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When gods fall



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REJI VARGHESE shares his thoughts on Eric Clapton's new album, *I Still Do*

People have a tendency to follow the herd. Take **music** fans for example: if they really don't like a cult artiste's music, they are often hesitant to voice their opinion. Over the years, I've heard friends and musicians refer to Clapton as "repetitive", "predictable" and "unoriginal", but this was done in hushed tones because after all, "Clapton is God", as the famous graffiti at Islington Station declared in the Sixties.

These were exactly my thoughts while listening to Clapton's latest album, *I Still Do*, which released on May 20. There are three Clapton originals – 'Spiral', 'I'll be Alright' and 'Catch the Blues' – all of which are lacklustre. The guitar playing is still great; but they're the same recycled pentatonic and blues licks that you've heard over and over on his albums from decades ago. But my biggest problem is that the nine other songs in the album are covers.

There are three interesting things on this album: the cover designed by Peter Blake (who had designed the album cover for The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*); the slick production by Glyn Johns, who has produced albums for The Who, The Rolling Stones and Eagles, among others; and a posthumous guest appearance by George Harrison on the song 'I Will Be There'. Harrison is credited as Angelo Mysterioso, a pseudonym he used previously for a cameo appearance on Cream's album *Goodbye* in 1969.

Despite the creative shortcomings on this album, Clapton will remain one of my favourite guitarists. Songs like 'Cocaine', 'Wonderful Tonight' and 'Lay down Sally' are a large part of my youth, and are etched into my subconscious.

But the Clapton of my early teens is not the Clapton of today. Sometimes, in the process of growing up, legends, heroes and even gods, fall by the wayside. To paraphrase what John Steinbeck said in *East of Eden*, "When a child first catches adults out... that their judgments are not always wise, their thinking true, their sentences just – his world falls into panic desolation... And there is one sure thing about the fall of gods: they do not fall a little; they crash and shatter... And the child's world is never quite whole again. It is an aching kind of growing." For me, Clapton crashed down many years ago.

This new album just reinforces the ache, and it's an ache that doesn't seem to go away.

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