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Stryper

Greatest Hits - Live in Puerto Rico [DVD]

(MVD)
 US release date: 24 April 2007

by Dan MacIntosh

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For most folks outside the Christian music community, Stryper is one of two Christian artists they can quickly name, were there a gun to their head. The other lifesaver is Amy Grant. But to aurally needy believers starting for Christian heavy metal in the '80s, this Southern California outfit was a god-send.

This concert DVD finds Stryper reformed in 2004 and playing in front of a very appreciative Puerto Rican audience. Band members are obviously older, fatter, and more conservatively attired at this time in their lives, yet they don't sound all that different from how they did during their prime in the '80s. Michael Sweet can still hit the high notes; Oz Fox plays those same ripping guitar solos; Robert Sweet remains more of a pretty boy than a drummer; and Tim Gaines looks more like an accountant than a rock musician. But not a thread of Spandex this time.

Although Stryper strayed from the fold spiritually, even covering Earth, Wind & Fire's "Shining Star" as one play for secular rock success, this show finds the quartet closely adhering to its original evangelical roots. On screen, the band takes a few moments to throw Stryper-approved Bibles into the audience and Michael Sweet doesn't let this show end without first giving an altar call.

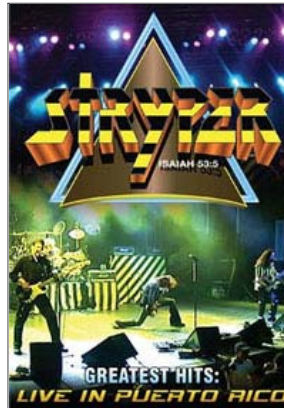
It is hardly worth going into great detail about Stryper's music. After all, this was/is more of a goofy concept than a legitimate rock act. But for long-haired Christians back in the day, "Soldiers under Command" was a sort of battle cry and "To Hell with the Devil" was the antidote to the Satanism they thought was rampant in hard rock music. But these songs stand the test of time about as well as most other glam-metal, which is to say, not very well. Heck, the group even had its own power ballad hit, "Honestly", a sing-along favorite included toward the end of this disc. The slow-ee features Brent Jeffers on keyboards, which sets it apart distinctly from the rest of the band's guitar-centric repertoire. Oh, and it's a tender love ballad – not a God-praise or Satan-put-down—as well.



Subtlety has never been one of Stryper's strong points. Song titles like "More Than a Man" and "The Way" are dead giveaways about the act's evangelical intentions. But unlike so many of the other Spinal Tap inspirations of its era, which never truly believed all the satanic stuff they sang about, Stryper is a group of true believers. Heck, they even toured with Motley Crue for what was dubbed the "Heaven 'N'

Hell" tour.

Putting all its cheesy faults aside, this show's opening song combination is



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still pretty cool. Sweet begins by singing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic", which feeds into "Sing along Song". This latter, nearly wordless tune is an effective way to open a concert. It gets the crowd into the mood right from the get-go, as it has a swaying rhythm. In Stryper's case, this tune is intended for spiritual warfare prep.

This DVD's strangest moment of all is concert-closer "Winter Wonderland". Why did a heavy metal band cover that Christmas standard in the first place? And why has it remained in the band's repertoire? This show was filmed in March, by no means the Christmas season, so its inclusion makes no sense.

This disc's bonus section reaches back for show clips from 1989, which is a whole lot closer to Stryper's beginnings. In addition to a Robert Sweet drum solo, as well as lone bass work from Gaines and guitar histrionics by Oz Fox, this segment finds the band performing "Keep The Fire Burning", "Always There For You", and "Rockin' The World"—all selections not found on the DVD's main portion.

If you're intrigued by this disc, say, just for its kitsch value, you may end up mildly amused by it. But if you want to re-live '80s heavy metal memories, catch the Van Halen reunion tour – assuming it ever happens – instead. On the other hand, if you are a balding, bulging, backslidden Christian, this package may just be the musical trick that reignites your faith.

Stryper - "Calling on You"

RATING: 1 2 3 4 **5** 6 7 8 9 10

— 20 June 2007

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