

FREEZE! Live In Europe 2020

The Aristocrats

BOING!, 2020

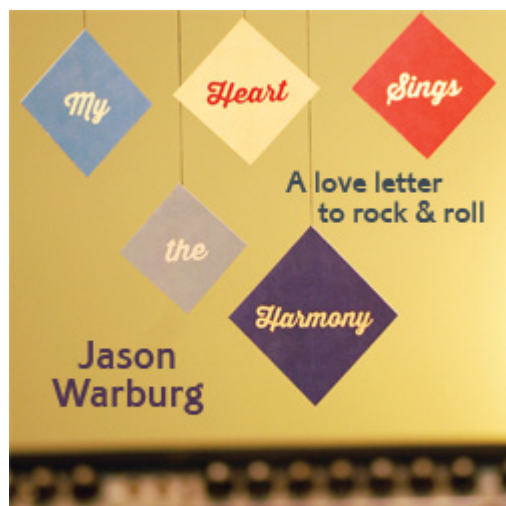
<http://the-aristocrats-band.com>

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Drawn from four back-to-back concerts The Aristocrats played in Spain from February 9th to 12th, 2020, *FREEZE!* captures an instrumental trio playing at its finest, six months into a world tour cut short by the outbreak of COVID-19.

Composed of Guthrie Govan (guitar), Bryan Beller (bass), and Marco Minnemann (drums), The Aristocrats was touring in support of their fourth studio album *You Know What...?* (2019), from which five of the six tracks are taken. The opener, “D Grade F*ck Move Jam,” revs up for a turbulent show of many notes and time signatures. From a wah-heavy groove in the first two minutes, to speedy solos in the middle, the song shifts gears and explores new ground a number of times before returning to the introductory riff as a closer. The musicianship is indisputable, and the fans who have followed The Aristocrats since their debut in 2011 will embrace this complex and unpredictable show. But for new and/or casual listeners, the song will be quite the frenetic introduction to the band. A shorter and more structured song called “Blues Fuckers” from The Aristocrats’ first album served as the opener during the 2019-2020 tour and did a great job whetting fans’ appetites for the show to come, so it’s a pity to see it left off.



The awkward choice of opening number aside, *FREEZE!* captures an excellent snapshot of a virtuoso trio that channels a broad range of influence and ideas into their playing. “Spanish Eddie” is a delight, led by Govan taking a bit of flamenco guitar into alien territory: about 4:30 in, he tears into a delightfully clean bit of soloing atop a great rhythm section. The Aristocrats is a band with so much talent, one can choose to tune in to the guitar, bass, or drums at any given time and be amazed. The exit from the soloing around 5:10 sees the band dabble in a range of styles – the best coming at 6:15 when they revisit the clean introduction with distortion and double-bass drumming! – before guiding the song to its end. “We All Come Together” is a highlight for its chicken pickin’ and a series of trade-offs between guitar and bass. The interplay between Steve Morse and Andy West in The Dixie Dregs’ *Night Of The Living Dregs* immediately comes to mind. At 4:10, Beller gets some time in the spotlight for a smooth, clean, melodic bass solo that peaks in him playing in sync with Govan’s lead. That the band works a few jingles of “Comin’ Round The Mountain” and the *Ghostbusters* theme into the jam shows their sense of humor.

For many fans, the highlight to this album will be “Get It Like That (Dedicated To Neil Peart),” which features a drum solo from Minnemann in memory of Rush’s legendary drummer who passed away in January 2020. As with Neil Peart’s dazzling solo spots with Rush, Minnemann plays an intricate composition of rhythms, beats, and percussion over the course of eight minutes, adding a few references to “YYZ” and “Tom Sawyer” along the way.

That he is the only drummer with whom Rush's guitarist, Alex Lifeson, has written and recorded with since the band retired (a limited-edition 12" picture EP of their seven minute composition "Lovers Calling" was available at The Aristocrats' shows on this tour) gives Minnemann's tribute a feeling of extra significance. "Last Orders" is a great choice for a closing song. A slower number penned by guitarist Guthrie Govan, it has at times the feel of an atmospheric journey where single notes count - think of Frank Zappa's "Watermelon In Easter Hay" with a minute's injection of rock at 3:40 before the band segues to a jazzy outro to wrap up the night.

While new listeners best begin with the studio albums for an introduction to the band, for the fans that The Aristocrats has gained in the past ten years, *FREEZE!* captures everything they hope to hear from the band: virtuosic playing, twists and turns of innovation, and an appreciation for the absurd expressed in a setlist of brand new material.

Rating: **B+**

User Rating: Not Yet Rated

Comments

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