

Song of Scheherazade

Renaissance

[Cherry Red Records](#) - CRDVD174 (DVD)

Available from [Cherry Red Records](#).

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange

by **Mark S. Tucker**

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Believe it or not, this is the first-ever Renaissance DVD. The group is still an estimable prog landmark, issued 15 albums, went through all kinds of personnel changes -- even suffered the usual post-mortem knock-offs (Michael Dunford's Renaissance, Annie Haslam's Renaissance, and Renaissant, essentially a Terry Sullivan solo gig) -- and appeared on television numerous times but never enjoyed video or DVD documentation until now.

Therefore, you'd expect that we adulants would be happy to get **anything** at all, wouldn't you?...and you'd be 100% right. Any Renaissance is good Renaissance! This 2-hour delight was culled from two New Jersey concerts: the Capital Theatre appearance in 1976 and the Convention Hall appearance of 1979, both with the same line-up and both broadcast on TV. The liner makes the usual apologies about the age and quality of the material, but it also has what appears to be a rhetorical giveaway: "there contains some loss of technical quality compared to normal broadcast standards"—in other words, if I'm right, this was actually shot from a TV screen back in the day, not taken from any masters. The visual glitches indicate it (especially a short backlit interference where the photographer's head can be seen cast on the TV screen!), I'm betting on it, and, when you see the DVD, it makes perfect sense.

It also makes no damn difference, 'cause Renaissance fans worldwide will be overjoyed to have *Song of Scheherazade*, a great piece of history no matter how you slice it. I caught the group at the Coach House in San Juan Capistrano many years ago, and that gig was little different from this one. Renaissance was ever a class act. Take this as an indication: their only double LP, *Live at Carnegie Hall*, despite being almost a note-for-note take on songs from previous studio discs, hit the #55 spot in the American charts. Most progressive rock albums never came within spitting distance of the top 60.

Song reprises exactly what one would expect: the title song, *Ocean Gypsy*, *Mother Russia*, *A Song for All Seasons*, and many many others. As this was their prime period, every cut's a gem and the chance to see them do it all live is impossible to pass up, especially as Baby Boomers are reaching middle-age and, some, the first blushes of old age, with memory and reminiscence suddenly dear commodities. From Jon Tout's pristine opening piano solo right up to the very last note, every ounce of anticipation is amply repaid.

Annie Haslam is as beautiful as she ever was, singing like a lark, and the group as tight as it ever was. The northeast U.S. had always been the stronghold of their fan base, and this seems to have galvanized the band to outdo itself in Jersey, capturing an irresistible vibe and élan. Renaissance based in folk and madrigal modes but incorporated large segments of the classical canon and thus joined the progrock vanguard of the time ('69 to the late 70s), still standing alone, as none have taken the mode and run with it to this day. This makes the DVD even more valuable.

This is a set of concerts for relaxing into despite many vaulting passages, as the songs take a story-telling and novelistic tack, filled with imagery and spaciousness. Each player is a craftsman/woman and carefully sees to detail, tone, and atmosphere with consummate precision and taste. More than one viewer is going to find him- and herself floating back to the good ol' stoner days and post-Woodstock vibes, luxuriating in the hedonisms and carefree attitudes of the time, refreshing a second take on pleasures all too rare in these troubled times. As the medievalist aesthetic of the groups' work would indicate, you need to drink this mead until the cup is empty.

Track List:

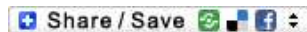
CAPITAL THEATRE / 1976

- Running Hard
- Ocean Gypsy
- Carpet of the Sun
- Mother Russia
- Prologue
- Song of Scheherazade: Sultan
- The Young Prince and Princess
- Te Festival

CONVENTION HALL / 1979

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

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