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The Michael Schenker Group: 30th Anniversary Concert

[MVD Visual](#) // 2010 // 104 Minutes // Not Rated
Reviewed by Judge Victor Valdivia // November 27th, 2010

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Scales of Justice

Judgment: 70

Perp ProfileStudio: [MVD Visual](#)**Video Formats:**

- 1.78:1 Anamorphic

Audio Formats:

- DTS 5.1 Surround (English)
- Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround (English)
- PCM 2.0 Stereo (English)

Subtitles:

- None

Running Time: 104 Minutes**Release Year:** 2010**MPAA Rating:** Not Rated**Genres:**

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

Distinguishing Marks

- Featurettes

Accomplices

- [Michael Schenker](#)

All Rise...

Judge Victor Valdivia can't distinguish his good ideas from his bad ones. Well, actually, all his ideas are pretty bad.

The Charge

One of the great moments of rock music.

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Michael Schenker is easily one of the most frustrating and bewildering musicians in hard rock. Starting off as the founding guitarist for the Scorpions, he made his most influential work with British hard rock titans UFO, with whom he recorded a string of remarkable albums in the '70s. His stripped-down, brutal riffs, and fleet-fingered solos virtually invented the New Wave of British Heavy Metal-style of bands like Iron Maiden. He was later cited as a crucial influence by such artists as Metallica and Def Leppard.

When Schenker left UFO and started his own band in 1980, however, fans who had thrilled to his previous work were shocked to discover a painful truth: as gifted as he is, Schenker is a poor judge of quality. In both UFO and the Scorpions, Schenker was surrounded by strong-willed and talented collaborators who helped shape his ideas into classic songs. In the **Michael Schenker Group**, however, his dictatorial style and inability to distinguish good ideas from bad ones resulted in albums that are, to put it gently, wildly uneven. Far too many MSG albums are filled with pedestrian arrangements and dated production that overshadow even Schenker's finest guitar work. It doesn't help that Schenker's main collaborators were journeyman singers like Gary Barden and Graham Bonnet, singers whose forgettable lyrics and generic voices aren't even in the same league as Schenker's guitar skills.

It would be nice to report that this DVD, filmed at Tokyo's Nakano Sun Plaza on Jan. 13, 2010, finally presents an opportunity to reassess Schenker's solo work. Sorry to say, it actually embodies all of the flaws that make MSG's music so maddening. Here is the set list:

- "Welcome Howl"
- "Armed and Ready"
- "Feels Like A Good Thing"
- "Cry For The Nations"
- "Let Sleeping Dogs Lie"
- "Victim of Illusion"
- "Are You Ready To Rock"
- "I Want You"
- "Night To Remember"
- "Into The Arena"
- "Lost Horizons"
- "Rock My Nights Away"
- "On And On"
- "Attack of the Mad Axeman"
- "Ride On My Way"
- "Rock Bottom"
- "Dance Lady Gypsy"
- "Doctor, Doctor"

The show was filmed to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the release of the first self-titled MSG album.

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Consequently, Schenker reunited three of the four musicians who played on the album, including Barden and drummer Simon Phillips. That proves to be a huge mistake. While Phillips is an able drummer who handles his parts well, Barden almost singlehandedly brings the show down. Never a particularly distinctive singer, he is so hoarse and out of breath that his first song, "Armed and Ready," is downright painful to listen to. For the rest of the concert, he relies on the old arena-rock trick of holding his microphone out towards the audience and asking *them* to sing verses and choruses, a gimmick that grows tiresome long before the concert is over. His desecration of the set's two UFO classics, "Doctor, Doctor" and "Rock Bottom," is especially risible. Coupled with his goofball lyrics on songs like "Rock My Nights Away" and "Attack of the Mad Axeman," Barden's vocals will leave most viewers too irritated to appreciate Schenker's playing.

Schenker makes another massive blunder in cluttering up the band's onstage sound with keyboardist/guitarist Wayne Findlay. Findlay's rhythm guitar lines are superfluous but even worse are his synthesizer parts, which regurgitate every dreadful '80s hair-metal cliché with gusto. Why couldn't Schenker have chosen a more stripped-down band with a better singer? Schenker's jaw-dropping solos and hard-hitting riffs prove that he's lost nothing in the last thirty years; if anything, his playing is so disciplined and focused that it's possible he may just now be hitting his peak. Why can't he pick better songs and more gifted collaborators who can push him to making smarter choices, the way somebody like UFO singer Phil Mogg did?

At least the DVD is technically superb. The concert was shot on DV and looks astounding, with pristine colors and no glitches or grain whatsoever. The sound mixes are also excellent. Both the surround mixes are equally loud and well-separated, making it possible to hear even the worst parts clearly. The extras are also good. The best is "The L.A. Rehearsal" (21:40), which compiles some rehearsal footage with interviews with the band members. In his interview, Schenker actually gives a remarkably lucid history of his entire career with refreshing frankness. Though the other musicians are much less illuminating, this is still worth seeing for Schenker's fans. The other featurette, "Backstage Impressions" (8:16), is a mildly diverting montage of backstage footage.

Nonetheless, it's hard to recommend **The 30th Anniversary Concert: Live in Tokyo** to anyone who isn't already a hardcore fan. Michael Schenker remains one of the most formidable guitarists in hard rock history but all this DVD confirms is that he is nowhere near as skilled a bandleader and songwriter as he is a musician. You'd be better served by tracking down a UFO anthology such as *The Best of UFO 1974-1983* or *The Essential UFO* to really understand just why Schenker is so revered. As it stands, this underwhelming DVD will make viewers think that Schenker is little more than a slightly more accomplished hair-metal guitarist—and that's a huge disservice to everybody.

The Verdict

Guilty of not doing justice to Michael Schenker's enormous talent.

You, The Jury...

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