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Squackett

A Life Within A Day

Review by Alison Henderson

If ever there was a perfect dream team then it would have to be the bassist with one of the legendary bands joining forces with the guitarist from another of the bands in the prog pantheon, namely Yes and Genesis. Whether either of the bands ever saw themselves as rivals back in the 70s when they were both in their pomp still remains to be seen. However, more than 30 years later, the coming together of Chris Squire and Steve Hackett has been one of prog's worst kept secrets through countless hints being dropped over the past two years about this joint project, only adding to the palpable sense of expectation.

The two first came together when Squire invited Hackett to play on his Christmas *Swiss Choir* album five years ago. Following that, Hackett asked Squire to put down some bass lines for his two most recent albums and Squackett emerged as the side project which they worked on at their leisure. And the result is, well, it is definitely not a hybrid of Yes or Genesis. It is no *Tales from the Foxtrot* but their individual musical styles which defined the sound of their respective bands are there for all to hear. Coupled with that, all the songs are less than seven minutes long though at least two of them are mini-epics in their own right with the whole album lasting just over 46 minutes, which would be the length of two of their earlier masterpieces played back to back.

However, *A Life Within A Day* has a special life of its own as a superb demonstration of two superlative musicians playing together for the sheer joy of it all. There were no deadlines so they simply created songs together that capture the pleasure they obviously felt during their recording. On first listening, most of them may sound pretty straightforward but on closer inspection, you can hear the terrific depth in the way they have been developed which will be most apparent for those with a 5.1 system. Much of this is due to the thoughtful production by Roger King, Hackett's regular musical collaborator, who brings a freshness and clarity to the mix so that every note sounds sharp and each vocal harmony lush and lovely. King is also credited as a co-writer on all nine songs, with the musical line-up completed by Jeremy Stacey on drums and Amanda Lehmann, another member of Hackett's excellent band (and his sister-in-law) on backing vocals. What hits you most of all is how the songs seem to incorporate a variety of styles including Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young harmonies, AOR, metal and West Coast-inspired melodies that melt in your mind. If ever there was an album with which to celebrate summer then look no further than *A Life Within A Day*. Some purists might find it too lightweight and far removed from their more traditional bodies of work. But that is to totally miss the point. This album comes as a complete breath of fresh air and a more uplifting, life-affirming album to enjoy will be very hard to find this year.

Track by Track Review

A Life Within A Day

The title track, "A Life Within A Day" just grabs you the moment it starts as a shimmering waterfall keyboard intro gives way to a mighty guitar motif and then it is a full-on Led Zeppelin "Kashmir" riff which drives the motor of this kaleidoscopic juggernaut, twisting and turning as it does through jazzy passes and orchestral flurries. Squire's bass rumbles and Hackett's guitar blazes to wondrous effect. With its dazzling lyrical imagery and panoply of prog sonics, the song lives up its name and sets the bar incredibly high for the rest of the album.

Tall Ships

Then it is straight into the majestic "Tall Ships" with Hackett's glorious acoustic guitar making way for Squire's growling bass and Jeremy Stacey's metronome drums, followed by King's shimmering keys. Hackett recommends

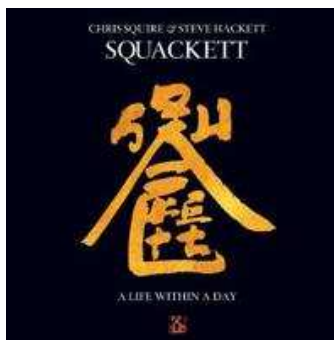
that this song is best listened to in 5.1 and it is easy to hear why. Multi-textures and orchestral tones swirl deep down in the mix. You can detect a hint of "Heart of the Sunrise" in Squire's bass-line and the silky vocal harmonies of the chorus just make it all sail along with effortless grace and ease. It is the nearest anyone will ever get musically to conjuring up the feeling of being on a magnificent three mast ship in the Caribbean in summer.

Divided Self

This is an uptempo poppy number which put me in mind of Nick Lowe's "Cruel To Be Kind" with Squire leading off on vocals and Hackett's guitar adding a jangling melody line. There is a touch of Yes in the delivery of the chorus hook and Hackett adds a solo which somehow manages to combine warmth with a real edge. After some vocal jiggery-pokery, it suddenly ends with a touch of eccentricity through a fairground organ piping away.

Aliens

The first real Yes theme is explored in "Aliens," a cut that Squire once performed with Oliver Wakeman during one of Yes' sets. This acoustically driven song with orchestral background emits a really dreamy quality. Squire is on top of his game vocally leading some creamy harmonies explaining why aliens are only us from the future and how one day we will all have passports to the sun.



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Sea Of Smiles

There is a pervading air of nostalgia to "Sea Of Smiles," the first single from the album, which has bells, percussion, a sonorous bass and the tightest sweetest harmonies. The combination of all of those together gives off almost a hippie vibe. It keeps its shape and restraint enough for Hackett to deliver a gorgeous guitar flourish, while several other musical conversations take place elsewhere.

The Summer Backwards

This comes out of the same top drawer as Hackett's "The Serpentine Song." All the same elements are there with the strong harmonies, an achingly lovely melody and a choral backdrop giving it a psychedelic twist. This is what summer listening is all about.

Stormchaser

But just proving that the boys can still kick, "Stormchaser" is a real blast of metal with Stacey's John Bonham-like beat followed by crashing guitars and dirty bass, that blazes along in a metal haze with some interesting programming effects from King, pared down vocals from Hackett and a very catchy chorus line in which Lehmann's voice offer up a delicate lightness to this out and out rocker. Think of Hackett's "Still Waters" with a hefty wedge of Zeppelin thrown in.

Can't Stop The Rain

And so we come to perhaps the most beautifully ambiguous track on the album, the astonishing "Can't Stop the Rain" with Squire on lead vocals. It is a rite of passage song about growing up and taking the knocks which life hands out occasionally. It does have the hallmark of an easy listening classic along the lines of Burt Bacharach (would you believe?), and if they were to put out another single, it would have to be this one because it would reach a much wider audience with its commercial appeal.

Perfect Love Song

As it builds to a huge climactic end with swelling guitar, it segues seamlessly into "Perfect Love Song." Again, the melody line here is emotionally charged and once more, the voices blend perfectly. It is as though they have been doing it all their musical lives. Hackett delivers yet another searing guitar solo which shows his power of musical self-expression carries on undiminished bringing the album to a close on an unassailably high note.

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