

= Devil 's Halo =

Devil 's Halo is the eighth studio album by American singer @-@ songwriter and bassist Me 'Shell Ndegéocello . After writing songs for over a year , Ndegéocello recorded the album in seven days with audio engineer S. Husky Höskulds . She was accompanied by a band featuring drummer Deantoni Parks , guitarist Chris Bruce , and keyboardist Keefus Ciancia ; Bruce and Ciancia produced the record with Ndegéocello .

The songs on Devil 's Halo featured an eclectic fusion of styles , including alternative rock , soul , and jazz @-@ rock . Ndegéocello 's spiritually complex and ambiguous lyrics spoke of romantic love and loneliness , among other themes . Released by Downtown Records on October 6 , 2009 , Devil 's Halo charted modestly but was well received by most critics .

= = Background = =

Ndegéocello spent over a year writing the songs from Devil 's Halo , being inspired in part by her trip to Ireland . " I went to a couple of pubs and there were much older gentlemen playing the guitar and just singing these amazing , simple songs " , Ndegéocello recalled . " I really admired that . I wanted to get to that kind of place where the song could just exist with a guitar and a vocal . " With Icelandic audio engineer S. Husky Höskulds , Ndegéocello proceeded to record the album in seven days , backed by a band that featured guitarist Chris Bruce , keyboardist Keefus Ciancia , and drummer Deantoni Parks . She later credited them with providing her inspiration and critique while keeping her " clear about what is the real focus ? in life and in music " . Their instruments were recorded live without digital post @-@ production , which New York Times critic Ben Ratliff said contributed to the music 's raw and organic sound .

= = Music and lyrics = =

According to The Boston Globe 's Sarah Rodman , Devil 's Halo featured a " catholicity of sounds " . Ndegéocello performed in what Nick Coleman of The Independent described as " the alt @-@ rock idiom " , while Slant Magazine 's Matthew Cole called Devil 's Halo an R & B record that utilized textures from experimental rock and electronica . Jacqueline Smith from The New Zealand Herald said its fusion of styles was based in soul music : " Though it channelled everyone from Sade to Santana , it 's an album of mostly soul - of the soul @-@ baring kind " . AllMusic 's Thom Jurek found the record 's " soulish , near @-@ pop , rock tunes " starker than her previous three albums .

For the song " Slaughter " , Ndegéocello tried to weave together sonic influences from the producers Trevor Horn and RZA , as well as the bands Yes , Sade , and The Human League : " That 's what I tried to achieve in this particular recording : some sonic tapestries that people , even if they 're not listening to the lyrics , could just feel or hear , or just have a deep , inner dialogue with . " She covered Ready for the World 's 1986 song " Love You Down " , deconstructing it into what Village Voice critic Eugene Holley Jr. described as " a stripper 's classic " . Songs such as " Mass Transit " and " White Girl " featured Ndegéocello 's characteristic ska and reggae influenced basslines ; Holley argued that Caribbean riddims and country @-@ rock guitar grooves underpinned the music , serving as a backdrop for Ndegéocello 's contralto singing throughout Devil 's Halo . In the opinion of Ed Potton from The Times , her voice " resided somewhere between Sade and PJ Harvey " .

The main theme of Devil 's Halo , City Pages critic Rick Mason said , was the treachery of love and its bitter effects , with songs Holley described as brimming with " spiritual complexity and ambiguity " . In Jurek 's opinion , " romance , substance abuse , and one woman speaking candidly to another are themes in this musical meditation on bliss , lust , loneliness , and emotional wreckage " . musicOMH journalist Andrew Burgess described the record 's content as " achingly sensual and brutally violent " , while Seattle Weekly 's Saby Reyes @-@ Kulkami wrote " isolation ? even more than the sexual charge the songs exude ? serves as the linchpin that pushes her narrators to strive for connection in the first place . " According to The Huffington Post 's Mike Ragogna , while the

music covered styles ranging from pop and quiet storm to " light " avant @-@ garde , the subject matter had a " low key / high concept " quality expressed through terse lyrics , sonic experiments , and character studies such as " Lola " and " White Girl " .

" Lola " was written as a critique of mainstream societal treatment of romantic love and heartbreak society . " A wife ? s just a whore with a diamond ring " , Ndegéocello 's sang . She drew inspiration from matchmaking reality television shows that presented love as a " really clear exchange " . " I hear young women going ' well if he can buy me something ' " , Ndegéocello explained . " That song ? ' Put It in the Bag ' ? which is based on ' can you buy me some things ? ' And then the male counterpart , all he can really talk about is sex and if the woman can cook . And it ? s funny to me . That you 're no more than a whore , you just have a wedding ring . " " Bright Shiny Morning " was titled after the book of the same name by James Frey . Ndegéocello wrote the song after reflecting on her past lies and misrepresentations , particularly those she made in an attempt to be accepted in the music industry . " People change themselves " , she said . " Almost in the sense of creating mental anguish in order to make other people happy and to obtain celebrity and fame . That 's why the lyric is ' you do anything . ' Some people do anything for their big dreams of sunshine . "

= = Release and reception = =

Devil 's Halo was released by Downtown Records on October 6 , 2009 , to generally positive reviews from critics . At Metacritic , which assigns a normalized rating out of 100 to reviews from mainstream publications , the album received an average score of 78 , based on seven reviews . In Billboard , Gary Graff wrote that the record " neatly straddles a line between challenging and accessible " , featuring some of Ndegéocello 's strongest compositions yet . Jurek claimed she " hasn 't been so nakedly vulnerable and brazenly honest on record as she is here " . Tyler Lewis of PopMatters hailed it as her most consistent and " emotionally potent work " since 1999 's Bitter while adding that Devil 's Halo featured " a greater sense of perspective of life 's realities " . According to Q , the songs expressing frantic feelings were balanced by " unpredictable but always apposite moments of beauty " . Salon journalist Heather Havrilesky said " like a world @-@ weary muse , Ndegéocello taps into something rich and melancholy at the sludgy bottom of our hearts " while possessing a " mellow depth " in her singing . Washington Post critic Mark Jenkins believed the music 's " stripped @-@ down approach accentuated her musical brawn " . Noel Murray from The A.V. Club found the album " bracingly unpredictable and persistently enjoyable ; it 's an art @-@ soul record for those who like to be challenged while they ? re tapping their toes . Or vice versa " .

In a less enthusiastic review , Andy Gill of The Independent believed the eclectic style on Devil 's Halo sounded muddled : " The songs seem to bleed into one another , with too much pointlessly flashy playing leading to polite jazz @-@ rock hell . One 's left yearning for a hummable melody that might imprint one of these songs upon one 's memory " . Mojo wrote that while the lyrics to " her songs are as politically charged as ever , musically they 're laboured experiments in style " . Robert Christgau from MSN Music was even less receptive , rating the album a " dud " , which indicated " a bad record whose details rarely merit further thought " .

= = Track listing = =

= = Personnel = =

Credits are adapted from the album 's liner notes .

Oren Bloedow ? vocal arrangements and vocals on " Slaughter "

Chris Bruce ? banjo , bass , guitar , production

Keith Ciancia ? keyboards , production , programming

Eric Elterman ? recording engineer

Lisa Germano ? cello on " Hair of the Dog " and " Bright Shiny Morning " ( also violin )

S. Husky Höskulds ? recording engineer

Me 'Shell Ndegéocello ? bass , keyboards , production , vocals on all tracks  
Deantoni Parks ? drums  
Bob Power ? mastering

= = Charts = =