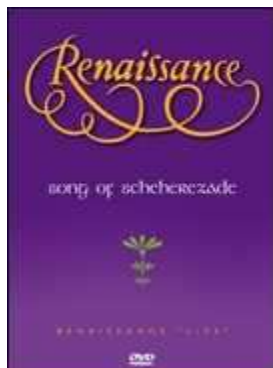



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Case Number 17016: Small Claims Court



Renaissance: Song Of Scheherazade

MVD Visual // 1976 // 125 Minutes // Not Rated
Reviewed by Judge Victor Valdivia // August 12th, 2009

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Judge Victor Valdivia's DVD reviews are like prog-rock: long-winded and pompous, but you can get high to them.

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Search:

Scales of Justice

Judgment: 70

Perp Profile

Studio: [MVD Visual](#)

Video Formats:

- Full Frame

Audio Formats:

- PCM 2.0 Stereo (English)

Subtitles:

- None

Running Time: 125 Minutes

Release Year: 1976

MPAA Rating: Not Rated

Genres:

- [Concerts and Musicals](#)
- [Performance](#)

Distinguishing Marks

- None

Accomplices

- [All-Music Guide: Renaissance](#)

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The Charge

Renaissance live!

The Case

In any musical movement there are always two tiers of artists. In the first tier are the ones that break new ground or become megastars, earning critical glory and sometimes selling out stadiums, if they're lucky. Then there are the second-tier artists, the also-rans. They release some music and earn a few devoted fans here and there, but are simply neither inventive nor popular enough to really matter much outside the movement's devoted fans. In the wave of prog-rock bands that emerged in the late '60s and early '70s in England, Renaissance simply has to be considered in the latter category. That's not a slam on their musicianship, which is solid, or their songwriting, which is decent. It's just that with one exception, Renaissance lacks a truly distinctive identity that would make more than another competent but unexceptional prog-band of the '70s.

Song of Scheherazade consists of two concerts. The first was recorded at the Capital Theater in Passaic, New Jersey, on May 21, 1976. Here is the

set list for that show:

- "Running Hard"
- "Ocean Gypsy"
- "Mother Russia"
- "Prologue"
- "Song of Scheherazade: Sultan/The Young Prince and Princess/The Festival"

The second was recorded at the Convention Hall in Asbury Park, New Jersey, on July 28, 1979. Here is the set list for that one:

- "Can You Understand"
- "Vultures Fly High"
- "Jekyll and Hyde"
- "Northern Lights"
- "Forever Changing"
- "Secret Mission"
- "Mother Russia"
- "A Song for All Seasons"
- "Flood at Lyons"

The one thing that Renaissance does have going for it is lead singer Annie Haslam. Her extraordinary voice is arguably the best of any of the prog singers of the era. Rich, powerful, and evocative, Haslam's voice makes even the weakest lyrics (of which there are several) work. Even better, Haslam is smart about how she uses her voice. She doesn't oversing but instead deploys her voice carefully, only going for the top when necessary. The relative success of Renaissance would give Haslam a devoted cult following which still persists to this day and after seeing this footage you'll understand why she's so beloved.

Haslam's vocals make this DVD of some value. Unfortunately, they're not enough to really recommend it outside of her fanbase. Renaissance is a competent enough band but their music isn't really that significant. Too often, it falls into standard '70s prog clichés. Bassist Jon Camp plays knotty intricate bass lines in the same vein as Yes' Chris Squire, keyboardist John Tout plays elaborate flowery arpeggios much like Rick Wakeman and Keith Emerson, and guitarist Michael Dunford plays in the same neo-classical style as Yes guitarist Steve Howe. None of the band's songs really stand out from typical '70s prog fodder; even by prog standards, they're generally lacking in truly outstanding or memorable melodies. "Forever Changing" is the best song here, and several others have moments of soaring grandeur and beauty, but mostly they're all pleasant but fairly indistinguishable. Even "Scheherazade," the group's intended magnum opus, is too long to sustain interest. Plus, like way too many acts of the pre-video '70s, Renaissance doesn't have an especially riveting live act. Without the rococo excesses of Yes, the testosterone-fueled aggression of Emerson, Lake, & Palmer, or the sophisticated musicianship of King Crimson, Renaissance really doesn't have much, apart from Haslam's remarkable voice, that makes the band noteworthy outside of prog circles.



Technically, this DVD isn't going to be easy to watch for most people, either. Like most concert footage in the '70s the two shows captured here were shot on black-and-white video, since back then only big-name superstars like Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones could afford to shoot on color film. The video looks its age—it's grainy, fuzzy, and murky, with not much detail visible. The packaging claims that the audio is in "simulated 5.1 surround sound," but whatever that means, it just sounds like garden-variety PCM stereo, and it's not particularly loud either. You'll have to really crank it up to make out the softer instruments. There are no extras.

Renaissance: Song of Scheherazade, then, isn't really essential for anyone outside of Renaissance's fans, and even they might struggle with the subpar technical quality. Renaissance is simply not in the same league as the big-name prog-acts they sometimes imitate, and this DVD helps prove why they never really caught on in the United States despite Annie Haslam's enormous talent. Anyone looking for a good representation of Renaissance's music would do better to look into the band's albums first.

The Verdict

Guilty of having extremely limited appeal.

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- [Sound And Motion: Volume 1](#)
- [Joni Mitchell: Refuge Of The Roads](#)
- [And Ya Don't Stop](#)

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