

# Mp3 Michael Haaga - The Plus And Minus Show



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Yes, it's that Michael Haaga. Rock Music. 11 MP3 Songs ROCK: Modern Rock, METAL: Doom/Stoner Metal Details: When Michael Haaga called it quits with local Death Metal legends Dead Horse in 1996, he seemingly dropped off the face of the planet to those who didn't keep up on the local music scene. To those that have made it a practice to know what's going on, he's been a busy man ever since. A significant amount of time was spent with Phil Anselmo's Superjoint Ritual with Haaga taking on the bass and backing vocal duties. More time was spent touring with this "garage band on crank." Finally, Haaga's talents were utilized once more on the landmark debut recording that appeared from SJR in 2002 -- Use Once Destroy. In the liner notes, be sure to look 14 lines down below the rest of the band to find Haaga's credit. He's there right below the photography credits which is where the bass player and backing vocalist credit is supposed to be, right? Overlapping some of his work with SJR was time spent with a short-lived Demonseeds project. This featured Haaga back on guitar and vocals with (at the time) fellow SJR drummer Joe Fazzio and Craig Cazaubon on bass. This produced one recording in the 1999 release Knee Deep in Hell's Grasp that had decent local success. It also featured a poorly reworked version of "Every God For Himself" - a Dead Horse song from the Feed Me demo, which was the last thing to ever come from the original Dead Horse lineup. Segue to 2002 when Haaga sat down with me at Rudz to catch the rest of the world up on what was happening with him. He spoke of a new project he was calling The Plus and Minus Show. This project, with a cast of plenty, was to begin recording at that point "very soon." He went on to explain that this was definitely a roots record. Haaga made it more than clear that this would not even be in the same zip code as Dead Horse or even Death Metal, for that matter. This brings us to right now. Haaga has released this project to the waiting masses and, so far, the masses are reporting good things to say. I ordered my copy last week and received it promptly two days later. Since

that time, it hasn't left my CD player nor have all the catchy little tunes left my head. I find myself whistling those most of the time now. The record starts off dark with a short, slow acoustic number called Same Old Strings, which initially threw me because I wasn't expecting to be hearing anything quite so.....down. The song is all of a minute or less. As soon as it fades out, the CD immediately kicks into exactly what I expected to hear in the first place -- pure Pop-Rock. The disc has 11 songs that are well written, well recorded and well staffed. Each song is as catchy as the song before it. This recording features a collection of well-known Houston Musicians and some (possibly) not so well known. Listed as "Players" on the record are as follows: Scott Ayers (Walking Timebombs, Painteens) Eric Bogle (Bring Back The Guns, The Octopus Project) David Cummings (Clouseaux, Middlefinger) Brian Davis (Middlefinger, 30footFALL) Jason Davis (Middlefinger, 30footFALL, The Suspects) Claudio De Pujadas (Clouseaux, The Suspects, Magnetic Four, Janitor) Kelly Doyle (Three Fantastic, Clouseaux, Les Saucy Pants) Derek Dunivan (Penny Royal, Pure Rubbish) Tomas Escalante (Clouseaux, The Suspects) Jason Farmer (Our Black Love Song) Leesa Harrington-Squyres (Orange is In, Slapshifter, Joint Chiefs, Carolyn Wonderland The Imperial Monkeys, Guy Schwartz and the New Jack Hippies) Matt Kelly (Middlefinger, Les Saucy Pants, Sprawl) Chris King (Jug-o-Lightning, Carolyn Wonderland The Imperial Monkeys) Greg Main (Academy Black, Flamin' Hellcats) Jason McMaster (Broken Teeth, Activator, Dangerous Toys, Watchtower) Brian Lee Sebastian (Noisetet) Carolyn Wonderland There is no way in hell this record could have sucked. It was win/win for Haaga - with or without the support of his legions of Dead Horse fans. And speaking of which: Don't think for a minute that they don't concern him at all. Haaga will do whatever he wants to do creatively. However, in his mind, he knows he'll be crucified by those single-minded individuals who just will not accept a "Death Metal-less" Mike Haaga. He is already prepared to take that beating. That thought is even represented in the artwork for the record. In it, there is a wind-up bird - presumably Haaga -- standing in what appears to be the bulls-eye of a much larger target. The entire outer perimeter of this target is lined with missiles. Just try and tell me he hasn't thought about this. Well single-minded individuals be damned! Haaga has put out a great non-Death Metal recording anyway - a recording that very much tells a story, if not his story, if you listen closely to the lyrics of some of the songs. As much as I'd love to do a song-by-song breakdown, I'll let you buy the record and decide for yourself. The songs on this record flow seamlessly together from one happy tune to the next and take on the feel of a 50's teen B-movie. The songs are fresh and original with outstanding performances

instrumentally, as well as vocally. What is probably the most surprising is actually hearing Haaga sing. He sings beautifully, which is something you never really heard from him while he was with Dead Horse. It always seemed like he was screaming on those old records. Clearly he was not; that's just how his voice is. I'm sure a lot of people were confused (as was I) when Haaga's name appeared on this year's Houston Press ballot for "Best Guitar Player." I say that not because he isn't a great guitar player but rather, at the time, this record hadn't dropped yet. Since that time, however, the record has definitely dropped....and dropped BIG. In listening to the recording though, you'll notice that the guitar isn't heavily exploited in the way of breakout solos and that sort of thing - something that was more or less a staple of Haaga's Thrash Metal past life. You'll notice though while listening to this record that Haaga drops a few not-so-subtle reminders that he hasn't forgotten how to deliver the goods. You won't hear it on the first three tracks. However, when track four hits, he gives you a little taste of some straightforward heavy rock soloing on "If and When" that ties this song together perfectly. You're let off the hook a little bit on track five in the way of a guitar solo but then comes track six - an absolutely beautiful love song titled "Serious." At first, the song won't strike you as the type that would encase the type of guitar solo that would make any male guitar player wannabe (this writer) stand up, grab his nuts and say "Daaaaayum!!" ....but it does. Haaga goes completely off the hook with a lead that would even make Slash walk off the stage. This is when you know without a doubt that the premature nomination for the HPMA(s) wasn't really a wishful hope or merely a joke. Rather, it was someone's wish to prepare everyone for next year's awards. If this record doesn't take home at least four awards next year, then there is something terribly wrong with the system. My HPMA 2005 nominations already (This better be a minimum too) Best Guitarist - Michael Haaga Best songwriter - Michael Haaga Best Piano/Keyboards - David Cummings (The Plus and Minus Show) Album of the Year - The Plus and Minus Show Scott Deaver aka Remus

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