

Rock Vinyl Revival

Presents

A Brief History

In the Court of the Crimson King



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In the Court of the Crimson King (subtitled An Observation by King Crimson) is the debut studio album by English rock band King Crimson, released on 10 October 1969 by Island Records. The album is one of the first and most influential of the progressive rock genre, where the band largely combined blues influences that rock music was founded upon with elements of jazz, classical, and symphonic music.

The album reached number five on the UK Albums Chart and number 28 on the US Billboard 200, where it was certified Gold by the Recording Industry Association of America.

It was reissued several times in the 1980s and 1990s using inferior copies of the master tapes. After the original masters were discovered in the Virgin archives in 2003, the album was remastered again by Simon Heyworth and reissued in 2004.

A 40th anniversary edition of the album was released in 2009 with new stereo and 5.1 surround sound mixes by Steven Wilson. King Crimson made their live debut on 9 April 1969 and made a breakthrough by playing the Rolling Stones free concert at Hyde Park, London in July 1969, before an estimated 250,000 to 500,000 people.

Initial sessions for the album were held in early 1969 with producer Tony Clarke, most famous for his work with the Moody Blues. After these sessions failed to work out, the group were given permission to produce the album themselves.

The album was recorded on a 1" 8-channel recorder at Wessex Sound Studios in London, engineered by Robin Thompson and assisted by Tony Page. In order to achieve the characteristic lush, orchestral sounds on the album, Ian McDonald spent many hours overdubbing layers of Mellotron and various woodwind and reed instruments. In some cases, the band went through 5 tape generations to attain deeply layered, segued tracks.

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Some time after the album had been completed, however, it was discovered that the stereo master recorder used during the mixdown stage of the album had incorrectly-aligned recording heads.

This misalignment resulted in a loss of high frequencies and introduced some unwanted distortion. This is evident in certain parts of the album, particularly on "21st Century Schizoid Man". Consequently, while preparing the first American release for Atlantic Records, a special copy was made from the original 2-track stereo master in an attempt to correct some of these anomalies. (The analog tape copying process usually results in generation loss.)

From 1969 to 2003, this second-generation "corrected" copy was the source used in the dubbing of the various sub-masters used for vinyl, cassette and CD releases over the years. The original, "first-generation" stereo masters, however, had been filed away soon after the original 1969 mixdown sessions. These tapes were considered lost until 2003.

Barry Godber (1946-1970), a computer programmer, painted the design for the album cover. Godber died in February 1970 from a heart attack, shortly after the album's release. It was his only album cover; the original painting is now owned by Robert Fripp. Fripp had said about Godber:

“Peter brought this painting in and the band loved it. I recently recovered the original from [managing label E.G. Records's] offices because they kept it exposed to bright light, at the risk of ruining it, so I ended up removing it. The face on the outside is the Schizoid Man, and on the inside it's the Crimson King. If you cover the smiling face, the eyes reveal an incredible sadness. What can one add? It reflects the music”.

The album cover is painted on a wall in the 1987 Troma Entertainment film *Surf Nazis Must Die*.

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In the Court of the Crimson King initially received mixed reactions from critics. Village Voice critic Robert Christgau called the album "ersatz shit", while John Morthland of Rolling Stone said King Crimson had "combined aspects of many musical forms to create a surreal work of force and originality".

The album has since attained a classic status, with AllMusic praising it "as if somehow prophetic, King Crimson projected a darker and edgier brand of post-psychedelic rock" in its original review by Lindsay Planer, and calling it "definitive" and "daring" in its current review.

In his 1997 book *Rocking the Classics*, critic and musicologist Edward Macan notes that In the Court of the Crimson King "may be the most influential progressive rock album ever released". The Who's Pete Townshend was quoted as calling the album "an uncanny masterpiece".

In the Q & Mojo Classic Special Edition *Pink Floyd & The Story of Prog Rock*, the album came fourth in its list of "40 Cosmic Rock Albums". The album was named as one of Classic Rock magazine's "50 Albums That Built Prog Rock".

In 2014, readers of *Rhythm* voted it the eighth greatest drumming album in the history of progressive rock. In 2015, Rolling Stone named In the Court of the Crimson King the second greatest progressive rock album of all time, behind Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon*.

The album is also featured in the book *1001 Albums You Must Hear Before You Die*. It was voted number 193 in Colin Larkin's *All Time Top 1000 Albums*.

In the *Venture Bros.* episode "Perchance to Dean," Dean is cautioned against listening to the album before listening to Yes, as it could turn him into an "evil scientist."

In the Court of the Crimson King was reissued several times in the 1980s and 1990s through Polydor and E.G. Records, with pressings made from copies that were several generations removed from the stereo sub-master tape. This resulted in sub-par audio quality and audible tape hiss.

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In 1982, Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab released a half speed mastered version of the album on vinyl, cut by Stan Ricker with the Ortofon Cutting System. In 1989 the album was remastered for its debut on CD by Robert Fripp and Tony Arnold, this version was part of "The Definitive Edition" series, which consisted of other remastered albums by the band.

In 1999, in commemoration of its 30th anniversary, the album was remastered again, this time using 24 bit and HDCD technology by Simon Heyworth, Robert Fripp and David Singleton, this edition was part of the "30th Anniversary Edition" series, which consisted of remastered editions of King Crimson back-catalogue for their thirtieth anniversaries.

Four years later, in 2003, the original masters were discovered in the Virgin archives, with splicing tape still present between the various songs, and crossfade between I Talk To The Wind and Epitaph yet to be created, therefore, in 2004, a new remaster was done by Simon Heyworth using these first-generation stereo master tapes and it was released the same year with a 12 page booklet, this release was called "Original Master Edition" and used the same HDCD and 24 bit technology as the 1999 remaster.

In October 2009, Fripp collaborated with musician and producer Steven Wilson to remix the original 8-track master recordings in a new stereo and 5.1 surround sound mix, released as the album's 40th Anniversary edition. The album was sold as three different packages: a two-CD set with the old and new stereo versions, a CD and DVD set with the new stereo and surround sound mixes, and a six-disc (5 CD/1 DVD) box with all mixes and bonus audio and video tracks.

In 2010, the original 1969 stereo mix was remastered and reissued on 200-gram super-heavyweight vinyl. This edition was cut by John Dent at Loud Mastering, it was approved by Robert Fripp and included a download code for a 320 kbps transfer of the original 1969 vinyl.

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In 2019, the album was remixed in 5.1 and stereo by Steven Wilson once again for a 50th anniversary box set of the album. Wilson commented that he thinks that his 2009 mixes are pretty good but that his 50th anniversary mixes are a significant improvement, more faithful to the original 1969 stereo mix and benefit of his 10 years of experience. The box set includes 3 CDs and a Blu-ray. The Blu-ray features the all-new 2019 stereo and 5.1 mixes encoded at 24/96 resolution, the 2004 "Original Master Edition" with the 1969 mix (also encoded at 24/96), a complete alternate version of the album comprising 2019 Steven Wilson mixes and 2019 instrumental mixes while the three CDs in the box set feature the new 2019 stereo mix, an expanded edition of the alternate album in the blu-ray and the "Original Master Edition" plus additional tracks.

Related to this you can see the release In the Court of the Crimson King - box set for additional related tracks from this era.

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