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MSG (Michael Schenker Group) - In The Midst Of Beauty (2008)



MSG - In The Midst Of Beauty (2008, Inakustik Records)

1. City Lights
2. Competition
3. I Want You
4. End Of The Line
5. Summerdays
6. A Night To Remember
7. Wings Of Emotion
8. Come Closer
9. The Cross Of Crosses
10. Na Na
11. I Am The One
12. Ride On My Way

Band Lineup:

Michael Schenker - Guitars

Gary Barden - Vocals

Don Airey - Keyboards, B3 Organ

Neil Murray - Bass

Simon Phillips - Drums

Produced by: Michael Schenker, Romi Schickle, Siggi Schwarz

Total Time = 49:41

[Michael Schenker official website](#)

[Michael Schenker MySpace page](#)

[In-Akustik Records](#)

Michael Schenker is a guitar legend who's creativity is unbound.....when he allows himself to be creative. Despite all of the substance abuse and organizational problems, Schenker continues his career with the Michael Schenker Group. In 2006, Michael released TALES OF ROCK 'N' ROLL: 25 YEARS CELEBRATION, an album that comprised of 19 songs and featured every MSG vocalist on at least one song. Original MSG vocalist Gary Barden took part in the project, singing on the excellent 'Life Vacation', and that collaboration between himself and the Mad Axeman turned into a reunion of the two men for the latest MSG offering.....IN THE MIDST OF BEAUTY.

In addition to Gary Barden and Michael Schenker, original MSG keyboardist Don Airey (Deep Purple) and drummer Simon Phillips (Toto) re-join the fold to add stability and quality musicianship to the band. The only missing original member is bassist Mo Foster but his absence is no big deal because former Whitesnake and Black Sabbath bassist Neil Murray fills the slot nicely. With the lineup set with strong musicians, and personalities, Michael Schenker has a new found creativity and drive.

If there were any questions or doubts then the album's opener, 'City Lights', dispells them quickly. Schenker immediately turns a classic Hard Rock riff that blends into the song with Airey playing just over the top of the guitar, the Murray/Phillips rhythm section keeping solid time, and Barden providing a silky smooth vocal. Michael lets loose on this uptempo rocker with searing solos weaving in and out of the main riff while everyone remains rooted to the song. The thing I notice right away is that this sounds like a true band, the chemistry is obviously there. Another serious Schenker riff powers the faster 'Competition' with more expert soloing but retaining a sense of melody to hook the listener in. I really enjoy the organ flourishes that follow the chorus, Don Airey is a master on the keys and he just adds to the overall sound. 'I Want You' keeps the momentum high with it's equally fast pace (listen for Murray & Phillips driving this track) and exotic guitar tone that reminds me of Ritchie Blackmore. Schenker really shines at the solo but it's his ability to make the main riff a solo and vary it throughout the song that shows his genius. More hard rockin' comes with one of my favorites 'End Of The Line'. Every song is a Schenker showcase but there is something about this main riff that just stays in my head. Gary Barden starts to branch out a little with his vocals. So far he has been mostly in a calm low to mid-range but there are lines in 'End Of The Line' where he gets a bit higher, not for long mind you, but he does add some variety. Listen for Don Airey's piano as it mirrors the vocal.

Michael is known the world over as a premier Rock guitarist but what is usually never mentioned is his acoustic work. 'Summerdays' opens with a nice acoustic intro that moves into a subdued electric power chord. Add the haunting keys and saddened vocals and this ballad sounds like it could have come from the MSG debut of ASSAULT ATTACK (1982). Even the solo is subdued but beautiful nonetheless, fitting into the somber tone but also being uplifting. 'A Night To Remember' is a UFO/Deep Purple/Rainbow flavored track probably due to the organ being right up front with the guitar in the mix. The song has a '70s heavy mid-tempo vibe to it that fits Barden's low-key approach. Schenker solos in and out of the main riff throughout the song proving his guitar hero status and lending that unique eccentricity to the song. 'Wings Of Emotion' skirts along the lines of mid-tempo and ballad and sounds very similar to Schenker's '70s heyday with UFO. No doubt that UFO singer Phil Mogg and Gary Barden share a similar low-key, bluesy style and mood making the song sound like Michael's previous band. There are a few Barden highs just like on 'End Of The Line' but he keeps an even sound for most of the track. 'Come Closer' speeds up some during the verses and solo but it slows come the chorus. This ebb and flow keep things interesting with another solid backing performance from Murray & Phillips (listen for some quick fills by Simon) and Airey continuing to use the organ to complement Michael's guitar.

Another favorite is 'The Cross Of Crosses', a Tony Martin-era Black Sabbath song title if I ever heard one! This has to be one of my favorites on the record because of Michael's soloing: it's powerful, passionate, and inspired. When he wants to work, Michael puts some of the most mind blowing guitar to tape. He just seems rejuvenated across the whole album but on 'The Cross Of Crosses' he sounds like he has transported back to the late '70s/early '80s and is channelling his former self. This song sounds very Euro-Metal without being true Heavy metal, more like a bluesed up hybrid with all the power

of the first three MSG records. 'Na Na' has some interesting parts and is catchy but the chorus bothers me, not my favorite song on the record. It does have a solid solo (just like every song on the album) and solid accompanying keyboards but Gary Barden shows off his higher register like a grittier David Coverdale on this year's GOOD TO BE BAD. 'Na Na' is uptempo but it does have that slow breakdown throughout the song to give it variety. 'I Am The One' is another solid melodic hard rocker that really hooks the listener in to the chorus with a solid vocal and some cool Schenker leads. That guitar in the chorus is so catchy that I prefer to whistle the guitar than sing the chorus! 'Ride On My Way' starts off with an inspired opening intro that features a melodic Schenker lead that weaves in and out of the song. Again, the pairing of Neil Murray and Simon Phillips provide a solid backbone while Don Airey complements the sound with a subdued organ. The vocals are very good from Gary Barden, who uses a higher register on the chorus but you can tell his comfort zone is that mid-range rasp. Uptempo and melodic, 'Ride On My Way' ends the album on a high note.

Bottom Line:

Despite all the personal and organizational problems that plagued him in 2006 and most of 2007, Michael Schenker has roared back to his classic form as one of Rock's premier talents. A solid supporting cast that is almost a full reunion of the original MSG lineup helps stabilize and complement the guitar heroics that make Michael the legend he is. I've had an advance copy for about two months and I have not stopped playing it, this album has received at least two spins a day! I kept delaying the review because I didn't want to spoil my enjoyment by picking it apart but the problem is that there isn't anything really bad about the album. Every song is well written, every band member's performance is solid, and the axe-work is pure classic Schenker. If I had to pick one small detail I didn't like it would have to be the simplistic chorus of 'Na Na'.....that's it. I have been somewhat disappointed with Schenker's last few albums, especially TALES OF ROCK 'N' ROLL and ARACHNOPHOBIAC (2003), but also all the cover albums and collaborations. I have always thought that a solid vocalist and lyricist bring out the best in Michael (Phil Mogg, Graham Bonnet, Klaus Meine, Robin McAuley) and Gary Barden continues the excellence that reminds of the first two MSG albums and pairs well with Schenker's innovative unique style. IN THE MIDST OF BEAUTY is one of my favorite albums of the year.

Favorite songs: 'City Lights', 'Competition', 'I Am The One', 'The Cross Of Crosses', 'Summerdays'.....actually, I like every song on the album.

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2 Responses to "MSG (Michael Schenker Group) - In The Midst Of Beauty (2008)"

1.  [Rob Rockitt](#) Says:
[June 13, 2008 at 9:12 am](#)

I agree with you this one. This is a return to form for MSG. Great stuff!

2.  [Bastian Bauer](#) Says:
[June 19, 2008 at 11:41 am](#)

Thanks for the review. I really like this album.

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