

lateralus album review



by kole

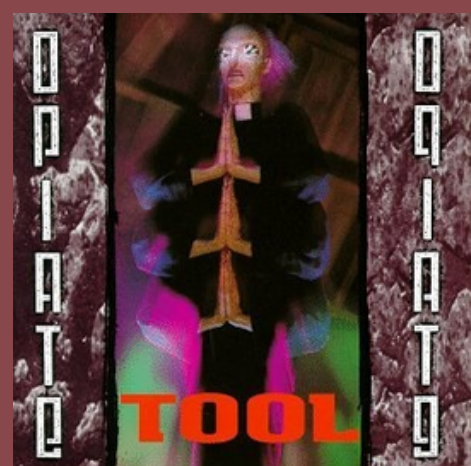
Who is TOOL?



TOOL, a progressive rock band with a large amount of metal influence, was founded in 1990, in Los Angeles by Maynard James Keenan, (the small guy with the odd-looking hair.) and Adam Jones. (the person with the long dark brown hair.) The band was formed after Maynard and Jones met through a mutual friend, Maynard showing Jones some demos from one of his previous bands. Jones was amazed by Maynard's voice, and later convinced him to start up another band; both of them jamming out together whilst searching for a drummer, and bassist. Luckily for the two, their future drummer, Danny Carey, (the tall guy on the far right) lived just above Maynard, and heard of the two trying to find more band members.



Carey felt bad for the two, and began playing with them, giving TOOL one of its most skilled members. Sometime later, Adam Jones was introduced to Paul D'Amour, (the guy in the LSD hat) and later on, he became the bassist of TOOL. After 2 years of local performances, and a good amount of practice, TOOL was approached by Zoo Entertainment, and in March of 1992, their first EP was created, Opiate. One year later, their first album, Undertow, was released, and came with one of their most popular songs, Sober, which won the Best Video by a New Artist award due to its use of stop motion in the music video.



1992



1993

New Bassist

New sound



Paul D'Amour is gone, he's still alive, but due to his ambitions regarding what type of music he wants to make, and with what instrument, he decided to leave TOOL, and start up his psychedelic pop band, Lusk. Now missing a member, right at the start of recording their second album, TOOL needed a bassist, and fast. Well, TOOL was pretty lucky, as Peach's Justin Chancellor, the bassist of a smaller band who supported TOOL during their 1994 Europe tour, was open to moving bands, and becoming TOOL's new bassist. Justin Chancellor (far left of the photo) would start his time in TOOL writing most of the bass of *Ænema*, performing all of the album as their bassist. With Justin as a part of the writing team, amazing songs like *Forty-Six & 2*, *Stinkfist*, and the Grammy-winning title track, *Ænema*, were made. Although there weren't many major changes to their overall sound in *Ænema*, maybe apart from *Third Eye*, 5 years later they'd come out with something completely different.



Lateralus



In 2001, Lateralus was released, and it was completely different from anything they did before it. The album reached No.1 on the US Billboard 200 for its first week after being released, and the hit song of the album, Schism, was the reason TOOL received their second Grammy, also outselling artists like Jay-Z, Eminem, and Madonna for the first-week album sales. According to Justin Chancellor, during most of the writing for the album, Maynard was away with his other band, A Perfect Circle, with their debut album, Mer De Noms, this allowed the three musicians, Jones, Chancellor, and Carey to experiment with the sound of the album, you could even see this with the final track of the previous album, Third Eye off of Ænima, being an attempt to bring progressive rock, and progressive metal elements to their sound.

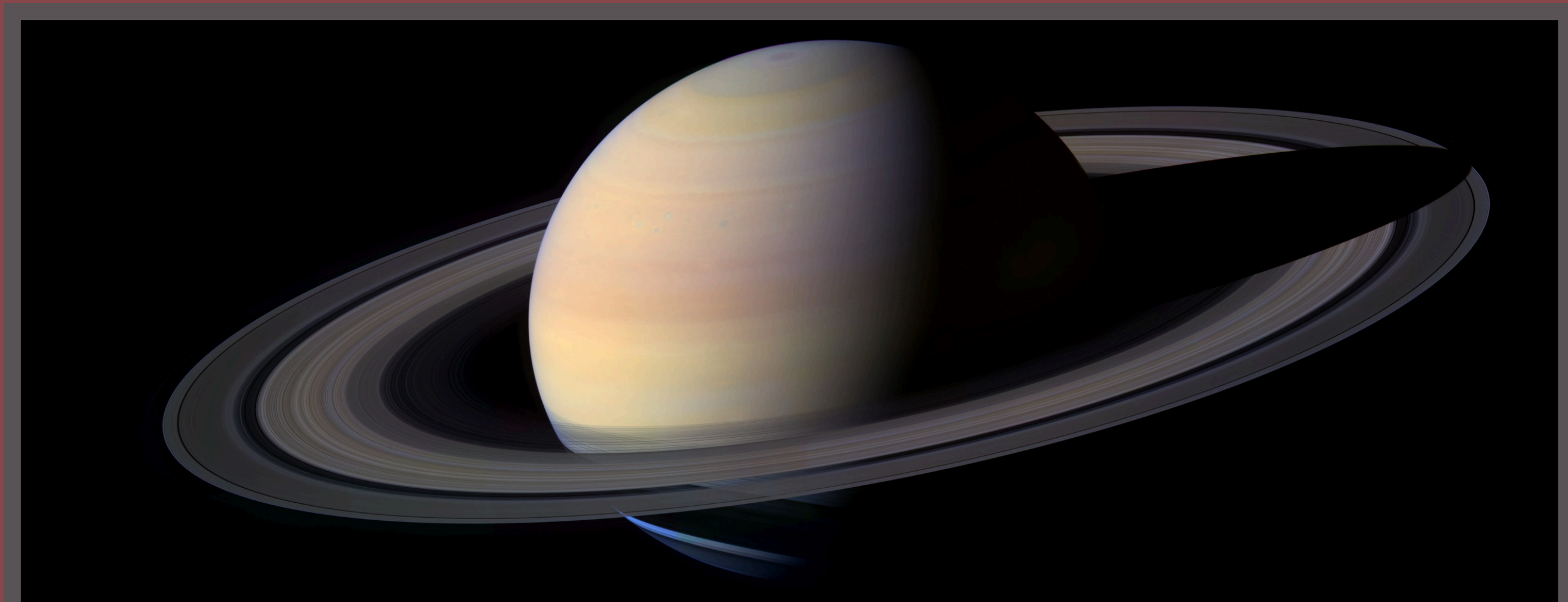


Lateralus has 9 songs, 3 interludes, 1 instrumental, and is 1 hour and 17 minutes long. The album might be TOOL's first concept album, there is no confirmed concept, but all the songs have common meanings revolving around emotions, maturing, relationships, and the ego. The most popular song from this album is Schism, the song winning TOOL their second Grammy for best metal performance. Rolling Stones magazine placed the album at No. 32 of the 50 greatest progressive metal albums of all time, alongside the album being ranked at 123 on the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's Definitive 200 list.



The Grudge

Opening track



The Grudge is a song about, you guessed it, grudges, but it isn't just about grudges, it's centred around someone who is enveloped in their negative emotions, and their grudges, wearing this grudge like a crown. This grudge is so powerful that it not only controls their emotions, but also influences their everyday life, how they feel towards certain things, what they do/don't do, etc, if this person were to overcome this grudge, they would have to change many aspects to their life to be rid of the consequences of this grudge. With how extreme this grudge sounds, it seems very unlikely that this person will be able to let up on this grudge spontaneously, and on their own, needing some sort of sign to change, and in the line, "Saturn ascends, comes round again" that sign can be found. Saturn has an orbital period of roughly 30 years, alongside that, some psychologists believe that a key point of adult maturation occurs around the age of 30, meaning that when Saturn ascends, this person has their chance to finally let go of this grudge, and live a more healthy life without this negativity plaguing their everyday life.



I'd give The Grudge a 4.5 out of 5, it's a very complex track that tackles an issue that many people face, and has an amazing instrumental aspect to the song that catches the feeling of the topic, the instruments are heavy and impactful, and Danny Carey's drumming skills shine on this song. The meaning of the song was fun to research, as before this assignment, I only knew aspects of the meaning, not understanding all layers to the song, and I still don't know everything about it. I don't have a negative thing to say about the track, but one of the only reasons it's not a 5 is because other tracks on the album outshine The Grudge.

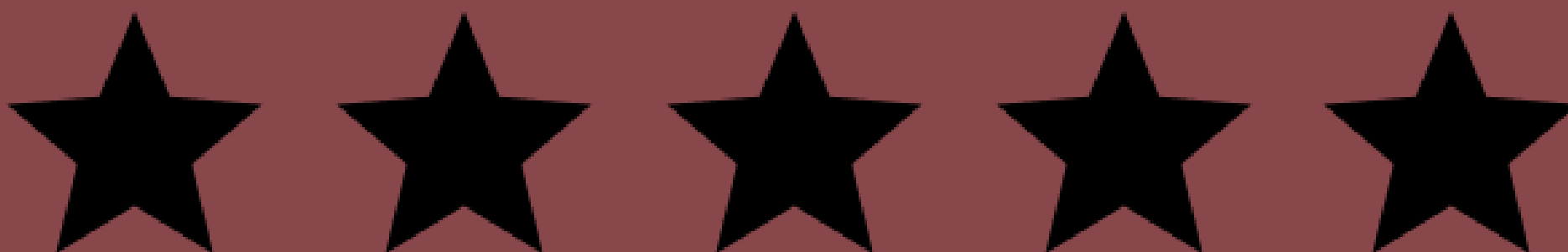
[The link](#)

The Patient

Second Song



Judith Marie Keenan was Maynard James Keenan's mother, in 1975 she suffered from a brain aneurysm, and was paralyzed on her right side. A lot of the music Maynard was connected to at the time holds stories of his mother, you can see this more clearly with "Judith" by A Perfect Circle, or with the songs "Wings For Marie" and "10,000 Days" by TOOL, with them being about her situation, and in 10,000 Days' case, her death, but hidden under clever lyrics, "The Patient" is about Judith as well, mainly her perseverance, and loyalty towards Christ. Many would grow bitter, or distasteful to their beliefs if placed in the same situation as her, Judith was certain that this was all a test, and that she must wait until God thought she was ready, she had to be patient. The song is set inside Judith's mind as she argues whether to continue to live for her spot in Heaven, or to let go of life before it's her time. In the song, she eventually realizes that she will wait and continue her journey through life. The song could also be using Judith's story not just as a story, but as an example of discipline and strength, allowing the listener to see how Maynard sees her, as someone who had all the right to veer from their path, yet didn't.



The Patient is a great track, and I think it deserves its 5 out of 5 rating, it's the first song to fully dive into TOOL's progressive sound off of this album, and provides a good contrast to The Grudge's heavy and aggressive instrumentals, providing a softer experience to the listener, whilst still holding a heavy and layered meaning, that could be interpreted as so many other things. The song is at its best at the 5-minute and 30-second mark and afterwards, the combination of Maynard's voice and the guitar sounds super unique and well done.

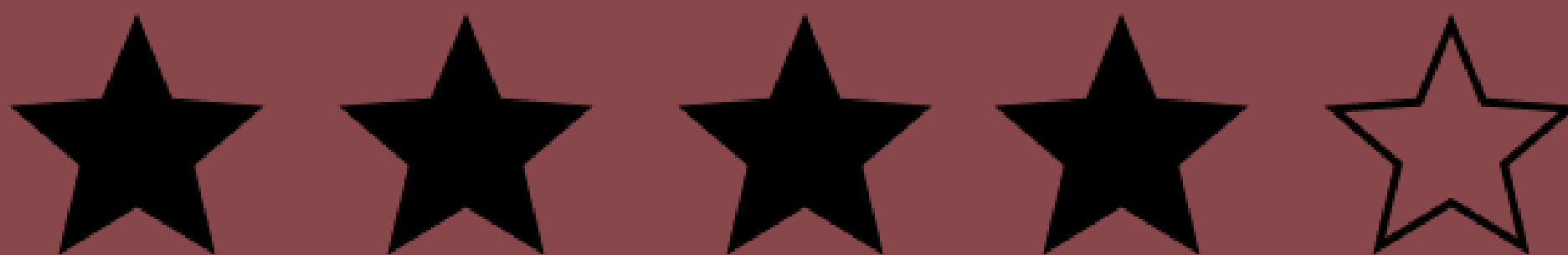
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Schism

Third Song



The Grammy-winning song, Schism, seems to be a little more straightforward when compared to other songs on the album, the topic of the song is about 2 people, who hold a strong relationship, but due to change, the 2 lose communication, and their relationship is threatened. The rest of the song talks about pretty common things that occur in relationships when trust and communication are challenged, blaming each other for how things went, ideas of bringing back the relationship, and healing the communication are thought about in the lyrics, but then its believed that its too late to fix the relationship, time has gotten in the way. In the end, the lyrics state that cold silence has killed the relationship even if the pieces of their relationship still fit.



I think Schism is a great song, it holds a meaning that many can relate to, and is pretty easy to follow, I think Maynard's vocals are great on this track, but the instrumentals are the only thing that fall short. The song is somewhat catchy, but it feels as if the instrumentals are purposely being held back in order to deliver this catchy sound, the only time I feel this change is at the end of the song, around the 5-minute and 10-second mark, the peak of the song. Apart from my complaints, this song is great, it uses timing very well, and I like the build it has before the peak of the song, and if they didn't make it the way it is currently, then TOOL might've not won their second Grammy. Also, Schism has a music video, and like most TOOL music videos, it feels very abstract, and confusing; I don't recommend watching it if you're new to TOOL.

[The Music Video](#)

[The link to just the song](#)

Parabol/Parabola

Fourth and Fifth song



Parabol, and Parabola are two interesting songs, in the lyrics of both, they seem very appreciative of an intimate moment, appreciative of two becoming one; this kinda sounds like Schism if it wasn't about the breaking of communication, and trust, rather the formation. Parabola presents a very optimistic, and healthy view of the moment, and just life in general with lines like, "Recognize this as a holy gift and celebrate this chance to be alive and breathing" or "Feeling eternal all this pain is an illusion". The two songs are really just one song, Parabol is the buildup, and the start of Parabola is the peak, the slow start to Parabol, and the quick and violent change to fast and intense electric guitar when going into Parabola is done very well, and sounds seamless as a transition.



4.5 out of 5 is a good rating for both of these songs, they demonstrate a unique sound, and also sound great, the distorted guitar in Parabola is by far one of my favourite aspects of the song, especially with how it's introduced. Alongside the instrumental aspects of the song, Maynard provides great vocals that sync up well with the rest of the song, providing soft and aggressive vocals to different parts of the song. Parabola also has a music video, which has some cool visual parts but is still pretty confusing, in my opinion, those interesting visual parts, especially at the end, make it the better music video when compared to the Schism video.

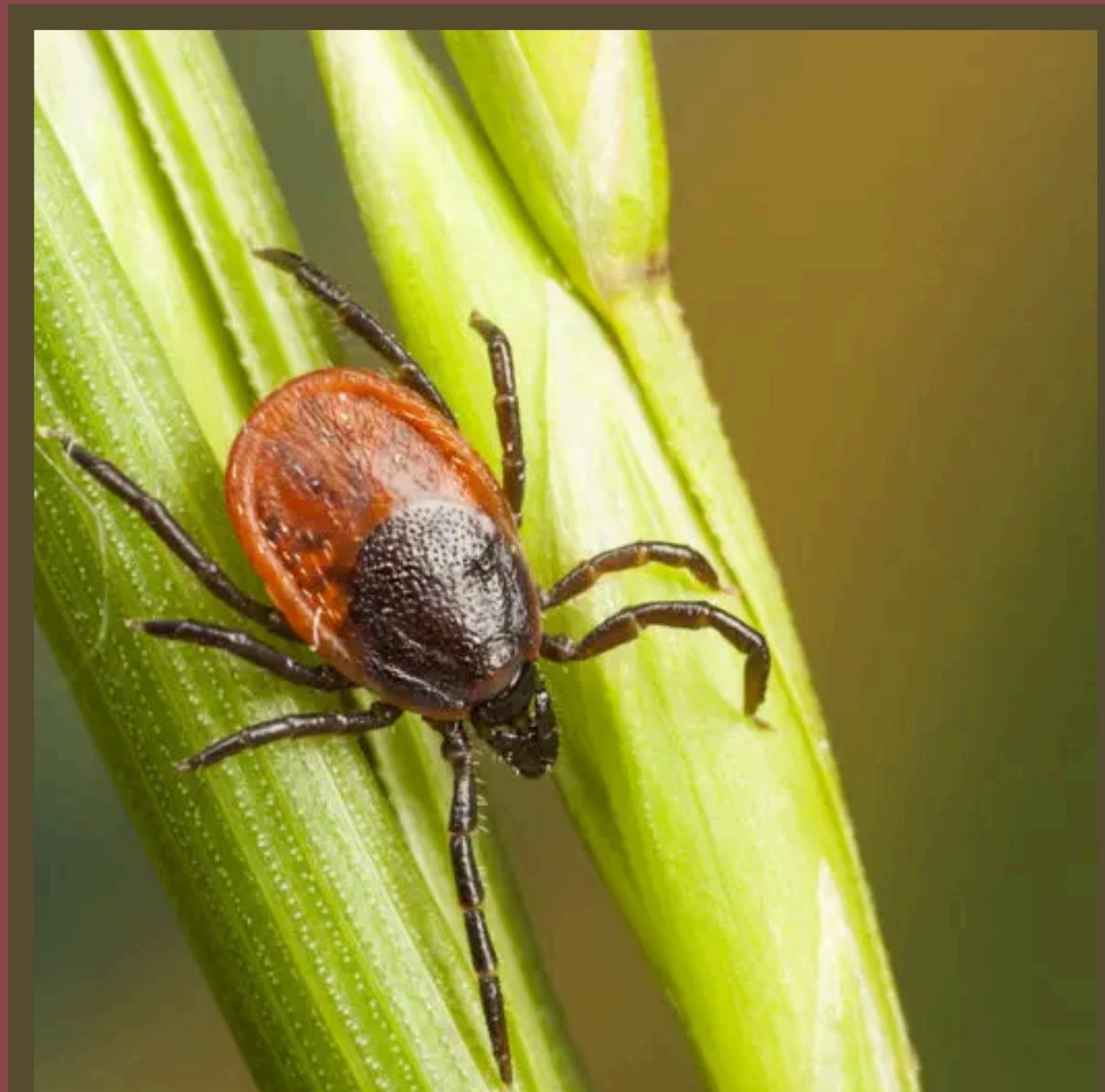
[The Music Video](#)

[Parabol](#)

[Parabola](#)

Ticks & Leeches

Sixth Song



Ticks and Leeches is the track that stands out the most in this album, and not in a good way, the song is quite aggressive, and more similar to a track off of Undertow, or Opiate, it makes the track just feel unneeded on the album, you could point to certain things that make it seem connected to the concept of the album, but overall it keeps its negative outlook even at the end of the song, which further disconnects it from the rest of the songs on the album, all of their resolves being positive. The song is still nice though, I like the drumming, and the guitar, they present unique styles, and are performed very well, Maynard's vocals are really good here too, they're really gravelly and rough, which is paying homage to older TOOL, but this further just detached the song from the rest of the album.



3.5 out of 5 seems like the right rating for the song, it's an amazing song, but it doesn't fit the theme of the album, slightly dragging down the album as a whole. This song was probably fun to make for Danny, Adam, and Maynard with them all having to put in a bit of extra effort and getting to hear themselves performing something a little heavier for only one song.

[The link](#)

Lateralus

Title Track/Seventh Song



Lateralus is one of the more complicated songs of the album, but luckily there's a transcript online of an interview by Aggro Active with Maynard James Keenan speaking about the album, and this song.

“Lateralus itself is actually a muscle, and although the title has something to do with the muscle, its more about lateral thinking and the only way to really evolve as an artist--or as a human, I think--is to start trying to think outside of the lines and push your boundaries. Kind of take yourself where you haven't been and put yourself in different shoes; all of those cliches.” I'd say this quote is pretty on point with how I view the song, Its key premise is changing how you think, learning how to be comfortable in an unfamiliar situation, and learning how to live without knowing what will happen next, living without certainty.



5 out of 5 stars is definitely a good ranking for this song, the song sounds amazing, and all members of the band put in extra work in order to make this track stand out. If I were asked to define the album down to one track, this would be it, It has TOOL's new sound, it has an important meaning, and features great performances from all of the band members. This song is my second favourite off of the album, only being beaten by a song we'll get to soon.

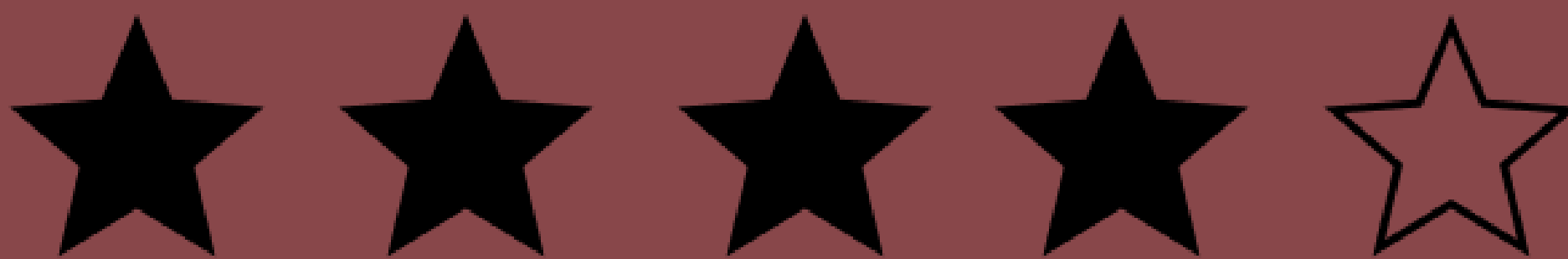
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Disposition

Eighth Song



Building off of what was stated in Lateralus, Disposition is an example of humans being afraid of the unknown, in the line “Mention this to me, mention something, mention anything” is a person pleading for someone to mention what's going on with the weather, the weather just being an example, in response, they're told to “watch the weather change”. It all plays into the idea of not needing to know everything, to just allow some things to exist without overanalyzing every aspect as to why this occurs, and how.



This song is kinda weird to rank, this song is nice, but lacks a lot of substance, it's like if you were to turn down the music after Lateralus, and take a moment to comprehend what was said. The song's most notable instrument is Adam Jones's guitar, the unique distortion, and the Arabic influence makes the guitar stand out, as we have heard nothing like this on this album before now. Less prominent in the song, is Danny Carey's drumming, specifically it sounds like he's using some sort of bongos, or bongo-like drums. But what makes this song so good, is its connection to the next song, Reflection, my favourite song off of Lateralus.

[The link](#)

Reflection

Ninth/Final Song



Reflection is my favourite song off of Lateralus, and probably my favourite song of all time. This song is just amazing, it has such a unique sound, with things like the guitar, the drums, Maynard and the weird voice effect he has on, everything about this song is enjoyable to me, even the meaning. The song is about a person who followed the ideas of the album, and separated the idea of themselves from the relationships they've had, looking to find themselves, eventually finding themselves, but then they reach a dilemma after the moon reminds them of their ego, they've learned to love themselves, but they don't know how much should they love themselves, so they decide to crucify the ego, and realizes that they need to leave the current way they think, and embrace the idea that we are all one mind, that we are capable of all that's imagined and all conceivable, and to let the past breakthrough, bringing out our hope and reason. Quite the optimistic and creative message, with an instrumental like that, you go big or go home.



5 out of 5 is the perfect rating for Reflection, the song has so much Arabic influence in how it sounds, with both the guitar and the drums, and they just sound amazing. This song is the peak of Lateralus, without it, there would be no concept, this song gives the album resolve, and to Lateralus the resolve is the most important part of the album.

[The link](#)

The end



Lateralus is a great album, and is important due to its meaning, the album presents abstract, and different ways of thinking, and viewing things, I've heard many stories of people claiming this album changed who they are, and others saying it helped them throughout tough times in their life. The album is meant for its songs to be interpreted differently by everyone who listens to it. Even though Maynard may have made some parts more difficult to relate to, it's still easy to find branching-off points where the song mentions certain things, and shifts how you perceive the song in its entirety.



This is definitely one of my favourite albums, I love it's sound, I live its message, and I love the cover art for it, it's just a great album that I think more people should listen to, even if they don't like progressive music. It was fun making this album review, I got to learn more about an album that I already like, and come out with even more reasons to like it, art is fun to appreciate when it's complex.

