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REVIEW

Music DVD Review: Al Di Meola - *Speak A Volcano (Return to Electric Guitar)*

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When I first saw the advertisement for this DVD showing Al Di Meola playing the electric guitar, I just couldn't wait to get my hands on the thing. As much as I love Di Meola's acoustic guitar playing - he is certainly one of the world's best - it was the blazing electric jazz fusion of his early solo albums, as well as his work with Chick Corea's *Return To Forever*, that really made me a fan.

Up until now, Di Meola's only live music videos have been solely acoustic based. His two *Live At Montreux* releases, [1986/1993](#), and 1994, with Jean-Luc Ponty and Stanley Clarke, both brilliantly showcased some amazing acoustic guitar performances. But what about his legendary electric guitar output? *Speak A Volcano* is certainly a fitting title for a live Al Di Meola performance, because his playing can be that explosive. But the subtitle, *A Return To Electric Guitar*, is a tad misleading.

Speak A Volcano was recorded at Leverkusener Jazztage, Germany, in November 2006 and captures one of the world's greatest jazz fusion guitarists sounding stronger than ever thirty years after the release of his debut solo album *Land Of The Midnight Sun* in 1976. The guy looks like he hasn't aged in thirty years either. Dressed in black jeans, a long sleeve black tee shirt, and a head full of thick black hair, the 60 year old Di Meola looks fit enough to be playing left-wing for the Boston Bruins.

Di Meola takes the stage backed by a foursome of equally impressive musicians; Mario Parmisano (keyboards), Joel Taylor (drums), Mike Pope (bass), and his longtime companion Gumbi Ortiz on percussion. They begin the show with "San Marco" from Di Meola's brand new (at the time) *Consequence of Chaos* album. Di Meola is playing a gorgeous new, black and gold, tiger-striped Paul Reed Smith electric guitar, which allows him to expertly mix delicate world music passages with blazing jazz and rock riffs making this one of the best electric compositions he has done in years.

"San Marco" is very similar in style to the next song, "One Night Last June," which comes from one of my favorite mid-period Di Meola albums, 1991's *Kiss My Axe*. The band extends the song into an 11-minute epic jam that gives plenty of time to showcase each of their dazzling musical chops. So far, so good. Al Di Meola has definitely made a dazzling return to the electric guitar. Ah, but not so fast.

This is where I became a bit befuddled by this DVD's subtitle. Beginning with the third song of the set, "Azzura", Di Meola completely changes course as he takes a seat at the front of the stage with his black Ovation signature acoustic guitar and proceeds to lead the next eight songs in a row solely, with the exception of the second half of a drastically expanded "Red Moon", on the acoustic. This is what you call a return to electric guitar?

Now I am not saying that this part of the show wasn't outstanding. Di Meola's acoustic guitar performance was absolutely mesmerizing, as usual - but I was really jonesing for some more of that fiery electric fusion from the master of the genre.

It turns out that the focus of this performance was really on the acoustic side of his new *Consequence of Chaos* album, as well as a few songs from his forthcoming *Diabolic Inventions and Seduction for Solo Guitar* album, which were performed solo on classical guitar. That album was just released (at about the same time as this DVD), and all of the songs are based on the compositions of Argentinean tango composer Astor Piazzolla, as are many of his other songs here. The only somewhat dated acoustic song performed was the elegant "Rhapsody of Fire" from his 1987 album *Tirami Su*.

Have no fear, Di Meola does pick up the electric again to forcefully close out the set with *Consequence of Chaos's* superb "Tao," which gets extended to nearly twice it's album length. This is followed by the Chick Corea classic "Señor Mouse," which Di Meola first made his own on his legendary 1978 album *Casino* album, and reworked again for 2002's *Flesh On Flesh*. This one too gets the extended treatment as it is transformed into a stunning 12-minute jam, which makes these two performances worth the price of this DVD alone.

The later mentioned album also provides the evenings encore performance, the Piazzolla classic "Fugata," which takes you on a wild musical journey featuring everything from Fender Rhodes piano, a six-string bass and guitar duel between Pope and Di Meola, some

performances of each individual musician, with plenty of good close-ups, while also presenting the overall band performance as if you were right there in the crowd. Bonus features included an interview and a brief guitar lesson with Di Meola.

As I watched this DVD for the second time, I realized that it presents an excellent overview of Di Meola's many guitar styles, and actually turned out to be about a 50/50 split of acoustic and electric guitar playing when you add it all up. You get some of DiMeola's standard jazzy and Latin flavored acoustic playing, some solo classical guitar, and of course he does "return to electric guitar" in force.

I only wish that while he was there he would have dusted off a few more of those early classic electric tunes such as "Land Of The Midnight Sun," "Race With The Devil On A Spanish Highway," "Elegant Gypsy Suite," and "Midnight Tango."

Maybe next time around.

Set List

01. San Marco
02. One Night Last June
03. Azzura
04. Mi Longa Del Angel
05. Rhapsody of Fire
06. Hypnose
07. Red Moon
08. Tena De Maria
09. Tangata
10. Double Concerto
11. Tao
12. Señor Mouse
13. Fugata

Ratings:

Performance 8/10

Production 10/10

Comments

