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## Metallica: Some Kind of Monster Film Review

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## **Metallica: Some Kind of Monster Film Review**

Ceara Costa

The movie that I chose to watch for this assignment was *Metallica: Some Kind of Monster* (2004) a documentary directed by Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky. This film follows the members James Hetfield, Lars Ulrich, Kirk Hammett, and producer Bob Rock after bass player Jason Newsted left the band in 2001. The documentary looks at the struggles and successes of the creation of their album *St. Anger*. In the film, the band looks for new ways to develop their music, deals with their own personal demons, and works with therapists to figure out the roots of their anger and how to best use it to their advantage when writing new music.

In the beginning, the band discussed with the therapists how they had their own internal issues as well as issues with each other. The members developed a mission statement together to help them set goals on what they wanted their future as a band to look like. While creating that statement, the band's team suggested they move away from the traditional studio atmosphere to somewhere more temporary in San Francisco in the Presidio. The album producer explained how he did not want the members to be comfortable when producing the album. Bob Rock wanted to invoke a different kind of energy in the members in order to get a new sound. We later see that this would not work as he had hoped and the band would be forced back into their comfortable and controlled HQ studio.

Throughout the film, the topic of songwriting is debated and further analyzed. Traditionally, drummer Ulrich and vocalist Hetfield would take the ideas from everyone and use that to write songs on their own. It was very different for them to have to write something right in front of everyone and communicate and collaborate. They both even confessed how much pressure this technique had put on them to come up with something good before someone else does. This

new method of songwriting was difficult for them at first, but eventually it led to the creation of an incredible record.

There was one evening when the band was writing music in the new untraditional fashion where Hetfield and Ulrich could not come to an agreement on the new sound they had just created. Hetfield had already warned the members that he was in a bad mood, but he took Ulrich's criticism as that he was purposely trying to make him angrier. He stormed out of the studio and slammed the door. This was the last time that they worked in the Presidio.

Then Hetfield entered treatment for addiction and the band's album creation ground to a halt. Hetfield used his feelings of anger to fuel his powerful lyrics for the album *St. Anger*. He was gone for over a year while the other band members continued having therapy sessions. During the band's therapy sessions without Hetfield, they talked about how they had to work as a cohesive unit to create music. They discussed their discomfort in not knowing when they would be able to work productively together again. They even noted that they would not be surprised if he decided not to come back.

Hetfield did have the drive to come back, but was hesitant when it came to the idea of touring and song development. After over a year in rehab, James had written a letter that explained where he was and what he had gone through. The band members felt relieved that Metallica might still have a future. The filmmakers then shared footage of their conversation with the reunited band. James shared that he did not like being in the spotlight and that the cameras may have triggered that feeling in him. Metallica was a beast that he felt sucked into. They decided to continue filming in a new location that was more comfortable for the band.

After being released from rehab, James explained how he saw life in a new light and could see that his life actually has meaning. He gave a monologue on how the drinking lifestyle was so

predictable and got boring over time. His life after rehab was more exciting since it was not predictable. However, it was hard for the band to be productive since he was set on a strict working schedule of only four hours a day. The new production schedule took a toll on the band and led them to have another intervention. This is still relevant to today's society, especially since Hetfield has just re-checked himself into rehab in October of 2019. Addiction can happen to anyone, especially those struggling with being in the spotlight.

The film also shows former bassist Jason Newsted confessing that Hetfield approached him and said that he could not be in a band with him if he had a successful side project. Newsted had been working on Echobrain and Hetfield felt that he had poured more of his time and creativity into Echobrain than Metallica. Hetfield did not want Echobrain to replace Metallica. Unfortunately, Newsted interpreted that message to mean that he was no longer wanted in the band and decided to quit. While Hetfield was in rehab, the band members went to an Echobrain show to show their support for their former bassist. While at the show, Ulrich thought that Echobrain was the future and that Metallica was over for good, since they were then not able to move forward. Little did he know that they would soon come across a bassist that would change that mentality.

Megadeth founder and former Metallica guitarist Dave Mustaine, who was kicked out in 1983, also made an appearance in the documentary. Mustaine confronted Ulrich about how getting kicked out made him feel. Mustaine noted that people hate him because of Ulrich and that people on the street would mock him and yell "Metallica!" He wished that he had been forced into rehab for his alcohol and drug issues instead of publicly humiliated and dismissed from the band. This shows how the reputation of artists can still be altered by society and hurt their future as creators long after any public issues. As a result, Mustaine would always be told that new projects would always be second best to Metallica.

One of the most interesting conversations from the film was when Kirk, Lars, and Bob were talking about whether to put a guitar solo in one of the songs. Lars felt that guitar solos would make them look old and basic since guitar solos are overdone and are mostly associated with the 80s. Kirk was arguing that if the guitar solo sounds good, you should just include it. Guitar solos are popular and are still being widely used and are not only synonymous with 80s music. Bob cut in and noted that if a guitar solo would add whatever color to the song that the band was looking for, then use it. If it didn't, then don't use it. There are no specific set rules to music that anyone has to follow.

Aside from the fact that Hetfield had to enter rehab unexpectedly, the band also faced another challenge while trying to write this new record. Ulrich had taken the opportunity to fight back against Napster, a website that allows users to download music for free. Over 350,000 users were downloading Metallica's music without paying for it. Fans were outraged when hearing about the band's lawsuit against the site. Ulrich and the band were hit with loads of hate for fighting against Napster. The band just wanted to stand up for all the blood, sweat, and tears that were shed while creating their music.

The band was also dealing with missing a permanent bass player. However, once they held auditions, that problem was easily solved once they had experienced Robert Trujillo's playing. Trujillo had pushed the band in a better direction and the members themselves even testified that he was a valuable addition to their lineup.

One of my favorite takeaways from this film is a quote from Lars Ulrich: "You can make aggressive music with positive energy." As a lover of heavy music, I feel that some bands come into the scene with a bad attitude already, which results in issues similar to what happened with Metallica. Those on the outside who do not like heavy music may see it as music for tortured souls

that are angry all the time. In reality, this music is how artists deal with their aggression while sending a message to their audience that it is okay to feel that way. Metallica perfectly exemplifies this throughout the whole documentary and the creation of their record.

The film did not seem to show any inherent biases to paint the band a certain way. However, it seemed as if most of the issues resulted from clashes between Hetfield and Ulrich, although that may just be how most of their issues appear. I would recommend this film to anyone who is a music lover, especially any Metallica and heavy metal fans. I personally wanted to watch this because I have already bought my tickets to see Metallica play two headlining shows in October 2020 during Aftershock Festival in Sacramento. I wanted to learn more about the band and their background before I saw them for the first time. I am glad that I have watched this film and know more about the personal and creative lives of the band members. This makes me appreciate their music more and want to dig deeper into the meaning behind all of their records.