



Arek Religa - In memory of the Greatest

Review by Gary Hill

I've never heard of this guy before, but he's a great guitarist. He's also an excellent songwriter. Fans of Al Di Meola, Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, Carlos Santana and others would be well advised to pick this up. His playing is along the lines of guys of that ilk – yes, he's that good! Of course, he also plays a lot more than just guitar – he provides all the instrumentation on some of the tracks here and most on some of the others. Guitar, though, is his specialty and he deserves a place among the greats in that field. If I had one complaint here, it's the same as with a lot of instrumental music. Instrumental music by its very nature can have a tendency towards sameness and this disc, while fairly insulated, isn't completely immune to that. We could have used some vocals in one or two spots on the CD to shake things up a little. Still, that's the only real complaint here. All in all, this is a fine album from a man whose name should be spoken alongside all the guitar greats you already know.

Track by Track Review:

Hope

Piano begins this in a slow moving, intricate and very pretty melody. Other keyboard sounds join to fill in the arrangement. At around the one minute mark other instrumentation enters and this suddenly feels like a dramatic, symphonic piece of music with a bit (and rather small at that) rock edge. At around the minute and a half mark it drops way down to ambience and an evocative guitar line plays slowly and gently. The keys rise up here and there in accompaniment as the fretboard sings out its heart. The keys regain control at about three minutes in. Then we move back into the symphonic sounds. This takes it to a drop back down to ambient keys that ends the track.

Beyond Horizon

This is far more "rock" oriented. Percussion leads it in and other instrumentation joins after a time. When the guitar enters it's in a very Al Di Meola-ish motif. Fusion is written all over this cool track that has a great sort of groove to it. Just before the two minute mark they move things out into something more akin to Genesis meets Joe Satriani. This is worked through for a while until it gives way to the motif that preceded it to carry on. It makes it through several varying themes before closing out.

Viva Carlos!

This song feels like a cross between Di Meola and Carlos Santana. Of course, it is a definite tribute to the latter. This is a cool track, but perhaps a bit less prog like than some of the other material here. It really has a definite Santana vibe to it and CS' fans should really dig this one.

Island of my dreams

Here Religa brings it in with a lot more sedate motif. This feels like mellow fusion blended with balladic prog. It drops back to a more pure jazz motif, mostly due to the saxophone. Piano leads the way for a time and then the sax returns to carry more melody. At around the two minute mark this shifts out to a killer jazz groove that's quite intriguing. Then it takes another turn, into more mellow wanderings again. When the guitar rises up later it brings a major fusion sound as the bass churns away with some definite funk edge. It moves through a couple other moods before ending.

Next step to the end

Ambient textures lead this off and hold it for a time. When the music rises up it's quite mellow, almost to the level of new age music. This is a pretty piece of music. Around the two and a half minute mark it powers up to a more rock oriented sound. Some cool flanged guitar comes over the top. This takes on some territory close to the Satriani type of music. At around the seven minute mark this powers out into a killer, more pure prog, jam. It still has some of the funk and other elements of the earlier sections, but this would probably qualify as progressive rock in just about anyone's definition. It moves out to a more hard rocking motif later, with the focus shifting back to the guitar. Keys are laced over the top here and there before the track fades out to end. It's another tasty tune on an album that's full of them.

Into the future

Here we get a lighter sort of sound. This has an airy funk meets prog and pop music motif. The keyboards turn it more towards pure prog as they solo over the top of the backdrop for a time. Then Religa brings his brand of guitar to the forefront and the fusion elements are more in play. This turns into a cool groove after a time. It runs through in that motif for a while and then drops back for a more sedate section. Saxophone comes across after a while.

It's going to be better

This one alternates between a rocking sort of fusion meets jam band prog sound and a mellower, more fusion oriented sound. You might even hear a little Allman Brothers on this one. It's a cool tune. By now I'm to the point where I could use some vocals, though. Still a keyboard dominated section provides some much needed variety.

On the road

A backwards burst gives way to a dramatic jam that seems to combine modern progressive rock with AOR and jazz. This is a bit different from some of the other material on show and provides a bit of a change. It's quite powerful and prog rock oriented, but the bass and overall composition provides a good deal of fusion to the mix.. Then it drops way back to just keys and bass to gradually build up again. I like this one a lot. In fact, it's one of my favorites on show here. It turns more towards the more rocking sounds that permeate much of the disc.

And the road goes on

Drums lead things off in a more "rock and roll" sort of rhythm. As the other instruments join, though, we get a sort of groove oriented fusion meets Santana approach. This is another highlight of the disc. Although in many ways it doesn't differ greatly from a lot of the other material here it manages to pack a bit more of a punch than some of the other tracks.

Waiting for the miracle

This has a mellower, more pure jazz sound. Again, the saxophone is greatly responsible for that texture. As this moves along we get more pure fusion and then at other points more pure progressive rock. This is one of the more dynamic and effective pieces on show here. It's definitely a highlight of the disc. The saxophone ends it.

For all my Angels

"For all my Angels" comes in with a more pure rock and roll approach. A hard rocking riff that's almost a bit like Led Zeppelin starts it off and holds it for a while. It's shifted more towards prog rock at times, though. This hard edged section is alternated with a more melodic, fusion sort of sound. It makes for an intriguing ebb and flow approach to the track. While I wouldn't necessarily call this one a "highlight," it's definitely one of the more unique pieces on the disc.

By the paradise

Here we are treated to a more mellow, fusion like jam. The saxophone gets a prominent place in the mix on this track. The number has a relaxing and quite satisfying texture to it. It's again one of the more unique tunes offered here. It's also one of my favorites. I hear a bit of "Father and Son Reunion" in the melody on this. We actually get a little taste of country in the guitar solo.

In memory of the Greatests

A bit more along the lines of Satriani and such musicians, this is still fairly sedate and fusion-like. It has a definite air of drama and mystery at times. It's also quite pretty. It moves through a number of alternating musical formats, seeming at times ready to move off into space. We get a number of different textures and moods throughout. This is one of the most dynamic pieces on the CD. At almost nine minutes in length, it is the longest.



Arek Religa - In Memory Of The Greatests

Review by Keith "MuzikMan" Hannaleck (December 16, 2007)

Arek Religa was honored with the MuzikReviews.com Sonic Bids talent contest winner a few months ago. With his amazing guitar playing talents and his two-hand tapping technique video that leaves your mouth hanging open, made the choice obvious as we narrowed it down to the final three contestants.

In Memory Of The Greatests is Religa's tribute the great guitar maestros of our time. Arek hails from Poland. Quite amazingly, he did not start playing the guitar until he was sixteen years old. Getting a late start in life did not seem to matter.

This recording is comprised of 13 tracks of instrumental rock, jazz-fusion, blues, and all of that mixed together with atmospheric orchestrated backgrounds created by keyboards to give it a symphonic prog rock feel at times. On scorches like "Viva Carlos", the guitarist cuts loose and gives his best impression of the legendary rock-blues-world six-string hero Santana. That is the only track that is obviously dedicated to one particular artist, while the rest of the tracks are an intelligent mixture of influences and superb talent inspired by many years of studying the masters and perfecting a unique style.

In the end when the CD stops spinning, you are convinced that you have found a new guitar hero to bow to and acknowledge, yet another previously unrecognized force to be reckoned with in the vast world of indie music.

This guy can rock, he plays with taste and style, and a little bit of both for the perfect audio elixir that will have you mesmerized in no time flat. As you make your way through this instrumental treasure trove you discover how brilliant the artist is and how using influences from many genres and great guitar players through the ages allows for a most enjoyable and diversified listening experience. Do not let the tranquil cover of the CD put any expectations in your mind of what you are in for; this is an artist with a passionate flame burning inside. It comes flowing through the strings of his instrument one track after another.

I refer to one track on the CD however; I would prefer to look at it as a whole entity, a project that has a beginning and end with a storyline implicated by the title of each track. Songs without words can paint a canvas that leaves you to your own devices and imagination. Arek Religa perpetuates this very situation consistently throughout his work in all 13 tracks. The future is now for innovative independents like this; check out this amazing guitar work on *In Memory Of The Greatests*.

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"In memory of the Greatests" by Arek Religa

Review by Bill Coonley, evolutionofmedia.com

From Polish-born composer/guitarist/keyboardist Arek Religa comes this thirteen track disc of original instrumentals, most of which are in a jazz/rock fusion vein, with classical, electronica, Latin, progressive rock and World music elements incorporated into the mix, without losing focus. Religa is joined by Tomasz Wywrot on sax and keyboards, Jerzy Kusiak on drums, bassist Pawel Pospieszalski, percussionist Jacek Berlin, and Konrad Stankiewicz on boards and rhythm guitar.

The symphonic "Hope" provides the dramatic opening moments, slowly building to a cinematic climax. "Beyond Horizon" gets into funk territory, with some imaginative guitar orchestrations. "¡Viva Carlos!" is a nod to Santana - check out Arek's fiery wah-wah pedal work! "Island of My Dreams" and "Next Step to the End" both start in a pastoral mood, then kick it up a notch or two. "On the Road" and "And the Road Goes on" further show Religa's versatility as a guitarist, dialing up just the right sound for the occasion. "For All My Angels" toggles between distorted power chords and clean, echo-drenched lead lines under an almost robotic dance beat. "By the Paradise" features a slide guitar reminiscent of George Harrison, as well as some fine sax playing. "In Memory of the Greatests" closes with the haunting title track.

This is one CD to check out when you are in the mood for music that is at once adventurous and highly listenable.



Artistic Pursuit member Arek Religa has done Poland proud. I mean seriously, this guitarist/composer has got to be one of the most talented guitarists I've heard in a long time. I'm not joking. When I listened to the track, Viva Carlos, I had to play it over again just because it deserved to be heard again. For you true music lovers out there, you'll know what I mean when I say that the Viva Carlos track sounds like Arek studied under guitar-guru Carlos Santana for several years. The track sort of reminds you of the song "Smooth" from Santana's platinum-winning album Supernatural, featuring Rob Thomas. As a matter of fact, right after listening to Arek's CD, I pulled out the Supernatural CD to listen to Smooth and Maria, Maria, two of my favorite songs off of Santana's CD. Arek definitely has the gift. You can hear Viva Carlos and more of Arek's music by visiting his profile at <http://www.artisticpursuit.org/Arek>.

Arek recently came to the United States from Poland in 2000 and now resides in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois. He has already started making a name for himself here in the US, winning or placing in contests such as the Dallas Songwriter Association Contest and the Annual Great American Song Contest. He also had one of his songs used in an interesting documentary by J. Michael Seyfert called Rent-a-Rasta. Listening to Arek's CD, you can't help but think that he is just a stone's throw away from becoming the next Yanni, only with the guitar.

This melodic CD showcases songs that could easily propel Arek into superstar status as a virtuoso guitarist. Besides the hip Spanish track Viva Carlos, listeners will also find themselves attracted to tracks such as It's Going to be Better and Beyond Horizon. It's Going to be Better has an interesting twist to the music. At first you want to dance hard, but then, in the middle, it takes a different turn and you feel like slow dancing. This only lasts a short while though as it picks back up and has you getting back into the dance groove. With the track, Beyond Horizon, I imagine myself driving through the mountains in autumn while the leaves are changing color on a long deserted two-lane road. The songs mellow beginnings with the lead guitar playing over the keys, builds nicely to a melodic blend of keyboards, guitar, and percussion, that makes you feel as though you've been set free from something.

Other contributors to Arek's CD, In Memory of the Greatests, include Tomasz Wywrot on saxophone and keyboards, Jerzy Kusiak on drums and percussion, Pawel Pospieszalski on bass, Jacek Berlin, also on drums and percussion, Konrad Stankiewicz on keyboards and rhythm guitar, and finally Mark Ortega on percussion. Arek shows off his talents on the project as a composer, arranger, producer, guitarist, keyboardist, and programmer.

Arek Religa is a gifted and skilled guitarist with a unique sound that could entertain any music enthusiast. Be sure to visit his Artistic Pursuit profile at <http://www.artisticpursuit.org/Arek> and add him as a friend.



Review by John Scales

In Memory Of The Greatest – a 13 track instrumental opus from composer **Arek Religa** – is both a tribute to the gods of flashy arena shredding and singular guitar exposition that is impressive in its range and depth. Religa performs lengthy lead guitar gymnastics that either directly emulate legendary guitarists (as on the Santana-inspired “Viva Carlos!”) or attempt somewhat successfully to match up with the technical wizardry of the likes of Joe Satriani, especially on “Into The Future.” www.myspace.com/arekreliga)

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Review by Metal Mark of AtIMetal.com (<http://targetaudiencemagazine.org/summer08/id14.html>)

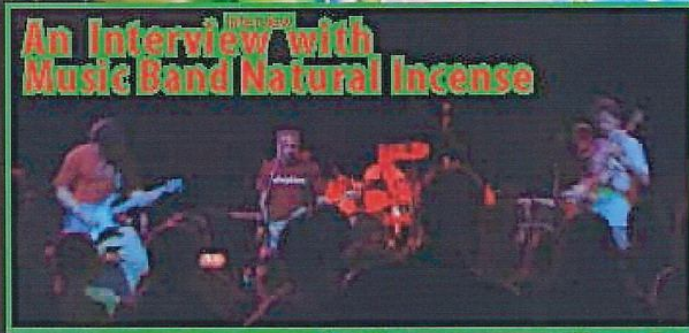
Santana fans rejoice! Arek Religa is here with guitar work very similar to Carlos, yet with his own twist on things. You can usually tell where more solo artists are heading in each song, and Arek is NOT one of those guys. Arek's guitar skills are on another planet, and it is something all fans of guitar will jam out to. His guitar playing is very versatile and anyone can hear that he puts his soul into each song. His mixture of rock, latin, and jazz guitar playing is a hard task to pull off and he does it with an amazing ease. I could sit out in the sun and listen to his music for hours and not have a care in the world. I love talented musicians that let you into their soul through their music, and Arek is the pure example of that. I will be checking in on Arek's site in the future, because I am interested to hear what his future music will bring.

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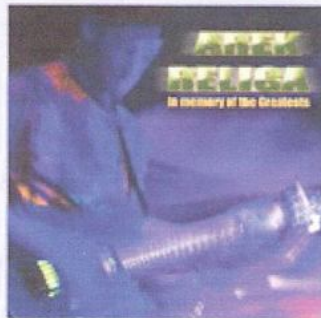
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AREK RELIGA

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vintage production touches and great riffs dominating.

This album is geared more toward multipart epics, with four of the seven tracks topping the nine-minute mark. The strongest of these is "Thieves," which starts off with a guitar line that hints at Celtic music before the full band roars in. Scott Albright is a muscular vocalist who seems equally at home with hard-rock crescendos and pastoral passages. The band also fearlessly explores structural variations in its songs.

This is a great release that should entice fans of Yes, Deep Purple, and Black Bonzo. -- **Bob Short**

PURRR: *Purrr*

2007 (CD, 39:13); RKSP69

Style: Electronic/pop/metal

Sound: ★★★ Composition: ★★ Musicianship: ★★1/2

Performance: ★★★ Total rating: 10 1/2

Billing themselves as "three extraterrestrials from the planet Luness in orbit around the star Zeta Reticuli," this otherwise Toronto-docked threesome has been melting transistors since 2006.

The beings who inhabit the Rhomboidal Net (whether Luness orbits Zeta 1 or 2 was never specified) must be picking up steady broadcasts of Ministry, Nine Inch Nails, and other DJ-driven robo-metal of that particular bandwidth. The opener "Space" features a sensuous, breathy Karli Forget voice-under. The disc closes with an expanded version of "Spitfire," itself a spacey ballad overflowing with dense analog synthesizer providing a hard bed for Sam Christian Cush's youthful, cynical every-grunger's voice. Two silly topical spoken intros introduce the first tracks.

But be warned: this isn't progressive rock as we've been conditioned to expect (through endless perambulations and inculcations as to what is and isn't "prog"). Exuberant, danceable collegiate plebianism, perhaps? -- **John Patrick**

RANDOM TOUCH: *A Box and a Word*

2008 (CD, 57:08); Token Boy TBR53892

Style: Avant-garde/experimental

Sound: ★★★ Composition: ★★★ Musicianship: ★★★

Performance: ★★★ Total rating: 12

Random Touch is an artist collective from Illinois consisting of three jazz-schooled musicians and a filmmaker. Like Thee Maximalists, Exit Terra, or Brit counterparts R.M.I, every note of its recordings and concerts is improvised.

To attempt describing the sound of this 10th release is as obtuse as explaining the color green to a blind man. The 16 mostly brief, declarative pieces use limitless sonic trickery and nuance, usually underscored by Christopher Brown's post-bop informed drumming. Snippets of spoken word slither in and out of a few pieces, culminating with the queasy chimera "The Altar Boy and the Priest." Varieties of shading and nuance are applied to individual pieces, lending each a unique character that nicely differentiates them from one another.

Finely honed communication skills just this side of telepathy, and collective comprehension of each musical event hitting its mark at precise moments of their unfolding, are prerequisites for success in this arena. A group also requires an original conception to distinguish itself, and with *A Box and a Word*, Random Touch has found its target. -- **John Patrick**

RANDOM TOUCH: *Duologue*

2008 (CD, 39:50); Roadnoise Prod. TBR53812

Style: Experimental/avant-garde

Sound: ★★★ Composition: ★★ Musicianship: ★★

Performance: ★★1/2 Total rating: 9 1/2

Random Touch is the duo of Christopher Brown on drums and occasional vocals and Scott Hamill on guitar. Like works in a modern art museum, their music is abstract and provocative; designed to challenge the listener's preconceptions about music, and by extension themselves and the world around them.

On *Duologue*, guitar focuses on tone/noise generation over playing specific notes, while drums deliver chaotic embellishments in cacophonous call-and-response. "Nestle" is a relatively soft and ambient opener whose dynamics build slowly. Subsequent tracks are pervasively heavy; for example the closer, "A Favorable Direction," which depicts the demise of a drunken sailor lost in a stormy sea of tortured guitar distortions.

Perhaps most memorable and interesting is "Somewhere," with its synth-like guitar line, King Crimson-like drumming, and lyrics that ask the ubiquitous question, "What part of this can you not digest?" For many listeners, the answer will be "all of it." But like much modern art, the point may lie more in the challenge of the underlying concept. Enter if you dare. -- **Bill Noland**

RC2: *Future Awaits*

CD (59:58) ProgRock Records PRR 510

Style: Symphonic progressive rock

Sound: ★★★ Composition: ★★1/2 Musicianship: ★★1/2

Performance: ★★★★★ Total rating: 14

Future Awaits is the second release and the first on Progrock Records for this band from Spain via Venezuela. The core sound remains intact with one major change being a switch to English vocals by lead singer Felix Duque. I usually favor native language vocals, though Duque is very comfortable with English and his singing is excellent. The rest of the band rounds out with Eduardo Benater (drums), Pedro Misle (bass) and Rafael Paz (keyboards). Guitars are handled by several hired hands, including former member Mauricio Barroeta.

This album is divided into eight tracks. A standout is "Coming Down Again," which runs to the melodic side with sections dominated by piano and vocals. The opening track, "Time Pieces," is nearly 11 minutes and kicks out in a fusion vein before mellowing out with Duque's vocals. Great tracks all around. -- **Allen Gunnison**

REFLECTION: *When Shadows Fall*

2008 (CD, 47:41); Cruz Del Sur cruz30

Style: Progressive/doom metal

Sound: ★★ Composition: ★★1/2 Musicianship: ★★1/2

Performance: ★★1/2 Total rating: 9 1/2

Hard to believe that this Greek band has been around almost 17 years. Even though *When Shadows Fall* is only the quintet's third album, you would think all those years of making demos and performing live would be an advantage for Reflection -- a way for band members to prove to young progressive-metal bands that seasoned veterans can, indeed, lead the way.

Instead, these guys rely on plodding, doom-laden texturing with such titles as "Mistress of Sea," "Eyes of the Night" and "Kingdom of Fire" that lack diversity and hooks but have plenty of prepositions. Sure, the playing is adequate, and Leo Stivala's constipated voice becomes sort of endearing once you get used to it. But *When Shadows Fall* is the sound of a band succumbing to the genre's status quo -- nothing more and, possibly, something less.

"Desert Land" and "Soul Salvation" boast stronger and more dynamic arrangements, but they come near the end of the album's sequence and, consequently, are too little too late. -- **Michael Popke**

AREK RELIGA: *In Memory of the Greatest*

2007 (CD, 65:36); independent release

Style: Progressive rock/instrumental/jazz-fusion

Sound: ★★★ Composition: ★★1/2 Musicianship: ★★★★★

Performance: ★★★★★ Total rating: 14 1/2

Polish guitarist Arek Religa is a fine musician who plays from the heart and extends that passion with every note. This baker's dozen of original compositions primarily in the instrumental rock/fusion vein finds this consummate guitarist in a very contented place, leading his solid and capable ensemble through upbeat, spiritually satisfying material. As the title suggests, these tracks pay homage to Religa's influences, with interesting, symphonic-fueled arrangements lending a decidedly progressive-rock ambience.

"Hope" kicks things off in a somber and austere manner. Things blossom with memorable and vibrant guitar lines in the follow up "Beyond Horizon." "Viva Carlos!" is another highlight dedicated to Santana, featuring that incisive, searing tone recalling the master himself.

Some songs are dedicated to Religa's friends, children and parents, lending all a very personal nature. If you seek a substantive pick-me-up that will stimulate and feed your soul, Arek Religa will cure what ails you! --Eric Harabadian

REVOLUTION RENAISSANCE: *New Era*
2008 (CD, 47:25); Blistering USA BR003

Style: Progressive/power metal

Sound: ★★1/2 Composition: ★★1/2 Musicianship: ★★★

Performance: ★★1/2 Total rating: 12 1/2

In the wake of Stratovarius's recent demise, band founder and guitarist Timo Tolkki could have gone off and made another painful-to-hear solo album like 2002's *Hymn to Life*. Instead, he took the material he'd originally written for the next Strat record, hired vocalists Tobias Sammet (Edguy), Michael Kiske (Helloween) and Pasi Rantanen (Thunderstone), and formed a new collective called Revolution Renaissance.

New Era combines the melodic signatures of Tolkki's old band with the strengths of the singers' past and present bands in a logical progression of the Stratovarius legacy.

Sammet, Kiske and Rantanen, along with a tight band of players, help Tolkki find his groove with accessible, mostly upbeat songs. Among the highlights: the prog-metal leaning "Eden Is Burning," the brooding "Born Upon the Cross" (which sounds like it could be a Dio or Heaven and Hell track), and the ballad "Keep the Flame Alive" -- a could-be-a-movie theme song that echoes '90s-era Aerosmith and could work wonders in a live setting. -- Michael Popke

ULI JON ROTH: *Under a Dark Sky*
2008 (CD, 63:39); SPV 80001200 CD

Style: Orchestral rock/classical

Sound: ★★1/2 Composition: ★★1/2 Musicianship: ★★★★★

Performance: ★★★★★ Total rating: 15

This is Rhapsody of Fire without the galloping speed-metal tempos: Guitarist Uli Jon Roth (of Scorpions fame) gathers another large supporting cast for 10 grandly orchestrated tracks that owe just as much to classical as rock. Along with orchestra and choir, Roth employs a drummer, two percussionists, plus several singers -- a cast to which he adds all guitars, bass, keyboards and his own vocals.

The standout singers are Mark Boals (Yngwie Malmsteen) and Liz Vandall, whose dramatic contributions usher *Under a Dark Sky* into the realm of big-stage operatic theater, a la Trans-Siberian Orchestra. (It wouldn't surprise me to see a DVD version of this pop up eventually.)

Roth's lyrical themes invoke universal spirituality -- pleas for peace, love and understanding, etc. -- which can be refreshing in its own way. Of course, this type of production invites epic treatment, and Roth obliges with the 11-minute "Land of Dawn" and 19-minute closer "Tanz in Die Dämmerung." If you like neo-classical, guitar-propelled orchestral grandiosity blending booming crescendos with pastoral interludes, Uli's got your ticket. -- John Collinge

STEFFEN SCHACKINGER: *ElectriGuitaristry*
2008 (CD, 57:53); CandyRat Records 55-02

Style: Instrumental guitar

Sound: ★★★ Composition: ★★★ Musicianship: ★★1/2

Performance: ★★1/2 Total rating: 13

Danish guitarist Steffen Schackinger's compositional skills almost equal his technical prowess. His pieces unfold as he takes his time proving his mettle over the course of an hour. He shreds like nobody's business but picks his spots. Melodic runs are fluid and smooth and his tone can be gorgeously lush or wickedly sharp and biting.

Let's be honest, an instrumental guitar album is only going to cover so

much ground. Schackinger's debut, with bassist Henrik Bjorn and drummer Mickey Hurricane, takes a predominately rock-oriented route sometimes wandering into Joe Satriani territory. We have fusion and classical elements with some impressive acoustic guitar moments, which combine in a high caliber jaunt.

"Major Inventions" sets the table with the composition first and foremost displaying Steffen's considerable virtuosity, a constant throughout this disc. Near closing, the crew really cuts loose on the Dixie Dregs-styled "The Dixieland," aided by Riverdance violinist Jane Clark. Aficionados will appreciate the abundance of talent here. -- Warren Barker

SEVEN STEPS TO THE GREEN DOOR: *Step in 2 My World*
2008 (CD, 65:47); ProgRock PRR590

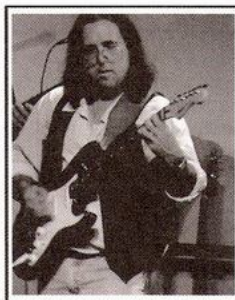
Style: Progressive rock/neo-progressive

Sound: ★★1/2 Composition: ★★1/2 Musicianship: ★★1/2

Performance: ★★★ Total rating: 12 1/2

What grabs you about this creative German septet are the vocal-driven melodies and harmonies (sung in English): With three members who do nothing but sing -- Anne Trautmann, Ronny Grube, Lars Kohler -- you'd expect the arrangements to lean heavily in that direction. But *Step in 2 My World* has plenty of surprising changeups, including: outright jazz ("My Lovely Mr. Singing Club"), pop-flavored balladeering ("Melissa"), rollicking Gentle Giant-style rhythmic quirk ("Attract Me"), hard-driving prog-rock ("Rising Shore," "New Rising"), funk ("Out of Clouds"), goofy novelty music ("The Making Of") -- even a taste of forced-sounding rap we probably could have done without ("Stay Beside").

I'm all for variety if it's convincingly homogenized, and this oddly named group does a good job most of the time. But you also get the feeling these adventurous musos sometimes stretch a bit too hard for the kitchen sink with their mix-and-match genre hopping. Thankfully, a symphonic-progressive foundation holds firm amidst frequent stylistic detours. If they keep at it, a uniquely distinctive sound and group identity ultimately should coalesce. Good playing, regardless. -- John Collinge



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