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In The Midst Of Beauty

The Michael Schenker Group



Guitar worshippers rejoice; The Michael Schenker Group is back! It's been a long tome since we heard from Schenker, he of UFO/Scorpions fame; he of the blistering guitar lead; he of MSG, a group with a rabid following and critical acclaim the world over. **In The Midst Of Beauty** is their latest, a 12-song release featuring Mr. Schenker, singer Gary Barden, drummer extraordinaire Simon Phillips, keyboardist Don Airey and bassist Neil Murray. It's 50 minutes of music you have come to love and expect from MSG, long on Schenker's sometimes intrusive guitar work, that straight-ahead driving beat, sustained organ playing, and powerful vocals we have come to know so well.

No surprises here, but then again do we need them with MSG back in form? Though I feel many of these tunes waste the talents of Simon Phillips (the beat is straight ahead, hardy ever wavering in style, never enough to showcase the drummer's talents), the band is tight as all hell. Barden sounds good, a little punk on the second tune, "Competition," nicely restrained on the ballad "Summerdays," and having fun on the last number, "This Time."

Elsewhere, we get hit with an old style cool beat in "Night to Remember" (Phillips' best performance for me), "Wings of Emotion," "Come Closer" and my personal favorite, "Nana," a light, hook-in-the-chorus kind of tune that may be a little unusual for MSG, but great nonetheless. **In The Midst Of Beauty** is listenable and fun but falls short of being great. I would have liked a little more variation of the usual Schenker thang, like when he gets into some nice mellow electric guitar work in the middle of "Summerdays." It might not be the same line-up when MSG hits the road, but it's nice to have them back in any form — doing what they do best by presenting rock and roll with a certified master guitarist playing over every conceivable open space known to man.

~ Ralph Greco, Jr.

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