

= Devil Pray =

" Devil Pray " is a song recorded by American singer and songwriter Madonna for her thirteenth studio album , Rebel Heart (2015) . It was written and produced by Madonna , Avicii , DJ Dahi , and Michael Diamonds , with additional writing by Arash Pournouri , Carl Falk , Rami Yacoub , and Savan Kotecha . During the early stages of the album , Madonna was encouraged by her manager to work with Avicii and his team of songwriters . Together , they worked on seven songs and " Devil Pray " was composed after Madonna desired to talk about her experiences with drugs and quest for spirituality . Lyrically , the song deals with themes of drug addiction , sin , temptation , and the desire for salvation and the allure , and destructiveness , of drug @-@ fueled revelry .

" Devil Pray " is a technopop song , which combines elements of country @-@ pop and folk , and has similarities with Madonna 's own single " Don 't Tell Me " , Avicii 's previous work and The Animals ' version of the traditional folk song " The House of the Rising Sun " . The song received high praise from critics for its musical elements , while also being highlighted for its self @-@ conscious lyrics . However , there were some criticism towards the list of drugs used in the chorus . Following its release as a pre @-@ ordered song from Rebel Heart , the song charted in many European territories , reaching the top @-@ 25 in Finland , Greece , Hungary and Lebanon . Madonna performed the song for the first time on the Italian TV show Che tempo che fa , wearing a black robe and various rosaries .

= = Background and release = =

Madonna and Avicii first met in 2012 when the singer appeared on the Ultra Music Festival to premiere a remix of her single " Girl Gone Wild " , produced by the DJ . Later , while developing her then upcoming album , Madonna 's manager Guy Oseary suggested the singer to work with Avicii 's songwriting team ; the singer accepted since she was a fan of Avicii 's work . On March 7 , 2014 , the singer posted a picture of herself on her Instagram account with the caption , " Doing some house work before heading to the studio with Avicii . " A week later , she posted photos with Avicii and his team of songwriters , claiming that they did " so many great songs " . In an interview with David Blaine for Interview , Madonna said of the song :

It 's about how people take drugs to connect to God or to a higher level of consciousness . I keep saying , ' Plugging into the matrix ' . If you get high , you can do that , which is why a lot of people drop acid or do drugs , because they want to get closer to God . But there 's going to be a short circuit , and that 's the illusion of drugs , because they give you the illusion of getting closer to God , but ultimately they kill you . They destroy you . I mean , I tried everything once , but as soon as I was high , I spent my time drinking tons of water to get it out of my system . As soon as I was high , I was obsessed with flushing it out of me . I was like , ' OK , I 'm done now ' .

In the same interview , she said the song was not written to anyone in particular and that she was merely sharing her experiences . Rolling Stone published an article in which Madonna advocated " intense personal exploration " over drug use . While being asked if " Devil Pray " could run the risk of being misunderstood as a song encouraging drugs , Madonna replied : " I 'm certainly not judging people who take drugs or saying ' don 't do drugs ' , however , I 'm saying you can do all of these things to connect to a higher level , but ultimately you 're going to be lost . People who are getting high are instinctively also trying to connect to a higher level of consciousness , but are doing it in a way that will not sustain them . "

The demo version of " Devil Pray " leaked onto the Internet in December 2014 , alongside 12 other demos from the upcoming album . Following this Madonna released the album , titled Rebel Heart , for pre @-@ order on December 20 , 2014 . When ordered , the first six tracks were automatically downloaded , including " Devil Pray " . Madonna stated that the songs were meant to be " an early Christmas gift " and added that she would prefer her fans hear the completed versions of some of the songs instead of the incomplete tracks that were circulating .

= = Recording and composition = =

" Devil Pray " was written and produced by Madonna , Avicii , DJ Dahi and Michael Diamonds , with additional writing done by Savan Kotecha , Carl Falk , Rami Yacoub and Arash Pournouri . Avicii and Falk were also responsible for providing keyboards and programming , with Falk also providing guitars . Additional recording and mixing was done by Angie Teo , while Demacio " Demo " Castellon was the song 's engineer and mixer . " Devil Pray " has been described as " moody mid @-@ tempo semi @-@ acoustic pop " and technopop song about overcoming addiction , with a more " country @-@ tinged " and " folksy " style in comparison to other tracks on the album . Critics found similarities between the song and Madonna 's own single " Don 't Tell Me " (2000) for its " country @-@ pop elements " and the traditional folk song " The House of the Rising Sun " , due to its " bluesy @-@ vibe " .

" Devil Pray " brings Madonna " as a devoted disciple , drawn to a darker kind of prayer " , as noted by The Quietus 's Amy Pettifer , and its story deals with sin , temptation and deliverance . The song starts with hand claps and guitar , " whose country edge is [...] characteristic of Swedish producer Avicii 's own output " , claimed Pettifer . The chorus contains " an intoned , warning list of narcotic distractions " that " offer brief relief " , as she sings , " And we can do drugs , and we can smoke weed , and we can drink whiskey / Yeah , we can get high , and we can get stoned / And we can sniff glue , and we can do E , and we can drop acid . "

During the second verse , Madonna " seems to understand her own spiritual plight when she sings [...] , ' Mother Mary , can 't you [help] me ? / ' Cause I 've gone astray / All the angels that were around me / Have all flown away ' , " before warning , " Lucifer is near " . Later , she advises that although providing brief relief , the use of those drugs will not provide any positive effect on the user , warning , " Yeah , we can run and we can hide / But we won 't find the answers " and invite them to " get help " for making the " devil pray " . Then , a " pitched down " voice joins in a " plea for [her] soul to be saved " . As she sings , " Ooh , save my soul , save my soul , save my / Devil 's here to fool ya " , a " bed of throaty , orgasmic samples rises in the mix , " and " a hundred tiny Madonna @-@ voices in coital abyss . "

= = Critical reception = =

" Devil Pray " received mostly positive response from music critics . While noting that the song " reaches back smartly , not only to the hoe @-@ down pop of [her single] ' Don 't Tell Me ' , but to the subject matter , and bluesy gait of ' The House of the Rising Sun ' , " Jim Farber of New York Daily News praised " [t] he addition of a pulsing house beat [that] gives it yet another lure . " Bernard Zuel of Sydney Morning Herald also found similarities in " Devil Pray " with both songs , defining it as an " acoustic guitar @-@ with @-@ electro @-@ cowboy " song , whose melody " doesn 't attempt to hide its familiarity with ' House of the Rising Sun ' . " The Huffington Post 's Matthew Jacobs pointed out that Madonna evoked " the more traditional dance palate for which she is known . " Jamieson Cox of Time enthusiastically wrote that the song " could fit in neatly on the radio beside this year 's British house @-@ pop crossovers and Avicii 's own ' Hey Brother ' . " Kathy Landoli of Idolator praised Avicii and Blood Diamonds for " becom [ing] a divine pair for [' Devil Pray '] where you can hear both of their styles woven into the beat . " Andy Gill of The Independent found that " Devil Pray " recalled " the career @-@ apex achievements of ' Like a Prayer ' , while Gavin Haynes of NME opined that the song is " reminiscent of Lady Gaga 's crazed 2013 dance tune ' Aura ' . "

Stephen Thomas Erlewine of AllMusic picked it as one of Rebel Heart 's best songs , calling it " an expert evocation of her folktronica Y2K . " Caryn Ganz of Rolling Stone agreed , noting that " Avicii helps Madonna revive the strums @-@ and @-@ beats vibe of 2000 's Music . " Sal Cinquemani of Slant Magazine went further , calling it " her best song in 15 years " . He continued praising " Devil Pray " for " reimagin [ing] The Animals as a folktronica band with witch @-@ house tendencies ... Her ruminations on salvation and the existential pitfalls of sniffing glue [that] rid [es] an unexpected low @-@ end groove . " Annie Zaleski of The A.V. Club also saw the song as a highlight , describing it as a " gospel @-@ tinged , acoustic @-@ guitar irresistible plea for salvation and

divine guidance in the face of temptations such as drugs . " Sasha Geffen of Consequence of Sound considered " Devil Pray " as one of Madonna 's best release in years and its chorus as " one of her strongest in decades " . She praised " Madonna 's voice [which] is pitch @-@ shifted into a ghostly echo ? and unlike those ' Bitch ' beats , the production slides in perfectly . It 's one hell of a song about getting fucked up on every molecule imaginable , but it 's also heavy with the longing for self @-@ purification and direction . " The New York Times also shared this view , noting that the song " showcase [s] some of Madonna 's best singing in years . " Saeed Saeed of The National felt that the song was similar to The Animals ' version of " The House of the Rising Sun " and praised it for being a better country @-@ dance song than Madonna 's cover of Don McLean 's " American Pie " .

However , there were some criticism directed at the list of drugs used in the chorus of " Devil Pray " . Chris Richards from The Washington Post criticized the fact that the " lyrics on Rebel Heart feel almost violently resistant to wisdom " , citing the menu of intoxicants used in the chorus and asking , " Which one will best help us forget that this is happening ? " Andrew Unterberger of Spin also wrote about the " laundry list of intoxicants " referenced in the song , noting that it " makes ' Devil Pray ' sound like a mid @-@ 80s PSA . " Jessica Hopper of Pitchfork Media went on to criticize the list for being " a strange , tender , comical thing , [...] but ultimately , it 's a boring stadium @-@ throb lite @-@ EDM song about seeking sobriety and / or big @-@ G , God . It 's also a Madonna @-@ doing @-@ Madonna cliché [sic] , which is too often the downfall of Rebel Heart . " Alexis Petridis of The Guardian was negative about " Devil Pray " ' s production , claiming that " [it 's] a pretty transparent attempt by Avicii to come up with something along the lines of his hit ' Wake Me Up ' . "

= = Chart performance = =

" Devil Pray " charted in many European territories after its release along with the other album 's five tracks , on December 20 , 2014 . The song reached the top @-@ ten in Greece and Hungary , peaking at numbers 9 and 10 , respectively , while in Finland , Lebanon and Sweden , " Devil Pray " managed to reach the top @-@ twenty , reaching numbers 16 , 18 and 14 . In Spain , the song reached number 50 and was the album 's lowest charting song , while in France , " Devil Pray " was the third highest charting song , after " Living for Love " and " Ghosttown " , the album 's first and second single respectively , and peaked at number 62 .

= = Live performances = =

On March 1 , 2015 , Madonna performed the song for the first time on Italian TV show , Che tempo che fa , along with " Ghosttown " , the album 's second single . An episode featuring her appearance was aired on March 8 . For the performance of " Devil Pray " , Madonna wore " an extravagant black robe and various rosaries . " A writer for Yahoo ! noticed that both performances were warmly received by the audience , while Lionel Nicaise appreciated that Madonna put more emphasis on the melodies and her vocals during the performance , rather than costumes and stage props . Bianca Grace of Idolator noted that the performance " will have you repenting your weekend sins , as the singer emotionally sings the tune . " " Devil Pray " is currently being performed during Madonna 's 2015 ? 16 Rebel Heart Tour . Following the Last Supper @-@ themed mashup performance of " Holy Water " and " Vogue " , Madonna climbed down to the center stage to perform " Devil Pray " ; during the performance she straddled one of her male dancers , who was dressed as a priest , and engaged in a dance @-@ off with other dancers . Jordan Zivitz from the Montreal Gazette said that she found the performance to be " challenging " . Previous to this the song was also used for promotional videos related to the tour 's rehearsals and dancer interviews .

= = Credits and personnel = =

Management

Webo Girl Publishing , Inc . (ASCAP) / EMI Blackwood Music Inc . (BMI) / EMI Music Publishing

Scandinavia AB (STIM) / Sony / ATV Songs LLC (BMI)

Sony / ATV Scandinavia AB (STIM) / Team 2101 Songs (ASCAP) / Rami Productions AB (ASCAP) / Kobalt Songs Music Publishing

Sony / ATV Sonata and Dahi Productions (SESAC) / Michael Tucker Music (ASCAP) c / o Kobalt Songs Music Publishing / These Are Songs of Pulse (ASCAP) / OWSLA Trax (ASCAP)

Personnel

Personnel adapted from Madonna official website .

= = Charts = =