

Artist/ Band: Syzygy
Title: A Glorious Disturbance
Label: FHL Records
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[Official Artist/ Band Link](#)



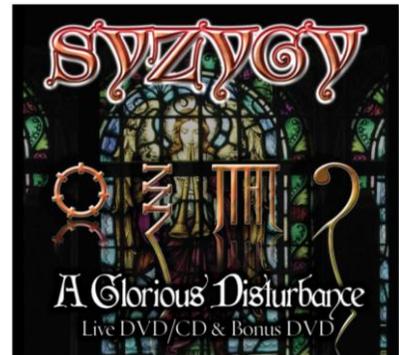
The Review:

Mamma Mia!!!
Talk about making a first impression!

Although the musicians in the Ohio based band Syzygy have been performing together in one incarnation or another for nearly three decades, their mammoth three-disc live concert package “A Glorious Disturbance” is my introduction to the group.

And what an introduction it is!

Three discs ... two DVDs and a CD ... with well over 5 hours of content, including the band's performance captured live August 9, 2009 at the “Three Rivers Progressive Rock Festival” in Burgettstown, Pennsylvania, and the August 14, 2010 “A Day of Prog Festival” in Bridgeville, Pennsylvania (where the band was headlined); a second DVD chock full of interviews, a roundtable discussion with members of the band, and an in-studio break-down of the making of the album “Realms Of Eternity” (an informative must-see for audiophile prog nuts and fellow musicians); as well as a 72 minute CD featuring select tracks from the two performances.



I haven't been this taken aback by so impressive a live concert package since the release of the three-platter live concerts from ELP (Welcome Back My Friends To The Show That Never Ends ... Ladies And Gentlemen, Emerson, Lake & Palmer) and YES (Yessongs) back in the mid-70s'.

The roots of Syzygy can be traced back to the cover band Abraxas and the burgeoning partnership between guitarist Carl Baldassarre and keyboardist Sam Giunta. Baldassarre and Giunta grew weary of playing cover songs and decided to re-direct their energy toward writing and recording original material. So by applying years of advanced music theory the pair set their sights on the progressive rock genre, composing a collection of songs with complex counterpoint arrangements and a good hook. And thus Witsend became

their outlet. The pair teamed up with drummer Paul Mihacevich and released the first and only Witsend album "Cosmos And Chaos" in 1993.

Soon after the release of the album the band found themselves in a legal dispute over the name Witsend and eventually settled on the difficult to pronounce Syzygy, securing the rights to the name to avoid future legal entanglements. Unfortunately that hasn't kept the name Syzygy from being used - by my count - by no less than six other bands. Which made researching Syzygy a little more difficult than I expected.

Between 1995 – 2004 a four-piece instrumental progressive metal band from Pert, Australia recorded under the name Syzygy releasing the album "Prominence" in 1997; performing under the moniker of Syzygy the electronic music duo of Dominic Glenn and Justin MacCay recorded for Rising High Records and Infonet Records in the 90s' releasing a cult album of hybrid techno/ambient electronica "Morohic Resonance"; going by the name Syzygy (2) the psytrance project of Johan Hellqvist, Jens Eriksson and Ola Eriksson (who appears on the Oresund Space Collective album I reviewed here a while back) were featured on a pair of electronica compilation albums: 2005's "Boldly Audio" on Sanaton Records which included the track "Zodiac", and the 2006 compilation "Capsule Presents Supersonic Treats From The City Of Birmingham" featuring their song "Tinted Windows"; the Japanese duo of Hitomi Shimizu and Hiromi Nishida simply added the letter 's' to the end on the name becoming Syzygys and recorded "Syzygys: Complete Studio Recordings" in 2003 on Tzadik Records; and there also appears to be a few other US artists performing under the name Syzygy – one an indie/rock cover band from Grand Haven, Michigan; the other an acoustic classic rock band from Wading River, New York. And to confuse the matter even more-so there is a classical chamber orchestra who call themselves Syzygy Ensemble.

With so many artists fixated on the name Syzygy it got me wondering what was the actual meaning of the word. And apparently the definition has as many different meanings as the number of bands employing the name. Syzygy can mean – a concept in the philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov to denote 'close union'; a term used by Carl Jung to mean 'a union of opposites'; the male-female pairing of the emanations known as aeons; in astronomy it denotes a straight line configuration of three celestial bodies; in mathematics it's a relation between the generators of a module; or it can be any one segment of an arm on a Crinoid – a marine animal that's been around since the age of the dinosaurs. Well if the name was meant to represent the band's musical philosophy ... then that meaning is as clear as mud.

But what's crystal clear is the music of Syzygy puts them head-and-shoulders above the fray, perching them atop a pedestal reserved for the giants in the field. Their exhilarating music is as complex and challenging as anything by Yes, ELP, King Crimson, and Gentle Giant, yet accessible to those outside prog circles with an affinity for the classic arena rock of Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, Styx, Kansas, Uriah Heep, Magnum, and Rush.

After their rollicking performance at the 2010 Day Of Prog the band returned to the stage for their encore and belted out spirited cover versions of UK's "Night After Night" and Deep Purple's "Burn". So I guess in one respect by performing together for several decades the band adheres to the 'close union' philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov as well as Carl Jung's contrasting 'union of opposites' by taking the complexities of progressive music and making it accessible to the masses.

It should be noted that along with the name change from Witsend to Syzygy came the inclusion of ex-Abraxas bass player Al Rolick to the fold. Now the band was complete.

Or was it?

Syzygy wasn't done yet. Refinements were still being made to the music even after two Syzygy studio albums were recorded and in the can. The acquisition of heavy metal vocalist Mark Boals provided the band with the unique opportunity to insert dynamic vocals into what was once instrumental tracks, giving the tunes a harder-edge – and something of a surprise to fans familiar with the original compositions. This change incorporated a strong element of Dream Theater, Queensryche, and Symphony X to the material.

Mark Boals has amassed an impressive list of credentials during the course of his career which include: three solo albums (“Ignition” – 1998, “Ring Of Fire” - 2000, and “Edge Of The World” - 2002), founded the band Ring Of Fire which produced four albums (“The Oracle” - 2001, “Burning Live In Tokyo” - 2002, “Dreamtower” - 2004, and “Lapse Of Reality” - 2004), as well as the project “Seven The Hard Way” in 2010 with guitarist Tony MacAlpine. Boals has appeared on dozens of albums from artists like Yngwie Malmsteen, Lana Lane, Erik Norlander, Ring Of Fire, Royal Hunt, Uli Jon Roth, Iron Mask, Billionaires Boys Club, Empire, Indigo Dying, The Codex, Holy Fire ... just to name a few.

With so much music to offer on the discs it still left me wanting more. It was heart-breaking to discover the tune “The Sea” which was an epic highlight of the DVD was omitted from the CD. Unfortunately the time factor limitations of CDs didn't allow for all 12 tracks on the DVD to be included. Also sorely missing is “Dialectic” a song discussed in great length during the studio sessions which does not appear on either the CD or DVD. But just listening to snippets of the tune as they were breaking it down in the studio got my juices flowing. Now I have to go out and buy “Realms Of Eternity”.

Besides, as tight and amazing as the band sounds in a live venue I'm curious to discover how the original studio album differs from their live performance. In the studio layers of subtle textures, overdubs, effects and audio magic can polish and enhance the product even more so. What little nuances am I missing from the original recordings?

To be perfectly frank, after spending an entire day watching and re-listening to “A Glorious Disturbance” I'll probably be digging into my wallet to buy their whole discography (“Cosmos And Chaos, “The Allegory Of Light” and “Realms Of Eternity”).

So count me in as a recent convert to the Church Of Syzygy.

This three-disc collection is sure to salivate the pallet of prog rock aficionados with an insatiable appetite for Yes, ELP, Genesis, King Crimson, Jethro Tull, Brand X, Gentle Giant, Deep Purple, Dream Theater, Symphony X, The Tangent, Transatlantic, The Flower Kings, RPWL, OSI, Spock's Beard, Queensryche, Ayreon and the countless others I may have missed that represent all the best that progressive rock has to offer.

“A Glorious Disturbance” is Highly Recommended and an essential addition to your music library!

Reviewed by Joseph Shingler
Spring 2013