

06/02/15

Gathered in this document (of admittedly hilarious nature) are:

- I. My thoughts about why Tool is so great.
- II. The specific thoughts, stories, emotions, themes, etc. that each song evokes within me (I have often thought to myself that I could write an essay about every Tool song).
- III. Possibly: my thoughts about music, what makes music interesting/good, and my explanations for my strange taste in music. (thoughts about melody vs. other forms/type of complexity in music)

There is one potential problem with the act of writing down part II. Namely, it might fix in my mind the meaning of each song, which would prevent me from developing new ideas about each song, and that wouldn't be any fun.

Part I

What I especially like about Tool is: everything. The songwriting, the vocals, the drumming, the guitars and bass, the lyrics, etc. Literally everything. Allow me to elaborate, using a disorganized list:

Drums: Carey's drumming is unlike any other drumming I have ever heard. In most/many tool songs, the drum track is practically a song by itself. I would be happy to listen to the drum track, by itself. As much as I have tried, I have never found this quality – at least, not consistently – in any other drummer. Carey's drumming has a fascinating, organic complexity – it's much more than just the backbone of the song.

AND, AT THE SAME TIME, it perfectly harmonizes with and complements all the other instruments. It never ceases to amaze me.

Guitars: For the most part, this is pretty obvious. I really don't need to say much – the guitar melodies and bass lines constructed by Jones and Chancellor/d'Amour are beautiful and unique. Somber and emotional in some songs (e.g. Pushit), mysterious and spooky in others (Forty Six and Two), complex and intellectual in many songs on Lateralus, and also uniquely brutal and disturbing in others (Prison Sex, Jambi, Jimmy). In some they also have this 'muddy' sound, especially in Jimmy.

But there is something else that bothers me. One of the things that drew me to Tool the most, from the very beginning, was the specific sound – the tuning, I guess – of the guitars in most/all Tool songs. I noticed it first in the live Lateralus recording from Vienna, Austria, of course (my favorite recording, of any type, of all time). It really appealed to me and struck me as different from anything I'd heard before – unique to Tool. I will try (and fail) to describe it: it seems somehow 'hard' and inhuman/inorganic, sort of like some of the industrial noises in Einstuerzende Neubauten songs (e.g. Headcleaner), but at the same time clear and natural.

Vocals: Again, not much needs to be said (or so I think) – others have explained this nearly as well as I can. Maynard’s vocals are unique and beautiful and emotionally complex and potent, for a starter. I agree with some guy’s comment about how he alternates between aggressive, unsympathetic growls and ‘metal scream’s (which he does a totally unique and wonderful style which I love), and vulnerable, hurt or sad or painful or lonely or profound or spooky, smooth, subdued vocals. How’s that for word salad.

Lyrics: Maynard also happens to be my favorite lyricist of all time. As others have observed, his lyrics have an utterly unique, and very rewarding, quality. Namely, they strike a perfect balance between 2 things: 1. Being specific enough to evoke very novel and interesting ideas/thoughts in the listener or express specific themes; 2. Being vague enough that the listener’s mind can impart to them a meaning which is very personally relevant/meaningful to the listener. And of course, the way Maynard crafts them is beautifully poetic, again in a unique way (I’m getting tired of using that word, but there’s not much else I can do – it’s a placeholder for words that don’t exist and that only a small group of people, perhaps solely myself, could conceivably understand).

Misc. vaguaries: Another thing that historically (lol) drew me to Tool was a specific set of vague qualities that I perceive in their music (among many others). They are utterly without ‘poppiness’, silliness, trivialness, or joviality. Their music seems completely serious and ‘real’ to me in a very rare way. There are very few other artists that are similarly serious, but some examples are Einstuerzende Neubauten and Pink Floyd. These are among the reasons why I sort of saw them as a paragon of masculine virtue (lol): their songs sound like they were made in a world where women don’t exist. There are no silly love songs or any of the silly “you’re hot have sex with me” crap that pervades rock music. Instead, they seem: Cold, intelligent, emotionally hard and serious... They seem like they have transcended the animalistic nature of humans in most ways (with the exception being my favorite thing: negative emotions and aggression). This is the opposite of Aerosmith, of course.

Most of their songs are subtly disturbing – not only lyrically, but musically as well. But some of them have this quality much more than others: Prison Sex, Jimmy, and Jambi.

Part II

For now I’ll just do something safe and note which songs invoke the most well-developed, complex, and/or interesting ideas in my mind: Lateralus, Jambi, Jimmy, Prison Sex, and Forty Six & 2 (one of the greatest lyrical concepts of all time).