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Michael Schenker Group - Live in Tokyo: 30th Anniversary Japan Tour

Publisher: MVD Entertainment Group

Michael Schenker is nothing less than a flipping rock legend. I mean, how do you measure the guy's contribution after Scorpion, after the Flying V? He's just iconic, and it's no surprise to hear the audience lucky enough to witness his 30th Anniversary Japan Tour singing along on every number. In many cases, Schenker sings about 60% of each song and lets the fans sing the rest. There's a serious following worldwide behind metal, but the Japanese and a few other countries play a special role in keeping the music alive. Schenker proves that he's very much alive and kicking in this 2-CD collection of the Michael Schenker Group - Live in Tokyo, 30 years after they played to perhaps some of the same Japanese fans. Suffice it to say that if you like rocking guitar and heavy metal music, you owe it to yourself to check this one out. It's clear that Schenker and Barden have lost a lot in their voices, but this mostly adds charm. I have a theory that inflection and phrasing trumps vocal quality; just look at Billy Holiday's Lady in Satin album. Her voice was toasted, but she was still Lady Day and turned in some truly awesome renditions of well-worn tunes. Schenker works through material that is every bit of 30-years old with the enthusiasm of a much younger man, and with the guitar chops that most men simply don't achieve. It's inspirational and a serious boon to fans of classic metal and the Michael Schenker Group as an ensemble.



You young whipper-snappers will connect with the fact that the Schenker/Barden tune "Armed And Ready" was featured recently enough in Guitar Hero: Metallica, and another not featured here ("Assault Attack") made it into Brutal Legend. You have to be a music fan to really appreciate the lineup, but the record features three original members of the Michael Schenker Group, plus two awesome bonuses. Schenker and Gary Barden are the core, elder statesmen compared to Wayne Findlay who joined the band in the late '90s. Backing the three on bass is Neil Murray of Sabbath and Whitesnake, plus Simon Phillips on drums. Phillips is stylistically the odd-man here, but ironically becomes one of the hardest rocking elements in the group. Two CDs and eighteen songs makes for a seriously great compilation, especially considering how many of the group's early songs are here. Schenker has plenty of opportunity to really stretch out and showcase his technique, still impressive this many years later.

Live music is unbeatable, and if you can't make the event, recordings like this do a great job of making you feel as if you were there. The crowd's reaction at the first three chords of "Rock My Nights Away" is worth the price of admission alone. Schenker plays lots of call-and-response games with the crowd, and Barden does his fair share on the mic, which never gets old. You can tell this audience is loving the show, and Schenker responds with great, energetic playing. Sure, it seems at times like you've been beamed back to the '70s or '80s, but that's all part of the charm. Moody metal with screaming guitar licks, rasping voices, and tragically out-of-date (but authentic!) synth patches may not be for everyone. At the very least, Michael Schenker Group - Live in Tokyo is a great retrospective of the early days of metal music, which spawned tons of great bands. Bands like Sabbath made an impression on the youngsters who grew up to form later waves with bands like Sepultura, Pantera, and modern acts just now coming up on the scene. Unlike many reunion shows that have an aura of embarrassment, Schenker rocks out with his Flying V out.

-Fridtjof, GameVortex Communications AKA Matt Paddock

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