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DVD Review

A Message Exclusive Look At New Music

Review by: **Joe Milliken**

The legendary jazz/rock ensemble Soft Machine was formed in Canterbury, England in 1966 by Robert Wyatt, Mike Ratledge, Kevin Ayers and Daavid Allen, and along with The Pink Floyd, pioneered the late 60's progressive-psychedelic movement of the time.

Although Soft Machine would obviously never obtain the fame and recognition Pink Floyd would receive, the band forged a unique sound and cult following that has endured for over 40 years.

The band would go through several lineup changes over the years, with the newest lineup created in 2004 and dubbed Soft Machine Legacy, which features four past members.

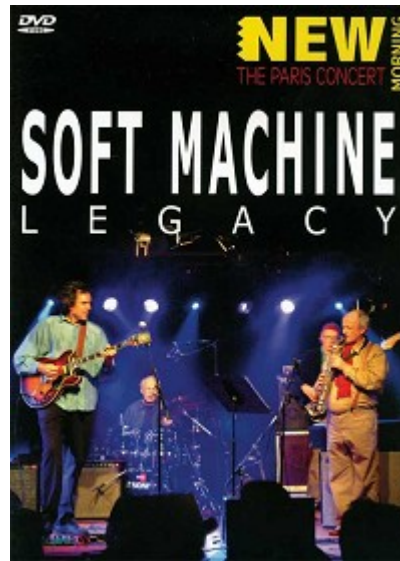
Unfortunately one of those originals, Elton Dean, (saxophone/piano) would pass away not too long after the recording of this concert.

New Morning-The Paris Concert documents the bands' 40th Year Jubilee Celebration performance on December 12, 2005 at the infamous New Morning Jazz Club in Paris. What's more, the recording seems to be a fitting tribute to the late Dean, who is not only prominent throughout the set, but also gives a 20-minute interview in the bonus features of the release.

As for the live material itself, four cameras captured this spectacular performance in Dolby Digital surround sound, with the band covering an assortment of material from both Soft Machine as well as each individuals' solo career, although longtime fans would have probably asked for a little more of the classic early 70's material featuring guitarist Allan Holdsworth be included.

What makes this release so unique is the fact that the band is made up of four musicians who all played in Soft Machine at one time or another, but never together at the same time.

The music is composed of Soft Machine themes along with the aforementioned selections from each members' solo efforts, with an emphasis



The Paris Concert



on improvised solos that turn the material into something familiar to the old fans, yet new and fresh simultaneously.

As individual soloists, these guys jam with reckless abandon and (to be blunt) rock harder than blokes half their age! (the youngest member playing onstage is 58 years young!)

The late Dean seems the most active during the set, bouncing between soprano and saxello (a cousin of the alto) saxophones and the Fender Rhodes, ripping off open-ended solos with fervent passion.

Bassist Hugh Hopper is the backbone of this unit, laying a solid foundation throughout the set that effectively ties everything together, while drummer John Marshall is both steady, yet versatile throughout the improvisational sections of the set.

However the most impressive performer (to this reviewer) has to be guitarist John Etheridge, whose versatility and virtuosity is simply astounding.

Because Ethridge was only in the band for a short period of time in the mid-to-late 70's and replacing a fan-favorite in Holdsworth, he is unfortunately often overlooked within the "legacy" of Soft Machine, which is a shame.

Ethridge demonstrates a fluid, jazzy style that incorporates a more risky, improvisational feel to the music, complete with an imaginative use of looping, effects and open-ended solos. His overall energy and distinct guitar clarity and tone is no doubt as inspirational, if not more so, to this lineup than any other element.

The Paris Concert certainly shows that at no matter what age, these veteran musicians have no problem being able to tap into the progressive-infused jazz of their youth to create something fresh and meaningful to their longtime-fans.

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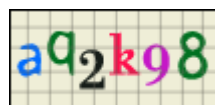
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