

Thursday, November 22, 2007

Blackmore's Night: "Paris Moon"

There are two distinct schools of thought when discussing the career of Ritchie Blackmore. Either you are totally ambivalent and only remember him for playing the ultimate guitar riff in "Smoke on the Water," or you are a total Blackmore nut who collects everything he's ever recorded.

If you are in the latter group, you are probably already aware that his renaissance-revival band, Blackmore's Night, is not in the same league as his hard-rocking electric bands Deep Purple or Rainbow. Instead of pummeling a Stratocaster, Blackmore delicately strums acoustic stringed instruments. The band's lead vocalist and lyricist, Candice Night, is a lovely yet slightly cloying lady who could be the daughter of actress Barbara Eden. Night completely immerses her lyrics in medieval imagery, which is easily absorbed in small doses. The entire Blackmore's Night catalog represents a solid body of work that will satisfy a narrowly-defined audience.

The new DVD set from Blackmore's Night, "Paris Moon," is a live concert of the band performing in a mid-sized theater in Paris in 2006. For this concert, Blackmore and Night lead the band (bass, drums, keyboards, two lovely background vocalists) through a lively set of highly melodic medieval songs. Blackmore is in charge, but he is not the star of the show. Instead, he lurks in the background, demonstrating complete command of his guitars and mandolins. His band is given plenty of room to demonstrate their chops in a variety of complex interplay that resembles classic progressive rock at times. The melding of "Past Times With Good Company" and the Jethro Tull track "Rainbow Blues" is a brilliant opening to the set, but the momentum is lost as the band seems to be unsure of their set-list. The audience is eager for the band to increase the energy level, but Blackmore resists and instead plays the uninspired instrumental track "Durch Den Wald Zum Bachaus." Fortunately, the lively tempo and solid musicianship of "Under a Violet Moon" and a creative re-visioning of the Rainbow track "Soldier of Fortune" resurrect what could be a fairly dull concert. Candice Night does her best to entertain, and she sings with precision and perfect pitch. She also plays a variety of woodwinds, which successfully add to the texture and dynamics of the songs.

"Paris Moon" is a very nicely packaged product. Along with the DVD is an 11-track companion CD of songs from the concert and two bonus studio tracks. An earlier Blackmore's Night DVD release (2003), "Under a Violet Moon," contains a livelier performance of the band at an outdoor renaissance festival. Fans of the band should consider adding the earlier DVD to their collection before purchasing "Paris Moon."

posted by Doug Cornell at 7:30 AM