

Steve Vai: *Real Illusions: Reflections*

This disc is another long awaited masterpiece from one of the greatest musical minds of our times. (I hope I didn't understate that.)

I instantly felt that bi-polar energy that knocks me down the first time a milestone recording like this enters my life: inspiration and depression. First hits the inspired feeling of possibilities of creation and imagination. Followed immediately by that sinking feeling of depression of how effortlessly he plays like that. His writing transcends from just good guitar playing to an experience that can become a part of your life, memories and understanding. This is music that can teach you things, if you listen...

The opening with Tony McAlpine on keys is sick. The main groove is heavy and has some straight forward shredding that you want to hear from Vai. Billy Sheehan's bass sound is incredibly fat – the whole mix is tight and powerful right from the start.

Vai draws from many sources in generating the sound that is undeniably his through rich harmonic movement. He references early twentieth century composers in the vocal melody and chord changes. Dark tones and solemn atmospheres are created using dissonance in the manner of Bartok or Schoenberg. The piece evokes the expressionists' interpretation of the industrialization of their time, but now we see our world changing through a screen of technology.

He builds chords with quartal harmony, where he stacks fifths to get the ninth in the voicings (a good stretch for most of us). Then comes a warm slow guitar riff that reminds me of Hendrix. This tune is beautiful - I couldn't get it out of my head. Up comes a crazy vocal intro where they sing a drumbeat. There are Tower of Power style horns and some great hits – this song is a blast. Next is the colossal fusion tune that is full of chops, odd time meters, altered scales and more sickness than you can handle. Along the lines of Return to Forever or Mahavishnu – except on espresso.

Then Vai plays along with a symphony – and it's so well done you will cry.

For contrast there's a goofy little piece where they sing a Chinese pentatonic melody through a wah and a talk box. Totally strange, but somehow they make it groove. There's an acoustic tune in an alternate tuning similar to Michael Hedges. I've decided to start every morning by listening to this tune.

The last song of the disc is the most epic and conveys an all too accurate Reflection of the chaotic world we live in and the Illusions we believe are Real.

In *Real Illusions: Reflections*, Vai shows us that the world can be a very fun and a very sinister place. Through the use of musical references to many cultures and times, he reminds us that within us all lays the memories of past lives through time.

Vai is Proof of God.

If you don't believe me, buy the disc.

By Derek R. Lauer, aia

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