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## Michael Schenker - Temple of Rock

posted 22 Nov 2011 02:55 by Tony Gaskin

Review by Brian McGowan

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If he was ever away, one of rock's great survivors is certainly back.

In life as in art, Schenker's career seems to have been the backdrop for a series of dramatic personal events (and a bunch of great albums). He wears the "troubled artist" persona like a hero (or a pantomime villain, depending on your viewpoint).

And of such stuff legends are made.

Cue 'Temple Of Rock', a fanciful title – reinforced by the ironic artwork - playfully conferring Godlike status on the inhabitant.

And, in his favour, there's unquestionably a religious fervour to Schenker's unwavering devotion to old school rock and metal. He continues to pursue that awesome melodic moment when searching vocals, ringing guitars and inspired songwriting alchemise into rock music magic.

That said, recent albums, like the disappointing 'Gypsy Lady' seemed to be low points from which it would be hard to recover.

So, sensible chap that he is, he's sought help from all the right people.

Michael Voss is on vocals. Pete Way and Herman Rarebell are in the band. Support comes from Doogie White, Robin M Don Airey, Simon Phillips, Leslie West, Rudolph Schenker and on and on...

And so, from the clarion call of opener, the antiwar 'How Long', Schenker's star is once again on the ascendant.

No frills here, just the thrill of a driving riff and a melodic economy that stops short of minimalism, riding on the back of a sinuous hook.

Album standout, 'Hanging On', catches the band in full flight. It opens with a pulsing riff, a yearning, aching vocal and trill keyboards, all heightening the sense of anticipation. And when that breakout moment arrives, when the drums explode in underwater detonation and the song ignites, we can surmise that 'Temple Of Rock' might just be another landmark release for Schenker.

'Miss Claustrophobia' opens in a blur of fingers and a riff of a darker hue, perfectly matched to a Voss lyric that emphasises phobia's visceral emotional impact. Interesting that they should personify this anxiety disorder as female.

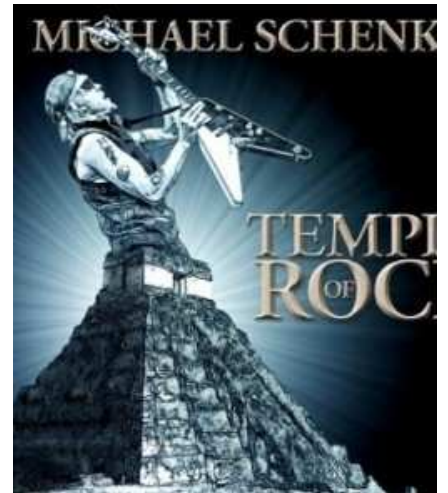
There are plenty more highpoints: the balladic 'With You' cuts against the prevailing grain. A romanticised love song wrapped in acid tongued axe work.

Doogie White handles vocals on the stabbing staccato clatter of 'Before The Devil Knows Your Dead'. More of a power metal piece, it is well served by White's grittier, edgier lead vocals, and 'Storming In' sounds exactly like its title. A blistering rock anthem with an urgent riff and measured lead axe work.

Elsewhere, party rock celebration, 'Saturday Night', and poprocker, 'Fallen Angel' are real throwbacks, emblematic of the time rock'n'roll era, when all you needed was a catchy hook and a positive attitude.

It's evident that Schenker has continued to polish his technique and perfect his craft over the years. Yes, the music is full of slashing riffs and joyful hooks, spilling over with power, vitality and colour, but there are no displays of virtuosity for its own sake. Every note is designed to fit, with none left over - Schenker's guitar expresses its emotional point without need for histrionics. Maybe he just needed Voss's professionalism as a writer and producer to anchor his ego and harness his talent.

'Temple Of Rock' may lack the punch and the presence of his signature material, but there's ample evidence here to suggest that Schenker's best years may not yet be behind him.



Fashions come and fashions go. Class never goes out of style.

8/10