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reviews

Isotope - *Golden Section*

By [derek](#) · November 7, 2008 ·  · [commentellen](#)

[Cuneiform](#)

The British fusion outfit Isotope operates at peak collective power through this series of vintage air shots on this, their first release on an American imprint. Nominally fronted by guitarist Gary Boyle, the quartet also included Soft Machine bassist Hugh Hopper, drummer Nigel Morris and dentist cum keyboardist Laurence Scott. Their shared sound leans closer to rock than jazz with Boyle's quicksilver picking the flamboyant centerpiece. The disc's first six cuts cull from a Bremen gig in May of '75 with percussionist Aureo de Souza added for extra ensemble color. Copy on the obi-strip helpfully likens the group to electric-Miles, Mahavishnu and Weather Report and the signposts aren't idle boasts, particularly on the cuts with Souza.

Boyle fully embraces a Seventies guitar god compartment both visually and aurally, rocking a Marc Bolan mullet and polyester hip-huggers in a period photo and dipping heavily into a medley of effects on his axe. Frenzied arpeggios occupy the fore and aft sections of the Scott-scripted "Rangoon Creeper" exuding a blaze of flashing sparks. "Atilla" is similarly loaded with pyrotechnics and while Boyle's barrages are often thrilling and explosive, they also tip dangerously close to near-wankery depending upon one's tolerance level. Hopper slings his bass below the waist, tugging out ropy lines that frequently smudge with flanging fuzz. By comparison, Morris' drumming is clean and direct, shifting from creased pocket-play of "Crunch Cake" to looser rhythms for the expansive "Spanish Sun". The latter piece, co-penned with Boyle, features a slightly less florid side to the guitarist, but only slightly.

Two cuts from a New York gig a month earlier segue to a final five from a London gig the year prior. Hopper's influence is particularly strong in the second batch with delirium dialed down in favor of loping funk. As is common Cuneiform custom, the accompanying booklet is far from incidental and includes an illuminating interview with three out of four band mates. The anecdotes of opening for the likes of Humble Pie and Judas Priest and signing to Motown(!) are hilarious and Hopper's dry humor is in full bloom: "Eventually I became less interested in the direction the music was taking, so yet again I decided to leave. I always leave bands, anyway."

~ Derek Taylor



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