Xandria - Theater Of Dimensions [2017]

1-1 Where The Heart Is Home 1-2 Death To The Holy 1-3 Forsaken Love 1-4 Call Of Destiny 1-5 We Are Murderers (We All) 1-6 Dark Night Of The Souls 1-7 When The Walls Came Down (Heartache Was Born) 1-8 Ship Of Doom 1-9 Ceilí 1-10 Song For Sorrow And Woe 1-11 Burn Me 1-12 Queen Of Hearts Reborn 1-13 A Theater Of Dimensions Bonus Acoustic *2-1 Call Of Destiny 2-2 Dark Night Of The Soul 2-3 In Remembrance 2-4 Sweet Atonement 2-5 Valentine*
Marco Heubaum - Guitars, Vocals, Keyboards Gerit Lamm - Drums Philip Restemeier - Guitars Steven Wussow - Bass Dianne van Giersbergen - Vocals

Xandria's transformation from a second rate goth band into one of the best symphonic metal acts in the scene was a wonderful turn of events. Their early stuff didn't grab me at all, but when they became the best Nightwish clone on the market, everyone sat up and paid attention. It was so refreshing to see a band worship the real Nightwish, the one I fell in love with before 'Once' came out and changed the game forever. Xandria put out an album called 'Neverworld's End' which was basically their answer to 'Century Child', and then they recruited the gorgeous Dianne van Giersbergen, who is my favourite soprano, and the best in the business for my money. Her tone, vibrato, and projection are precise and immaculate. She's more operatic in her delivery than most female metal vocalists, and 'Sacrificium' was her claim to fame. It was also the best album Nightwish never wrote. Sadly, Dianne would be booted from Xandria not long after, but we got another full-length with her at the helm, the satisfying yet flawed 'Theater Of Dimensions'.

It was a daunting task to follow up an album as good as 'Sacrificium', but they managed to pull it off, delivering a solid symphonic metal record that taken on its own merits is varied, intricate, and wide in scope, but when considered as part of their oeuvre post-transformation, it's the weakest of the three. But that's not to say it's a bad record. The first half of the album is actually pretty awesome, shuffling a bunch of tunes that range from high-flying double-bass-driven power metal like 'Call Of Destiny' and 'Death To The Holy', to more romantic, softer songs as

with ‘Forsaken Love’ (which still ends up double kicking towards the end) and the somber ‘Dark Night Of The Soul’. Dianne sounds great here, her performance a little more human than last time out, and the band dish up solid riffs that hover somewhere between ‘Wishmaster’ and the groovy side of Epica, with a touch of Rhapsody thrown in via huge orchestral swells. The production is a little weird, with the guitars being pretty gritty, but the drums have a plastic quality, which is a shame because Gerit Lamm does a damn good job behind the kit. The vocals and keys are way up in the mix, and the whole thing just doesn’t have enough room to breathe with so much going on.

The problems occur later on, mainly with the guest stars, who all sound utterly shit, despite being decent performers in their own right. Soilwork’s Bjorn Strid sounds forced on the dumbly heavy ‘We Are Murderers’, a silly song to begin with, and Myrath’s Zaher Zorgati is horrendous during his spot in ‘Burn Me’. It’s like he can’t sing at all. Weird, as I remember digging ‘Desert Call’ upon release. The album loses a bit of steam in the second stretch, with the pointless, pirate-themed ‘Ship Of Doom’ finding the band dumbing themselves down for a stab at this pathetic trend, and folky instrumental ‘Ceili’ continuing the theme. The fourteen-minute-plus title track is a mess, too, with cool sections cropping up here and there, but ruined by Henning Basse’s counterpoint piece in the middle. He also sounds dreadful, which turns the song from mildly interesting to actively annoying.

Despite all this, ‘Theater Of Dimensions’ remains a solid album, one fans of symphonic metal will certainly enjoy, but it doesn’t touch the highs of the two albums preceding it. The first half is full of bangers, but the second is misguided and bloated. I’m sad Dianne is no longer with the band, as they were on their way to stardom with that girl, but I’m excited to see what the future holds for Xandria, as they always deliver a stunning album when they get a new singer. Hell, they should put Tarja to good use at long last and give her a call. ---Dragonchaser, metal-archives.com

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