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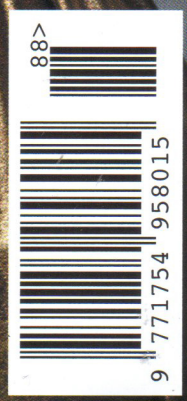
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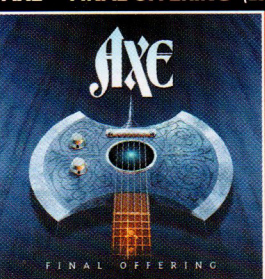
reach 'Ano

their new album is a 'Revelation'

vulnerable, yet aggressive
new album 'In The Raw'



AXE - 'FINAL OFFERING' (Escape) MELODIC ROCK



The first time I heard Axe was thirty-odd years ago and I've been a fan ever since. Like many of you, I thought we'd heard the last of them after they released their 'Live At Sweden Rock' CD/DVD in 2012, but now in my thankful hand is a brand-new album entitled 'Final Offering' and I haven't stopped smiling since.

Main-man Bobby Barth called upon old friends and new to participate in the recording sessions, and the result is a pure old-school Hard/Melodic Rock release that anyone of the older persuasion will lap up with glee. You youngsters should also take heed because Barth and his cohorts have recorded a stonkingly good album where not one melody is lost, overplayed or overused, and this makes for a wonderful listening experience every time you play this record.

Opener 'Born To Lose' is pure Axe and you could put this track on any of their albums and it would be a perfect fit. From there we get a masterclass in how to write and perform Melodic Rock music. 'Bad Romance', 'Fire And Stone', 'Make A Dream', 'Where Will You Run To' and 'Money' are all classy slices of Melodic Rock that show just what great song-writing is all about; I guarantee you'll love them all!

However, my favourite tracks are the ones that detail the band's own stories. 'Old Scratch' is about the Devil coming to call on you (see interview for Barth's explanation), whilst 'Land Of Our Fathers' deals with the Native American people and the loss of their lands. My personal choice for the best song goes to the wonderfully emotional 'Road To Damascus', a slow-burning track which explores the idea that no matter what you try in life, maybe you're cursed to return to the same place that you started to repeat the things you've done before. The beautiful way the group tell this story is a delight to hear. Another cut with a deep lyrical meaning is the song entitled 'Ty Ochen' Kراسي Vaya' ('You Are So Beautiful') which tells of being smitten by love's arrow and not having that love reciprocated. Finally, there's the stunning 'Years Slip Away', a track about growing older in life and how it naturally comes to an end – this number is pure class.

This release absolutely needs to be purchased by anyone who reads this magazine – they don't make albums like this anymore.

Ian Johnson

they want, confusion whips a storm through the train they are riding together, and the lives of the brothers and their family all come into question. The story mainly takes place on The Frontier Mail train in 1934 India as it travels from Bombay to Peshawar.

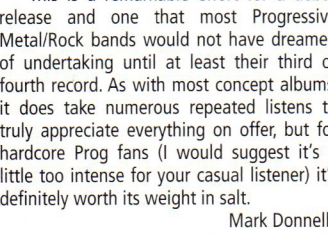
The account is quite involved so the singing of British vocalist Baker is perfect for the required narratives. The musicianship is of a high standard, and the release is peppered with influences from the likes of Dream Theater, Fates Warning, Iron Maiden and Genesis yet it is still very unique. I won't go through each song individually other than to state that the pace varies throughout in keeping with the sequence of events.

It begins with an impressive five-minute instrumental '400th Year' before the following eight tracks tell the complex saga; the lyric booklet is a staggering thirteen pages long! The opus concludes with 'Beyond The Old' which is a fourteen-minute epic (a necessity for any self-respecting Prog record).

This is a remarkable effort for a debut release and one that most Progressive Metal/Rock bands would not have dreamed of undertaking until at least their third or fourth record. As with most concept albums, it does take numerous repeated listens to truly appreciate everything on offer, but for hardcore Prog fans (I would suggest it's a little too intense for your casual listener) it's definitely worth its weight in salt.

Mark Donnelly

AVAGRACE - 'THE WITCHING HOURS' (Independent) MODERN/ALTERNATIVE



In 2019, Alternative Rock is as overcrowded as the London Underground during rush hour. More so, Metalcore is overflowing with bands like coffee pots in the ever-increasing number of high street coffee shops. If you're popping up in 2019, you've got to prove why you're worth listening to and why you're better than the dozen or more other groups bursting out of your hometown. For Kent's Alt-Rock-gone-Metalcore quintet AvaGrace, their debut album 'The Witching Hour' is where they plead their case for scene supremacy.

Whilst mid-noughties Metalcore veterans

BADHOVEN - 'ALL THE WORLD'S A FAKE' (ATS) MELODIC ROCK



Badhoven are an Austrian band that have been around since 2001. To date they have released six other long players and a live DVD. They have also been through a couple of personnel changes since they began and this album is the first to be recorded by the current (and third) version of the group. This opus has very Classic-inspired Melodic Rock sounds with obvious influences from

Underoath and Alexisonfire have both been bouncing off the ceilings of big-time comebacks, their contemporaries have lacked the muster to make the grade. AvaGrace pick up where the aforementioned acts left off initially; they clearly amp up the melodies, yet also kick open the pit with enormous riffs and a rhythm section that'll whip you up into shape through the pummelling bass lines and drum patterns.

Opener 'Misguided' is one of the finest songs I've heard in 2019 and it blasts out of the gate with a drum fill from Ashlee Green that'll burst some brain cells. The fret-work from Ben Goodey and Craig Matthews fires up the front line as vocalist Chris Horton punches you in the face with a chorus that would sound more at home in an arena than the various clubs they're currently playing in. Shape-shifting the track into a Metalcore-meets-Post-Hardcore blast of clean and scream vocals midway through the mix, this cut is an absolute anthem.

Unfortunately, it sets the bar so high that they miss the next nine jumps every time, even if some of them are narrow misses. It's not that the rest of the release is bad or even mediocre – in fact, it's a contender for Metalcore Album Of The Year – it's just that 'Misguided' is so damn good that the heavy-hitting 'Still In Motion Pt. II' and the jangly Alt-jam of 'Letters To Home' come off as middle-of-the-road when on any other record they'd have been all-out highlights.

'The Witching Hours' introduces us to a band who are simply filled to the brim with potential. If they do a little fine-tuning here and there, AvaGrace could well be the leaders of British Metalcore's next wave.

Jack Press

BASTIAN PER - 'EPIC JOURNEY' (Independent) PROGRESSIVE



'Epic Journey' is totally derivative of many Progressive Metal bands and the genre in general, and I'm unashamed to say I totally love it! As there was no bio attached, I've had to rely on my best mate of the last twenty years "Inter Net" for some information. Bastian Per are the brainchild of Sebastián Prosperi, an Argentinian from Buenos Aires who plays lead guitar (awesomely well I might add) and also drums. The rest of the line-up is completed by Mariano Barreiro on vocals, Martin Sokol on bass and Gabriel Kohout on keyboards.

The guys haven't been together for that long, not that you can tell! 'Defying Sinergy' kicks off proceedings with a metallic riff, swirling keyboards and a fine vocal performance from Barreiro. He sounds uncannily like Dream Theater's James LaBrie and on the choruses any of the Threshold singers. 'Whispers In The Silence' begins slowly and develops into more of a Melodic Rock tune with soaring vocals, superb guitar work and excellent drumming from Prosperi, while 'Dream Paralysis' has haunting melodies, excellent keyboard work by Kohout and lovely harmonies; Prosperi also adds some great riffs!

Dawn Osborne

Whitesnake, Gotthard, Europe et al.

The opening title-track gets the album off to a very good start with a great groove and it immediately shows off what a fine vocalist they have in Kurt Christian. More catchy songs and driving rhythms follow, all of which include blisteringly good guitar solos from Mario Pohn and excellent background keyboards and harmonies from original member Gerhard Paar. Credit must also be given to the solid driving tempo throughout the recordings from Flo Verant on bass and Gerd Sojka on drums (and backing vocals).

Some of the standout tracks are 'All The World's A Fake', 'Let's Be United', 'Keep It On Rocking!' and 'Masters Of The Game'. The slower tracks are 'Feeling All Your Power' and 'Good Times', and both have a typical Whitesnake feel about them.

Elsewhere, 'The Power Of Love' could easily pass off as a Scorpions track, while 'How Will It Be' has been re-recorded; it first appeared on an album by Black Rose in 1996 before the band renamed themselves Badhoven. It has an obvious Joe Satriani influence as the introduction to it sounds almost the same as 'Flying In A Blue Dream', but it is a very good song all the same.

In summation, this is a very good release with many great tracks. If you like your Rock with a tinge of eighties and nineties influences, excellent vocals and great musicianship, then this is the album for you.

Paul Gregory

BAI BANG - 'BEST OF FOUR' (Lions Pride) HARD ROCK



Since the late eighties, Bai Bang have released eight studio albums and following a compilation in 2005, which cherry-picked from their first four records, this album does exactly the same thing for the latest four that came out between 2009 and 2017. As such, it's a great way to revisit their recent classics, or if you are new to the band, get a great "one-stop-shop" intro.

Hailing from Sweden and being of the Sunset Strip frame of mind, this group are all about having a good time and getting involved. Openers 'Everybody Everywhere' and 'Are You Ready, I'm Ready' are good examples of such crowd anthems. The band have something of the same bouncy "joie de vivre" as exhibited by other Scandinavian groups like Reckless Love.

This band love to play live and many of their songs reflect that; the likes of 'Rock It' and 'Hey Hey You' are classic catchy tunes. Yes, this stuff is super eighties, but I love it and many other people do just for that reason. Diddi Kastenholt (vocalist and original member of the group) wears these colours on his chest, proudly having been there, lived it and done it.

AOR influences drip from 'Livin' The Dream', 'Gonna Make it' and 'Come On', and if you like the early Bon Jovi attitude of living life to the full with everything being within reach for those who dare to try, then you'll like this aspirational, inspirational music. The 'Raise Your Hands' track is similar in ethos, but it's an original song and not a Bon Jovi cover.

The only ballad on the release, 'Only The Best Die Young', is a highly personal track to Kastenholt and is about the loss of his brother. Knowing this makes it a sad song to me, but it is also a celebration of a life which is kept positive by the expressed conviction that one day they will be reunited again and that his brother's spirit remains alive. The album closes with what I think is the band's best track – 'I Love The Things You Hate'. Along with 'Stop Messing Around' you just won't be able to avoid repeatedly singing this one.

If you are a fan of good-time, vintage-eighties Rock 'n' Roll, then look no further; Bai Bang can cater for pretty much all your needs.

Dawn Osborne

BALLS GONE WILD - 'HIGH ROLLER' (Metalville) HARD ROCK



If you've been feeling like the expected new Airbourne release is taking too long and AC/DC's mythical live return is way overdue, you may find comfort in the high-octane "Sleaze 'n' Roll" that German trio Balls Gone Wild dabble in. On their debut album, the turbo-rockers channel Airbourne and AC/DC with precision as they riff and booze their way through forty minutes of eighties-inspired Hard Rock.

The titular opener sets the tone by sounding so much like AC/DC that you'd be forgiven for assuming you're actually listening to the legendary group. 'High Roller' doesn't add anything new to the genre, but nor does it feel like a one-way ticket to nostalgia town. The pure Punk energy running through the veins of the borderline Thrash anthem 'No Way Out' feels as much like a nod to Motörhead as it does a testament to AC/DC, whereas the riff-and-roll of 'Heartbreaker' wouldn't feel out of place on a Dio record; it fits perfectly into that Arena Rock category.

Lead guitarist Tommy Voltage wields his axe like a weapon, the trigger cocked and the bullet ready to explode in your eardrums, as solos detonate left, right and centre. No solo feels out of place or over-extended; everything is as high-octane and as self-indulgent as it should be. 'Danger' spirals out of control with jangling zigzag riffs, whilst the bally 'MoFo' is built on a line Dave Mustaine would've been proud of in the late-eighties as it ignites a circle pit in your bedroom.

Much like the band's guitarist Voltage, vocalist Vince Van Roth and drummer Dommy Lee are "characters" in their own right, playing their own music in exactly the same way they like their eighties music – easy and sleazy. Van Roth's vocals are unique to the scene right now; they're powerful enough to channel his eighties idols, yet versatile enough to fit into the group's different shapes and sizes, from the Hard Rock hitters ('Balls Gone Wild') to the Thrashy-Punk moshers ('Flying High').

Whoever said Rock 'n' Roll belonged to the eighties should be running for their lives right now because Balls Gone Wild are in session and here to prove everyone wrong... one guitar solo at a time.

Jack Press

THUNDER - 'THE WITCHING HOURS' (Independent) MODERN/ALTERNATIVE



In 2019, Alternative Rock is as overcrowded as the London Underground during rush hour. More so, Metalcore is overflowing with bands like coffee pots in the ever-increasing number of high street coffee shops. If you're popping up in 2019, you've got to prove why you're worth listening to and why you're better than the dozen or more other groups bursting out of your hometown. For Kent's Alt-Rock-gone-Metalcore quintet AvaGrace, their debut album 'The Witching Hour' is where they plead their case for scene supremacy.

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