

Casablanca - Apocalyptic Youth Rocket (2012)



01. *Apocalyptic Youth* 02. *Deliberately Wasted* 03. *Downtown* 04. *The Juggler* 05. *Rich Girl*
06. *Love and Desperation* 07. *Secret Agents of Lust* 08. *Beast of Summer* 09. *Last of the*
Rockstars 10. *A Lifetime On the Run* Anders Ljung - Vocals Erik Stenemo - Guitars
Josephine Forsman - Drums Mats Rubarth - Bass Ryan Roxie – Guitars

Hailing from Sweden (though the band does feature American guitarist Ryan Roxie of Alice Cooper/Electric Angels fame) and with knob-maestro Chris Laney at the production helm, it would have been enticingly easy for Casablanca to simply take the “monkey see, monkey do” route and copy the Swedish sleaze/glam sound being exported from that country on a regular basis. Instead, they have crafted their own sound that is pure melodic, ‘80s-influenced hard rock but without strict adherence to preconceived formulas.

Before anyone gets the wrong impression, while Casablanca might go slightly against the grain, they do so without ruffling the feathers of melodic rock fans. This is not an avant-garde album or eclectic exercise in experimentation; this is a melodic hard rock release with all the requisite bells and whistles, but with a unique edge that Casablanca can rightfully call their own. Their influences may be obvious, but they stamp them with their own identity rather than settle for slavish mimicry.

Apocalyptic Youth is a fun, energetic, lighthearted album. Not lighthearted in a poppy way—this isn’t Miley Cyrus—but in its overall vibe and approach. Summertime rock, if you will. Despite an album title that sounds better suited to a Norwegian black metal band, there is nothing dark or dangerous about this release. The sonic characteristics are wide open, the guitars and drums given ample room to breathe and allow the melodies to dominate rather than focus on overt aggression. Casablanca want to rock you, but they don’t feel the need to rock your face off.

In keeping with the band's mature sound, the guitar tone is warm and smooth, with rich, earthy textures. Ryan Roxie is not what you would call a shredder, but he has talent to spare, even if that talent does not manifest itself in flash and sizzle. The drummer is female, a rarity in the rock realm, and Josephine Forsman's authoritative skin-pounding perfectly complements Roxie's six-string skills and emphatically proves that a drum kit is not exclusively masculine domain.

The downside to all this uniqueness and maturity is that some of the songs come off as a little subdued, with choruses that sound restrained. And while restraint is not necessarily a bad word, it is likely that some melodic rock fans will wish the energy had been kicked up a notch or two. That said, the album does offer several high octane tracks as well, with "Deliberately Wasted" being the highlight. The song opens with a superlative hook and then the chorus takes that hook and makes it explode, powered by gang backing vocals into a powerhouse anthem. Elsewhere, "Love and Desperation" comfortably rides along on some catchy, pulsing rhythms, "Beast of Summer" channels the breezy mid-tempo excellence of prime Bon Jovi, and "Secret Agents of Lust" reeks so much of the '80s that you'll be digging your parachute pants and pastel shirts out of the closet while cranking up the Miami Vice soundtrack on cassette.

This album may not be a classic, but it's still pretty good and well-rounded enough to offer both the sing-along melodic hard rock anthems many fans demand as well as something a little more downplayed for those who find that big, loud, over-the-top style a bit wearisome. Probably not going to rate as one of those beloved albums you would grab if a zombie apocalypse broke out tomorrow and you could only take a dozen CD's with you to an island sanctuary, but until such a holocaust happens, most melodic rock fans should be happy to have this in their collection. ---
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