

● ROCK

INCUBUS

Monuments and Melodies

Epic

★★★

The greatest hits compilation is often a death knell for artists: A sign of withering fame, or a contractual obligation to get off a record label. But for Incubus, *Monuments and Melodies* is none of the above. Instead, it's a statement of strength — a logical stopgap before the next studio release. Besides hit singles, the two-disc, 26-song set includes two new tracks and a plethora of rarities and B-sides. Incubus staples like *Drive*, *Wish You Were Here*, *Megalomaniac* and *Anna Molly* are present, although *Monuments* ignores most of the band's heavier, funkier material that preceded the 1999 breakout album, *Make Yourself*.

Black Heart Inertia, the first single, is surprisingly straightforward musically, ditching much of the spacey, moody soundscape found in most of Incubus' best-known songs. This allows room for singer Brandon Boyd to exhibit his vocal range and songwriting abilities, and underrated guitarist Mike Einziger to let loose with a fiery solo.

Although the second disc is advertised as featuring "unreleased" material, much of it has been available on the group's DVDs, on iTunes, and in versions recorded live in concert. While most of these songs, including the folky title track, the dynamic *Look Alive* and the surprisingly faithful cover of Prince's *Let's Go Crazy* stand their ground against the hits, the out-of-place, half-rapped *Martini* and the uninteresting *While All The Vultures Feed* weigh down the otherwise strong compilation.

For Incubus fans wondering if *Monuments* is worth a purchase, the physical copy comes with a download code for access to hundreds of rare audio files, videos and photographs on the band's website. For newcomers to the group, the album provides an almost perfect retrospective for one of the most talented and musically compelling mainstream rock groups of the last 10 years.

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