

JSS: a Beautiful Mess in Budapest JEFF SCOTT SOTO LIVE

Jeff Scott Soto (+ H.A.R.D., Snakebite) - Budapest, Diesel Club - 9 April 2009

Due to late hours of work I partly accidentally, partly consciously missed the two opening Hungarian acts. As for Snakebite, an acoustic Whitesnake tribute project of a good friend of mine, I've seen and covered them quite a few times (check the live report archives) and as far as H.A.R.D. goes I simply can't get as enthusiastic about them as some reviewers seem to do. I may be ignorant but I can't get into a five piece band that weighs more than a thousand pounds (a skinny drummer included) and plays rehashed 70s hard rock riffs all over the place. With that said let's focus on more important issues like the gig Jeff Scott Soto and his new live band was about to pull.



Jeff arrived struggling with a flu, yet I have to say other than consuming an enormous amount of various liquid and solid medicine on stage and mentioning his health problems between two songs in the beginning of the show, no one would have ever noticed any signs of that. His voice was as powerful as ever and his stage presence as dynamic as a Corvette kicked in drive. They opened up with "21st Century" from the new album and the first part of the set was rather heavy on new songs. Jeff even grabbed a guitar every now and then to give a thick enough arrangement for the new songs. Not that Jorge Salan's playing wouldn't have been entertaining enough on its own. He is one of my favorite "newcomer" guitarists and it was good to see him live on stage. He reminded me of Vito Bratta a lot, a genius when it comes to playing but a rather shy boy as far as performance and stage presence goes. I can only hope a few years of touring with Jeff would bring the best out of him.



The other side of the stage was better occupied with BJ, the lead singer of Tempestt (Jeff's tour support from last year's tour - see the archives for a report of that show, especially the "musical slavery" part...). BJ was responsible for the backing guitars and the keyboards the entire gig long, quite some "evolution", dare I say... And much to my pleasant surprise he did a very good job, and he even got his 5 minutes fame with the opportunity to sing a Journey medley Jeff taking the keyboards over. That was one of the highlights of the entire gig.

And as if hispanic background was a must when it came to auditioning for Soto, the rhythm section consisted of Edu Cominato on drums also from Tempestt and a Spanish guy Fernando Mainer on bass. They did a very good job providing a solid background and added their share of backing vocals. That made five singing voices and sufficient musicianship to switch instruments when needed, so unlike last year the band didn't need to rely on canned keyboards and backing vocals which was a very pleasant feature for me (as I vehemently hate those).



The band had such a good chemistry that they pulled quite a few gags, throwing in a couple of half-played songs out of pure fun, getting into songs by audience requests (my fave part was when BJ already had his acoustic guitar in his hands ready for the next acoustic medley when Jorge started "I am a Viking" by audience request and the band joined in with BJ playing powerchords on his acoustic guitar). They stopped it after the first verse, saving what was left of Jeff's voice.

We had the "compulsary" acoustic medley, the piano medley, the 70s disco medley, as well as "Stand Up" from Rock Star and "I'll Be Waiting" from Talisman, so all the necessary ingredients of a Soto show. I personally missed some Queen and could have done with more just "Nobody Said It Was Easy" in a piano medley from Eyes but I can't complain as even a relatively "sick" Soto beats anybody else out there these days. Don't miss him if he comes to town!



Review by Endre 'Bandi' Hübner
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