

MANILLA ROAD- Open the Gates LP 1985 Black Dragon

Wpisany przez Oldchool Metal Maniac

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I can still remember the times when I would travel for many hundred kilometers to visit various vinyl record fairs and get at least one interesting black plate. Back then, apart from the official musical bookstores, there were no music shops – in result, to obtain some interesting stuff was almost impossible.

When there showed up just any piece of music one can buy, an immediate line was formed – it didn't matter it was PERFECT, TSA or LADY PUNK; I am not even talking about such situations where on order to get the Polish edition of IRON MAIDEN's Live After Death one had to buy some shitty album too! There were simply too many worthless records at the shelves which were to be gotten rid of. Of course, the fact you didn't care about a particular album you had to buy was not relevant at all. To get an IRON MAIDEN album you simply had to get this "bonus" shit too.

In those times, music fairs were the only places where one could find anything interesting; although we were practically sealed off from the West by the Iron Curtain, it was still possible for some records to find their way to Poland. Some had families in the West, some other people would bring some new records back to Poland. We were shocked there were so many materials that didn't reach Poland at the time. Yes, whole albums were played at the radio, as nobody respected copyright – but extreme metal was not aired too often.

Metalowe Tortury and Muzyka Młodych were one of few radio programs that dealt with extreme metal and made us thirsty for new, at the time, genres of metal. You must not forget that back then a record plate was sometimes even more expensive than a monthly wage of an average Pole. Still, it was difficult to get new records. Well, we didn't care at all, as we always wanted more records. I didn't care that I had to save every single penny to get a new vinyl record; when I collected the right amount, me and my friends travelled to Katowice, Warsaw or Wroclaw to get some new stuff.

It was always exciting. And so was one Sunday of 1986 when I boarded the train going from Cracow to Wroclaw. After 5 hours I got to Wroclaw and the record fair there (in the place called Palacyk). I can still remember the moment I held in my hands this "Open the gates" LP for the first time. I didn't know the band at the time, but I could feel this album had power, the cover art was fascinating, and thus I took the risk and bought this record. When I got on the train on my way back home, each of us showed to others their new records. My older friends confirmed I did right buying the album.

MANILLA ROAD is a great band. On my way back home, I kept gazing at the front cover, anxiously waiting to get back home and play it. I spent 5 hours on the train not even knowing how fast time flew by. Well, it was due to the fact our bunch talked ferociously about our new records. We later would meet up at my place and listen to purchased stuff. Each of us would bring some new stuff – we used to copy stuff from each other as we were not able to get every title we wanted, and simply couldn't afford buying too many lps.

Until today, Open the Gates is one of my most important albums and this is not only because the sentiment I have for this material, but because of the power that comes from this music. The vinyl edition released by Black Dragon was released as a double lp; the second plate contains 12`` ep The Ninth Wave/Witches Brew. Understandably, "Open the Gates" is 53 minute long in total, and a standard lp was around 40 minutes in length back then. After years, German high roller re-released this album as a standard single lp.

Interestingly, despite more condensed grooving, the dynamics of the lp is still preserved – nice to listen to. Actually, I have two versions of this album in my collection; listen to newer one more often so that I don't wear out the first one totally – but this edition has a different track order and this annoys me a little bit. This lp is absolutely magical – this album has not become old at all, yet was released thirty years ago!

MANILLA ROAD is another example confirming that three-piece bands are most optimal when it comes to music. The band itself comes from Wichita and since 1976 had introduced a number of very interesting directions in the metal world. With every album, the band approached the crystallization of the new metal genre. MANILLA ROAD is, undoubtedly, the pioneers of epic heavy metal. In 1983, they released a ground-breaking album titled Crystal Logic.

This raw sounding material, still heavily influenced by hard rock music, brought a high dose of epic ideas, freshness, and stylistic refinement. Also, we ought to note that the lineup was changed; after recording of Crystal Logic, Rick Fisher left the band and was replaced by genial drummer Randy Foxx who brought finesse, and thanks to his unique drumming style, moved the music to a higher level. His style, full of ornaments and very technical made the MANILLA ROAD's music heavier and more aggressive – yet, suffused with virtuosity.

I think that here, the change of the drummer influenced the structure of music to a considerable

degree. It became heavier, more epic. "Metal storm" that opens the LP comes with very dense drum work that makes this stuff sound very speedy. One can feel the Radi's passion here, who virtuosically suffuses this music with power – it is a very solid track with a truly barbaric atmosphere. Another track is the title song "Open the Gates"; this one is slower, and played in mid-tempo, full of dramaturgy. These sounds are all wrapped in magic aura – it all brings back pictures of past eons.

One of my favorite tracks – "Astronomica" played with perfect and high quality guitar work, heavy sound and short, kick ass solos, is elegantly interwoven with other elements – it all is impressive. This track has a god aura and you can easily see the progress this band made. Indeed, this track is a good indicator of the band's style. Since the times of "Crystal Logic," Mark had never-ending troubles with his throat, but on "Open The Gates" his voice still sounded very strong – he paid his price but it was worthy...the effect is impressive.

"Weavers of the Web" is the track that closes the A side. This is a very energetic song, all right. The B side starts with excellent "Heavy Metal to the World" – played with a high dose of aggressiveness à la MOTORHEAD. It's a very heavy metal-ish track – full of dynamic power, this track really is. One can hear pleasure of playing music – the awesome guitar solo here just fucking kills! AWESOME! Whereas I am still impressed by the previous song and here there comes "The Fires of Mars" – another KILLER track. This song just sends the shivers down my spine – there is so much magic in this – the way this track flows gives this music real power. "Road of King" and this song are just loaded with energy, just go and read the lyrics:

**"What do you see in your mind's eye?
Is it the fate of mankind to die?
Do you know or do you want to find the
Road Back to the light before the dawn?"**

A damn good track with excellent lyrics that ends side B "Hour of the Dragon" vibrates so strongly that one cannot ignore its power. With every next song, this album gets heavier and heavier; we can hear this knight-like atmosphere on this album. It all is very malicious yet noble.

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“The Nineth Wave” from the C side is my fave one. You can feel some atmosphere of ancient knight battles. A great, very well structured track influences the listener’s imagination. It runs for almost 10 minutes – it evolves and gets more expressive – plenty of Mark’s virtuosic guitar work makes this track very dramatic. This track is full of dark atmosphere – you can feel the breath of death here. The D side ends with “Witches Brew” – another great track indeed. I am not sure if to include the 12`` ep with these two last tracks was done on purpose or not, but these are the lp’s strongest points. They are just amazing – in sum, why not get crazy because of MANILLA ROAD, huh?

“Open The Gates” is certainly the band’s magnum opus. This great album has become the metal bible for next generations who are still heavily influenced by these amazing metal hymns. Of course, after “Open the Gates”, MANILLA ROAD released plenty of great music too. “The Deluge” is fairly similar to “Open the Gates”, next comes “Mystification” – another amazing album. In general, every metal maniac will find some interesting music in the 18 chapters that the discography of this band consist of. I like other bands too, but most often I get back to “Open the Gates” – it’s a magical music.

Leszek Wojnicz-Sianożęcki