

Puluche Album Review Rubric ©

<u>Artist:</u> U2		<u>Album Title:</u> The Joshua Tree (1987) - Island			
Categories	Criteria				Rating
	4 - Exemplary	3 - Proficient	2 - Developing	1 - Underdeveloped	
<u>Compositions</u>	Every song is quality and has a distinctive appeal of its own. Tracks have a perfect flow and continuity that enhance the album's overall appeal.	Many quality songs with distinctive appeal. Tracks have a good flow and continuity that enhance the album's overall appeal.	Some quality songs with distinctive appeal but not sustained. Track flow and continuity have little effect on album's overall appeal.	Few to no quality songs lacking any distinctive appeal. Track flow and continuity have little/poor effect on album's overall appeal.	20
<u>Breaking Ground</u>	Has impressive elements of high creativity and is experimentally innovative. Developing own signature sound. Shows extreme growth and/or potential as a substantial and influential artist.	Features elements of creativity and uniqueness. Shows growth and/or potential as a developing and influential artist.	Has very few moments of creativity and uniqueness. Shows little growth and/or some potential as a developing artist. Displays some stagnation or notable regression as an established artist.	Has no creativity and uniqueness. Shows no growth and/or little potential as a developing or established artist.	20
<u>Engagement</u>	Music has a transcending quality with numerous songs that grab the listener on respective emotional/social levels. Many songs have an addictive effect and memorable quality.	Music has transcending qualities with some songs that grab the listener on respective emotional/social levels. Some songs have an addictive effect and memorable quality.	Music has some transcending qualities with few songs that appeal on respective emotional/social levels, as well as having any addictive or memorable qualities.	Music has minimal transcending qualities and few to no songs that appeal on respective emotional/social levels. No positive memorable qualities.	20
<u>Lyrics</u>	Has a strong lyrical voice with multiple thought-provoking messages with clear and/or possible meanings and depth.	Has notable lyrical voice with some thought-provoking messages and/or possible meanings and depth.	Has limited lyrical voice with few-to-no thought-provoking messages, meanings and depth.	Has a weak lyrical voice with no thought-provoking messages or meanings and seriously lacks any depth.	20
<u>Production</u>	Masterful sound quality with noticeable studio techniques employed that demand headphone inquiry. Vision flawlessly executed. Overall packaging and artwork effectively compliments and enhances album enjoyment.	Very good sound quality with some noticeable studio techniques that demand headphone inquiry. Vision is acceptable. Overall packaging and artwork compliments album enjoyment.	Inconsistent sound quality with questionable studio techniques employed. Vision is questionable. Overall packaging and artwork fails to compliment album.	Questionable to poor sound quality. Lacks vision. Overall packaging and artwork fails to compliment album.	20

Comments

Coming off of the recent success of their hard rock-anthem album, *War*, and the experimental, *The Unforgettable Fire*, the Irish rock band U2 took yet another step in a different direction with *The Joshua Tree*; producing an edgy rock album while purposely confining themselves to conventional song structures.

U2 began with heavy influences from post-punk rock and rapidly developed a sound that was able to incorporate many popular genres. *The Joshua Tree* is an album where U2 displays their innovation through many styles of rock, such as alternative, punk, and pop. The band also draws on American and Irish influences, equally, displaying some sounds and rhythm from folk and blues.

The Joshua Tree was inspired by the band's recent experiences while touring in America during the mid 1980s. U2 dove deep into the literature, pop culture, and politics of American life when they chose America as a theme for the album. The members of U2 are avid human and civil activists. Lead singer, Bono's trip to Central America, between recording sessions, is widely believed to have had a life-changing effect on the artist. The album shows a sense of location - known or unknown, social and political, as well as emotional and physical - on each composition.

The opening track "Where the Streets Have No Name" is an iconic 80s pop-rock track. The pace-progressing synth at the start of the song builds up slowly into the bright tone of the chords that then build into the drums and bass before the melody changes and Bono comes in with his soft, raspy vocals. This track sets the theme for the entire album, flawlessly. The first verse, "I wanna run, I want to hide. I want to tear down the walls that hold me inside," captures the emotions behind feeling caged and wanting to travel the vast empty deserts and plains of America, and "I want to take shelter in the poison rain," describes the acid rain of the American deserts.

"With or Without You" was released as the album's first single in March 1987. The song reached the number one chart position in both Ireland, Canada, and the US. The making of the song began in 1985 and U2 continued to work on the final draft as they began recording *The Joshua Tree*. Ultimately, this is a love song; inspired by Bono's feelings about being in a domestic relationship as a travelling musician. The song features an early version of the "infinite guitar" played by guitarist The Edge. When Bono enters, he sings in a lower key than his usual vocals. Critics praised this new display of talent by the singer. "With or Without You" quickly became - and still is - one of U2's best known songs and it often shows up on many lists ranking the best songs of all time, in both rock and pop music.

"I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" became the bands' second US number one single and remained in the spot for two weeks. The song was an example of the group's interest in American sounds. The song was nominated for Song of the Year in the 1988 Grammy Awards. The lyrics of the song stress the emotions of feeling inferior in light of a life full of accomplishments and unique experiences: "I have kissed the honey lips, felt the healing in the fingertips. It burned like fire; this burning desire. I have spoke with the tongue of angels. I have held the hand of a devil... But, I still haven't found what I'm looking for." Bono is a civil and human rights activist on a global scale; he has travelled the world and experienced many wonderful things and lived a solid life as a musician but, Bono expresses, none of it has made him complete. Whether it can be found in religion, political activism, social revolution, or within oneself, Bono sings these lyrics as a man who is still searching for a deeper explanation or meaning to whatever ails him.

	<p>The song is known as U2's prime display of pop music on <i>The Joshua Tree</i>, and proved that the band could step into commercial success through mainstream popular music without relying on typical rock techniques. The lyrics on each song are impeccable but, this track in particular sticks out and shows the reality of Bono's lyrical capabilities.</p> <p>"Bullet the Blue Sky" is an edgy, almost punk rock track that has a more ominous intro. The lyrics are dark and thought provoking. Bono and lead guitarist The Edge created the song about American military interference during the El Salvador Civil War. The lyrics, "This guy comes up to me, his face red like a rose on a thorn bush. Like all the colors of a royal flush and he's peeling off those dollar bills. Slapping them down: 100...200," are Bono's criticism of American President Ronald Reagan.</p> <p>U2 chose producers Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois to handle this album based on their great success on <i>The Unforgettable Fire</i> (1984). The band credits this duo as the first producers who took such interest in the rhythm portion of the recordings. Both producers purposely worked on the album at alternating times; Eno and Lanois may have done this in order to not develop conflicting visions and have another producer proofread their work when they left the studio, so to speak, keeping each other on track with the bands vision.</p> <p>While the track flow is flawless in relation to U2's vision of self-identity and discovery in a world shaped by social and political realms, the ending of side two of the record takes a turn in a much edgier direction. Regardless, each track on the album is incredibly aligned with the production and bands' vision. This album explores many controversial and popular aspects of discovery on many scales. The album artwork displays the importance of a sense of location in a vast world that influenced U2's production of <i>The Joshua Tree</i> with an image of a lone tree in the American desert; more specifically a "Joshua Tree" in the Mojave Desert in California.</p>	
<p><u>Commendations</u></p>	<p><i>The Joshua Tree</i> was showered with critical acclaim and was awarded U2's best reviews to date. It was a favorite across many Billboard charts as well, achieving high marks in numerous countries. U2 earned their first two Grammy's in 1988 for Album of the Year and Best Rock Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocal during <i>The Joshua Tree</i> tour. It was also one of the best-selling albums of that year and in rock history, with sales over 25 million worldwide. <i>The Joshua Tree</i> catapulted U2 from the dark war-like rock tones that had made them so successful in the early 1980s into a position to become historic icons of alternative rock and roll. The album also proved that it was possible for the band to transcend genres and produce the same quality work while displaying their versatility in various forms of rock music.</p>	
<p><u>Next Steps</u></p>	<p>Immediately after its release, U2 embarked on a world tour called <i>The Joshua Tree</i> Tour in April of 1987. U2 used this tour as an outlet to openly address political and social concerns, and never stopped exploring new outlets for creativity or developing sounds with newly discovered roots. For example, during their world tour, the band collaborated with artists such as B.B. King and Bob Dylan. Bono said, at the time, that the band was not prepared for all of the success coming their way. U2, overall, was not satisfied with their own creativity and music.</p> <p>U2 continued to be extremely successful and made themselves a staple of Irish rock music as they became international pioneers of mainstream alternative rock. Their album, <i>How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb</i> (2004), displays the</p>	

	height of the bands' mainstream alterative sound. U2 was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2005, their first year of eligibility. The band ended a three year worldwide tour called U2360 Degrees in 2011, selling out venues across the globe.
Reviewer	Brandon J. Holmes IRC: Tom Byrne