

## Puluche Album Review Rubric ©

**Artist:** The Smiths

**Album Title:** *Strangeways, Here We Come (1987) – Rough Trade*

Categories	Criteria				Rating
	4 - Exemplary	3 - Proficient	2 - Developing	1 - Underdeveloped	
<b><u>Compositions</u></b>	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.	<b>Many quality songs with some distinctive appeal. Tracks have a good flow and continuity that enhance the album's overall appeal.</b>	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.	<b>15</b>
<b><u>Breaking Ground</u></b>	<b>Has impressive elements of high creativity and is experimentally innovative. Developing own signature sound.</b> Shows extreme growth and/or potential as a substantial and influential artist.	Features elements of creativity and uniqueness. <b>Shows growth</b> and/or potential <b>as a developing and influential artist, but some stagnation as an established artist.</b>	Has very few moments of creativity and uniqueness. Shows a little growth and/or some potential as a developing artist, but notable regression as an established artist.	Has no creativity and uniqueness. Shows no growth and/or little potential as a developing or established artist.	<b>17.5</b>
<b><u>Engagement</u></b>	<b>Music has a transcending quality with numerous songs that grab the listener on respective emotional/social levels.</b> 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. <b>Some songs have an addictive effect and memorable quality.</b>	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 - only negative.	<b>17.5</b>
<b><u>Lyrics</u></b>	<b>Has a strong lyrical voice with multiple thought-provoking messages with clear and/or possible meanings and depth.</b>	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.	<b>20</b>
<b><u>Production</u></b>	<b>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.</b>	Very good sound quality with some noticeable studio techniques that demand headphone inquiry. Vision is acceptable. Overall packaging and artwork compliments album enjoyment.	Decent sound quality with few-to-no noticeable studio techniques employed. Vision is questionable. Overall packaging and artwork fails to compliment album.	Questionable sound quality with no noticeable studio techniques. Lacks vision. Overall packaging and artwork fails to compliment album.	<b>20</b>

Comments

The Smiths came busting out of Manchester, England in 1982 when singer Morrissey and guitarist Johnny came together and formed a group. The band added Mike Joyce on drums and bass player Andy Rourke (after a few short-lived band members left). The band was dubbed The Smiths because it was the most ordinary name they could imagine, as they wanted to distance themselves from what they believed to be pretentious band names (read: Spandau Ballet and Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark).

Between 1984 and 1986, the Smiths released three albums that cemented themselves as one of the most popular and revered English bands to come out of the late 20th century. Not without controversy, of course. While the jangly guitar sounds were loved by many, Morrissey's lyrics - often political, sometimes questionable - were criticised more than a few times. However, though they weathered challenges and their albums were all received well critically.

Their magnum opus is most likely 1986's *The Queen is Dead*, which is surprising since the band went through a lot of turmoil in the months leading up to and following the album release (Rourke being fired due to heroin use, legal dispute with their record label, Marr beginning to get exhausted from their extensive touring, and so on.) Featuring their popular songs "There is a Light That Never Goes Out" and "I Know it's Over", the album continues to be cited as a genre-defining alternative album, as well as a personal success story for the band.

So, how did they follow it up? With *Strangeways, Here We Come*, which was released in the autumn of 1987. Sonically, the album is similar to its immediate predecessor in terms of Morrissey's lyrics, while Marr's guitars are less "jingle jangle" and a little more rock oriented.

The album opens with "A Rush and a Push and the Land Is Ours," which features odd grunting from Morrissey that can also be found on the second track, "I Started Something I Couldn't Finish." Lyrically, Morrissey is as down as ever, with standout lyrics from the first song being "They said: 'there's too much caffeine in your bloodstream and a lack of real spice in your life.'" - potentially calling out hit critics. In "Death of a Disco Dancer," the discouraging lyrics continue with Morrissey sarcastically singing "Love, peace and harmony? Oh, very nice...but maybe in the next world."

One of the standout tracks on *Strangeways* is "Girlfriend in a Coma," which features a jangly guitar performance from Marr and some rather morbid lyrics from Morrissey (i.e. "there were times when I could have murdered her but, you know, I would hate anything to happen to her.") These lyrics call to mind earlier tracks such as "Bigmouth Strikes Again."

One recurring theme of not only *Strangeways*, but many Smiths albums is the theme of heartbreak and deceit. Morrissey seems to always be sighing about a love that has ended or saddened by a love that was never reciprocated. For example, in the memorable "Last Night I Dreamt That Somebody Loved Me," he sighs, "Last night I dreamt that somebody loved me. No hope, no harm - just another false alarm." Morrissey's lyrics, however mopey or morbid, always seem to be relatable. "I've come to wish you an unhappy birthday because you're evil and you lie and if you should die, I may feel slightly sad, but I won't cry." Lyrics like that are so uniquely The Smiths, and that is one of the major reasons why they are one of the most memorable bands to come out of the late 1980s alternative movement.

<p><b><u>Commendations</u></b></p>	<p>This is the final Smiths album, and it is the closing chapter of the legacy The Smiths created in their whirlwind of a career. The album is a strong one, but the Smiths seemed to always know what their sound and messages were, so this is more like a continuation more than a new road.</p> <p>That being said, the band was on the verge of some changes during the recording of <i>Strangeways</i> and Johnny Marr felt like the band was ready to evolve musically at the time of its recording. The band used synthesised saxophone and string arrangements and a drum machine in addition to the instruments they traditionally used. As their previous albums, this was produced by Stephen Street, who specializes in British alternative rock (later working with the likes of Blur, Babysambles, and Kaiser Chiefs.)</p>
<p><b><u>Next Steps</u></b></p>	<p>Shortly after its release in 1987, Marr grew exhausted with the band and decided to leave The Smiths, thus dissolving the group. The breakdown in the relationship was attributed to Morrissey becoming annoyed by Marr's work with other artists and Marr being frustrated by Morrissey's musical inflexibility.</p> <p>This album was a success in the band's native UK, and was also their biggest hit in the US, hitting number 55 on the <i>Billboard 200</i>. Although not as warmly received by critics as <i>The Queen is Dead</i>, both Morrissey and Marr have cited it as their favorite The Smiths album.</p> <p>Since then, all Smiths members have been active musically, although not together. Throughout the years since their breakup, the band has gained an insurmountable number of fans. Although both Morrissey and Marr have both fervently denied any plans for a reunion, many hope that one day they can put their differences aside and play again as The Smiths.</p>
<p><b><u>Reviewer</u></b></p>	<p>Tricia Stansberry</p> <p style="text-align: right;">IRC: Lucy Patton</p>