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SBB: The Rock

OK, I must confess I haven't been a big fan of the 70s Polish giants SBB so I approached this release with some caution. Their origins as the Silesian Blues Band is now buried so deep as to be unrecognisable as they evolved through jazz-rock and psychedelia to instrumental fusion and their own brand of progressive rock. Since 1980 the band have split and reformed a few times with changes of drummer but always with bassist, keyboard player and writer Josef Skrzek and guitarist Apostolis Anthimos at their heart. Gabor Nemeth is the man with the sticks on this latest release coming 3 years after their celebrated return with *New Century*, which they showcased at Bajaprogram 2006.



The album features a mix of English and Polish vocals in the 9 songs which generally clock in the mid-range of 7 minutes or so. The shorter "Skala" signals a heavy intent on opening as dirty swirling guitar, grinding bass and organ introduce an Atomic Rooster (e.g. Death walks behind you) like vocal. Like a leviathan the trio rumble through the gears and finish on a wild guitar and organ flourish.

The second track couldn't be more different, with a cleaner guitar figure acting as lead for a plaintively emotional lyric. Verses are interspersed with sprightly organ and guitar duets. In the centre of the track the vocal turns to a sweet melody which reminds me slightly of a similar song on Colin Bass's *Outcast of the Islands* album. A beautiful soaring guitar solo follows over a rich Hammond layer. Harmonica, synth and atmospheric percussion introduce the next piece, the instrumental "In Heaven and Hell". The opening gradually resolves into a stern beat with fleeting guitar injections and distorted walking bass which picks up pace and density as it develops before dropping out to a moody repetition of the word "Heaven".

"Silence" is the first of three heavily accented English songs, this one a gentle pop ballad. "Sunny day" has a distorted weeping guitar covering a lugubrious vocal contradicting the song's happier sounding title. "My paradise" uses a synth melody to support another slow ballad, becoming more upbeat only at the rather menacing delivery of the chorus lines and in the wilder frenzy of the closing guitar solo. After this it was good to get back to Polish, the guttural nature of the language somehow being more in keeping with the band's musical style. However the pace is still stuck firmly in the andante area although "Pielgrzym" has something of a Middle Eastern flavour to it (I guess it means Pilgrim) and does grow in intensity as it develops with a neat synth/guitar duet appearing to drive the rhythm on from the midpoint. Nemeth's drumming here is particularly effective in controlling the flow. "Akri" is another of those plaintive laments accompanied by soaring guitar lines and organ textures which seems popular with the band. For me I'd like to hear more of the style of "Skala" which began the album.

A Hammond Organ motif starts the final track, switching suddenly to a plodding beat and a familiar theme which I can't quite place. This faster paced rhythm and blues style number is an enjoyable closer; the album as a whole is as good as anything they produced in the 70s in my opinion so if you loved them then, you should enjoy this. As for me I'm still unconvinced.

- Track Listing**
1. Skala
 2. Plonace Mysli
 3. In Heaven and Hell
 4. Silence
 5. Sunny day
 6. My paradise
 7. Pielgrzym
 8. Akri
 9. Zug a zene mendehohl

Added: January 26th 2008
Reviewer: Richard Barnes
Score: ★★★★★
Related Link: Metal Mind Productions
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