

SHINE - "Like Each Is The First"

Review by *Ted Perlman #1*

Well, SHINE have obviously been listening to the radio. It's apparent in their very radio-friendly approach to this record. I use the word "*record*" instead of "*demo*" because with a few tweaks this could fit very nicely in any programmers' top-40, rock or even modern country format. What I detect from listening, however, is "*band member's disease*" rearing its ugly head. That's when everybody in the band is jockeying for their particular part to be heard. Now, I'm not sure how many members there are in SHINE. But regardless of their number, when it comes to a mix there should always be ONE person who has the final word. And that person should be the one who is the most objective about the sound, and can make critical judgments based on the record as a whole, not whether their own particular contribution is standing out from the rest. Even a solo singer (unless they're producing themselves), should learn to trust the producer or engineer enough to allow them to mix a balanced record. That's the key to any mix – "*balance*". Get ready; I'm going to use that word at least 500 more times before I'm finished.

Arrangement

The arrangement is beautiful. From the opening guitar riff to the (thankfully in tune) great violin everything builds nicely. The adding of vocal harmonies when the chorus hits is exactly what A&R people are always looking for. SHINE should never have to hear the dreaded A&R speech "*the chorus didn't jump out at me*" if they keep to this formula-type approach. As I'm listening more I am reminded of what Fleetwood Mac might sound like today if they had continued recording.

The intro is a nice length. You don't have time to go to the loo before the first verse starts, as is the case with some records. I really like the way the violin is used in the arrangement, both tonally and note-wise. The violin player is obviously very experienced with making a record, and of how to use certain tonalities in various places of the song to enhance the whole sound. Listen to the way the violin builds dynamically with the singer at the end of the bridge. And then lays out for a while to let you appreciate it when it does come back in at the last chorus. Same for the guitars. Since this record features the violin, the guitars are being played in an octave range that lets them cut through without taking away from the vocals or violin. Very nice.

Instrumentation

Great choice of instrumentation. The guitars, violin, bass, & drums all blend together nicely. The snare drum sounds like a nice old Ludwig Super 400, not too thin and not too boomy. The bass (although I wish it was a Fender – ANY Fender) blends with the kick (wooden beater?) to make a cohesive sound. My only gripe is the lack of any keyboards. Even in heavy metal you need something to reinforce the low midrange. My friend Glen Kolotkin engineered a bunch of heavy metal records, and he told me they always put acoustic piano in there, even if you couldn't hear it. An acoustic piano or even a real Hammond B3 with Leslie would really "*balance*" out this record.

Engineering

Here's where I'm missing a sense of balance. The instruments are mixed and eq'd nicely. The low end is punchy without being boomy, and the top end sizzles without sounding too "*aural excited*". The vocal is recorded nicely, and eq'd nicely. However, I CAN'T HEAR THE FRIGGIN' VOCAL enough. Bad balance. The singer sounds great, but I'm missing a lot of her words because she's tucked in the mix like a baby in its crib. With this type of song the listener wants to hear what the song is about. Plus, it's in a low register for the singer (maybe raise the key a whole step?). It sounds like they've already used a limiter on the vocal in the recording and mix (a typical practice). But somebody has to actually put their hands on the vocal fader and turn it up when she's singing those low notes. This is not kiddie pop – turn her up. She sounds great.

Overall

SHINE have a very promising future. I don't think they need a new producer, but they do need a new mixer. Someone who is more attuned to vocals. The drums sound great, the snare reverb is killer, the violin is recorded beautifully (not an easy task), the guitars sound brilliant. Just a little more time getting a great vocal sound and balance in the mix, and this could be a hit record. Balance, balance, balance....