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by Ed Kopp
ALEX SKOLNICK TRIO

Goodbye To Romance: Standards For A New Generation (Skol Productions)

Few mainstream jazz artists have covered songs by Kiss, The Who, or Aerosmith and certainly no jazzier has thought to record Black Sabbath's dark anthem "War Pigs." But Alex Skolnick is not your typical jazz artist. On this unusual and impressive trio release, the former heavy metal guitarist delivers straight-ahead jazz renditions of headbanger hits.

Skolnick's evolution from hard rocker to jazzier didn't happen overnight. While grinding away as the big-haired axe-man for the thrash metal band Testament during the late '80's, Skolnick happened to catch Miles Davis and his fusion group on TV one night. Before long Skolnick was hooked on jazz. Eventually he quit the metal scene and enrolled in college to study jazz guitar. More than a decade after his Miles epiphany, Skolnick felt confident enough to record *Goodbye To Romance*, an improvised tribute to the hard rockers who first inspired him to take up the axe.

Skolnick is teamed here with acoustic bassist John Graham Davis and drummer Matt Zebroski, former classmates from the New School in New York. Their collaboration is far closer to the Pat Metheny Trio than to Testament. Still, listeners familiar with the original versions should easily recognize the tunes.

The trio's presentation is rhythmically charged yet elegantly textured, and Skolnick's fluid lines evoke the best in these melodies. The Scorpions' "No One Like You" receives an inventive bossa-nova treatment, while Ozzy Osbourne's "Goodbye To Romance" transforms into a gorgeous ballad with a ripping finale. The Who's "Pinball Wizard" is a misstep, but the rest of this CD is an unexpected treat. Yes, here a former metalhead is reborn as a heady jazz guitarist in the Metheny-Scofield mold.