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Michael Schenker Group - 30th Anniversary Concert review

Michael Schenker Group – 30th Anniversary Concert Live in Tokyo album review

Released on: Inakustik through MVD. Release Date: Available now.

Double CD set, DVD and Blue Ray available.



This **M.S.G.** release has been made available as a 2 CD set, DVD and Blue Ray, for those of you out there looking to check this out.

The last two or so years have been good for **Michael Schenker**, as he appears to have put a lot of his demons behind him, got himself in pretty good shape and by all accounts has been playing better than he has in years, literally!

2008's studio release *'In The Midst of Beauty'* reunited the man with the majority of the original line up that released the very first **Michael Schenker Group** album, back in 1980, minus **Mo Foster** on bass, but including **Gary Barden**, **Don Airey** and **Simon Phillips**, ably assisted on bass by **Neil Murray** (Ex-**Whitesnake**, etc).

To celebrate 30 years since Mr. Schenker started MSG - as it's best known - he talked Simon Phillips and Neil Murray to join Gary Barden, **Wayne Findlay** (Long time MSG member) and himself to return to the city that recorded his classic live album *'Live at Budokan'* and the guys stepped up to the invitation!

I must admit I was really looking forward to this release, for a very long time, as the shows took place back in January of this year and yet it's only just been released now (Late October.). Why so long, beats me, although maybe it's something to do with how Gary Barden sounds today ... We all get older I guess and many vocalists tend to struggle with maintaining their voices to a top level ... Anyway, on with the review!

The album starts with Schenker's, '*Welcome Howl!*' as it's titled here on the sleeve notes, with just him and some keyboards backing him, for an atmospheric start and then 'wallop!' Here's the band for '*Feels Like a Good Thing*' and Barden sounds OK, if a little strained, lacking here is stronger backing vocals, a point I noticed throughout listening. Schenker sounds great though and Simon Phillips and Murray are solid enough, keyboards fairly low in the mix though.

'*Cry For The Nations*' is next up and starts solid enough, although rhythm guitar sound pretty thin and Barden starts something that seems to trend throughout this live album and that is he backs off from singing most of the choruses, leaving it to the crowd, which fortunately works for him, as the crowd is clearly very happy to be here to see this line up.

Barden introduces next track as, '*You might remember this one, it's something about little woes!*' Hmm ... Woof, woof's perhaps?! '*Let Sleeping Dogs Lie*' is certainly good to hear again, although Barden's voice is up and down ... The keyboards big string sound, backs up Schenker's soloing well and Phillips and Murray are keeping thing solid enough too.

'*Armed and Ready*' comes next and musically sounds great and I don't know how Barden has been on other live dates, but he does sound like he's struggling some and yes, he has the audience take the lead on the first chorus and later chorus but Schenker adds some additional soloing which is great but – I'm guessing – Wayne Findlay's backing vocals are so low in the mix ... It's almost like ..., well why weren't they mixed in better?

It's really a great reminder of how good the songs were from that first MSG album and '*Victim of Illusion*' next is another fine example of that, sadly Barden's voice is weak again and it's like he feels he has to add extra screams to try and make it up.

'*Are You Ready To Rock*' next, starts with Schenkens riffing and clearly gets the crowds complete support, Barden's 'singing' on this track is perhaps at it's worst so far ... It's a real shame as I know he's older and it's tough to retain good vocals as the years go on, particularly with some of the songs demands from MSG and I can remember Barden playing some great shows back in the day. This sadly isn't one of those nights.

I really think they *shouldn't* have used this show for the live release, but as I mentioned before, I don't how Barden's voice was at other times during the tour. He gets the audience into a sing along midway through and then just as you think they're wrapping the song up, Simon Phillips gives us a drum solo. You go mate! Fairly short and sweet though, compared to what he'd do with *Toto*.

A track from the *'Midst of Beauty'* next in *'I Want You'* and I thought this should possibly work better for Barden as it's something he's done more recently and should be within his reach and for the most it's OK, but again when it comes to the chorus he reaches to the audience to sing it and as it's a newer song perhaps he was asking too much.

Schenker is on top form himself, soloing above and beyond the call of duty if you ask me!

Another newer song in *'A Night To Remember'* next and Barden sings it at a fairly pedestrian pace. Again it's OK and relatively safe for Barden it seems but he did sing it better on the album and the backing vocals sounded off at the one point they can be heard. Shame ...

OK, they really can't do any wrong with *'Into the Arena'* next, very well done lads!

Onto the second disc and it opens with *'Lost Horizons'* and the keyboards sound a little more emphasized during the verses and Barden perhaps a little more comfortable with this one. Murray's bass plays out well, midway through, keeping true to the original. Schenker's playing sounds like he's enjoying himself. Backing vocals towards the end, sound bad ...

I think perhaps one of my favourite Schenker tracks live is next one, *'Rock My Nights Away,'* it's just so upbeat and all encompassing. Great stuff and Barden doesn't sound too bad at all here. Fun track!

'On and On' next is another favourite live MSG track for me too and the keyboard intro here, probably throws a few people off.

Barden lets the audience take the choruses here too, overall not too bad at all.

Time for *'Attack of the Mad Axeman'* next and it's almost like Barden's voice has warmed up a bit perhaps, as the second half of this double live set is clearly better vocally than the first disc. What a great track this is and I've always loved how it takes off after the midsection of the song. Schenker does not hold back at all!

'Ride On My Way' is another one from the 'Midst of Beauty' release and it's OK, perhaps not one of the strongest tracks of that album, so perhaps a surprise choice for inclusion here ...

OK, no denying Schenker's history at all, certainly not with *UFO* and next up is the absolute classic *'Rock Bottom.'*

Barden again using the crowd as much as possible, even by singing one line of the verse, letting the audience sing the next and so on, but they are clearly lapping it up! Good stuff!

Odd choice for inclusion next with *'Dance Lady Gipsy'* from the *'Gipsy Lady'* album, maybe again kind of safe for Barden?!

Final number has to be *'Doctor, Doctor'* from *UFO* and the crowd goes absolutely nuts! I don't know if it's just me, but every time I've ever heard Barden sing this, it's almost like he doesn't take it seriously, just in how he presents it. Maybe it's just me?

The DVD isn't too bad either and you get the same tracks, obviously running straight through though. Again, Barden's short fallings are apparent, perhaps more so at times? There's the addition of interviews with each band member too with the DVD, so that's not too bad either.

It's a real shame that Barden's voice wasn't really up to it, that and the backing vocals being off here and there, otherwise this really could've been a 5 out of 5 review. Schenker's playing is great and the musicianship from the rest of the band is still very good indeed. It's just the vocals that are off from time to time. That to me is why it takes a hit in my final rating. That's a real shame

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Rating: 3.75 out of 5.

Michael Schenker official website, right here!

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