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MICHAEL SCHENKER GROUP - IN THE MIDST OF BEAUTY (B+) in-akustik, 2008

12 tracks, RT: 49:39

MICHAEL SCHENKER GROUP - GIPSY LADY (B/B-) in-akustik, 2009

12 tracks, RT: 47:02

[<http://www.michaelschenkerhimself.com/>]

[<http://www.myspace.com/michaelschenkerhimself>]

[<http://www.myspace.com/bardenofmichaelschenker>]

[<http://www.a-minor-records.ch/>]

[<http://www.kidroom-music.de/>]

[<http://www.myspace.com/kidroommusicde>]

[<http://www.in-akustik.com/>]

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Don't ever try to predict Michael Schenker. He released a new MSG studio album last year (IN THE MIDST OF BEAUTY), canceled some tour dates, released a follow-up acoustic album (GIPSY LADY), and is now touring behind...the '08 release. Got all that? :) The great news is IN THE MIDST OF BEAUTY sees Schenker reteam with almost the entire original 1980 MSG lineup -- vocalist Gary Barden, keyboardist Don Airey, and drummer Simon Phillips, plus bassist Neil Murray instead of Mo Foster -- and it's great to hear these grizzled veterans rocking out. Airey adds some Deep Purple moments with his B3 (check out "I Want You," "A Night To Remember," and "Come Closer"), Barden's lower register had me thinking David Coverdale (especially in "Wings Of Emotion"), and of course Schenker's guitar playing is in fine form as always. You'll recognize a few riffs from the old days, and it's nice to hear an album kick off with four straight rockers. There's only one true ballad ("Summerdays"), and the rest are a mix of up- and mid-tempo numbers. Highlights include "Competition," "I Want You," the insanely silly/catchy "Na Na," "I Am The One," opener "City Lights," and "End Of The Line." Now fast-forward a year; Schenker and Barden are (thankfully!) still together, and have teamed up with percussionist Kai Luennemann and utility man Michael Voss (Silver, Mad Max, Casanova, Demon Drive; on guitar, bass, keyboards, orchestra arrangement, and backing vocals) for the all-acoustic GIPSY LADY. Schenker is no stranger to acoustic projects, having released NIGHTMARE with Robin McAuley back in '92, doing a series of acoustic instrumental solo discs called THANK YOU over the years, and including unplugged sets in his concerts. For the most part what's here is an expansion of the THANK YOU discs, but with vocals added (aside from the instrumentals "El Grande" and "The Journey"). There are no solo guitar tracks; each features a "full band" dynamic, and the addition of female backing vocals, strings, harmonica, piano, flute, and even a fiddle in a few places definitely spices up the works. Overall the disc is rather laidback and it's a bit of a grower. True, the catchy duo "Another Melody" and "Travelled So Far" jumps out at first, but to be honest, I really can't decide if the songs are good-catchy or goofy-catchy. But after repeat listens some other highlights began to emerge: "Dance Lady Gipsy," the groovin' "Fight For Freedom," "Starting Over," "Can't Live On Love Alone" (dig that tasty solo!), and closer "The Journey." It's great to see the Schenker/Barden pairing back in action, and producing good, diverse material. Long live MSG!

- Tim Wadzinski (tsw512@yahoo.com)

Detritus Rock/Metal e-zine

"Rock Hard With A Purpose"

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