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December 2,
2008

New CD Reviews



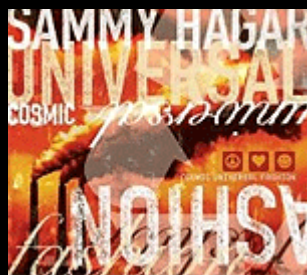
Highway Chile - KEEPER OF THE EARTH



Gamma Ray - HELL YEAH! THE AWESOME FOURSOME LIVE



Nickelback - DARK HORSE



Sammy Hagar - COSMIC UNIVERSAL FASHION

Highway Chile - KEEPER OF THE EARTH (Mausoleum)

Highway Chile
KEEPER OF THE EARTH
Mausoleum Records



Rock & Roll is better than music! I've been awaiting this record for 25 years! I've been championing the cause of these Dutch metalers since I first devoured their North American debut, 1983's Storybook Heroes. While huge in Holland, the various band members wouldn't realize more international success until the band splintered into Sleeze Beez and Helloise amongst others.

The newly reformed Highway Chile features founding members guitarist Martin Mens (whom exited before the recording of the debut) and drummer Ernst Van Ee (ex-Helloise), new guitarist Gert Nijboer, and bassist Marchell Remeus (ex-Helloise). The vocal duties in Highway Chile have boasted some of the most distinctive voices in all of European hard rock and metal. The reformed lineup features Stan Verbraak (ex-Helloise), the latest in a line that features the classic rock pipes of Robert Soeterboek, Sav Pearce, and original voice of Highway Chile, Armand Vander Stigchel (now famous chicken wing cookbook author and Food TV personality Chef Armand!)

At the band's formation, Martin Mens suggested the name of his favorite Jimi Hendrix song as the band monicker, and as such named the band Highway Chile (like Child, not Chili!). The band's early sound was akin to early Def Leppard/NWOBHM and drifted later towards California hair Metal, which left a huge question mark, all these years later, what was Highway Chile gonna sound like?

Pure European power metal! I could not believe when I first took it out for a test drive how powerful and heavy this record was. The guitars of Gert and Martin are thick and heavy, lots of old school chug. The drums of Ernst Van Ee are quite a surprise, as in the past they've been serviceable rock drums, he's now developed into a powerful drummer that can find the pocket, explore the groove, and pummel with precise double kicks. The biggest treat to the ears, especially for old school fans like me are Stan's vocals, a man truly in command of his pipes as well as his influences.

Songs like the title track, Keeper Of The Earth and Dreaming Of Heaven, has Stan pulling all sorts of Halford and Dio sonic references, all over a Stryper-esque melody! A nice surprise for crusty old headbangers like me is the reworking of two classics originally found on Storybook Heroes. End-of-relationship ballad Endless Trail, sounding silkier and more radio friendly in Stan's hands (a difficult task, considering die hard fans have had 25



Guns N' Roses -
CHINESE DEMOCRACY



Saxon - INTO THE
LABYRINTH



Eden's Curse - SECOND
COMING



Axel Rudi Pell - TALES
OF THE CROWN



DC4 - EXPLODE

years of Armand's questionable pitch etched into memory...it's our imperfections that make us unique, and I loved every sharp and flat that Chef Armand uttered, but Stan makes Storybook Heroes version sound like a rough demo!). The other is Headbangers, featuring a guest solo by original guitarist Ben Blaauw. The track is tastefully reconstructed, but the 2008 reworking makes the dated lyrics sound silly.

Also returning for a guest solo is Storybook-era guitarist Peter Barnouw, this time on a cover of Long Live Rock & Roll, which...to be candid is the only disappointment on the record. The whole charm to the song, as done by Rainbow, is the definitive "swing" to the rhythm that the song carries, Here Van Ee opts for a standard 4/4 rock beat and renders the song clunky and tense, after hearing Dio and Blackmore bounce over waves of Cozy Powell's "swing", it's just difficult to digest such a stylistic change.

As a complete album, Keeper Of The Earth is a really solid statement, from a band that has the experience, (unfortunately not the record sales), to make a legitimate comeback record, one that spends a lot of time in my player, and will continue to do so. You will be doing your collection a great service by bolstering up the "H" section by adding Keeper Of The Earth.

PITRIFF RATING - 9/10 - I'm so happy to see and hear that hard rock and metal is aging gracefully. It was always a young man's game, but the crowd and the bands are now fighting the sands of time and receding hairlines. It's great to have your heroes come out strong as a vibrant metal band, where it could've been more embarrassing than having your parents pick you up at school. I love my dad, but I cringe at the thought of him recording metal records and throwing horns!

Added: Friday, November 28, 2008

Reviewer: [John O'Brien](#)

Score: ★★★★★

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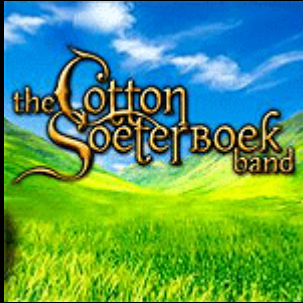
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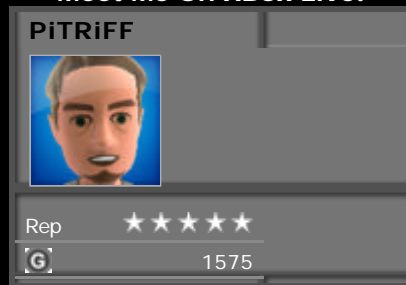
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