

= The Age of Adz =

The Age of Adz ( pronounced / ʔdz / ) is a 2010 album by American singer / songwriter Sufjan Stevens , released on October 12 , 2010 by Asthmatic Kitty . It is Stevens ' sixth studio album and his first song @-@ based full @-@ length album in five years , since the release of Illinois in 2005 .

The album features a heavy use of electronics augmented by orchestration , and takes inspiration from the apocalyptic artwork of schizophrenic artist Royal Robertson . Stevens ' use of electronics marked a radical departure from much of his previous work ? most notably from Seven Swans and Michigan . Unlike Illinois , the lyrics do not explore events , characters or setting , but deal instead with themes and emotions on a personal level .

Critics praised the intimacy of the album , but many were divided over the change in style that Stevens had taken . Nonetheless , it appeared on several " best of 2010 " lists ? including those of Paste , The New York Times and MTV . Commercially , the album gave Stevens his career 's best first week sales to date and was his highest charting album to date , peaking in the top ten on the Billboard 200 .

= = Background and recording = =

In 2006 , Sufjan Stevens released an album of extra material left over from Illinois ( originally conceived as a double album ) , titled The Avalanche , as well as an album of Christmas music titled Songs for Christmas ( produced in parts between 2001 and 2006 ) . Following the release of The Avalanche , Stevens expressed a dissatisfaction with his music , stating in an interview with Pitchfork Media in 2006 : " I 'm getting tired of my voice . I 'm getting tired of ... the banjo . I 'm getting tired of ... the trumpet " . In 2009 Stevens admitted that his Fifty States Project ? an attempt to write an album for each of the 50 U.S. States ? had been a " promotional gimmick " and not something that he had seriously intended to complete . In the same year he released The BQE , an orchestral suite accompanying a home @-@ made film dedicated to the Brooklyn @-@ Queens Expressway . In an interview with BeatRoute Magazine in 2010 , Stevens stated " [ The BQE ] kinda sabotaged the mechanical way of approaching my music , which was basically narrative long @-@ form . It really opened things up for me . It also confused things as well . I don ' t think I ever really fully recovered from that process " . On August 20 , 2010 , without prior announcement , Stevens released the EP All Delighted People , and less than one week later , announced The Age of Adz to be released on October 12 .

In interviews , Stevens stated that during 2009 ? 2010 he suffered from a mysterious debilitating viral infection that affected his nervous system . He experienced chronic pain , and was forced to stop working on music for several months . He said : " The Age of Adz , is , in some ways , a result of that process of working through health issues and getting much more in touch with my physical self . That 's why I think the record 's really obsessed with sensation and has a hysterical melodrama to it . "

My Brightest Diamond frontwoman Shara Nova ? who previously collaborated with Stevens as a backing vocalist on the albums The Avalanche and Illinois ? has a solo performance on the track " Impossible Soul " , and provides backing vocals throughout the album .

The song " Vesuvius " was sampled in " Fade Away " by Social Club and Khleo Thomas and " All For Myself " was sampled in Asaiah Ziv and Kiya Lacey 's " Babylon [ ER ] " and Kendrick Lamar 's " Hood Politics " .

= = = Artwork = = =

The artwork of Royal Robertson , a self @-@ proclaimed prophet from Louisiana , was used for the album 's cover and interior . Will Hermes of Rolling Stone said that Sufjan Stevens uses the artwork " as a springboard for music that evokes a visionary psyche . " Stevens became interested in the work of Robertson after recording music for a friend 's documentary on the artist , and said that " [ the more I studied him and his work ] , the more I felt a weird affinity to this guy and the story of his

life . " He began to transcribe some of the text that appears in Robertson 's artwork , and says this process stayed with him a " long time " and " that some of it started to come up in the lyrics , in the songs I was writing .

= = Musical style and themes = =

= = = Musical style = = =

The Age of Adz marked a radical departure in musical style from that of Stevens ' previous album Illinois . Robin Hilton summarised the changes as Stevens " [ replacing ] delicately plucked banjo lines , wispy vocals and sentimental melodies with glitchy soundscapes , hip @-@ hop [ sic ] beats and heavily filtered vocals . " Amongst his other work , the 2001 electronic album Enjoy Your Rabbit was regarded as being the most close in style to this album . Nevertheless , critics highlighted the first track " Futile Devices " as being stylistically consistent with his earlier acoustic work .

Sufjan Stevens himself has said that the album 's tracks " are pop songs , but they ? re based on sound experimentation and noise " . He contrasted the way in which the album was made for listeners who understood his interest in " electronic music and noise and in sound sculpting and minimalism " , and with Illinois which he described as a " populist record " .

= = = Themes = = =

The Age of Adz departs from the geography @-@ based concepts of Stevens ' previous albums ; until his announcement in 2009 that he had never seriously intended to complete the project , it had been expected that his next work might continue the Fifty States Project that he had begun with Michigan and continued with Illinois . The album contains no " conceptual underpinnings " , instead focusing on themes that are personal and intimate to Stevens himself ; the label Asthmatic Kitty describes the themes as " personal and primal ? love , sex , death , disease , illness , anxiety , and suicide " .

A recurrent focus of the album is love , a theme that sometimes overlaps with spirituality as Stevens seems to address both a lover and a divine power . Another important theme is that of mortality ? the song " Now That I 'm Older " has been noted as " repeatedly [ acknowledging ] mortality and the importance of making the most of life . " Acknowledging the interplay of these two themes , the album has been described as having songs " in which love and death reign darkly over an imaginative landscape peopled with apparitions , ghosts , orators and space travellers " .

= = Release and reception = =

The Age of Adz debuted at number seven on the Billboard 200 , with 36 @,@ 000 copies sold , giving Stevens his career 's best first week sales to date until Carrie & Lowell opened with 51 @,@ 000 copies in 2015 . It was his highest charting album to date , peaking in the top ten on the Billboard 200 . It also placed number one on Billboard 's " Rock Albums " , " Independent Albums " , " Alternative Albums " and " Folk Albums " lists , and placed number two on the " Digital Albums " and " Tastemaker Albums " lists . The album also placed within the " Top 100 Albums " lists in several other countries .

= = = Critical reception = = =

The Age of Adz received widespread critical acclaim upon its release . At Metacritic , which assigns a normalised rating out of 100 to reviews from mainstream critics , the album received an average score of 80 , based on 33 reviews , indicating " generally favorable reviews " . Keith Meatto of the Frontier Psychiatrist described the album as " a musical masterpiece that blends analog and digital sounds as it reflects on love and loss , life and death , humanity and divinity " . Entertainment.ie 's

Jenny Mulligan described Stevens as " a strange one , that 's for sure , but he may just be a genius " . Uncut commented that the album provides plenty of evidence to argue that he is either " one of the most important songwriters of his generation " or " just an infuriating , neurotic show @-@ off " . Alexis Petridis of The Guardian said that although the album " goes a bit barmy and over @-@ the @-@ top " there are some " incredible tune [ s ] " that are " not only genuinely remarkable , but genuinely enjoyable " . Alex Denney of NME similarly commented that the album " conjures just enough moments of heart @-@ stopping gorgeousness to foot the bill for its dizzying excesses " . Sam Lewis of the BBC remarked on the same point : that the album is " suffused with individual moments of brilliance " , but overall it is " let down by its self @-@ conscious incoherence " .

The most discussed track of the album among reviewers was " Impossible Soul " , which at 25 minutes in length comprises a third of the overall album . Pitchfork 's reviewer Ryan Dombal described the track as having " more engaging ideas than most artists could muster in a career " , although No Ripcord reviewer Alan Shulman criticized the middle sections as being an " epic train wreck " , saying that the closing minutes come as " a breath of fresh air " . One Thirty BPM reviewer Rob Hakimian was mixed in his reception of the track , and commented that it would " make or break " the album for listeners , describing it as a successful " proclamation of love " , but also " bloated " and " way over the top " .

= = = Accolades = = =

Many reviewing sites included The Age of Adz in their best of 2010 lists .

= = Track listing = =

All songs written and composed by Sufjan Stevens .

Note : On the vinyl release of the album , the last movement ( about three minutes ) of " Impossible Soul " is moved to the end of side C , just after " I Want to be Well " for reasons of space and time restrictions .

= = Personnel = =

The album 's liner notes provides limited information regarding the personnel . Prophet Royal Robertson is credited with all artwork except the pieces " Bar @-@ Koom ! " , " Katora " , and " Space Autos " by Scott Ogden . Shara Worden performs a solo on " Impossible Soul " , and provides backing vocals throughout . Annie Clark sang backing vocals on " Now That I 'm Older " .

= = Chart positions = =