

## Prog Talk: Syzygy 3-CD Set Depicts Band's Expansive History

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Syzygy (siz'i jee): Any two related things, either alike or opposite.

It is also the moniker for one of the most inventive progressive rock bands on today's scene. While it may be an odd-ball, tongue-twister of a name, Syzygy suits the Cleveland, Ohio-based ensemble to a tee. Guitarist Carl Baldassarre, keyboardist Sam Giunta, drummer Paul Mihacevich and bassist Al Rolik have four distinct personalities, but as a group, the collective sum is greater than its separate parts.

Baldassarre and Giunta began their careers in a band called Abraxas. During the early '80s, they headlined at various major clubs throughout the Midwest such as Cleveland's Agora Ballroom. They developed a solid and reliable reputation as musician's musicians, with their distinctive reworking of popular songs. In 1983 Abraxas disbanded, leaving Baldassarre and Giunta to retool the lineup and move in a more progressive direction. They returned with a new name, Witsend, and a new lineup that included drummer Roman Zmudzinski and bassist Gary Prebie. Unfortunately, this aggregation was short-lived.

Enter neighbor Mihacevich, who auditioned for the band and got the gig from eavesdropping on previous rehearsal sessions. Operating as a trio, Witsend recorded their first full-length indie release, *Cosmos and Chaos*, in 1993. Giunta texturized the arrangements on keyboard by covering bass parts with his left hand until former Abraxas bandmate Rolik returned as the band's recording bassist. Rolik served as a guest musician on Syzygy's second album, *The Allegory of Light*.

After the release of *The Allegory Of Light*, Witsend changed its name to Syzygy due to trademark conflicts. The ensuing years leading up to 2009 were consumed with writing and production for Syzygy's most ambitious project to date, *Realms of Eternity*. For this effort, they wanted to craft a



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fresh, edgier sound and actively sought a lead vocalist. After a long search, seasoned session vet and reliable sideman Mark Boals filled the void. Boals had an extensive resume that included stints with Ted Nugent, Savoy Brown, Yngwie Malmsteen, Uli Jon Roth and Erik Norlander. The band's instincts in hiring Boals were well founded as Realms Of Eternity proved to be a critical and commercial success. Its mix of highly complex contrapuntal writing with dazzling harmonies, catchy hooks and spiritually moving lyrics even caught the attention of legendary artists such as original Genesis guitarist Steve Hackett and Yes/Moody Blues keyboardist Patrick Moraz.

The group's latest disc, *A Glorious Disturbance*, is a three-disc CD/DVD package that contains nearly five hours of music and bonus features. Previous studio recordings are fully updated and, in some cases, rearranged for the stage. On DVD one, two shows are recorded in 5.1 Surround Sound: 2009's 3RP Festival in Burgettstown, Penn., and 2010's Day of Prog Festival in Bridgeville, Penn. There's the immediacy and rawness of rock intertwined with jazzy harmonies and symphonic textures for dynamic effect. Songs such as "Mount Ethereal" and "Darkfield" are broad and cinematic in scope. "Circadian Rhythm" utilizes acoustic folk and jazz flourishes while an epic like "The Sea" is almost Wagnerian in scale. DVD Two provides nearly 90 minutes of behind-the-scenes interviews with various band members, including Baldassarre and Giunta at the mixing console and classic footage of the band dating back 30 years. The third disc is an audio amalgam of live material from both concerts.

Whether you're a speculative consumer or faithful convert, *A Glorious Disturbance* is a comprehensive gateway to Syzygy's storied career.

—Eric Harabadian

