

Music DVD Review: Renaissance - *Song of Scheherazade (Renaissance Live)*



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Renaissance was a band who enjoyed a brief run of popularity in the late seventies playing a largely classical piano-based brand of symphonic rock. Although they never quite became Moody Blues huge, they did have a sizable enough cult following to earn them a run at New York's prestigious Carnegie Hall playing with the New York Philharmonic, which was captured on the recently reissued *Live At Carnegie Hall* album.

While Renaissance's sound was mostly piano-based, the band were all great musicians, and had a particularly amazing bassist in Jon Camp. But the true star of Renaissance was Annie Haslam, a stunning vocalist also rarely gifted with a five octave range.

I can still remember the first time I saw them covering them as a still underage music journalist during a performance at a Seattle nightclub. Standing roughly five feet away from the band, I was rather startled to actually feel the air vibrating in front of me as Annie Haslam sang. It was a truly amazing experience, as she hit notes so high that I've no doubt every dog in the neighborhood could hear them.

Song of Scheherazade captures two Renaissance performances from roughly the same time period -- one from 1976 and the other from 1979. While the music here is as amazing as I remember it, the DVD itself is far from perfect. The entire thing is shot in black and white and the often grainy visual quality also suffers due to its age.

Taking that into account, this DVD is far better than it really has any right to be. The sound, while not excellent by modern standards, is surprisingly good -- kind of like about what you'd expect from an upper tier bootleg from the same period. The camera angles also capture some pretty great stuff, particularly when they zero in on Camp's bass playing -- which thankfully they do fairly often.

Not that Renaissance were ever really that visual a band to begin with though. As a frontperson, Annie Haslam could never be mistaken for a dynamic performer in the Janis Joplin or Tina Turner mold. In fact, her onstage persona is a lot more like that of a New Age-y sort of fairy princess with her swirling movements and flowing dresses.

But even in glorious black and white, Annie Haslam sounds as amazing as I can remember, especially when hitting those impossibly high notes on songs like "Prologue," "Can You Understand," and "Song Of Scheherezade."

It's just too bad they didn't include her vocal tour de' force on the song "Ashes Are Burning" here. But to see exactly what I'm talking about, you can check out the video below (which is not from this DVD, but rather from a 1983 performance in Chicago).

For Renaissance fans, and for those who can overlook the visual quality here in favor of the historical significance, *Song of Scheherezade* is something of a must. For the curious, I'd point you toward the re-release of *Live At Carnegie Hall*.