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Solitude Aeter

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Solitude Aeternus: Hour of Despair

MVD/Metal Mind

I don't know how I missed these guys the first time around! What the fuck, man, their first album, *Into The Depths Of Sorrow* came out at about the same time I was coming close to openly weeping at Cathedral gigs and digging on Grief and Sorrow (bands, not moods, sorry, this ain't a diary). So what happened? I can only guess that Roadrunner did fuck all to support the album, as they were releasing a glut of records around that time, and a lot got buried. And unfortunately as well, too many utterly excellent doom bands were toiling away to indifference or disdain until a relatively purple patch a couple of years ago, thanks largely to labels like Southern Lord and bands like Queens of the Stone Age (featuring Kyuss alumni) making it, ummmm, overground. So it looks as though a classic-sounding doom band from Texas had the deck stacked against it from the very beginning, which, now that I think about it, makes their mournful music all the more apropos. (Seriously, man, for years there, this was a type of music you made ONLY because you loved it – there were no rewards to be had. Just ask Saint Vitus.)



But there's a triumphant coda to this musical tragedy, the truly excellent Metal Mind Productions (out of Poland) has been snatching amazing/classic/influential bands out of (relative) obscurity, and setting them up with a top-flight "one night only" gig in a large club/theatre in Poland, filming the event with a crack camera crew and great equipment –

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basically treating them like the important musicians they are. Fucking Europeans know their metal, face it. It seems invigorating for all involved. And for Solitude Aeternus, that kind of a fluke lucky break was sorely needed. Even a doom band can only take so much gloom. Guitarist John Perez is positively fucking ebullient with his between-song banter, cracking jokes, drinking beer, and thanking the audience again and again. Even vocalist Robert Lowe stops being moody for a couple of seconds to thank the audience. Speaking of Robert Lowe...

I wasn't quite sure what to expect performance-wise from Solitude Aeternus, but let me tell you, when I saw vocalist Lowe stalk onstage wearing a priest's cassock and vestments with crucifix necklace, I was like, good lord, if he keeps this on the whole concert, this is going to be the fucking best thing ever. (He did.) Messiah Marcolin must have felt a sharp pain in his arm at that very moment. The man looks like a cross between a young Kevin Sullivan and Cardinal Richelieu. That is very much a compliment. His performance style is somewhere between cult leader and religious mystic – eyes rolling back into the head, hands forming strange patterns and arcane symbols, not at all averse to getting one of his bandmates into a stranglehold here and there. His vocal style on the other hand, is pure strength and clarity, it's a voice that owes as much to the doom tradition of Dio and Ozzy, as it does to the more harmonic belting of classical power metal. Great mix, with this... just... voice soaring over these mournful guitar chords. Not a bum note to be found. Long-suffering metal survivor and mainman/guitarist John Perez also formerly of Ripping Corpse holds down the majority of the rhythm guitar work and the stage banter, joking in-between songs and thanking the crowd, he seems very much the captain of the ship. Bassist James Martin and Drummer Steve Nichols keep the groove nice and sloooooooooooooow, but still add enough little fills and flourishes that they're not nodding off in a codeine haze. Guitarist Steve Mosely, though, excels in long, mournful, funeral/elegiac soloing that is pure fucking liquid tears. Well played. Not much in the way of shredding, thank god. Despite a hiatus of too many years, the band are totally self-assured up on stage, far away from home, the music they play is classic Sabbath-y doom with just enough of a punkish kick to it, to keep the pit going – although it must be said, the moshers do look like they're stuck in a fucking tarpit. But

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that's the way it's supposed to be.

As has been par for the course, thus far, the bonuses are plentiful and of great help to the Solitude Aeternus fan or metal historian in general. There is bootleg footage from two different concerts early in their career, both with completely different lineups (save for Perez), that are grainy as fuck and the cameraman seems afraid to get anywhere near the stage, but are very interesting glimpses into a band that was seemingly fully musically developed from the get-go. It also makes you appreciate the Metal Mind crew's professional camera work all the more. Highlights include the band using a Dead Can Dance number as their intro tape (yes!) and seeing everyone look so young and world-beating, as if they had success in the palms of their hands, not yet knowing all the music business fuckery that was going to rain down on them for years. There is also an extended sit-down interview with Robert Lowe and John Perez in which they take a long-view look at their career thus far. Prodded on by the same earnest journo from the Obituary DVD, Lowe and Perez talk freely and openly about past, present, and future, without a hint of the bitterness that one would rightfully expect. Both come off as exceptionally open, intelligent, and witty as fuck. Which is cool, a couple of lions in winter showing the young'uns how it's done. (Something Lowe will undoubtedly now have many opportunities for, as the new singer in Candlemass.)

Technically speaking, it's another stellar piece of product from Metal Mind – the concert is filmed like a dream, the band come off looking like total superstars (though frustratingly, the hall isn't as packed as it was for Obituary) with a great lightshow and everyone has a blast. The band is shot from many different angles, with smooth edits in-between, the picture and song quality are top-shelf (especially when starkly contrasted with the bootleg footage), and you can see that the band are helluva players onstage. The menus are easily navigable and I like the packaging, with some epic shots of the band on the inside cover. This shit's educational, man.

The bad: The bass player has his bass strapped on wayyyyyyyy too high. C'mon, man, you're in a fucking awesome doom band, your bass should be hanging somewhere around your ankles. Goddamn you look like Jaco fucking Pastorius out there. Get it sorted out!

MVD: mvdb2b.com

Matthew Moyer

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