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Railway Returns!

For some - make that lots - of you, "returns" may be a puzzling part of this title. Who the hell is Railway and where are they returning from? Well, if you weren't a Euro-metalhead from back in the 80s, then there's no reason you necessarily should have heard of them before. For those of you in this category, pretend this article is called "Meet Railway."

(To be fair, I hadn't heard of them before these Metal Mind/Roadrunner re-issues came to my attention.) What you get across the expanse of these three discs - the band's first three albums, "Railway," "II" and "Climax" - is a band that is trying to capture the dominant metal sound of that decade (rather than merely copycatting it).

While Railway doesn't jump out all 3D from the crowd of other acts at the time, Railway still sounds more like Railway than like an Insert-Name-Here bad, generic act. Trailblazing? No, not even for the era. But it isn't crap either. Not at all, in fact.

The touch of a Teutonic edge (just a touch) in this German band's metal and plenty o' heart get the energy cranking up pretty well. It's to Railway's credit that the band doesn't sound like Iron Maiden or Judas Priest or whatever other major 80s-style metal a second-tier act is apt to get compared to.

No, as I say, Railway sounds like Railway.

Hot guitars jamming out melodic but metallic hooks and a somewhat distinctive but not obnoxious (perils of the genre) vocalist - along with a rhythm section that can more than keep up - make these musical documents worth preserving.

I'm sure there are plenty of also-rans that have vanished from genre memory and which deserved to. Railway, however, is better than such a fate, and so, along comes Metal Mind and Roadrunner, by way of Music Video Distributors, reminding fan consciousness that there were, in fact, other good metal acts from that timeframe besides just Ozzy and Iron Maiden and Judas Priest.

The New Wave of British Heavy Metal hardly has a monopoly on Eurometal. Continental Europe has its contributors, too, and they include more than just luminaries such as Manowar and such.

Most metal die-hards have already consumed, repeatedly, those yummys and so now it's time to dig a little deeper and see what gems are floating around European metal history and to rescue those gems.

Railway has a sound with some personality and energy (and even a little brains, as well, with some not-too-surprising political sentiments - to be expected in the metal scene, maybe especially from that era), and the fact that they aren't ho-hum blah metal makes one not regret the efforts to bring forth these albums.

While it's true casual metal fans are more apt (and better served) to drink from the main stage well, more hardcore metal fans will be looking for something off the beaten path, perhaps.

Not that Railway is off the beaten path, sound wise. As I say, while not derivative, they still capture that classic heavy metal sound just fine. But they aren't the first name in the Rolodex if you go hunting around for a metal band to listen to.

This kind of metal has largely fallen out of favor, especially with the bad hair metal acts tarnishing the whole scene and modern listeners moving on to heavier fare, such as Lamb of God, Shadows Fall and Killswitch Engage (just to name a few) and older listeners sticking with tried-and-true classics.

So it's good to hear a metal band of this vintage and style that performs this metal subgenre with some panache and attitudinal grit.

Railway proves that there is good so-called "80s metal" and that it doesn't stop with the mainstreamers.

(Metal Mind/Roadrunner)

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Upchuck Undergrind listens to a little bit of a lot of things - just note the eclecticism of his reviews. He also reads voraciously and loves movies. He is a very open-minded Episcopalian (and student of Buddhism and Hinduism) who thinks Slayer is one of the greatest metal bands. Ever. In addition to his work with Corazine - for which he has written since its inception (he is a Fishcomcollective veteran) - he also writes for DJFix.com and B-Scared.com (his horror/exploitation review site).

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