



Music for the New Year's Eve!

August 15, 2006

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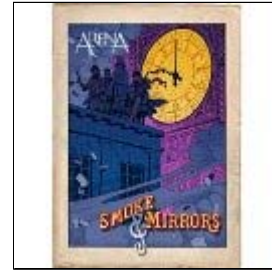
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### *Arena: Smoke & Mirrors (DVD)*

Celebrating the bands 10th Anniversary comes a wonderful concert film from Progressive Rock giants Arena. Filmed at a spacious theatre in front of an apparently sold-out crowd, the folks at Metal Mind Productions have given us another quality concert to enjoy. I have to admit going in that I hardly knew what to expect from Arena since I had never followed them before or had much exposure to their material in the ten years that they have existed. This made watching the DVD film



a little sketchy for me until it began and I found myself caught in some very interesting Progressive Rock music. As a long-time fan of old Marillion, I definitely caught some similarities in the style between Arena and the Fish years for Marillion. Singer Robert Snowden is a great front man with a voice that suits the material very well. He also has a couple of costume changes during the set which bring to mind influences of Gabriel and Fish from Progressive years past and help out with the overall effect of the bands music. The music is performed to perfection by John Mitchell (guitar), Clive Nolan (keyboards), Ian Salmon (bass) and Mick Pointer (drums). Readers who were up on the band as much as I was might also find it interesting to realize that drummer Pointer was one of the early members of Marillion. Overall the music is welcome to the fans of a semi-Progressive fan, it does not go off on tangents and break into too many directions for the average listener to follow but instead melds itself with some Hard Rock feels and uses the Prog influence to raise the musicianship up a notch. I had to stop the performance from running to return to a couple of songs that I was really enjoying with "The Hanging Tree", "Smoke And Mirrors" and Purgatory Road" being among them. This is a highly recommended DVD and thanks to the producers for a wonderful job of it. Sound wise, and visually, this is an outstanding production and is sure to convert or win over more people like myself who were unaware of the special nature of the group. More than a substantial amount of quality material is present on this to make that the case with ease.

**Bonus Features:** There is also six fan shot songs from a different show with all of them being represented on the main program of the DVD. It sounds pretty good considering the means it was obtained and I am generally very critical of this type of footage. A biography, discography and interview segment as well as web links and desktop images are also included.

#### **Song Listing**

1. Intro/Bedlam Fayre
2. A Crack In The Ice
3. Midas Visions

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- 3. Medusa Vision
- 4. Elea
- 5. The Hanging Tree
- 6. A State Of Grace
- 7. (Don't Forget To) Breathe
- 8. Smoke & Mirrors
- 9. Purgatory Road
- 10. Waiting For The Flood
- 11. Medusa
- 12. The Shattered Room
- 13. Chosen
- 14. Skin Game
- 15. Witch Hunt
- 16. Enemy Without
- 17. Solomon
- 18. Friday's Dream
- 19. Cry VII

**Added:** August 14th 2006  
**Reviewer:** Ken Pierce  
**Score:** ★★★★★  
**Related Link:** [Arena Website](#)  
**Hits:** 85  
**Language:** english

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### » SoT Staff Roundtable Reviews:

#### Arena: Smoke & Mirrors (DVD)

Posted by **Pete Pardo**, SoT Staff Writer on 2006-08-14 20:03:46

My Score: ★★★★★

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With a healthy dose of symphonic neo-prog, hard rock, and progressive metal, the UK's Arena have managed to celebrate 10 years as an active band, and the DVD *Smoke & Mirrors* is a great way to soak in all that is good about this majestic and powerful band. Filmed at a recent show in Poland in front of a sold out & enthusiastic crowd, Arena rip through many of their best tracks from throughout their career in what results in a stunning set. Singer Rob Sowden is really starting to get into his role as the frontman for the band, as his is employing more and more costume, wig, and hat changes throughout the set, adding a bit of theatricality to the bands live image. Of course, Arena is driven by the symphonic keyboards and Clive Nolan and the muscular yet emotional guitar work of John Mitchell, and the two don't dissappoint here one bit. Highlights include "The Hanging Tree", "A Crack in the Ice", "The Shattered Room", "Medusa", "Soloman", and the gem "Smoke & Mirrors". While some may miss the charismatic Jon Jowitt, current bassist Ian Salmon holds down the bottom end very well alongside long time drummer and former Marillion skinsman Mick Pointer.

Besides for the excellent performances here, there's a great moment where the audience sings happy birthday to the band in Polish, and you can tell the boys are genuinely moved as well as surprised. Not only does the DVD contain the full show, but also additional fan footage from a gig in Holland, interview, band biography, discography, and other assorted extras. A classy product, and a classy band.

#### Arena: Smoke & Mirrors (DVD)

Posted by **Greg Cummins**, SoT Staff Writer on 2006-08-03 16:52:28

My Score: ★★★★★

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Everyone's favourite Neo band right? Well maybe! When you rub shoulders with so many other similar bands whose attempts to impress you with their interpretation of how good music should sound, the inevitable comparison with their contemporaries becomes more than predictable. Arena has become hugely popular recently, due to their very strong song writing skills and their consistency with trying to break from the mould.

With each new release, one witnesses the evolutionary change that is brought about by any number of reasons, whether it is by personnel changes, technological improvements with their instruments or simply a maturation of their ideas. For this reason alone, many people applaud Arena for their willingness to attempt new and challenging ideas and to believe in everything they do.

Thankfully, then, this live DVD captures the band at their zenith both in terms of performance and song selection. While some are dismissive of this band, I am often impressed with their ability to capture the imagination of the listener and whisk you off to some far away destination and back again before you realise what has happened. Considering the members of Arena have been around for a very long time whether as members of this band or as a collaborative effort with other musicians, it goes without saying, the band never misses a beat. I have to admit I am often smitten by and admire the smoothness and cohesive nature the band manages to impart with their songs together with the fluent style and perfect note selection that guitarist, John Mitchell brings to the table. He is always a delight to listen to and is probably one of the reasons the band has managed to stay together for so long. Perhaps the audience also like what they hear and appreciate his consistency. When you include veterans like Clive Nolan on keyboards, Ian Salmon on bass, Mick Pointer on drums and youngster, Rob Sowden on vocal duties, you know you're in for a real treat. These guys are all supremely talented musicians and amongst the best within their field.

Metal Mind Productions have scored themselves and the band yet another winner here with this offering as it is so representative of what this band has managed to achieve during their long career together. Put this one down as a truly inspiring catalogue of some of the bands best music played in a truly delightful location and you'll appreciate the need to flash the plastic yet again to bathe in its bounteous offerings.



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