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801: Live

Phil Manzanera has been busy lately. Way back in the 70s when Roxy Music were on hiatus, Manzanera got together with some friends and formed the band 801. A series of concerts were performed which leads us to 2009. All of these nuggets have been remastered and have been repackaged with extensive liner notes and released on his own label Expression Records. My promo copy did not include liner notes.



For this concert the band's line-up included Bill MacCormick (bass, vocals), Brian Eno (vocals, synthesizer, guitar, tapes), Lloyd Watson (slide guitar, vocals), Francis Monkman (Fender Rhodes, clavinet), Simon Phillips (drums, rhythm box) and Phil Manzanera (guitar). This package consists of two CDs with the first recorded at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in September of 76 and the second recorded at Shepperton studios during rehearsals in August of the same year. The setlists are virtually identical with only a slight difference between them.

Of all the live records, see my reviews of *Latino*, *Manchester and Live @ Hull*, this is the best sounding recording and quite likely their most progressive. This may be the quintessential line-up and Eno really makes his mark with his understated synth play. There is a purveying moodiness and an experimental aura that is almost palpable. This is art rock/pop at its finest with obvious nods to Roxy Music and at times reminiscent of Bowie or the Talking Heads.

My personal favourites include the hard driving "Baby's On Fire" having the immediacy of punk rock but with a refined sensibility and the shimmering "Golden Hours" with its carnival-like motif, charming English vocals and heavy handed treatments from Eno.

Fans of The Kinks should appreciate a raucous rendition of the hard rock classic "You Really Got Me", one of the best versions I have heard. In a similar vein is the punkish "Third Uncle" with a starting bass line reminiscent of Floyd's "One Of These Days".

The 801 series should have broad fan appeal as the band pushes through these songs with a progressive flair and a melodic pop sense that will awaken your senses. Although this concert series boast similar sets I can see collectors lapping this stuff up. Highly recommended.