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15. Doctor Doctor
16. Rock Bottom



Artist: Michael Schenker Group
Venue: Blender Theater (New York, NY)
Date: 6/24/2009
Opener:
Label: MVD Audio

Written By: Ken Pierce (copyright 2009) for PiercingMetal.com

For the scores of Michael Schenker Group fans in the USA it seems as though their prayers have been answered after absence of about five years, the influential axe slinger would again be doing some shows in the region. The last time that I caught him performing was back in 2004 at Mulcahy's in Long Island, and from there is seemed as though every return engagement would be fraught with mystery, question about whether or not it would take place and eventual cancellation. It became frustrating for the fans of the guitarist who had always stood by him over the years and wondered if the personal demons that seemed to be plaguing him and the tours would be something that they could take for much longer. Fortunately for everyone involved, the musician would get himself together once again and be able to deliver a solid album with "In The Midst Of Beauty". It was a CD that would reunite him with vocalist Gary Barden, who was the first singer for the Michael Schenker Group, and the guy who had sung on such classic albums as "Michael Schenker Group", "M.S.G." and the live effort "One Night At Budokan". Based on this reunion we had heard reports of the material being focused on the pairs earliest years together and there was not a Metal fan in the club tonight who had any arguments about it. The show would be at the Blender Theater or the Gramercy Theatre, whatever they are officially calling it these days and it would be a sold out show. That's good because it meant that about 650 fans were in the venue and that is one hell of a welcome back if you asked me. Here is how the night went down for those who might have missed out.

The earliest reports of the tour had mentioned that the bands lineup would be Chris Slade (drums), Chris Glen (bass) and Wayne Findlay (guitar/keyboards) but the initial delays in this run of gigs based on some visa issues found the two Chris's replaced by Rev Jones (bass) and Pete Holmes (drums). I didn't mind this since Jones is an absolutely sick bass player and very entertaining while Holmes on drums is nothing less than a kick ass skin basher. I mentioned it once before in an MSG show review that he was also a member of Black N Blue back in the eighties and still works with those guys from time to time. Having seen this very same lineup outside of the addition of Barden on vocals in the past I knew the MSG material was in excellent hands. While the guys had recorded this new CD together after so many years apart it was great to find that it was only touched upon and instead the majority of the material performed tonight would be the considered Schenker classics. This was a good thing considering many bands have been opting to deliver most of or complete presentations of their new material at their shows of late. Depending on which band it is, the practice has not always been well received – just ask Iron Maiden. I think that only three tunes were done from the album when it came down to it.

I had to say it was nice to find Schenker back on his game and believe me he sounded terrific tonight and even looked like a man recharged once again about doing the Rock Guitar God thing from my vantage point. The band was on fire but it was his guitar that was propelling every tune into the audience's faces without any question. I had enjoyed the other concerts I caught those few years ago, but a lot of that seemed like going through the motions while tonight it was like watching a man determined and driven to deliver his very best for the people who had always believed in his music and his talents. That is never a bad thing. Barden was doing pretty good as well, but I had to say that a couple of times I felt that he let the audience sing a little more than I would have liked to have happen. Perhaps some of the higher notes are escaping his register at this point and that is understandable given how long he has been at this game. It seemed as though only two songs would come from the new CD and the rest was all vintage and while Wayne Findlay continually switched between keyboards and guitar, bassist Rev Jones was doing a very visual bassist act for all to enjoy. Back up there on the drums, Holmes was keeping it all in check with some serious pounding.

As the night of musical treats rolled along we found the one and only Leslie West from Mountain walking onto the stage and for a few minutes he and Michael riffed off of one another each with a big smile on their face. The crowd was eating this up and the riffing led to the song "Goin' Down" which is a classic Blues track. Leslie sang this one and the band and Michael backed him up which was absolutely fantastic to experience. They would follow this tune with "Dance Lady Gypsy" and during this one the guys all came out with acoustic guitars and sporting cowboy hats. We would also find the bands guitar tech Ryan Seelbach joining in on the fun by coming out to play as well. The show was winding down by this point and Michael had still not done any UFO numbers which I found rather interesting. The other two times that I had caught him found that bands material interspaced all around the set. In

Concert Photos





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one sense I liked this as it made the show much more different than those other times. The first one he would deliver was the classic "Doctor, Doctor" and this had the whole crowd singing along with the band. There would be some extended guitar flair from Schenker who was sporting a smile quite a bit this evening before he closed out with the rousing "Rock Bottom". Everyone who was a guitar player in the crowd this evening was again awed at the prowess of their idol and I am sure that they played a little bit of classic MSG on their way home. I had to say that my own favorites tonight outside of the UFO stuff came via "On and On", "Armed and Ready" and "Into The Arena".

I had to say that this show felt a lot different for me and this might be based on Schenker's very visible clarity and focus once again. Musically I would have liked a little more UFO, but since that band is returning in October I can easily wait. It was great to see Barden up there with Michael and I hope the pair continues to work going forward for the sake of Heavy Rock. Let's hope some of these shows are captured on film for an eventual DVD release. As I got home I also decided to play a little MSG and was amused at the fact that almost 75% of the show was what fans will find on the "One Night At Budokan" live CD that was released back in 1981. If you compared the release against the set list tonight you would find nine of the twelve numbers and when you add the other UFO song, the guest star cover and the new material, you are left with what we had tonight. Welcome back Michael, you are a truly legendary player who many people love. Never forget that and we hope you return for a second leg of touring soon. I think if he comes back that he should do either B.B. King's or Irving Plaza to allow for a few more people to get themselves inside. Tonight's sellout crowd is a testimony to his popularity and the dedication of his fans. Nice work everyone.

Official Web Site: www.michaelschenkerhimself.com

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