



Dutch Progressive Rock Page

review cd "MADAME ZELLE"

Madame Zelle is Italian progressive outfit Conqueror's fourth release in 16 years. Yes you've read correctly, 16 years and four albums - although it should be noted that the first Conqueror release was in 2003, so perhaps making it 11 years in the making. The band also state that this album consists of compositions throughout their career up to 2003. Now for their latest release Conqueror have taken the story of Madame Zelle - and they do what Italian prog does best - story telling.

Madame Zelle tells the story of Margarethe Geertruida Zelle (1876- 1917), known as as Madame Zelle or Mata Hari - has had her influence in the world. Being shot as an alleged German spy by the French in World War One. The story starts in Leeuwarden, Netherlands, passing through Indonesia, France, UK, Germany and finally ends as she is finally killed in France.

The group of musicians taking part in the story are: Simona Rigano: vocals and keyboards; Natale Russo: drums and percussions; Sabrina Rigano: flute and saxophone; Mario Pollino: guitars and Gianluca Villa: bass. The only member to have been with Conqueror from the start in 1994 is Natale Russo. Simona Rigano has been a member since the new start in 2002 and as such has also played on every album Conqueror have produced. Ever since their first album Natale and Simona have been the backbone of the band, the other members changing almost yearly.

The music Conqueror makes is your typical Italian progressive rock - which is best described as melancholic, eclectic in a way, but also certainly very melodic. It is almost always keyboard dominated, with long guitar solos to complete the songs - and this album is no different. The melody lines are strong with those Italian subtle changes like only Italian bands seem to really have a hang of.

I am, during my listening sessions, surprised by the sheer poetry of the songs, compositionally they have very complex structures but somehow sound like it is a piece of cake for the musicians playing them. Also I am utterly impressed that a band with so many line up changes manages to record albums of this nature and every time are able to find once again the musicians that fit into the band.

Now my Italian is not that strong, I do not always know what the songs are telling me but as I know some of the story behind Mata Hari, this enabled me to understand the first song telling the start of Margarethe's life in the Netherlands - and as the album goes on, the various episodes are told.

The musical concept is a stunning one with subtle bits on keyboards followed by rocking guitars, in their turn interacting with a keyboard solo. Or vice versa, keyboard layers with long spun out guitar solos by Mario the additional flute and saxophone playing of Sabrina, which gives additional value to the songs, the subtlety in which these sections are played are the grandioso moments on the album. Bass player Gianluca also gets his moments in which he can really show off his playing, but mostly the songs revolve around the keyboards and voice of Simona. With her typical but nice way of singing the lyrics. Just one person left in need of credit for his work is Natale Russo who is one great drummer and percussionist. Apart from his drumming Natale also takes care of part of the recording of the album and of course he and Simona are the masterminds behind the project Madame Zelle.

In conclusion - Madame Zelle is an album that is certainly worth checking out, especially if Italian prog is of your liking - in the vein of PFM, Le Orme, Latte E Miele. All these bands have their own unique style but there are commonalities within the nature of their "melodramatic music". Conqueror are now ready to conquer the world - I am impressed - hat's off to them.

Conclusion: 8 out of 10
GERT HULSHOF

APRIL 2010



www.conqueror.it