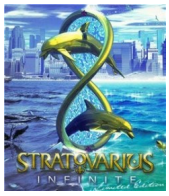
Stratovarius - Infinite (2010)



01. Hunting High And Low 04:09
02. Millennium 04:09
03. Mother Gaia 08:18
04. Phoenix 06:13
05. Glory Of The World 04:53
06. A Million Light Years Away 05:19
07. Freedom 05:04
08. Infinity 09:22
09. Celestial Dream 02:29
Bass – Jari Kainulainen Conductor [Choir And Orchestra] – Riku Niemi (tracks: 3, 8, 9) Drums – Jörg Michael Guitar, Producer – Timo Tolkki Keyboards – Jens Johansson Vocals – Timo Kotipelto

For anyone wishing that power metal albums would just get to the point, popping Infinite into your CD player is the way to go, seeing as it starts off with two of the most energetic and immediately satisfying songs from Stratovarius's discography. Purely for the singles 'Hunting High and Low' and 'A Million Light Years Away', as well as the buoyant and powerful 'Millenium', I would say Infinite is a necessary purchase for all fans of power metal, unless your idea of the genre extends to Sabaton and no further.

Coming hot on the heels of the excellent Destiny, Stratovarius took their brand of exciting, optimistic power metal into the realms of big production and bigger budgets, as the shining quality of the recording is quick to attest. By this point in their career, usually more classically power metal and less speed metal than their German peers like Helloween and Gamma Ray, the Finns were pushing the orchestral side of things and loading up their songs with bombast in a manner that would be familiar to Rhapsody of Fire if only there were more flutes and lyrics

about dragons. The keyboards of Jens Johansson play a large but not overwhelming role in the shaping of some of the songs, diddling along like a second guitar on the more energetic likes of 'Phoenix', while adding "epic" (remember those scare quotes, I'm coming back to them in a minute) atmospheres, choirs, and strings to some of the slower songs and instrumental sections. I'm not sure if this period of Stratovarius has a direct comparison in the rest of the European power metal scene, since their fast songs tend to sound quite distinctive, while the more progressive pieces are often fairly soft, such as 'Mother Gaia', which sounds like a really long ballad.

Happily for everyone, Timo Tolkki was still doing well in both mind and left hand, which always gave Stratovarius a huge advantage. He actually has more opportunity to play fast and aggressively here than he did on Destiny, which tended towards the epic and mid-paced for at least half its length, plus the fact that there were really quite a lot of ballads on that album. Here, we actually have five fast-paced songs, which is really quite a big deal, and he produces decent riffs on all of them, even if a few blur together because of Jörg Michael's furious blastbeats. Then there are the melodies and solos that Tolkki really lets rip in a song like 'Glory of the World': the beginning of his main solo just sounds out of this world and when the rest of the band come back in behind him, Stratovarius really become a force of nature. The power of the production does a big favour to everybody else too, with the drums punching strongly though not overwhelming everything, the bass warm and audible, keyboards grand but not overstated, and the other Timo (Kotipelto) in excellent voice, maybe as good as he's ever been.

As for songs, I've mentioned that preponderence towards speed that marks all of the shorter numbers, while the longer songs tend to include more varied material. I guess 'A Million Light Years Away' is the catchiest song here, since it features a memorable keyboard hook and one of the most powerful choruses, using its mid-pace to stick in the mind, but it's the likes of 'Millenium', 'Freedom', and 'Glory of the World' that leave the general impression of the album's character. All use that typical fast power metal beat and hold back little in the way of subtlety, roaring out group vocals, orchestral tags, and blazing leads at will. With so many of this kind of song, it sometimes feels slightly predictable, though most of them are exciting enough that it doesn't matter, and rarely too cheesy to be palatable. 'Glory of the World' certainly takes the prize for lead shenanigans and 'Millenium' does the job for sheer exuberance and heaviness, while 'Freedom' and 'Phoenix' feel slightly underwhelming by comparison, perhaps because of some surplus length. The two long epics are rather different, since 'Mother Gaia' is soft and gentle and 'Infinity' simply throws everything at one song (especially hugely overblown choirs and keys), though most of it sticks, even if the song structure is quite a mess. The strangest thing to relate is that the only thing resembling a ballad is 'Mother Gaia', since the acoustic 'Celestial Dream' feels more like an outro to 'Infinity' than a fully fleshed-out song.

I'm not sure what problem some have found with Infinite, because I really enjoy the more direct

approach and even the paint-splattered experiment of 'Infinity'. Perhaps a little generic at this point in their career, Stratovarius were still making exciting music that could endear them to several different sectors of the metal audience and proving that power metal at its best still means being powerful. ---gasmask_colostomy, metal-archives.com

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