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Dead End Drive-In: Now Showing - Stryper

Written by Gaz E
Sunday, 24 March 2013 03:30

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Stryper - 'Live In Indonesia at the Java Rockin' Land' (MVD Visual)

On the eve of the release of Stryper's first album for new record label, Frontiers Records, news that it is just the first of three long players planned for (near) future release - two in 2013, one next year - proves just one thing; it is a good time to be a fan of the Soldiers Under Command.

That first album for Frontiers, 'Second Coming', features fourteen songs from the band's back catalogue re-recorded, primarily due to the fact that, some quarter of a century after dazzling '80s rock audiences with their yellow and black attack, the band's sound is heavier, vocalist Michael Sweet's voice somewhat lower, those classic songs given a metal makeover that drags them into the here and now, and certainly more representative of Stryper in 2013.

Want further proof? Then check out the band's 'Live In Indonesia at the Java Rockin' Land' DVD, finally given a UK release by MVD Visual.

Released Stateside last winter, the concert film showcases the modern version of Stryper, now fully blessed with original members after the re-recruitment of bass player Timothy Gaines in 2009, and it was the tour in support of that year's album, 'Murder By Pride', that found the band adding a hurried, and somewhat unexpected, show in Indonesia to their live schedule.

'Murder By Pride' featured just Michael Sweet and Oz Fox, with the bass parts played by Gaines' replacement Tracy Ferrie, the drums by Kenny Aronoff, but the original four members would be present for the tour in support of the album, a tour that would span 2009 and 2010 and fuse itself to a 25th anniversary celebration.

MVD Visual's region free NTSC disc is a bare bones disc with just an option to select separate tracks as an 'extra', but the concert footage, running a modest 69 minutes, is worth the price of admission alone. Oft ridiculed, the sight of Stryper, in this expertly-shot live footage, playing to a massive festival crowd can't help but warm the cockles of this viewer who remembers when they burst onto the scene in the mid-eighties.

Java Rockin' Land is a three day music festival held annually at Carnaval Beach, Ancol Dreamland, Jakarta. The event, held since 2009 (though cancelled in 2012), is the biggest of its kind in Southeast Asia and has, since its inception, hosted the likes of Third Eye Blind, The Vines, Smashing Pumpkins, Stereophonics, Wolfmother, Good Charlotte, Happy Mondays, The Cranberries and 30 Seconds To Mars. A scattering of legendary rock bands has also appeared, from Mr Big to Loudness to Helloween and, of course, in 2010, Messrs Sweet, Sweet, Fox and Gaines, collectively known as Stryper.

'Sing-Along Song' opens up the performance, the band, yellow minimal amongst the black leather, looking at ease on the huge stage in front of the, seriously, vast expanses of the crowd - a true sea of people, many of them mouthing every word of the classic song back at their heroes.

Playing in front of a massive



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video screen, this first evidence of modern Stryper live offered a few key points: Michael Sweet tackles much more lead guitar than you would imagine, lead guitarist Oz Fox tackles way more vocals than you would imagine (even if it does sound like a choir of angels are hiding behind the amps providing backing vocals at times), and visual timekeeper Robert Sweet shows his sex face with every beat of his kit, his heavily-lacquered fringe hardly moving for the entirety of the performance.



That opening song runs straight into 'Murder By Pride', the aforementioned title track of the then-new album, before Michael talks to the crowd of a time when the hair was bigger, the clothes tighter, thanking God that those days are gone; it's back to 1984 and the opening cut of the band's debut, 'The Yellow and Black Attack'. Warning the crowd that the band will stop playing if they don't sing the chorus back at them, Michael is true to his word, pausing the show for a piece of audience participation that is heavily choreographed yet all kinds of fun.

The set based on the band's back catalogue in chronological order, 'Soldiers Under Command' gets pilfered for 'The Rock That Makes Me Roll' and a great 'Reach Out'. A 'To Hell With The Devil' four-way follows, the humongous 'Calling On You' going straight into 'Free', the album's final song, 'More Than A Man', giving way to 'Honestly', Michael onstage alone with just a ghostly keyboard for company, the audience singing their hearts out in response to his every instruction.

The chronological order is away with the night as 'Open Your Eyes', the opening song of the 2005 album 'Reborn', tears out, a swirl of heavy guitar, then it's 'All For One' from 1990's 'Against The Law'. This is a 'To Hell With The Devil' heavy settlist though; 'The Way' closing the main set, 'Abyss/To Hell With The Devil' accompanying the band's return for the obligatory encore. An encore completed by the epic 'Soldiers Under Command', the song ushered in simply by Sweet's voice and an few thousand Southeast Asian backing vocalists.

Michael Sweet, human dog whistle at times in the '80s, has matured into a fantastic vocalist and frontman and it's little wonder that other bands, Boston and T&N for example, constantly vie for his services.

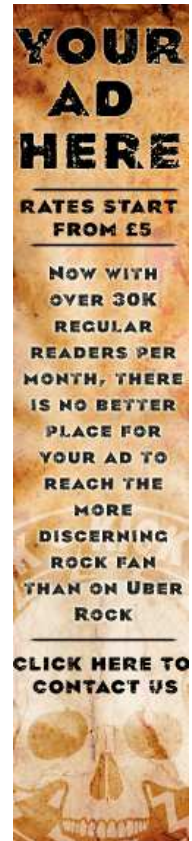
Stryper, troubled by splits and ridicule and controversy over sound and image changes over its career, is back...and with a real appetite it would seem. That new album's title, 'Second Coming', couldn't really be more apt because, with the bit between its collective teeth, you wouldn't bet against this band becoming one of the must-see veteran rock bands over the next couple of years.

Some bonus features would have made this DVD a must-purchase too; as it is, this release offers a way above average piece of concert film that certainly provides enough rock to make you roll.



www.stryper.com
www.mvvisual.com

[To pick up your copy of 'Stryper - Live At Java Rockin' Land \[DVD\]' - CLICK HERE](#)



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