

Blue Oyster Cult - The Symbol Remains (2020)

Written by bluesever (Bogdan Marszałkowski)

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1. *That Was Me* 2. *Box In My Head* 3. *Tainted Blood* 4. *Nightmare Epiphany* 5. *Edge Of The World* 6. *The Machine* 7. *Train True (Lennie's Song)* 8. *The Return Of St. Cecilia* 9. *Stand And Fight* 10. *Florida Man* 11. *The Alchemist* 12. *Secret Road* 13. *There's A Crime* 14. *Fight* Eric Bloom - vocals Donald "Buck Dharma" Roeser - lead guitar Richie Castellano - keyboards, rhythm guitar Danny Miranda - bass Jules Radino - drums

Indulge me, will you? Blue Oyster Cult has been part of my personal musical history since high school. Yeah, I mean the early to mid-Seventies. Blue Oyster Cult (1972), my favorite *Tyranny And Mutation* (1973), *Secret Treaties* (1974) and, of course, their chart topping *Agents Of Fortune*, which brought them mainstream success, were in constant rotation on my record player. BOC, as they are affectionately known, toured relentlessly and became one of the first bands to pioneer the use of laser effects in their shows. In 1977 or 1978 (my recollection is fuzzy), I saw my first laser-guided BOC show at The Spectrum in Philadelphia. It was pretty mind blowing.

As fate would have it, I lost interest with the releases *Mirrors* (1979) and the lackluster *Cultosaurus Erectus* (1980). Advancing some 25 years forward, my last encounter with BOC was in 2004 at the Keswick Theater in Glenside, outside of Philadelphia. (This was four years after the release of *Curse Of The Hidden Mirror* which, at the time, I never heard of. Apparently, according to some, the album didn't fare well.) I was there to see UFO who opened for them, but stuck around for a few songs. What struck me funny about that BOC show was that either Buck Dharma or Eric Bloom, not sure, one of them, took the stage wearing pressed jeans and a button-down white Oxford shirt. Had the once daring BOC, which inspired so many bands over the years, been domesticated?

Well, so much for some personal history and reflection, and on to what's new and next. With

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Dharma and Bloom now in their Seventies, Blue Oyster Cult now returns with their fifteenth studio album, The Symbol Remains. Frankly, it's hard not to review this album without listening to it through the ears of BOC's fabled early career. Those early albums with creative, imaginative and, quite honestly, quite ground breaking recordings. It's best, perhaps, if you can as a fan, not to judge this album by those legends.

Nevertheless, with The Symbol Remains, there is some quintessential BOC happening here. Not the least of which is Blue Oyster Cult's strong, twin guitar, melodic hard rock infused with some proto-metal edge, solid groove, and catchy hooks in melody, vocal harmony and refrains. These things rise large in such tunes as The Machine, That Was Me, Box In My Head, and Edge Of The World with it's fine vocal harmony. Additionally, BOC can still surprise with some novelty. Nightmare Epiphany has this interesting beat and groove that sounds like Sixties upbeat pop music while the riffs and guitar lines add to the rhythmic motion. For Train True, BOC drops in some harmonica and develops a bit of blues groove for this speedy number. Later, once again showing their musical versatility, BOC offers Florida Man and ventures into latent Southern rock territory. Alternatively, the band gets into their heavy metal groove with Stand And Fight with its thick riffs and beefy rhythm section where both bass and drums thunder along. It may be the heaviest song on the album. All in all, I found Blue Oyster Cult's The Symbol Remains to be interesting, entertaining, and sometimes a smidgen provocative, as Blue Oyster Cult should be. Long time fans, taking time to absorb all things, should enjoy this album. Recommended. ---Craig Hartranft, dangerdog.com

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