

Syzygy

3RP 2010: "A DAY OF PROG"

**Saturday, 14th July 2010
RPM's, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA**



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I had a wonderful time at the 2009 Three Rivers Progressive Rock Festival so, like many other prog fans, I was saddened to hear that 3RP would not carry on as a full fledged festival in 2010. However, festival organizer Howard Levy decided to “keep the flame alive” by having a Friday/Saturday progressive rock event in the greater Pittsburgh area predominantly featuring local bands (Going for the One, Skelnik, Gravity, Mandrake Project & Syzygy).

My girlfriend and I made the approximately three-hour drive to attend the Saturday portion of this year's festival, but unfortunately we got ridiculously lost in Pittsburgh so we didn't get to the venue until right after Mandrake Project's set started (Pittsburgh is an extremely confusing city to drive in – streets are poorly marked and nothing makes sense). I enjoyed Mandrake Project's set of searing instrumental prog, featuring several cuts from an upcoming release. However, my main reason for attending the event was to see the headliner Syzygy for the third time, and my review of their set is as follows.

The members of Syzygy are: Carl Baldassarre on lead guitar & vocals, Sam Giunta on keyboards, Paul Mihacevich on percussion, Al Rolik on bass guitar, and Mark Boals on lead vocals. Syzygy's performance didn't begin until later than expected due to some technical problems, but it was worth the wait. This time around they added some elements to their show that made the concert all the more enjoyable, such as a fog machine and a screen behind the

stage featuring images that were relevant to the music (whoever did the imagery did a wonderful job).

The band came on stage and surprised me by starting with three tracks from their 1993 "Cosmos & Chaos" album, back when the band was known as Witsend. "Mount Ethereal" and "Strange Loop II" were rocking songs that got the show off to a rousing inception. These were two tracks that appeared as instrumentals on the album but have since been given lyrics that were delivered with power and feeling by the exceptional vocalist Mark Boals. So many prog bands that have excellent instrumental work are limited by mediocre vocals (how many times have prog reviews said something like "this band is great ... if only they had a better vocalist"), but Mark Boals has taken Syzygy to the next level. At one point in the show Carl Baldassarre remarked that Syzygy was searching for a voice for a very long time but they have finally found it with Mark. Next, I was pleasantly surprised to hear the mellow acoustic song "Circadian Rhythms" as this was the first time that I've seen the song performed live.

That concluded the "Cosmos & Chaos" portion of the show – the band then moved on to a series of tracks from their recent release "Realms of Eternity". During the transition, Carl threw a copy of each CD to two lucky people in the audience. Carl engaged the audience with humour and sincere gratitude throughout the entire show, and it was obvious that the band was having just as much fun as the attentive and appreciative audience. They continued with a passionate rendition of the opening track from Realms of Eternity, "Darkfield". Before moving on to the next song, "Dreams", the band conveyed a special thanks to festival organizer Howard Levy and presented him with a limited edition CD copy of their performance at 3RP 2009 (which can be read about [HERE](#)). The band also took some time to read a portion of a letter that the legendary Steve Hackett sent to them about a recent Syzygy recording, a letter that solidifies a dream come true for the band and justifies all of their hard work. The portion that Carl read during the show is as follows:

"It's beautifully written and recorded and easily the best I'd ever been given to listen to. If I can help in any way [such as with liner] notes you'd like me to add I'll be very happy to get involved. I don't know how far down the road you are with this, but it's great stuff. I played it from beginning to end. I'm sure it was years in the making in one way or the other. I usually hope for a masterpiece every time I play an unknown quantity (to me) but this is the only time the dream has been fully delivered..."

"Dreams" was a highly enjoyable live piece as usual (I had the pleasure of hearing an early version of the song performed live years before the album came out) and the audience was noticeably into it.

Next up was the highlight of the show for me, the epic about deceased loved ones called "The Sea". The images projected on the screen during this song captured the spirit of the lyrics and the meaning of the piece and thus added to its effectiveness. I was on Cloud 9 during the concluding portion of this contemporary prog masterpiece.

"The Sea" concluded the "Realms of Eternity" portion, and the band subsequently moved on to tracks from "The Allegory of Light" (Carl threw a copy of the CD to someone in the audience just like before). "The Coronation" was the original intended title for the piece that became "The Journey of Myrrdin", and the version they did at this concert featured fantasy-

themes lyrics that I enjoyed quite a bit (I'm a sucker for fantasy-related escapism). This was followed by a keyboard solo by Sam Giunta which apparently featured some material that may appear on the next Syzygy album. The solo sounded like an orchestra and reminded me of Robert John Godfrey's work from The Enid's concert that I had the pleasure of witnessing at NEARFest 2010.

After Sam's solo Carl got out his classical guitar and played "The Beggar's Tale" from the three part "Allegory of Light" suite; the dream-like animated imagery of a man in a rowboat projected onto the screen during this song was breathtaking. "Master of the House" from the same "Allegory of Light" suite brought the set to a close in searing fashion. This piece is great to witness live because of the jaw-dropping interplay between the musicians.

By this point it was around midnight and the band knew that the audience was tired so they did the encore cover songs without leaving the stage and coming back. Carl introduced the first encore song by saying "*1978 ... the first prog supergroup*" and then the band played "In the Dead of Night" from the classic first UK album. Seeing Syzygy perform this awesome song was a special treat, especially the Allan Holdsworth guitar solo toward the end. The band concluded the evening with "Burn" by Deep Purple complete with note-perfect guitar and key solos – a rocking and fun way to end a great night of music. Hopefully there will be more 3RP events in the future – feeling connected to the greater progressive music community by hanging out and watching great bands give rare live performances is an absolute joy and I look forward to many similar experiences in the future.

Set list

Mount Ethereal
Strange Loop II
Circadian Rhythms
Darkfield
Dreams
The Sea
The Coronation
Sam Giunta Keyboard Solo
Beggar's Tale
M.O.T.H.

Encore:

In the Dead of Night (UK)
Burn (Deep Purple)

Links

[3RP - Official Website](#)

[Syzygy - Official Website](#)