

Jon Lord - Concerto For Group And Orchestra (2012)

Written by bluesever

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1 Moderato - Allegro 16:20 2 Andante 19:34 3 Vivace – Presto 10:48 Jon Lord – organ
Darin Vasilev – guitar (1) Joe Bonamassa – guitar (2) Steve Morse – guitar (3) Guy Pratt –
bass Brett Morgan - drums Bruce Dickinson, Kaskia Laska, Steve Balsamo – vocals Royal
Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra Paul Mann – conductor

For all of the dynamic playing associated with the late Jon Lord's performances of this life's-work composition alongside his band mates in Deep Purple, you never heard it quite like this.

Completed just before the legendary keyboardist succumbed to cancer, Concerto for Group and Orchestra becomes a platform for every finely conveyed nuance that Lord ever imagined, as Paul Mann conducts the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. There is, quite frankly, a breath-taking clarity in the interactions of the orchestra, Lord and his chosen soloists — including Deep Purple guitarist Steve Morse, as well as Iron Maiden's Bruce Dickinson, Joe Bonamassa, Guy Pratt, Steve Balsamo and others. Ian Gillan, long-time frontman with Purple, contributed lyrics.

In this way, Lord's prog rock-meets-classical piece ends up sounding brand new, even for long-time Purple fans. And sometimes, it actually is: Concerto for Group and Orchestra, issued via Ear Music-Eagle Records and set for expanded-edition release in early December, also showcases additional elements that Lord had continued to work into the piece over the years.

His original recorded take on the concerto dates back to 1969, of course, as memorably recorded with Malcolm Arnold and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Lord also made a pass at it in 1999, collaborating with the London Symphony Orchestra. Over the years, the piece was

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actually performed some 100 times — notably during Purple's 2000-01 world tour.

That, as much as anything, is why certain fresh twists leap out of the speakers here: Guitarist Darin Vasilev, for instance, narrows the wildly entertaining, but occasionally meandering 1969 solo taken by Deep Purple co-founder Ritchie Blackmore on the opening "Moderato – Allegro." Though known for his free-form blues-rock explorations, Bonamassa illustrates on "Andante," just as he does with Black Country Communion, how communicative and sharp his playing can be when he's given a more confined playing window. Vocalists Balsamo and Kasia Laska add to the dark portent that initially surrounds this second movement, before Dickinson manages to match — and maybe even exceed — Bonamassa's fiery intensity.

Then as now, though, the concerto's final third — Lord's torrential "Vivace – Presto," this time featuring some scalding asides from Morse — elicits wave after wave of jaw-dropping wonder. It is here, more than anywhere else, that Lord made the early case for combining these two seemingly disparate genres.

Issued as a CD or CD/DVD combo with a sparkling 5.1 mix, Concerto for Group and Orchestra works not just as a stirring monument to the prog-based classical form, but as a valedictory for a man and his stubborn creative vision. Lord lived like he plays the B3 here, with a ferocious creativity. That same dogged sense of determination pushed him to continue working on this piece until he got it just right — and I think, at long last but thankfully not a moment too late, he finally did. ---Nick Deriso, somethingelsereviews.com

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