



DOMAIN

The Essence Of Glory
Melodic Heaven Music (Korea)
CDMH0501

Korea's newest hard rock label, Melodic Heaven, continues with Domain where it left off with Manticora, releasing another extremely well packaged rock album from another of Europe's highly talented but underrated bands.

A glossy, autographed limited edition, 'The Essence Of Glory' cherry picks the best material from Domain's 'One Million Light Years From Home', 'The Artefact' and 'Sixth Dimension' releases and is an object lesson in how to do it and get it right.

It's hardly a career retrospective – there's nothing here from the early albums, though you could reasonably argue that Domain have had two careers. One that ended in 1991 when the band split, and the resurrection in 2001, engineered by mainman and chief songwriter, Axel Ritt. Instead then 'Essence Of Glory' is a highly entertaining run through the band's evolution since they reformed.

Three albums in as many years and the progression of the band's musical style from melodic hard rock to power metal is evident for all to hear.

The high drama and highly contagious celtic tunefulness of 'One Million Light Years...' gets us underway. The party flavoured 'New Horizon' veers off into Van Halen territory, while the sophisticated, effortless melodic rock of 'Wings Of Destiny' brings us back to the celtic influence, particularly recalling Thin Lizzy and maybe John Sykes' solo work.

BLACK MAJESTY

Silent Company
Stay Gold **ARTSG-006**

Chances are, if you asked a hundred European or American metal fans to name an act from Australia, most would struggle after the obvious. Sure, some would remember acts like Rose Tattoo and The Angels, whilst others might venture Jimmy Barnes or Rick Springfield, but all of these are established artists with a fair few miles on the clock. So where are all the new bands you might ask? Put simply, until the last couple of years, very few rock bands from down under have made any sort of impression up here in the Northern Hemisphere. Fortunately all that seems to be changing, and at long last we seem to be getting a steady flow of quality metal releases from our antipodean cousins, with the likes of Eyefear, Dungeon, Voyager and the mighty Vanishing Point all issuing great product in recent months. Well, now you can add the name of Melbourne four piece Black Majesty to that steadily growing list, the arrival of their sophomore effort 'Silent Company' proving that tasteful, old school metal really is alive and well on the other side of the world!

Debuting on the world stage about two years ago with the very well received 'Sands Of Time' opus, Black Majesty offered a well constructed, passionately delivered slice of classic melodic metal which showed they had a real empathy with the likes of Iron Maiden, Queensryche, and Jag Panzer. And for this latest release, the band have tried to stay fairly true to that same basic formula, whilst at the same time to pushing onwards into a bolder, far more dynamic and adventurous musical arena. And I must admit, even after just a couple of cursory spins, it was abundantly clear that for the most part, they seem to have succeeded rather admirably, passing whatever test they set themselves with flying colours.

Everything about this release seems to have taken a real step up – better songs, stronger melodies, bigger sound, and a much more commanding production. Not too sure whether that's entirely down to Endel Rivers (who if I'm honest, didn't make too bad a job of the debut either), or if Piet 'Iron Savior' Sielck has added that extra something – who or whatever it was, cheers guys because the sound on 'Silent Company' is amazing. If I was to offer up a comparison now, the two bands who really stand out for me would be Iron Maiden and Edguy – the latter especially! Edguy are one of the best traditional sounding metal bands in Europe right now, but most of the material on here is just as good as anything on 'Mandrake' or 'Hellfire Club'.

What I really like about Black Majesty is their innate ability to switch from fairly regular, albeit classy metal, to something with a touch more progression. Vocalist John Cavaliere is a past master at this - all Bruce Dickinson one minute, Geoff Tate the next – and the rest of the band ain't no slouches either. The pulsating riffs of opener 'Dragon Reborn' give it to you with both barrels blazing, but never in a random or reckless fashion, the band keeping a tight grip on the controls to deliver their message in a precisely controlled way. Title track 'Silent Company' sees Black Majesty sail very close to classic Maiden territory, although I must admit, I haven't heard Bruce and the boys sound this good since the late 80's.

Yet, whilst thrusting riffs are a major feature of the Black Majesty attack, there's a higher intelligence at work which ensures that plenty of light and shade is woven into the fabric too. Consequently, tracks such as the brooding 'Darkened Room', the bombastic 'New Horizons', searing 'Firestorm', and epic 'A Better Way To Die' ('Hallowed Be Thy Name' for the 21st Century), offer the kind of thrilling variation to keep you on the edge of your seat throughout. Nice choice of bonus tracks too on this Japanese version, with the bubbly 'Chasing Time' as strong as anything else on offer, and the acoustic reinterpretation of 'Guardian' from the debut showcasing just how strong their songs really are.

If you're a fan of sophisticated metal, don't let this one get lost in the ether as there aren't that many bands out there capable of producing albums as consistently strong as this one!

9/10 **Dave Cockett**

Second album in the sequence of three is 'The Artefact'. While 'Mystery Stone' bridges the two albums seamlessly, 'Charade' and 'Blackhole Visions' hike up the tension and the power, the tempo and the production values. They

mark a distinct, if not unwelcome change in direction. 'Seasons' full blown symphonic power metal rams home the point with relish and dazzling musicianship.

The collection then gains an

overwhelming sense of momentum, with 'Your Favourite Curse' and 'Kings Tears' combining simple melodies and powerful, complex arrangements, aiming for an epic sweep and major impact. The album ends with a couple of

