

JOHN TUCKER ONLINE - REVIEWS DECEMBER 2008



In a neat slice of synchronicity, 2008 ends musically in the same way as it began, with a release by Arjen Lucassen's **AYREON**. '01011001' released in January has been followed by 'Timeline' (InsideOut/SPV), a retrospective of Lucassen's most enduring and popular project. Covering all six/seven albums (depending on how you count the 'Universal Migrator' package) from 1995's 'The Final Experiment' to the present day, the slipcased three CDs and one DVD come nicely packaged with a detailed booklet and a poster which tries to explain the links between the albums (don't try to follow it after a couple of pints...). The only thing that's missing is some rarities: given the number of B-sides that have been produced over the years featuring new recordings, re-recordings and/or covers, a handful of oddities and forgotten gems wouldn't have gone amiss, but instead it's up to one nine-minute new song 'Epilogue: The Memory Remains' to fly the flag for novelty. But don't get me wrong: 'Timeline' is a nice anthology, beautifully packaged, and works both as a great introduction to Ayreon for the uninitiated and a worthwhile addition to any fan's collection. "But, of course, your favourite track isn't on it," notes the man himself on the DVD; "sorry!" And you know what? He's right!

Also on InsideOut/SPV comes **KARMAKANIC**'s third studio album 'Who's The Boss In The Factory'. The brainchild of Jonas

Reingold from The Flower Kings, Karamakanic mark out their territory by kicking things off with a nineteen minute song – that's a third of the album's length despatched with a slow-burner that takes a leaf or two from the Genesis songbook and heavies things up a tad; there's some nice work from guitarist Krister



Jonsson too. Reingold himself on his website describes the material as "Genesis/Jackson Brown [sic]/Pat Metheny/Joni Mitchell/Yes/Pink Floydish" and 'Two Blocks From The Edge' has a distinctive Floydian swagger, although it's the quirky, bouncy and much-more-to-the-point 'Let In Hollywood' that does it for me. Amongst a number of guests, fellow Flower King Tomas Bodin puts in an appearance, as does The Tangent's Andy Tillison.



Norway's **ASMEGIN** came together towards the end of 1998 as a more heads-down Viking metal band and slowly evolved into a more folk outfit band over time. 'Arv' (meaning heritage') is their second release, again on Napalm Records, and follows

on from 2003's 'Hin Vordende Sod & Sør'. The four piece (Erik Fossan Rasmussen, Raymond Håkenrud, Marius Olaussen – the only remaining member from the original line-up – and Lars Fredrik Frøislie) make effective use of a range of vocal styles and integrate traditional instruments into their material. They also call quite heavily on the guest vocals of Anne Marie Hveding, whose singing really breathes some atmosphere into the band's material. Check out 'Hiertebrand', and if that's not your thing then elsewhere there's the bass-driven doom-laden 'Yndifall'.



It's been many, many years since he was the guitarist in the ground-breaking Dokken, and his solo output steers generally well away from the MTV sound of daze gone by. **GEORGE LYNCH'S SOULS OF WE** (Mas-cot) comes over kinda like the Rollins Band in a way; it's not as straight-forward as you might be led to believe and is quite trippy 'n' groovy 'n' retro (check out the thanks list which includes "free thinkers, cave dwellers, bluesman, shaman, hippies, hillbillies, hobos..." etc etc) with a solid beat and, as you'd expect, some extremely hot guitar work from the man himself. Despite the four-piece photo and the roll-call of London LeGrande (vox), Johnny Chow (bass) and Vael (drums), the named drummer and bassist only appear on one song apiece: a host of other musicians cop a credit, including ex-Dokken colleague Jeff Pilson handling

bass duties on the majority of the songs.



ALMAH's 'Fragile Equality' (AFM Records) has been out for a while now, but is still worth a mention here. The second album by the band put together by Angra frontman Edu Falaschi (and also featuring Angra bassist Felipe Andreoli), 'Fragile Equality' is a power metal lover's dream. Kamelot is a point of reference that springs to mind, in particular in tracks like 'You'll Understand' and 'Beyond Tomorrow'. A couple of points would have been docked for the power-metal-by-numbers 'Magic Flame', although the stunning guitar interplay between guitarists Marcelo Barbosa and Paulo Schroeber does redress the cheese factor somewhat. And as with any album of this genre, a special mention goes to drummer Marcelo Moreira, who thrashes his socks off throughout the album while still keeping everything nice 'n' tight. Falaschi is apparently working on a Manga-style book (on which the lyrics to the album were based) which will come with an instrumental version of the album as a soundtrack. Some people really do have too much talent for their own good!

In a review in Fireworks once I mused that **KAMPFAR's** third album 'Kvass' came remarkably close to redefining metal for the Twenty-First Century. With just six tracks in forty-six minutes, the songs were deep and fully developed blends of black, pagan, folk and power metal, infused with originality. On 'Heimgang' (also on Napalm Records) the band have taken a step back

from the twisting and turnings of 'Kvass' and trimmed the material back in terms of length to go for a more direct, in-your-face approach. Whether this is just the way it went in the studio,



or part of a gameplan to keep things more streamlined is anyone's guess, but, to my mind, 'Heimgang' does lose some of the 'charm' – for the want of a better word – and uniqueness of its predecessor, although the ten full-on workouts offered up will appeal all the more to those who like things shorter and to-the-point. But, as ever, Kampfar have fused a range of influences to conjure up a pretty distinctive sound and there's little doubt that the band are pretty much at the front of the field when it



comes to what Napalm lovingly refer to as pagan folkore metal.

I'll freely admit to having a soft spot for **BATTLELORE**. On disc, the band's material makes great use of contrasting male and female vocals backed by epic compositions, and live they are a spectacle to behold; their set at 2007's Metal Female Voices Festival was one of the gig's highlights. Pretty much a year later, their fifth album 'The Last Alliance' sees the fantasy-lov-

ing Finns firmly back in Middle Earth once more; but the important thing here is not to get too hooked up on their image of woad and battleaxes but to immerse yourself in what is a truly enjoyable album. Battlelore have been together now in one shape or another since 1999, and have mastered the art of writing emotion-laden, larger-than-life songs that are still easily accessible and catchy.

Much of the band's appeal lies in the interplay between the luscious vocals of Kaisa Jouhki and the guttural delivery of her male counterpart Tomi Mykkänen, although that's not to take anything away from the instrumentalists (Jussi Rautio and Jyri Vahvanen – guitars; Maria – keyboards; Timo Honkanen – bass; Henri Vahvanen – drums) whose sweeping Tolkien-esque soundscapes frame the compositions majestically. Not only is 'The Last Alliance' a worthy addition to any CD collection, but there's a limited edition with a DVD of the band's 2007 Metal Female Voices Festival set, broadswords and all.



Written off more than once but always bouncing back, thirty years after their debut single 'Take It All Away' **GIRLSCHOOL** celebrate in style with 'Legacy' (Wacken/SPV). Much has been made of the guest contributors to the album, but the fact remains that 'Legacy' is the band's best release in many years and reaches the giddy heights of 'Demolition' and 'Hit 'N' Run' all those years ago. With a mix of eminently accessible material swinging from the heads-down ('Everything's The Same') to the quirky ('Spend

Spend Spend') to the cover ('Metropolis') to the historical ('Emergency') the album genuinely has something for everyone. The vocals are luscious, the songs catchy and the vibe just puts a smile on your face. Enjoy!



Finally, 'Nobody Does It Better' might be Carly Simon's contribution to an execrable James Bond film but it's also a worthy comment on the career of **DORO** Pesch. Twenty-five years on from making her debut on Warlock's 'Burning The Witches' the Metal Queen has seen off all comers and is still at the height of her game. Metal through and through and deliciously proud of the fact, Doro loudly celebrates her longevity with 'Celebrate – The Night Of The Warlock' (AFM), a five-track taster for her upcoming album. For your money you get three takes on the A-side: the original version, a duet version with Biff Byford and the 'full metal female version' featuring Sabina Classen, Floor Jansen, Angela Gossow, Veronica Freeman, Liv Kristine, Ji-In Cho, Liv from Sister Sin and all of Girlschool. Once these three cuts have been despatched, the EP runs out with 'The Night Of The Warlock' and 'Rescue Me'. Amidst all the guests, the band – Joe Taylor (guitars), Nick Douglas (bass), Oliver Palotai (keyboards) and Johnny Dee (drums) – power things along nicely. Hmm... Doro doing a James Bond theme: now there's a thought!