minutes without a single moment that is boring or repetitive — and any fans of Opeth should be aware that the later part of this song features a solo by Mikael Åkerfeldt (the lead singer and guitarist for Opeth).

In the end there is nothing I can say that will do enough justice for this band and if you do listen to their earlier music you'll see how far they've come. And also if Fear of a Blank Planet is any indication, the complexity and lyrical quality only seems to be increasing with each album. Porcupine Tree is really a band that you can get lost in, falling in love with song after song until you've gone through a whole album... and then you check out another one. They're currently working on a new CD, so now is a great time to start getting up to date on their discography. Come get lost.