

CORNERSTONE® - 'SOMEWHERE IN AMERICA' (Atom Records)

I was given a copy of this album by the band when I saw them play in Grimsby back in July with the (admittedly mild) imprecation to wait for the European remix before passing judgement. That is now in my hands, and those of a nervous disposition (i.e. those who hate digipacks) will be glad to know that the new version is in a jewel case! Just to clarify matters, this is not the band that featured Doogie White on vocals, hence the registered mark after their name. This is the young and enthusiastic band from Vienna in Austria featuring the powerful vocals of Patricia Hillinger, the line-up being completed by brothers Mike and Steve Wachelhofer (guitars) and Mike Pawlowitsch (drums).

This is the band's second release and can be described as a mixture of catchy AOR including some with a modern twist and some that borders on the cusp of melodic rock and pop/rock and whereas their first album 'Head Over Heels' was criticised in some quarters for sounding little better than a mediocre demo and comprising rather weak songs, this time around (and complete with an excellent new vocalist) there are no such worries, because the production is first rate, the musicianship is excellent and the quality of the songs mostly show a great improvement over the debut. I also have to add that having seen the band play live (when they presented six of the ten songs on this album) they turned in a pretty decent performance – good enough from my perspective to warrant an opening slot at Firefest within the next couple of years. They could be the next Nexx!

Patricia Hillinger's voice is, however, much stronger than that of Patricia Tapia and there are also moments where stylistically she sounds ever so slightly like Stevie Nicks and she is fully in command of the five well-crafted songs comprising the first half of the album. Both 'Stay' and 'Rise And Shine' have choruses to draw the listener in and flow at a decent pace too, while slower song 'Breathing For You' made me think of something that late 80s band Cry Before Dawn might have done, with a rather wistful quality to the chorus. 'Right Or Wrong' is ideal material for BBC Radio 2: a really wonderful pop/rock ballad and featuring one of the best vocal performances of the entire album (and with those Nicks' intonations very evident!) 'Like A Stranger' is another excellent up-beat song and featuring splendid harmony vocals

The second half of the album is not quite so strong, the best of the bunch being penultimate number 'High And Low', another of the faster-paced songs. A couple of the songs also fade (my bête noir!) The challenge for the band is therefore to make album number 3 an absolute killer from beginning to end. I do feel they have the talent and the enthusiasm to accomplish this, but for now the present release will do rather nicely!

Paul Jerome Smith