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Syzygy - A Glorious Disturbance

Musical Style: Progressive Rock

Record Label: FHL Records

Year Released: 2012

Tracks: 25

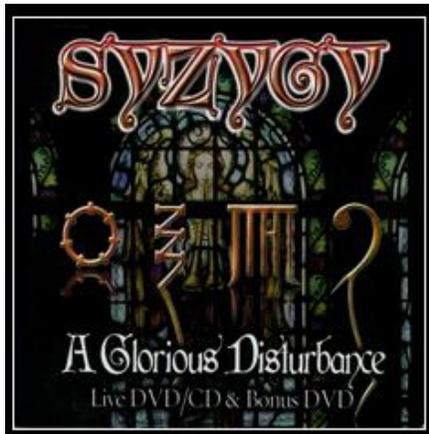
Running Time: 4:45

Produced By: Carl Baldassarre

Country Of Origin: USA

Artist Website: Syzygy

Rating: No Quote



After listening to A Glorious Disturbance, the late 2012 three disc live DVD/CD package from Ohio based Syzygy, we find it hard to believe progressive rock ever went out of fashion. Few bands within the genre have the presence that would allow them to put both the “progress” and “rock” into progressive rock in the same fashion as Syzygy. While some fall victim to unnecessarily lengthy songwriting, overindulgence in keyboards and protracted jam sessions, Syzygy stays true to the song with its emphasis on highly complex compositions that are also accessible and intelligently done at the same time. In other words Syzygy is not afraid to stay true to their progressive instincts but do so with tact and sound purpose in mind.

A Glorious Disturbance, released on the heels of the groups full length debut from 2003, Allegory Of Light, and 2009 follow-up effort Realms Of Eternity, breaks down into 2 DVDs and 1 CD. The first DVD, coming in at just under two hours, features live footage from Syzygy’s appearances at 2009’s Three Rivers Progressive Rock Festival and 2010’s A Day Of Prog Festival. The second contains over an hour and a half of special features, including an interview with guitarist Carl Baldassarre, in studio track by track breakdown of Realms Of Eternity and band roundtable in which both the past, present and future of Syzygy are discussed.

The CD, of which this review is primary based, encompasses over 70 minutes of music and 9 of the 10 songs from the two festival performances (with only the epic “The Sea” being excluded due to time constraints). Yes, that breaks down to roughly 8 minutes per song, but, again, Syzygy approaches the progressive genre with just the right combination of thought and technical leanings that would allow them to sidestep the pitfall of the overly predictable.

Consider ten minute pieces “The Coronation”, taking a heavier slant in approaching hard rock, “Darkfield”, slower and swarthy but weighty in feel, and “Dreams”, almost ethereal with its sublime aspects, as examples of the groups consummate songwriting skills. Twelve minute magnum opus “M.O.T.H.” and its creative keyboard flair represents another choice tracks as does “Mount Ethereal” from its over the top epic arrangements (sort of like Theocracy but minus the metal guitars).

When Syzygy moderates the length of its songwriting, quality fails to diminish. “Strange Loop II”, bringing a spirited, mirthful mentality, and “Circadian Rhythm”, penchant for the acoustic and keyboard driven, are in the four to six minute range, while “Beggar’s Tale” (also acoustic) comes in at just over

three. Give the group credit in this area for knowing when to change things up and deliver a piece on the more verse-chorus-verse side of things.

Syzygy can get instrumentally heavy but not to the point of losing your attention. Opening instrumental piece "Vanitas" deserves mention with its slower to faster to softer to heavier time signatures. Much of the lengthier material here also finds the group exploring its instrumental sound but with variety as its basis: Jazzy bass lines (Al Rolick proves quite the complementary player) and piano at a moment's notice can give way to fusion based guitars. Ethereal and symphonic based keyboards (courtesy of the skillful Sam Giunta) often trade off with roaring lead guitar passages (Carl Baldassarre proves quite the accomplished performer, as his soloing on "The Coronation" and "M.O.T.H." attests).

Helping tie everything together is vocalist Mark Boals. Yes, the same Mark Boals that fronted the most recent Joshua Perahia solo record Resurrection and whom I described (from the review) "as the best qualities to Ronnie James Dio, Robin Kyle Bassauri and Michael Sweet all thrown into a blender and combined into one". He maintains the same inspired performance here in proving not just an AOR and hard rock vocalist but an accomplished progressive one as well. First words that come to mind as a result are classy, professional and befitting.

The sound and picture quality to the live DVD is impeccable for both festival performances, albeit the A Day Of Prog show, in which the group headlined, turned out best with its use of added camera angles and large projection screen showing images and footage in the backdrop. Either way credit the directors for understanding the music to extent that would allow them to produce the most fitting camera angles, with the upshot being the capture of not only the cohesion behind a Syzygy live performance but the groups technical wizardry as well. There is something that is that much more moving to "seeing" a band in a live setting as opposed to just "hearing" and such is the case here.

It also cannot be understated the professional packaging, made up of a lavish cardboard gatefold box with beautiful colored artwork and foldout poster featuring lyrics on one side and a photo montage of the band on the other.

Lyrics, most often spiritually tinged but occasionally drawing upon medieval high fantasy themes, do a good job of reflecting the group's faith.

Track By Track

What better way to open a progressive rock live album than an instrumental track, which "Vanitas" aptly demonstrates in serving to showcase the multifarious Syzygy sound. Tempo changes are many, ranging from fusion based to shifts to a calmer direction carried by catchy guitar harmonies to others carried at a more uplifting and decisive tempo. All the while the band maintains its penchant for the jam band driven.

The first vocal piece, "Mount Ethereal", is a stunner. The song starts its first two minutes instrumentally to smoothly done keyboards and heavy rocking guitar riffs, decelerating slightly for its verses as pounding drums hold sway only to pick up tempo as an over the top catchy chorus is achieved. An almost epic affect that brings to mind Theocracy comes to the forefront in the process. Interestingly, the last three minutes represent a return to instrumental territory as jazzy piano and bass give way to fusion based guitar leads. Lyric snippet:

*From the Eastside of Mirkwood looms a towering site
Rising up from earth's crust turning day into night*

*I hear it calling me now, calling me home...
The chronicle of the ascent on Mount Ethereal*

*The daylight is waning
The snow drives and burns
You summon all courage
But the challenge returns*

*On this cruelest of nights
I question my dream
The journey is harder
Beyond all extremes*

"Circadian Rhythm" represents one of the albums shortest at "just under" four minutes. The song stands out with its mirthful melody, delectably joining a crisp acoustic guitar with generous but complementary keyboards. In the end a fitting "shorter" piece that segues to the lengthier material that ensues.

"Strange Loop II" takes the more up-tempo and combines it with a heavier rocking edge and understated melody (chorus is expertly but curtly done). It also maintains the instrumental based mentality, including an all-over-the-place two and a half minute jam session at the halfway point and another one closing out the final minute. Lyric snippet:

*Love and truth are intertwined
Similar in type and kind
Wherefore do the four winds blow?
Hence the source of wisdom flows*

*You and I have failed to see the light
To decide what's wrong and what is right?
Truth be told that there is an agreement on what's black or white*

*From a pluralistic creed
"What's good for you is good by me!"
Object-intellect are one; evermore and not undone!*

The quieter, laid back feel to "Dreams" impresses one of a semi-ballad. Piano, organ and keyboards hold sway over a slower tempo, interplaying with scintillating guitar harmonies and glossy backing vocals to establish a setting on the affluent side of things. A four and a half minute fusion filled instrumental jam session helps take the song past ten minutes. I cannot help but be reminded of Shadow Gallery.

The twists and turns to "Darkfield" are almost too numerous to describe. Essentially, the song opens ominously to a presence filled bass in the backdrop, slowly drifting forward until impetus picks up after three minutes as heavy rocking guitars kick in. The remaining eight minutes switch between a doirly

driven chorus and instrumental moments running the gamut from vibrant lead guitar to ethereal tinges reflecting a swarthy touch. This one sounds like something Neal Morse would put together. Lyric snippet:

*Here in the garden
Here in paradise*

*Why? Why do you tempt me?
Why? Aren't these just lies?*

*The spirit is willing
The body is weak
Up from the darkness
The gnashing of teeth*

*You want their soul?
You want their minds?
To you My wrath
I'll keep what's Mine*

"The Coronation", another lengthier piece (9:43), is a take on the Prodigal Son. The song fittingly proves one of the albums heaviest, with hard rocking guitars intertwined with profound keyboards to create a symphonic feel. Again, there is too much going on here to go into adequate detail, but imagine touches of Kansas or a rocked up AD (with Kerry Livgren jamming away either way) that combine to reflect touches of the stately. Being that guitar is the focus here, Baldassarre gets plenty opportunity to showcase his skills, ranging from fusion filled leads to more assertive soloing. Lyric snippet:

*From the depth God raised his soul,
Humbled though was he
Heading towards his father's home
Now on bended knee*

*Sincere was he
Sincere in deed
Heading towards his father's home*

*Now the son his father sees
Over-joyed he cries with ease
And the son said, "Father, now
I will earn my keep, I vow"*

After three songs combining for over a half hour of music, the three minute "Beggar's Tale" is a pleasing changeup. The song is acoustically driven its length, slow but delicate in upholding quite the pleasing melody. I can see Phil Keaggy doing something like this

The thirteen minute "M.O.T.H." brings things to their triumphant conclusion. There is a heavy keyboard slant here but merged with more than adequate rhythm guitar, particularly during the songs extended instrumental moments that are characterized by a plethora of jazzy (and at times very intense) lead

guitar. The songs strength, however, resides in its expertly done chorus giving rise to a dramatic (almost apocalyptic) feel. Fans of Affector will embrace this one. Lyric snippet:

*I'm the Master of the light of day
Helping all to see their way
From the earth a narrow view
Blades of grass are each of you*

*"I'm the Master of the House you live;
Come to me through seldom give
I am charged with thy rivers flow
Borne from hills thy mountains grow"*

Review by Andrew Rockwell

Track Listing: "Vanitas" (6:13), "Mount Ethereal" (7:57), "Circadian Rhythm" (3:46), "Strange Loop III" (6:39), "Dreams" (10:33), "Darkfield" (11:34), "The Coronation" (9:43), "Beggar's Tale" (3:03), "M.O.T.H." (12:59)

Musicians

Mark Boals - Lead Vocals

Carl Baldassarre - Guitars

Sam Giunta - Keyboards

Al Rolick - Bass

Paul Mihacevich - Drums & Percussion