

Ensiferum - One Man Army (2015)

Written by bluesever

Saturday, 07 September 2019 15:08 -

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1-1 *March Of War* 1:32 1-2 *Axe Of Judgement* 4:33 1-3 *Heathen Horde* 4:12 1-4 *One Man Army* 4:25 1-5 *Burden Of The Fallen* 1:49 1-6 *Warrior Without A War* 5:24 1-7 *Cry For The Earth Bounds* 7:31 1-8 *Two Of Spades* 3:39 Heaten Throne Part III: 1-9 *My Ancestors' Blood* 4:31 1-10 *Descendants, Defiance, Domination* 11:20 1-11 *Neito Pohjolan* 4:10 - (Bonus Material):

2-12 *Rawhide* 2:54 2-13 *Warmetal* 4:10 2-14 *Candour And Lies* 2:34 2-15 *Bonus Song* 4:29

Accordion – Netta Skog Bass – Sami Hinkka Choir – Emmi Silvennoinen, Janne Parviainen, Jukka-Pekka Miettinen, Markus Toivonen, Petri Lindroos, Sami Hinkka, Skid, Toni Salminen Choir [Divine] – Bianca Hösli, Heidi Parviainen, Jukka Hoffrén, Mikko P. Mustonen, Petteri Lehtikainen, Tanja Varha, Tapio Kuosma, Tuomas Nieminen Choir [Infernal] – Emmi Silvennoinen, Jukka-Pekka Miettinen, Markus Toivonen, Sami Hinkka Drums – Janne Parviainen Grand Piano – Emmi Silvennoinen Guitar – Markus Toivonen, Petri Lindroos Kantele – Timo Väänänen Keyboards – Emmi Silvennoinen Nyckelharpa – Lassi Lógren Organ [Hammond] – Emmi Silvennoinen Pedal Steel Guitar – Olli Haavisto Speech – Heri Joensen (tracks: 3), Matti Häkämies (tracks: 9,10) Vocals – Emmi Silvennoinen, Markus Toivonen, Miitri Aaltonen (tracks:14), Petri Lindroos, Sami Hinkka Vocals [Additional] – Frederik (tracks: 8), Jukka-Pekka Miettinen, Netta Skog (tracks: 11) Whistle – Manu Lohi (tracks: 8), Mikko Mustonen (tracks: 8)

I've never listened to Ensiferum before, so I guess it's time to give them a shot. I've heard of the band, and judging by their album covers I assume it's a safe bet I'll be treated to folk metal.

Unsurprisingly, the album opens with an intro ("March of War") employing acoustic instruments and folk melodies; it's a rather beautiful rendition that evokes the olden days, but I don't think it sounds very war-like; more like the soundtrack to a rustic medieval village where everybody's going about their business, like carting people's shit away from the main thoroughfare. Not saying the intro is shit, mind you, but medieval life was shitty and folk metal bands tend to glorify

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these long gone epochs, and glorification is precisely the word that comes to mind when the first proper track, "Axe of Judgement" kicks off; the music is pompous, even uplifting, the kind of music that makes you want to raise your sword and bang your head.

Much to my surprise (remember, Ensiferum was never on my radar), the power metal is lead by rasping vocals more commonly heard in black metal. It's almost like Blind Guardian or whatever recorded an album, then Hansi got sick and they hired a vocalist from a second-rate black metal band to finish their production. Well, I have to say I like the juxtaposition; it reminds me slightly of Eluveitie, but if I'm not mistaken (and I admit I could be - I'm not well versed in this subgenre) Ensiferum, at least on One Man Army, sounds a tad harsher due to the vocals, while the rest of the music is relatively "safe" - it's not quite viking metal to my ears; the strength and brutality of the vikings is not what comes to mind when I listen to these songs, which are melodic, upbeat (especially when the choir adds its voice, giving it a slightly Blind Guardian-like flavor), generally fast (for a heavy metal album); the riffs and melodies sound a lot happier than the vocalist, who hisses and rasps his way through the tracks.

I enjoy listening to this album, but the material is never challenging me, nor is it ever surprising. The songs are well structured, and there's some decent playing going on, with the drummer doing some fun fills here and there as a small highlight; the keyboards have a prominent role, leaving the guitars to fill the soundscape much like the bass does; however, there are leads flashing in and out, here and there, adding some spice.

Not until "Burden of the Fallen" do we get clean vocals, backed by acoustic instruments - strangely, this ballad-of-sorts is less than two minutes long, but as it slides into "Warrior without a War" I realize "Burden..." functions as an intro rather than a stand-alone track. The clean vocals are mediocre in my opinion, which might be why the singer spends most of his time sounding harsh(ish). "Warrior without a War", as a title, perfectly describes this concoction of relatively harmless metal; they are like warriors all right, but there's no real fight going on, if you know what I mean. It's never extreme, and is in essence a power metal album, at times bordering on poppy, Dark Moor-ish melodies and (choir) vocal lines, sometimes chugging along with riffs that could have been on an Amorphis album. Occasionally Ensiferum's folk melodies remind me of Falconer, from neighboring Sweden, but there's also something distinctly Finnish about Ensiferum although I struggle to pinpoint exactly what that is (the Children Of Bodom-like vocals in "My Ancestors' Blood", perhaps?)

I realize by looking at the band's discography that I may be reviewing Ensiferum's weakest effort, and that is quite promising since there's a lot of stuff on here that I am able to enjoy despite the somewhat weak presence. As a fan of the fantasy genre I certainly don't mind music

that brings to mind epic landscapes and the din of knights in battle, and songs like "Cry for the Earth Bounds" and "Heathen Horde" do get me in that mood.

Toward the end of the album, however, I feel that Ensiferum make two major mistakes. "Descendants, Defiance, Dominion" clocks in at over 11 minutes yet doesn't have good enough material to justify the length; it is the least interesting song on offer, and would benefit from being trimmed down to, say, three. The album closer, "Neito Pohjolan" is a pure folk song which, perhaps accidentally, sounds like a country song, although I am sure this must be a Finnish folk number that Ensiferum cover (I know, I could research this, but I am not that curious. At any rate, while it probably is a decent track if you're into this, I feel it detracts from the overall feel of the album, and would better serve as a single B-side. There's just something about it that I simply don't like, subjectively speaking.

The production is adequate, the musicianship is adequate, and there are some sweet dual guitar harmonies and fun (if predictable) ideas to spice things up. I am now officially curious about their earlier releases. I hoped for bloodshed, an epic battle between mightily thewed Viking berserkers and the defenders of the shores of England but found instead a small skirmish between less intimidating fighters - still enjoyable, just not as crushing as I prefer. Wait, the album's called One Man Army... now I want to hear Ensiferum with a full band of warriors in a proper fight. ---Slynt, metal-archives.com

"Unsung Heroes" było dla wielu straszliwym ciosem. Nagle okazało się, że nawet jeden z zespołów, które w oczach opinii publicznej, były niezdolne do wydania słabego albumu zszedł zdecydowanie poniżej poziomu, do którego nas przyzwyczaił. Osobiście uważam, że daleko mu do poprzedników, lecz nie nazwałbym go koszmarnym. Kiedy grupa przyzwyczaiła nas do niesamowicie wysokich standardów trudno przełknąć przeciętną płytę. Czy "One Man Army" zabiera nas z powrotem do czasów świetności Ensiferum? Jest lepiej niż poprzednio, ale nie ogłaszałbym jeszcze powrotu do dawnej formy. Chociaż znajdziemy tu kilka całkiem interesujących kawałków, to czasy ich debiutu, kiedy każdego numeru chciało się słuchać dziesiątki razy, minęły. Albumowi zdarzają się genialne momenty, a ogólny poziom nigdy nie schodzi poniżej "porządnego". Fani zespołu poczują się jak u siebie. Chórki, wstawki folkowe, solidne riffy, wszystko jest na swoim miejscu. Jednocześnie w niektórych momentach, ku mojej uciechu, Ensiferum potrafi zupełnie zbić z tropu. Wstawka disco w "Two Of Spades" to czyste złoto, a inspiracje muzyką rodem z westernów w finałowej piosence są świetnym urozmaicheniem. Z bardziej tradycyjnymi kawałkami jest już różnie, jedne prezentują się całkiem nieźle (np. "Axe Of Judgement", "Heathen Horde"), inne bardzo szybko tracą moje

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zainteresowanie. Trzeba przyznać, że po kilkunastu bardzo produktywnych latach dla folk metalu ciężko przyciągnąć uwagę słuchacza używając tej samej formuły co zawsze. Mimo wszystko "One Man Army" to całkiem solidny album, który powinien przypaść do gustu większości fanów zespołu. Drobne innowacje stanowią krok w dobrą stronę. Jeśli zespół pójdzie dalej tą ścieżką, nie będziemy musieli się martwić ewentualną powtórką z "Unsung Heroes".

Choć płyta nie powaliła mnie na kolana, to każdy, szukający porządnego folk metalu będzie nią usatysfakcjonowany. Przyszłość Ensiferum nie jawi się już w ciemnych barwach. Dostaliśmy album ze wszech miar porządny, momentami nawet zaskakujący, a to więcej niż się spodziewałem. --- Karol Wunsch, drugastronamuzyki.blogspot.com

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