

= The Headphone Masterpiece =

The Headphone Masterpiece is the debut album by American recording artist Cody Chesnutt . He recorded the album in his home bedroom with a 4 @-@ track recorder and played guitar , bass , keyboard , and an organ . A 36 @-@ song double album , The Headphone Masterpiece features neo soul and lo @-@ fi music , and distorted , overdubbed production . It was written and arranged by Chesnutt , whose ironic and sincere lyrics reflect on personal experiences such as falling in love with his wife and reconciling his love for rock and roll with the drawbacks of the rock lifestyle .

After unsuccessfully shopping the album to record companies , Chesnutt released it himself on his website in September 2002 before releasing it on September 24 through his own label Ready , Set , Go ! . The album charted for one week on the Billboard 200 and had sold 25 @,@ 000 copies by March 30 , 2003 , according to Nielsen SoundScan . The Headphone Masterpiece was well received by music critics , who found it musically adventurous , albeit indulgent .

= = Recording and composition = =

After his band The Crosswalk was dropped from Hollywood Records in 1997 , Cody Chesnutt spent several months recording The Headphone Masterpiece in his bedroom , which he used as a makeshift studio called the Sonic Promiseland , in Valley Village , California . He used a 4 @-@ track recorder , and recorded the songs entirely by himself with equipment worth \$ 10 @,@ 000 , including one microphone , an organ , a guitar , bass , and keyboard . He used a pair of Sony MDR @-@ 7506 headphones as a studio monitor in order not to wake up his roommate . It was subsequently mastered by Brian Gardner .

A 36 @-@ song double album , The Headphone Masterpiece has overdubbed , distorted production , and incorporates pop rock , soul , R & B , and hip hop styles . Music journalist Philip Sherburne said that it explores British Invasion music on songs such as " Upstarts in a Blowout " , synthpop on " The World Is Coming to My Party " , and " cheerfully misogynist " hip hop on " Bitch , I 'm Broke " , but the album 's " core is classic soul " . Jared Levy of Tiny Mix Tapes called it a neo soul album , while The Fader magazine 's Knox Robinson categorized it as lo @-@ fi music .

Chesnutt 's lyrics mix irony and sincerity . He wrote the album to express the complexity of his personal experiences , such as falling in love with his wife , rock and roll , and reconciling his love for the music with the trappings of the rock lifestyle . Pitchfork Media 's Rob Mitchum wrote that " Serve This Royalty " celebrates Chesnutt 's " cultural sect " , and " The Seed " mixes his " hypersexual egotism " with " a tone of evolutionary bravado . " On the former song , Chesnutt sings " Thank you Jesus / For my mama / Thank you bitches / For my money " . He said of recording the song , " I woke up , went to the organ , and played these chords " . Following " Bitch , I 'm Broke " , the album features a suite of songs written about Chesnutt 's wife and the pleasures of monogamy .

= = Release and promotion = =

Chesnutt shopped the album around to record companies , but they mistook it for a demo and rejected it . They encouraged him to reproduce it smoothly , rearrange the drums , and rerecord his vocals . He said in an interview for Vibe at the time , " I refuse to re @-@ record it @-@ that defeats the purpose . What about the experience I had in my bedroom ? To go back to the studio , I 'd be chasing something . If you 're listening to it and you love it , then it 's already done what it 's supposed to do . " In September 2002 , Chesnutt made the album available through his website , and released it on September 24 on his own label Ready , Set , Go ! .

Chesnutt performed at clubs in Los Angeles in the album 's promotion . He subsequently toured with Macy Gray , Erykah Badu , and The Roots , who covered his song " The Seed " on their 2002 album Phrenology . The band released a music video for the song featuring Chesnutt , which received airplay on MTV . Consequently , The Headphone Masterpiece entered the Billboard 200 at number 128 with sales of 8 @,@ 000 copies . By March 30 , 2003 , it had sold 25 @,@ 000 copies , according to Nielsen SoundScan . It spent one week on the Billboard 200 .

== Critical reception ==

In a positive review , AllMusic editor Mike Gowan called The Headphone Masterpiece a " lo @-@ fi gem " and " an eclectic celebration of sound " , while Rolling Stone magazine 's Tom Moon hailed it as " one of the most emotionally raw albums of the year " ; Moon wrote that the record " gathered musical strands from all over the pop universe into unadorned , remarkably intimate stream @-@ of @-@ consciousness musings on love , money and responsibility " . Uncut called the album " an awesome declaration of intent " and stated , " Although decidedly lo @-@ fi , this epic , adventurous and mischievous album bears comparison with Prince and Todd Rundgren (at their respective peaks) . " Matt Diehl from Spin called it " indie soul that traverses the chasm between Shuggie Otis and Guided by Voices " . Dream Hampton , writing in Vibe , said that the album is " everything that many roots and retro artists have reached for , pure and straightforward ; yet it is thoroughly modern in its outlook , inventive and unsentimental , with both feet in the future . "

Mojo was somewhat less enthusiastic , finding the record " at once engaging and aloof " , with " its often hamfisted production and errant vocals adding to its ramshackle , rusticated charms " . In The A.V. Club , Nathan Rabin said the album was " musically uneven in the best way " , calling it " a brilliant , self @-@ indulgent , kaleidoscopic , contradictory mess " . Pitchfork Media 's Rob Mitchum observed " a surplus of uniqueness overshadows a respectable aptitude " and remarked that its " self @-@ indulgence , lack of focus , and unbridled sonic and lyrical crudity " made the album " so frustrating , yet compelling . " Village Voice critic Robert Christgau gave the record an honorable mention , citing " Family on Blast " , " The World Is Coming to My Party " , and " My Woman , My Guitars " as highlights while writing , " just what alt @-@ r & b needed ? loads of ideas , considerable talent , and all the stern self @-@ discipline of a trust fund baby " .

== Track listing ==

All songs were written , arranged , and produced by Cody Chesnutt .

== Personnel ==

Credits adapted from liner notes .

Cody Chesnutt ? arranger , composer , engineer , mixing , vocals

Brian Gardner ? mastering

RH ? saxophone (track 6)

Sonja Marie ? vocals (track 2)

Talley Thomas ? background vocals (track 27) , dialogue (track 24)

== Charts ==