

Steve Hackett
Under A Mediterranean Sky

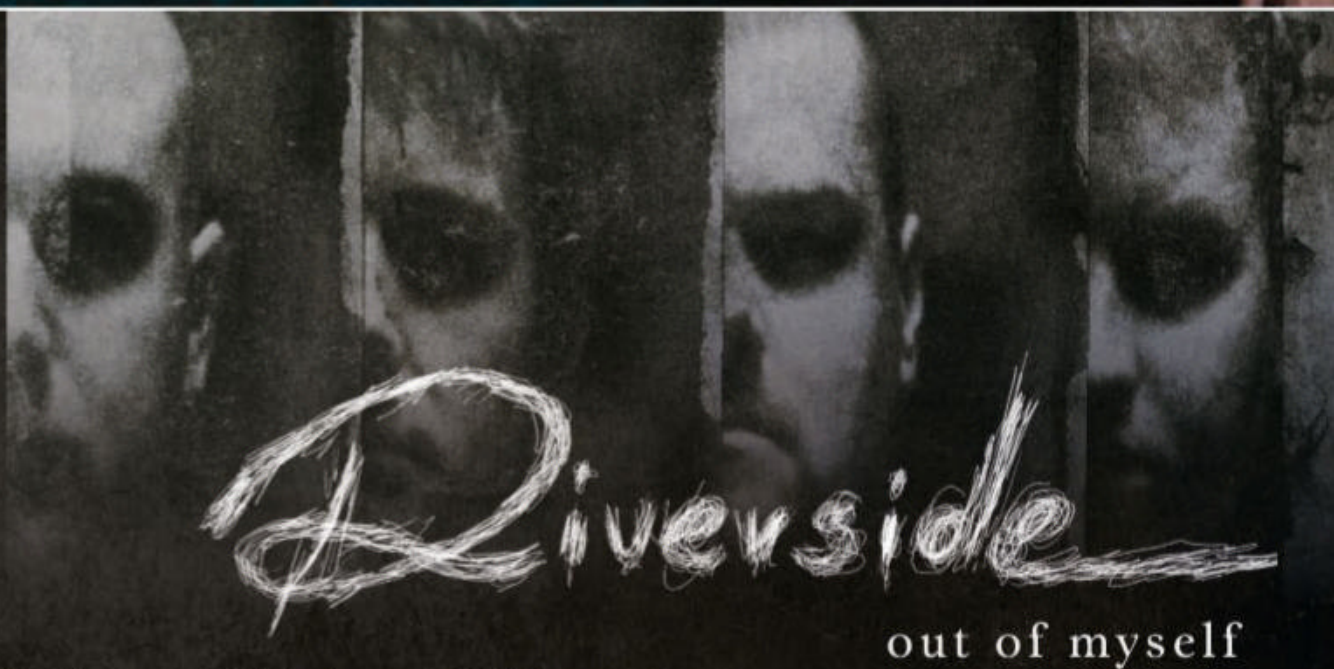


Steve Hackett
Under A Mediterranean Sky

In Stores Now

The first new acoustic album from the legendary guitarist since 2008's *Tribute*, incorporating a vast array of instruments and sounds, as well as orchestral soundscapes and his unique acoustic playing in several different styles.

Limited CD Digipak
Gatefold 180g Black 2LP + CD
Digital Album



In Stores 12th February 2021

The legendary debut album from 2003, with artwork by Travis Smith and vinyl re-mastered by Dan Swanö / Unisound.

Limited CD Digipak / 180g Black LP + CD / Digital Album



ANNEKE
VAN
GIERSBERGEN

THE DARKEST SKIES
ARE THE BRIGHTEST

In Stores 26th February 2021

The award-winning Dutch artist returns with her 23rd career album. Lyrically, and musically, she lays her soul bare with the most evocative record yet – captivating song-stories told with acoustic guitars, strings, horns, percussion, and Anneke's hypnotic vocal harmonies

Limited CD / Gatefold 180g Black LP + CD / Digital Album



PROG

ASTOUNDING SOUNDS
AMAZING MUSIC

JETHRO TULL

AQUALUNG AT 50:
A CELEBRATION!

STEVEN
WILSON

Bites back against
his critics

TRANSATLANTIC

Prog supergroup return
with two albums in one

STEVE
HACKETT

On his first acoustic
album for 13 years



+

GRYPHON
FRÖST*
BLACKFIELD
RING
VAN MÖBIUS
SIGUR RÓS
JUMP



TOE FAT

'BAD SIDE OF THE MOON - AN ANTHOLOGY 1970-1972' (2CD REMASTERED SET)

- Released February 26, 2021.
- A new 2 disc anthology of the recordings by the classic band Toe Fat
- Featuring Ken Hensley & Lee Kerslake (Uriah Heep) & John Glascock (Jethro Tull)
- Newly remastered from the original master tapes
- Featuring 2 rare bonus tracks taken from a 1972 single
- Includes an illustrated booklet with an essay

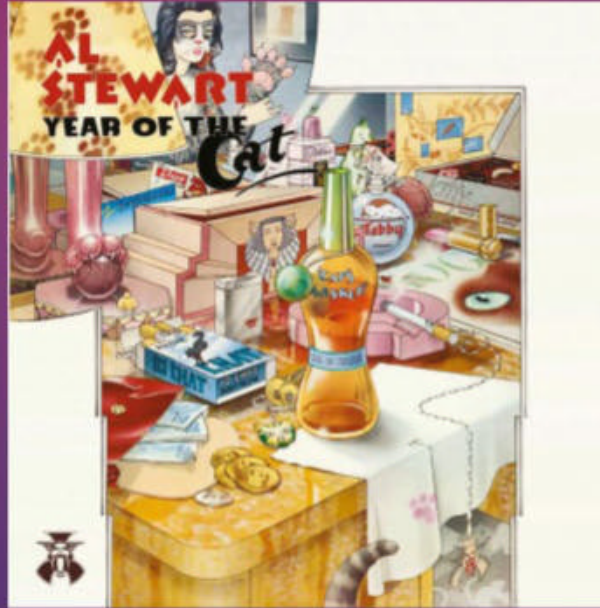


BE BOP DELUXE

'DRASTIC PLASTIC' (4CD/2DVD DELUXE BOX SET)

- Released February 26, 2021.
- A deluxe 6 disc limited edition boxed set of the classic 1978 final studio album by Be Bop Deluxe
- Newly remastered from the original master tapes
- Featuring an additional 88 tracks drawn from new 5.1 surround sound & stereo mixes from the original multi-track master tapes, non-album singles, previously unreleased Bill Nelson demos, a BBC Radio John Peel session and the "Sight & Sound In Concert" performance for radio in January 1978
- 2 disc edition also available

AL STEWART



'YEAR OF THE CAT' (3CD/1DVD 45TH ANNIVERSARY LIMITED EDITION BOX SET)

- This 45th Anniversary edition of this special album has been newly re-mastered for the very first time from the original first-generation master tapes by ALAN PARSONS and also features his stunning new 5.1 Surround sound mix from the original multi-track tapes.
- In addition, the set includes a complete, previously unreleased concert recorded at the Paramount Theater, Seattle in October 1976 on the YEAR OF THE CAT tour over two CDs and a new mix of the track 'Belsize Blues', recorded at Abbey Road Studios in September 1975.
- Plus an illustrated 68-page book with a new essay featuring an interview with Al Stewart and a facsimile promotional poster and a set of four postcards.

Release Date 26th March 2021 - QECLEC42724

ALSO AVAILABLE

(2CD REMASTERED & EXPANDED EDITION)

- This 2 disc edition of this special album has been newly re-mastered for the very first time from the original first-generation master tapes by ALAN PARSONS and also includes nine live tracks recorded at the Paramount Theater, Seattle in October 1976 on the YEAR OF THE CAT tour and a new mix of the track 'Belsize Blues', recorded at Abbey Road Studios in September 1975.
- This release also features an illustrated booklet with a new essay featuring an interview with Al Stewart and is a fitting tribute to a much treasured and legendary masterpiece by a consummate song writer and performer.

Release Date 26th March 2021 - QECLEC22725

STRAWBS



'SETTLEMENT' (180G VINYL LP)

- *Signed Limited Edition postcards available with pre-orders while stocks last!*
- Esoteric Antenna is delighted to announce the release of the new studio album by the legendary band STRAWBS. Settlement is the latest album recorded by STRAWBS, more than 50 years on from the band's first major label release. The album comes at a time of political and social upheaval, which the lyrics and melodies of the songs reflect.

Release Date 26th February 2021 - EANTLP1087

ALSO AVAILABLE

(CD EDITION)

- *Signed Limited Edition postcards available with pre-orders while stocks last!*
- Esoteric Antenna is delighted to announce the release of the new studio album by the legendary band STRAWBS. Settlement is the latest album recorded by STRAWBS, more than 50 years on from the band's first major label release. The album comes at a time of political and social upheaval, which the lyrics and melodies of the songs reflect.

Release Date 26th February 2021 - EANTCD1087



EDGAR BROUGHTON BAND

'SPEAK DOWN THE WIRES - THE RECORDINGS 1975-1982' (4CD BOX SET)

- Released January 29, 2021.
- A new remastered 4 CD clamshell box set featuring all of the albums by The Edgar Broughton Band / The Broughtons issued between 1975 & 1982
- Includes an illustrated booklet with essay & poster



CURVED AIR

'CURVED AIR: THE ALBUMS 1970-1973' (4CD CLAMSHELL BOX SET)

- Esoteric Recordings is pleased to announce the release of a new clamshell boxed set featuring all four of Curved Air's classic albums recorded between 1970 and 1973. "The Albums" features newly remastered versions of "Air Conditioning", "Second Album", "Phantasmagoria" and "Air Cut", along with bonus tracks "It Happened Today" (single version), "What Happens When You Blow Yourself Up" and "Sarah's Concern", all originally issued as singles.
- Newly remastered from the original master tapes
- Includes illustrated booklet with essay

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ISSUE 117 09.02.21

IF IT'S IN THERE IT'S ON HERE



MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

COVER
FEATURE



"It was so
important
for the
band."

Jethro Tull p28

Celebrating 50 years of Jethro Tull's *Aqualung*.

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REGULARS

BLOODY WELL WRITE pg 10

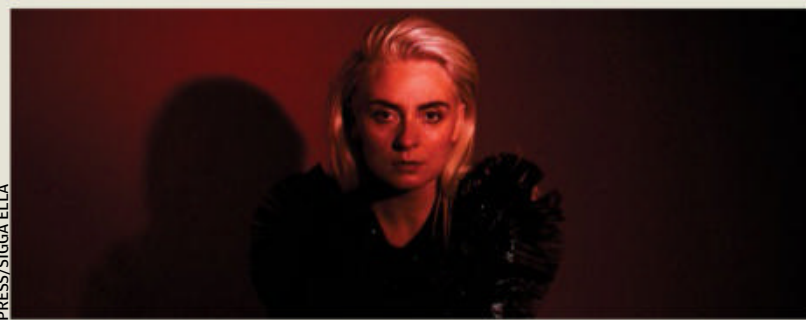
Missives, musings and tweets from Planet Prog.

THE INTRO pg 12

We announce the return of instrumental supergroup Liquid Tension Experiment, plus the very latest news from Cosmograf, Richard Barbieri, BTBAM, Wheel, Tusmørke, Robert Berry, Möbius Strip and more...

Q&A pg 26

American Tears mainman Mark Mangold discusses the band's latest album, his early prog days in Valhalla and the possibility of a new album from pomp rockers Touch.



OUTER LIMITS pg 68

She began writing folk tunes at 12, fell in love with Pink Floyd albums, and she's indulged in trip hop, rock and jazz while her music's appeared in the likes of *Game Of Thrones*. Which begs the inevitable question: how prog is Eivør?

THE PROG INTERVIEW pg 88

Baroque proggers Gryphon were one of the most unique bands of the 70s. They reformed in 2015 and have just released their latest album, *Get Out Of My Father's Car!*. Singer and drummer Dave Oberlé looks back over a most unique career.

THE MUSICAL BOX pg 94

The anchoress' second album, *The Art Of Losing*, takes top billing, and we also review new releases from Fish, Riverside, Be-Bop Deluxe, Curved Air, Downes Braide Association, Al Stewart, Anneke van Giersbergen, Kayak, Saga, God Is An Astronaut, The Lickerish Quartet, The Amorphous Androgynous, Cult Of Luna, Arc Of Life, Meer and more!

MY PROG pg 114

Karnataka's Ian Jones discusses a prog rock world full of Genesis, Clannad, Pink Floyd and, er, Madonna!

FEATURES

Esthesis Pg 42

Winners of Best Unsigned Band in the Readers' Poll introduce themselves.



Steve Hackett Pg 44

Hackett returns with his first acoustic album since *Tribute*.

Ring Van Möbius Pg 48

Norwegian retro proggers are having a blast with album number two.

Steven Wilson Pg 52

Discussing change, misconception and expectation on the artist's latest album.

Transatlantic Pg 56

The prog supergroup return after seven years with their grandest work so far.

Blackfield Pg 60

Where has Aviv Geffen steered the ship now Steven Wilson's taken a back seat?

Wardruna Pg 64

The Norwegian folk prog outfit talk of the old ways and current album *Kvittravn*.

Frost* Pg 72

Mainman Jem Godfrey looks back over Frost*'s career and ponders the future.

Jump Pg 76

The veteran UK proggers have their say on new long-player, *Breaking Point*.

Sigur Rós Pg 80

Icelandic post-rockers dig deep into the past for their latest album.

Teramaze Pg 84

The Australian proggers got busy during lockdown with another new recording.

TRANSATLANTIC

THE ABSOLUTE UNIVERSE

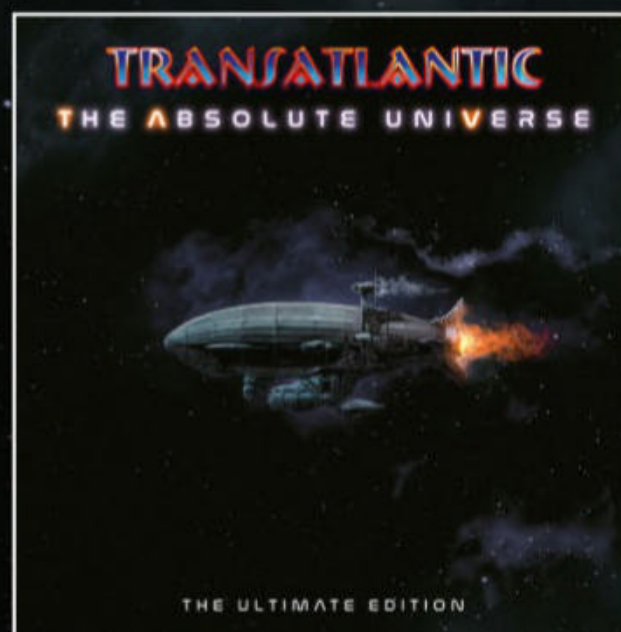
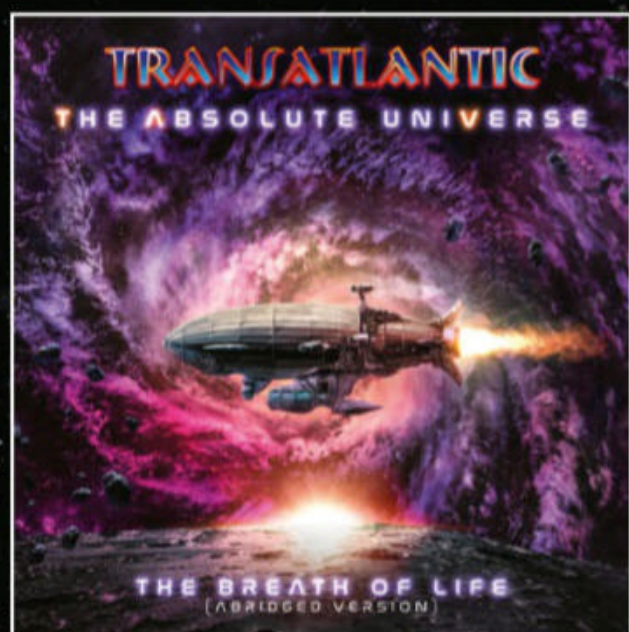
In Stores 5th February 2021



The 5th studio album from the progressive rock super-group featuring **Neal Morse, Mike Portnoy, Roine Stolt & Pete Trewavas**, available as 2 different editions subtitled '**The Breath Of Life**' & '**Forevermore**'. Each one provides a different way to experience the music.

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from 2014



CALIGONAUT
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Debut album from Ole Michael Bjørndal
(Oak, Bjørn Riis & Airbag, feat members
from Wobbler, Pymlico and Airbag etc)



FATAL FUSION
The Land Of The Sun

Re-release of debut
album from 2010



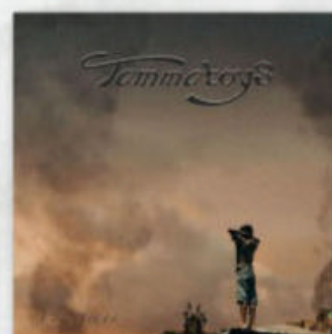
**SUBURBAN
SAVAGES**
Demagogue Days



**THE LAUGHING
STOCK**
Zero



WUDEWUSE
Northern Gothic



TAMMATOYS
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• EDWIN •



• JÜRJENDAL •



"With the greatest respect to them,
Frost* shouldn't be like Yes.
I don't want to be banging out albums
when I'm 70. I like the idea of things
being finite, because then
you can enjoy the journey."

Jem Godfrey

Ed's Letter



Hello, and welcome to the new issue of *Prog*. I hope the latest issue finds you well and dealing with the ongoing Covid-related restrictions as best you can. As I write there's plenty of chatter on the internet as listeners attempt to get to grips with progressive music's strange dichotomy of being, in name, exploratory and constantly evolving music, while a section of the fan community merely wants to hear a familiar sound they feel comfortable with. As is often the case there's a lot of hot air being spouted, but within the bluster, as always, are some very good points.

In this issue, many of the artists we've spoken to have made comments very relevant to the topic in hand, even if they weren't discussing it directly. Obviously the musical evolution of Steven Wilson (p52) looms large, given the incessant ire it's generated among some fans. Of the band's shift in sound in the 70s, Gryphon's Dave Oberlé says on p88, "You did run the risk of losing some fans along the way but you gained new ones", while Cosmograf's Robin Armstrong says in news this month, "I really don't like to make the same album twice." Both quotes highlight the hurdle of the prog musician wanting to expand their sound against a fanbase that can sometimes be resistant.

I suppose a lot comes down to your take on what progressive music is – the eternally unanswerable question it seems. Here too, classical musician-turned-progger Anna Hardy (All Around The World, p20) says, "I think progressive rock and classical music share the idea that musical expression should be unlimited", while Aurélien Goude of French proggers Esthesis (winners of Best Unsigned Band in last issue's Readers' Poll, p42) talks of prog as "travelling with sound".

I like all those comments. They paint a rich, broad and exciting musical landscape, which is how I've always viewed progressive rock. Hopefully you do too.

An interesting issue to start 2021 then. Enjoy. Take care and prog on...

Jerry Ewing – Editor



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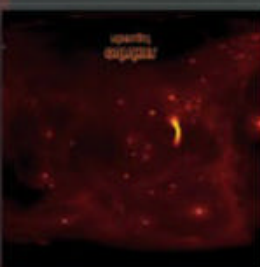
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MORE NEW HOUSE OF WATTS RELEASES



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Galaxies - LP

Always on the cusp of explosion, these spaced-out studio improvs define the universe the Lazertüth inhabits



Lazertüth

Leon - LP

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Motorhome

Scribble Cheeks/Amodeo - 7"

Anthemic and enigmatic, these flip-side storms of distortion and propulsion churn and burn



Lazertüth

Serpenter - LP

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Bloody Well Write

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WEELEY GREAT MEMORIES

I'm an old-age pensioner who's been there and seen the original prog vanguard: ELP, Jethro Tull, King Crimson, etc, but I have never seen anything in print in mags, such as yours, about the Weeley Festival in 1971. It was probably the greatest festival this country has never seen, with the likes of Colosseum, King Crimson, Curved Air, Juicy Lucy, Van der Graaf Generator, Caravan, Quintessence, Barclay James Harvest, Stray, Caravan, The Faces, Rory Gallagher, Groundhogs to name but a few. To my knowledge no media was released on the event, unlike the Isle of Wight, etc. It would be nice to see such an article appear with people's memories of the event.

Also I've never seen an article on groups such as Seventh Wave, Spring and Tonton Macoute. The same names appear in your mag on a regular basis regardless whether they have new music being released or not. I defy anyone to listen to *Things To Come* by Seventh Wave and not say this isn't prog or *Tonton Macoute* with its lush organ, vibes, tenor sax, flute etc. on their one and only release. So how about it?

Martin James Willgrass, via email

NOT SO SMALL BUT FAR AWAY!

I was very interested to read your article on Pink Floyd's *Animals* in *Prog* 116. I was lucky enough to see the supporting tour in Stafford (Bingley Hall) but, maybe even luckier, I was at the concert mentioned in the article at Trentham Gardens Ballroom in November 1974.

It was my second time seeing Pink Floyd (the first was in Stoke around the time of *Ummagumma*) and it is especially interesting to see Roger Waters' comment about that 1974 evening's venue. Trentham Gardens Ballroom was where my parents had met and danced during the Second World War and by 1974 it was being used for a handful of big-name concerts. Roger talks of his potential audience as being "kids" – yet I would have been 20, and I don't remember any much younger in the audience. Roger would have been 31 himself (I suspect about the average age of that audience). It would seem

Prog 116. Animals magnetism.



"Brilliant!" – Nick Mason and Roger Waters on Pink Floyd's Winter Tour.

his feeling of animosity towards the audience, that was such a major spark to the creation of *The Wall*, was already showing back in 1974.

So: the Ummagumma show was in Stoke (a walk away from me); *Dark Side...* with songs that lead to *Wish You Were Here* and *Animals* was in Trentham (a bus ride away); *Animals* was in Stafford (a car ride necessitating parking cost); *The Wall* (twice) was in London (a train journey and accommodation). Pink Floyd got ever further away from me and maybe Roger would be happy that yes it became ever "more expensive for the kids" but I'm not sure he is right about the performances getting better – they were *all* brilliant.

Steve Broadhurst, via email

PERSONA NON GRATA?

Since becoming a born again Christian nearly 20 years ago, it's clear that Neal Morse has become an outcast in the eyes of *Prog* Magazine. The bias continued in 2020. *Sola Gratia* somehow managed to receive a positive review. Ultimately the reviewer concluded that "*Sola Gratia* is still an excellent addition to Morse's

growing musical catalogue." What's amazing is that in your Critics' Poll [*Prog* 115] *Sola Gratia* did not receive a single vote. Twenty nine writers casting 20 votes each for a total of 580 votes... and not a single one for *Sola Gratia*. Unfortunately *Prog* loses a bit of credibility by not willing to recognise artists writing about Christian themes.

Jonathan MacDonald, via email

I can assure you Neal's no outcast. We've covered almost all of his releases, normally with four-page features, as we did with his recent Sola Gratia release in Prog 112. Unfortunately we were told he wasn't available for this issue's Transatlantic feature, but Neal did give us a quote for our Jethro Tull feature on page 28. — Ed.

BEYOND THE OUTER LIMITS

Great to see the mighty Groundhogs featured in *Prog* 116. I saw them live a few times way back when and, prog or not, they were a fine, if somewhat underrated, band with *Thank Christ For The Bomb* and *Split* being two of the best albums ever.

When trying to answer the question thrown out regularly by The Outer Limits

TWEET TALK

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DEVIN TOWNSEND

@dvtownsend

Over the last 6 months, I've been working on two 'scores' that have become a film, 2 albums, and a graphic novel among other things called *The Puzzle*. Finally in August, I will be begin recording my next actual 'album' for release early 2022.

RICK WAKEMAN

@GrumpyOldRick

I'm making a list... now there's a surprise... and I'm going for a walk later... if I can find my hat? Diet starts again tonight... looks like 2021 could be more of the same for me!

MATT COHEN

@MattCohenBass

#NowPlaying *Cursus 123 430* by Rob Reed. A bloody fantastic album! Electronic music, with feel, melody and a story. Happy days.



How good to see readers recognising Pendragon's brilliant album *Love Over Fear* in the 2020 Readers' Poll [Prog 116]. In my view, it is one of the outstanding prog records of the decade.

Pendragon was my last pre-lockdown prog gig, back on March 1 in The Green Hotel in Kinross, playing *Love Over Fear* in full. That iconic Scottish venue supports all sorts of great music and, like many small venues, has been struggling to survive the pandemic. Let's hope that the good sum they have recently raised by crowdfunding will tide them over.

The readers also expressed disappointment in the poll at the ticket prices for Genesis concerts. Pricing

apart, given that the concerts have been postponed due to Covid, what has happened to the tens of millions of pounds in income from ticket sales that has been held since the tickets went on sale originally nearly a year ago? That's a lot of fans' cash. How much interest has accrued on the ticket income? Could that money be used to support struggling venues? It's not just Genesis of course; I've also paid for Yes and Steve Hackett tickets where gigs have been postponed for a year. How about a campaign to encourage really well-off bands to support those in need at this time? It could make a real difference.

John Sturrock, Edinburgh

This issue's star letter wins a goodie bag from The Merch Desk at www.themerchdesk.com.

— "Are They Prog?" — I suppose you first have to consider the definition.

In the late-60s/early-70s the term 'progressive' was applied to a number of artists: Led Zeppelin, Fleetwood Mac, and, of course, The Groundhogs, to name but a few. Even Savoy Brown considered themselves progressive as witnessed by their album sleeve notes and Chris Youlden's pronouncement on *Savoy Brown Boogie* from the live side of the album *A Step Further*. Very few of these artists are now considered prog and yet were definitely progressive.

The term 'progressive' was coined to demonstrate an artist moving away, progressing, from what had come before — usually blues or pop. The Groundhogs are a classic example of this, especially as they announced it to the world with *Blues Obituary*! Arguably the best example of being progressive in the 60s was The Beatles. Their progression is clearly defined album by album. Maybe they should feature in The Outer Limits?

So then progressive got shortened to prog in order to differentiate the various types of rock — jazz, folk, heavy, hard, classical, blues, space, etc etc — and so at the same time was only applied to certain types of bands such as Yes, King Crimson, Pink Floyd. All of whom, of course, just to confuse things further, incorporated some elements of those different types of rock!

The irony of all this is threefold. Once an artist has attained prog status they tend not to progress but maintain a particular prog sound; the progressive artists from way back when get forgotten. Thank heavens for The Outer Limits and writing about The Groundhogs — I look forward to features on The Pretty Things, Deep Purple, Leafhound and many more!

It sounds as though I'm knocking prog — I'm not, I love it. I've already preordered the new Transatlantic album and I haven't yet heard a note! At the end of the day what's important is good music, however you pigeonhole it, and that, my friends, is the answer to that perennial question put by The Outer Limits in each issue of *Prog*.

Graham Smith, via email

We get a lot of letters about The Outer Limits and yours details just how much effort goes into making the section. We covered The Pretty Things back in Prog 92 but the others are certainly food for thought.
— Deputy Ed.

SEW CRIMSON!

I thought your readers would be impressed by my daughter Emily's amazing embroidered Christmas card and present to her old proghead dad! She started the year with a pot head pixie and I jokingly suggested the *Discipline* celtic knot... little did I know what she had planned! Genius! The Schizoid Man now takes pride of place in my lockdown study.

Simon O'Connell, West Malling

We love these embroidered pieces. Has anyone else had any prog-friendly craft projects during lockdown? — Deputy Ed.

Crimson crafting!



MARJANA (MARIANA) SEMKINA

@marjanasemkina

Told a friend the other day I'm working on my workaholicism meaning that I'm working on not being this way anymore but everyone just laughed at my ridiculous wording. Also, it's surprisingly hard so I'm thinking of the next project.



NICK BEGGS

@NickBeggs

Sawing a lady in half.
Ta-Dah!

PROG

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INTRO

IF IT'S OUT THERE, IT'S IN HERE

LIQUID TENSION EXPERIMENT END THEIR 22-YEAR SILENCE

Keyboardist Jordan Rudess says he never gave up hope of *LTE3* being made, even after Mike Portnoy's split with Dream Theater left issues that needed to be resolved.

More than two decades after their last studio album, instrumental powerhouse Liquid Tension Experiment are poised to release their long-awaited third record, *LTE3*, on March 26 via InsideOut. "[There was] a 22-year gap where not a day went by where somebody didn't message me and say, 'When is the next LTE? I really want the next LTE!'" says keyboardist Jordan Rudess.

Prospects for new material from Rudess, Mike Portnoy, John Petrucci and Tony Levin were widely assumed to have been scuppered after Portnoy's split from Dream Theater in 2010. But Rudess says he never gave up hope, and there was steady chatter among the four about getting back together.

"Mike and I kept communication through all this time, even when things were a little bit rocky," he says. "Like the weather, the clouds go away, and the sun comes out eventually. Things

change; relationships mend and heal." The buzz around a possible reunion intensified when Portnoy and Rudess played together on Yes' *Cruise To The Edge*, and was ramped up further when Portnoy drummed on Petrucci's *Terminal Velocity* album last year.

"I was really excited when John told me he was going to work with Mike on that album," Rudess says. "I was like, 'Finally!' Everybody has their own dynamics between each other, and I think there was a big opening recently in that relationship, where they could work together and felt it was going to be comfortable on all levels."

The four players reassembled last July, for the first time in over two decades, in Dream Theater's Yonderbarn headquarters. "Quite honestly, I've been a big proponent

of doing this whenever it was possible," the keyboardist says. "Then one of the things that really made this happen was, all of a sudden, we're all home and we have time. 'Guys, let's do this!'" It was the first time he'd been in a recording space with Levin since *LTE2* in 1999. "We walked into the studio and it was literally like no time had passed. It's crazy to think about that, because 22 years is a long time," he says.

"I worked with Tony a little bit on the *Levin Minnemann Rudess* project but he was in his studio, I was in my studio — we never got together. So, 22 years later we're there and we're just working like it's the next day."

All the material on *LTE3* is brand new, with the sole exception of Gershwin's *Rhapsody In Blue*, which they used to play live.



"It was a big healing for us to be all together and working"

Friends reunited: Nothing could keep Liquid Tension Experiment apart for ever.

This month, Intro was compiled by

Chris Cope
Malcolm Dome
Jerry Ewing
Martin Kielty
Alex Lynham
Hannah May Kilroy
Rhodri Marsden
Emily MacNavin
Chris Roberts
Natasha Scharf
Johnny Sharp
Phil Weller
David West
Holly Wright

COSMOGRAF ALBUM: IT'S ABOUT TIME!

Robin Armstrong clocks five aspects of a metaphor in as many musical styles.

Counting the seconds:
Robin Armstrong.



► **Cosmograf's new album** *Rattrapante* will be released on March 26 – and a follow-up is already in the works, mastermind Robin Armstrong reports.

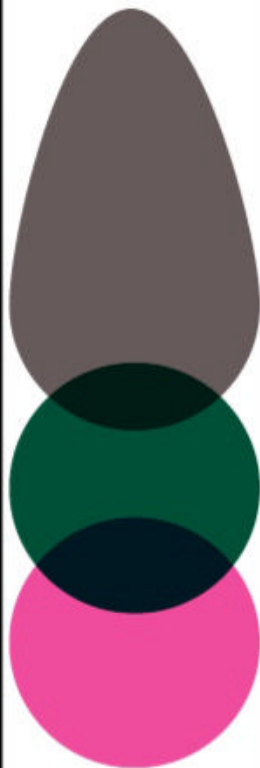
The eighth Cosmograf album to date focuses on people's interactions with time. It features Kyle Fenton on drums plus a cameo from The Blackheart Orchestra singer Chrissy Mostyn and contributions from voiceover artist Tommy McNally.

"It's five stories, or five aspects of the central theme, and the metaphor really is elapsed time, measurement of time and what we do, how we perceive it," Armstrong explains. "I really don't like to make the same album twice, so it's very much the case that I consciously try to make each one different. In places this album is very proggy. I think it's probably a more varied album in terms of styles. It doesn't really sit within one style."

The release of *Rattrapante* (from the French for 'catch up,' referring to a watch with two second hands that can therefore keep time to two events at once) helps soften the blow of Cosmograf having to reschedule a trio of rare live shows originally planned for last October. The gigs, due to be played alongside Rikard Sjöblom's Gungfly, have been pushed back to later this year.

Thanks to a creative splurge last year, Armstrong has already begun work on the project's ninth album. He says that record will also revolve around the concept of time, but that it's "much more nostalgic" and will focus on a certain period in time.

See www.cosmograf.com for more information. **CC**



STORY OF 3 ENDS WITH THE THIRD IMPRESSION

Robert Berry completes last song with Keith Emerson.

► **Robert Berry ends** the journey he began with Keith Emerson and Carl Palmer in 3 by releasing *Third Impression* under his 3.2 monicker via InsideOut on February 12. It includes *Never*, the final song Emerson wrote with Berry before the keyboard player died in 2016.

"When we lost him I had no idea what I'd do," says vocalist and multi-instrumentalist Berry, who first connected with the ELP pair in the late 80s. "But a year after Keith's death I felt it was important to put out the last work he did. I was surprised about how much I felt he was guiding me. I'm not a guy that believes in psychic powers, but something very deep was happening."

He's clear that the follow-up to 2018's *The Rules Have Changed* is 3.2's last word. "I tried to be true to the style we had developed, and also to explore where I might head," he says. "I hope the listeners come with me for my next phase."

See www.robertberry.com for more. **MK**



Closing the chapter:
3's Robert Berry.

"We do these things pretty quick – we're in the studio for two, three weeks," says Rudess. He'd arrived at the sessions with a folder full of ideas, just in case the years apart had dulled their chemistry. But he needn't have worried: "Of course, what happens is there's so much excitement, so much inspiration, so much energy between the players that a lot of things happened in the moment."

LTE3 will be released with an extra disc containing raw material from the writing sessions. "It features a lot of the pure improvisations that we did, so that's really fun," says Rudess, for whom the whole process has been emotionally and creatively restorative. "It was almost like this big exhale for all of us. It was a big healing for us to be all together and working."

See www.facebook.com/ltexperiment for more information. **DW**

RICHARD BARBIERI CASTS A SPELL

Fourth solo album's "strange dreams and imagery" are fuelled by forest wanderings.



A walk in the woods:
Richard Barbieri.

CARL GLOVER

Richard Barbieri releases his fourth full solo album, *Under A Spell*, via Kscope on February 26. It's a very different beast to the work he'd imagined as the follow-up to 2017's acclaimed *Planets + Persona*.

"I was going to travel around Europe, work in different studios, have large ensembles playing – it was going to be, let's say, a social thing," he says. "And of course what happened was the very opposite!"

Instead, the record was written and recorded at home, "with all this strangeness going on outside." Everything conspired, he adds, to produce "these strange dreams and imagery, which became my template for the work."

Having moved out of London last year, Barbieri found that the off-kilter surrealism of our current times was alleviated by walks in woods and forests, which informed his music. "Again, it's a little bit creepy, with a sense that very odd things might have once gone on there, amid the silence," he says. "But it became a case of trying to capture all these atmospheres. I was kind of *compelled* to make this album."

Former Brand X bassist Percy Jones features on the track *Serpentine*. Among the enigmatic, cinematic atmospherics and guileful grooves there are flickers of almost subliminal voices – sound elements rather than singing – by Swedish musician Lisen Rylander Love (who guested on *Planets + Persona*) and Marillion singer Steve Hogarth, who made the 2012 album *Not The Weapon But The Hand* with Barbieri.

Gratified that he's always been able to make the music he wanted to make, Barbieri adds: "I'm still coming at things from a different angle. And that, I guess, will always produce something a little different."

After rising to fame as a member of art-pop pioneers Japan, keyboardist and groundbreaking synth subverter Barbieri has worked with a variety of collaborators, notably spending 17 years with prog giants Porcupine Tree, with whom he made nine albums. "You never know," he teases

when asked if that band will ever return from their lengthy hiatus.

The new reissue of Japan's *Quiet Life* has also swung the spotlight back onto him. "It's my personal favourite Japan album," he says, "although *Tin Drum* is the best work." He's recently started writing again with former colleague Steve Jansen, and, on a separate project, with Tim Bowness. **CR**

For more, see www.facebook.com/RichardBarbieriOfficial.

"It became a case of trying to capture all these atmospheres."

INTRO extras

SIMON MCKECHNIE GOES RETRO

Composer Simon

McKechnie has

signed to Bad

Elephant Music for

the release of his

album *Retro* on

March 19. He turns

to his classical and

jazz influences on

four tracks – one of

which, *The Origin*

Of Species, explores

the magnum opus

of evolution theorist

Charles Darwin. Bad

Elephant Music say

the LP "harks back to

the good old days of

progressive rock."



Wheel are fuelled
by the future.

VILLE JUURIKKALA

WHEEL GET REAL IN RESIDENT HUMAN

Anglo-Finnish collective aim for honesty with their second album, due in March.

Anglo-Finnish proggers Wheel will release their second album *Resident Human* on March 26 via Odyssey Music. Like so many recent releases, it was pushed back due to the pandemic, but vocalist James Lascelles says the delay was in fact a blessing in disguise.

"We were so disappointed to have so many tours cancelled, especially with bands like Meshuggah and Devin Townsend," he confirms. "But in all honesty, the extra time was enormously beneficial." It gave the singer space to focus on the album's lyrics, which hone in on the complexity of the human condition often through last year's events, such as the aftermath of George Floyd's death (*Movement*) and the Covid-19 pandemic (*Fugue*).

Lascelles also found inspiration in the sci-fi novel series *Hyperion Cantos* by Dan Simmons, which he discovered during lockdown. "It blew my mind," he says. "It's set in the future, but there are so many elements of our world that pop into the books. It really contemplates the notion of mortality and death. The song *Hyperion* is 12 minutes long, so it needed a suitably big topic – the fit was just right!"

The singer adds that Wheel aimed for a "more humanistic vibe" than on their debut LP *Moving Backwards*. "We're living in a time where you can correct everything if you choose to, and it's great that you can do that, but for this album we really tried to pull back. I like how honest it's ended up being."

More details can be found at www.wheelband.net. **HMK**

MÖBIUS STRIP BACK FROM SILENCE WITH TIME LAG

Jazz proggers inspired by support slot with Soft Machine.

Italian progressive jazz quartet Möbius Strip have announce details of their upcoming second album, entitled *Time Lag*, which arrives four years after their self-titled debut. "We think we've created an album which, even though it's quite diverse, has a strong sense of unity," keyboardist Lorenzo Cellupica says.

The four-piece were invited to support Soft Machine at Progtoberfest in Chicago in 2018 and the keyboardist believes that, on the back of that experience, this new record represents their growing confidence and ambition.

"We wanted to expand the sound and the colours of the songs, compared to our debut," Cellupica says. "We've added new instruments including trumpets, trombones and a four-voice choir. We've found new ways of expressing our jazz influences in combination with prog rock, classical, funk and Latin elements. We hope people find that our new music sounds challenging and pleasant at the same time."

See www.mbiusstrip1.bandcamp.com for more. **POW**



Taking time: Möbius Strip.

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RICHARD BARBIERI UNDER A SPELL

k scope

New album from the legendary Japan
and Porcupine Tree keyboard virtuoso

A hauntingly hypnotic introspective work borne out of imaginings, haunted
spaces, deserted woods and lucid dreams. Guest performers include
Steve Hogarth (MARILLION) and Percy Jones (BRIAN ENO / BRAND X)



26/2/21

Available to order from kscopemusic.com/store
Available on gatefold red / black vinyl 2LP, CD, digital



The anchoress - The Art of Losing

Welsh multi-instrumentalist and producer The Anchoress
returns with 'The Art of Losing'. The follow up to the
PROG award-winning debut features guest appearances
from James Dean Bradfield (Manic Street Preachers) and
Sterling Campbell (David Bowie)

*"...it stares into the most harrowing caves of loss, illness, pain and
death, but comes out alive, its flesh and blood triumphing over
the cerebral... fierce, forlorn, yet stubbornly resilient."*

PROG

12/3/21 k scope

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Available on 3CD hardback book, Amazon exclusive gold 2LP, gatefold black vinyl 2LP, CD, digital

BTBAM PREPARE FOR "CRAZY RIDE"

"We're still pushing ourselves," says vocalist Tommy Rogers of the upcoming album.



Between The Buried And Me have confirmed that their forthcoming album will be their longest yet. The as-yet-untitled release, slated for arrival later this year, will be the follow-up to 2018's twin LPs *Automata I* and *II* and their 10th full-length studio title overall.

"We need to prove to the world that we're still here and we're still writing as well – or even better – than we ever have," says vocalist and keyboardist Tommy Rogers.

The album follows a year of writing, with Rogers admitting that the pandemic afforded the band more time to focus on the creative process. "We actually had way more material for this album than we ended up using."

He adds: "We tapped into some of our earlier influences as well as doing things we've never done before, which is always kind of a goal of ours when we write new music. We still surprise ourselves after all these years. We're still pushing ourselves to try new things as well."

Fans can rest assured that the earlier influences he mentions will include a return to BTBAM's heavier side. "It's tough to describe our albums in terms of a genre but there are definitely moments that are some of the heaviest stuff we've done in a while," he divulges.

"There's a lot of aggression. I hate to be cheesy and say that the year rubbed off on us, but I think it did, and it comes through in the music for sure." He warns that listeners should "be prepared for anything," adding that BTBAM "definitely didn't go soft rock on anyone."

While keeping track titles and other specifics close to his chest, Rogers is also vague about whether the new record is a concept album. "It is and it isn't," he says cryptically. "I tried to write more on the spot on this record. I didn't want to create a big story like I did on the last few records."

The band relied on established relationships on the studio project, recording with long-term collaborator Jamie King, while mixing is currently being completed by Jens Bogren, who's been working with them since 2015's *Coma Ecliptic*.

While they remain in discussions with Sumerian Records over a release date, they hope it will coincide with a tour later this year.

In the meantime, Rogers offers two more hints about what to expect, saying: "It's a crazy wild ride and it's the longest album we've ever done." **HW**

For more details when they're available, visit www.betweentheburiedandme.com.

"I didn't want to create a big story like I did on the last few records."

INTRO extras

HACKETT, JAKSZYK, ROTHERY ON ONE ALBUM

Steve Hackett, Jakko Jakszyk and Steve Rothery can all be heard on the same original album for the first time. Veteran session man Gabe Treiyr has recruited them for his debut Treiyr album, *Scars: Journey Through A Lifetime*, which features additional guest musicians too. For more, see www.facebook.com/treiyrband.



TUSMØRKE DREAM OF REALMS BEYOND

New album *Nordisk Krim* explores the world of prehistoric bog bodies.

Norwegian folk-proggers Tusmørke will release new album *Nordisk Krim* on February 26 via Karisma, in which they explore the world of bog bodies – people who were thrown into marshland as a form of sacrifice thousands of years ago.

"They're frozen glimpses of the transition from our world to the realms beyond," says leader Benedikt 'Benediktator' Momrak. "They are fixed in the moment of crossing over the threshold to the gods. The bog was a means of transcending mortality."

Some of the material has existed in various forms since 2000, but Momrak says the new presentations are "darker, more leaning towards heavy metal" than previous works, and also feature experimentation with "tape delay, ring modulators, other analogue effects, field recordings and so on."

He highlights some of the rhythmic patterns, especially on *Mysteries Of Sacrifice*, as worth looking out for. "I want the listener to feel elation, having escaped dense production and macabre lyrics," he says. "I guess the word is catharsis. And many fans will be happy to finally hear these songs recorded, since different versions have been played live from 2015."

Momrak says his inspiration goes back to seeing human remains in museums when he was a child. He adds, "I would have loved to become a bog body when I grew up! It's a strong look, the exhibitions give you plenty of exposure and people can study you and actually learn something."

For more details visit www.tusm-rke.bandcamp.com. **MK**

PHOTO CONTEST WINNER IS DAMIAN WILSON ACTION PIC

Bert Treep is named Affinity Photo New Rock Photographer.

The overall winner of a year-long photography challenge is a dramatic picture of vocalist Damian Wilson performing with Arjen Lucassen. *Louder* readers voted for Bert Treep's image, making him the Affinity Photo New Rock Photographer 2020. He captured the moment in his native Netherlands in 2019.

"The show was almost over and I was about to put my camera in the bag, when suddenly Damian Wilson jumped off the stage and started crowdsurfing," he says. Along with publication in *Prog* and our sister magazines *Classic Rock* and *Metal Hammer*, he wins an iPad Pro 11, Apple Pencil, Affinity Photo for iPad and the chance to go on assignment for *Louder*.

Affinity's John Atkin says: "The judges were blown away by the quality of images submitted to the different categories. Let's hope we can all be back out there soon capturing more amazing music memories."

For more details on Affinity's creative software products, visit www.affinity.serif.com. **MK**

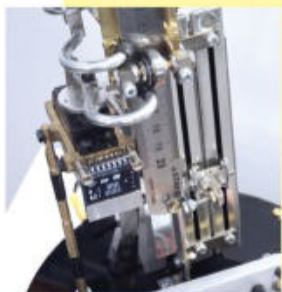


FAD GADGETS

Rhodri Marsden on three of the latest must-have gizmos currently putting the prog in progress.

RULER BASS SYNTH

The sound of a ruler twanging on the side of a desk can prompt wistful schoolday nostalgia – unless you're a teacher, in which case it may cause you



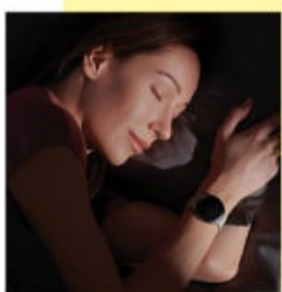
to run screaming from the room. Russian artist and researcher Dmitry Morozov (also known online as ::vtol::) has assembled this mechanical marvel, which takes

a 20cm ruler, clamps it in place and twangs it with rhythmic and melodic precision, creating a bass synth like no other. (Or, as Dmitry Morozov likes to call it, an automated plucked contrabass monochord.)

www.vtol.cc

DIGITAL LULLABY GENERATOR

We're living through a nocturnal crisis, with sleeping patterns shattered by anxiety surrounding everything from pandemics to Edam cheese price hikes. Zepp, who make smartwatches and go



a bundle on wellbeing, found that 89 per cent of us turn to calming music to help us drift off, with Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* the most popular choice. To broaden our

options, Zepp take information about when and for how long you sleep, and generate a piece of unique muzak in return. This is so hilariously unscientific that it deserves a round of applause for its sheer audacity.

www.zepplullaby.com

REVERSE TRIPLE NECK GUITAR

There's a school of thought that says that the more strings on a guitar, the more annoying it is, and that the more necks on a guitar, the quicker it should



be thrown into the nearest skip. But wait! Italian guitarist Luca Stricagnoli has been disputing that for many years, assembling a range of hand-built instruments to make his

point. His following on YouTube proves there's a massive audience for such a thing. I'm about to glue three guitars together and start practising.

www.lucastricagnoli.com



MY PROG HERO

Inspiring the wider music world...

A gentleman with impact: Chris Squire and Ellefson, below, liked to "geek out" at concerts together.



PRESS



MELODY MYERS

DAVID ELLEFSON

The Megadeth bassist explains his high regard for his **Yes** counterpart Chris Squire, who became a friend shortly before his death in 2015.

“I had this couple of stoner buddies at high school, who got me into smoking pot, and they were the ones who were into exploratory music. I didn't start smoking pot or drinking until I was about 16, so Yes didn't come into my life until I was about 16! Before that, probably Rush were my first entrance into prog – although I never considered Rush to be prog, more of a hard rock band.

“When I first heard the live album *Yesshows*, that was huge. I often discover bands through live albums for some reason.

“The first thing that caught me was Chris Squire's bass tone, then the parts, which were very advanced. They were clever; the bass really stood out – and Yes didn't really have that annoying prog sound about them. A rock'n'roller could follow it. I didn't like school, I didn't like math class. I didn't want my music to be a math lesson!

“I went to see No Doubt on their reunion tour and I was in the promoter's box with Chris. We went to lunch after that and he told me how he'd invented the Rick-O-Sound sound on the Rickenbacker bass. He still used the original

Marshall half-stack from all his records. It was a fun conversation – bass players geeking out! It confirmed to me that our aggressive approach to bass guitar in our respective bands was very similar.

“*Roundabout* is a classic song, but when *90125* came out, *It Can Happen* was a perfect song with a wonderful melodic bassline. It was a subtle entrance, but it was a statement. It was done with attention and it got your attention. Every song on that album is a slam-dunk.

“Chris had such an approachable presence about him and I always admired that. Sitting at concerts, being fans, picking apart shows, talking shop... just a couple of musicians hanging out. If we'd known each other in the

80s it would have been a different conversation; but being adults, family guys, it was a highlight to get to know him as a gentleman. He had such an impact on me.

“If I was making another covers album I'd probably pick Yes' *Tempus Fugit* to honour Chris.” MK

Ellefson's No Cover is out now via Napalm. See www.davidellefson.com for more information.

“Our approach to bass guitar in our respective bands was very similar.”

PROG IN BRIEF

A box set of unreleased **Daavid Allen** (right) material, *Deya Dreaming*, is coming out this year via the Daavid Allen Family Trust, which aims to preserve his legacy. The set contains work from his stay in Deia, Mallorca. For more, see www.bit.ly/DAFT_store

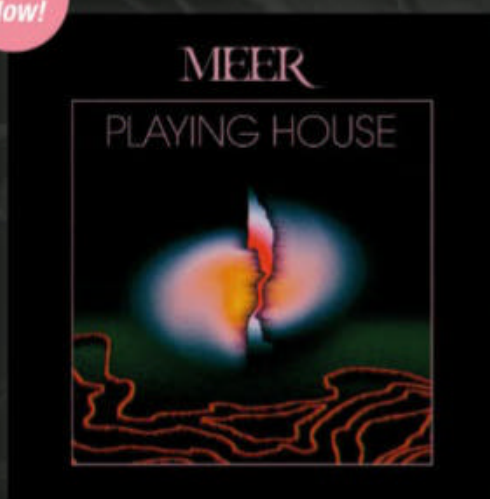


Hedvig Mollestad Trio will release *Ding Dong. You're Dead.* on March 19 via Rune Grammofon. Mollestad, who leads the Norwegian jazz prog outfit, says she's “trying to make the world make sense by having fun in music, experimenting and testing.”

Cynic will release a new album in 2021 and mark the 2020 deaths of Sean Reinert and Sean Malone, guitarist Paul Masvidal has confirmed. He adds: “The Cynic family has endured a lifetime of kaleidoscopic change.” www.cyniconline.com

New Releases Karisma Records

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Now!



MEER PLAYING HOUSE

With their grandiose string arrangements and polyphonic vocals, MEER's sound is far from minimalistic and flows in seemingly constant motion. If you like your progressive rock symphonic, orchestral, melodic, catchy and with lots of energetic spurs, this is for you.

Out
05.03!



BJØRN RIIS LULLABIES IN A CAR CRASH (Limited LP)

Airbag co-founder, songwriter and guitarist Bjørn Riis presents a limited vinyl reprint on white vinyl for his debut solo album, "Lullabies in a Car Crash". The album was very much a personal statement, and a homage to many of Bjørn's musical influences.

Out
26.02!



TUSMØRKE NORDISK KRIM

Norway's most far out and unique prog band TUSMØRKE is back – this time with a double concept album that is beyond epic, beyond life – and above death! 10 epic songs about bog bodies, clocking in at 82 minutes.

Out
05.03!



BJØRN RIIS FOREVER COMES TO AN END (Re-mastered LP)

Airbag co-founder, songwriter and lead guitarist, Bjørn Riis presents a limited vinyl reprint on white vinyl for his second solo album, "Forever Comes to an End". Bjørn's unique guitar playing has a central role, with soaring leads, heavy riffs and beautiful textures.



TUSMØRKE
Nordisk Krim
T-shirt

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BJØRN RIIS
Lullabies in a Car Crash
T-shirt



BJØRN RIIS
Forever Comes to an End
T-shirt

OUR OCEANS

Shred guitarist Tymon Kruidenier discovers his voice on latest project.

“ONE THING I’VE learned over the years is it’s good to go into a record not knowing too much about what you’re going to do. Just let it happen,” says Tymon Kruidenier. *While Time Disappears* is the second album under the banner of Our Oceans following the eponymous 2015 debut, but previously Kruidenier was known as the guitarist in instrumental fusion metal band Exivious. Our Oceans started life as a one-man side project to allow him to explore a different style of songwriting.

“I’ve always wanted to make a more ambient thing with singer-songwriter influences,” he says. “The first Our Oceans record was a chance to do that and I found out that I loved to make that type of music so much more, and also just the opportunity to sing, which was like an experiment for the first record, was so much more enjoyable than I ever imagined.”

Kruidenier invited his Exivious bandmates Robin Zielhorst and Yuma van Eekelen to join him on this new voyage, which they recorded in their hometown of Tilburg, in the Netherlands. It was there they set up a studio inside an abandoned office building. “It took some convincing of the other guys,” says Kruidenier. “In the beginning, they were like, ‘What the hell? Are we really going to do something completely different?’” They toyed with the idea of keeping the Exivious name but decided it was time to move on from that identity. “It’s like force-feeding something down the throats of your fans, that would feel disrespectful,” he says.

A major challenge for Kruidenier has been learning to be comfortable with putting his emotions on display in his lyrics. “With the first album it was crazy scary,” he says, “but I have to say that after the response we got from that first record, it started feeling very comfortable to be in that place of vulnerability. There are some parts of the album where I was deliberately searching for places to make myself uncomfortable. I think that song *The Heart’s Whisper* has the most touchy-feely, sensitive lyrics. If I listen to that song and pay attention to the lyrics, I’m actually almost on the verge of it feeling cringeworthy, but I feel like that is the right thing to do, to explore that vulnerable territory.”

The themes behind *While Time Disappears* are inspired by the personal experiences of the trio in overcoming adversity and tough times. “Going into this record, my bandmates and I were at a place in our lives where we were feeling good, then for our own reasons we all went into a downward spiral. For one person it was more depression, for another it was bad relationships, just the stuff life throws at you,” says Kruidenier, who didn’t want the recording to leave listeners feeling downbeat.

“The album starts out with *Unravel*, an overcoming song, feeling good with where you are in life, then life hits you in the face. Then *With Hands Torn Open*, the last song says, ‘It’s okay, just pick up the pieces and go on.’” **DW**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Tymon Kruidenier (vocals, guitar), **Robin Zielhorst** (bass, vocals), **Yuma van Eekelen** (drums)

SOUNDS LIKE

Thom Yorke and Jeff Buckley pouring their hearts out in a late-night jam with Porcupine Tree

CURRENT RELEASE

While Time Disappears is out now on Long Branch Records

WEBSITE

www.ouroceans.net



“It’s good to go into a record not knowing too much about what you’re going to do. Just let it happen.”

Our Oceans,
L-R, Robin Zielhorst,
Yuma van Eekelen,
Tymon Kruidenier.



PRESS/WILLIAM VAN DER VOORT



THE DOLL

LISTEN TO THE SILENCE

(BEGGARS BANQUET, 1979)

► If **Prog readers** know The Doll at all, it's probably because of their one hit single, *Desire Me*, which reached No.28 in the UK charts in January 1979. It may have given the impression the London band were no more than Blondie wannabes but that's a totally unfair and misguided description.

The Doll were formed in late '77 with a line-up of Marion Valentine (vocals, guitar), Adonis Yianni (keyboards), Christos Yianni (bass) and Mario Watts (drums). They were signed to Beggars Banquet, *Desire Me* was their second single. Valentine and Christos Yianni revamped the line-up with the addition of Jamie West-Oram (lead guitar), Denis Haines (keyboards) and Paul Turner (drums). This was the version of the band who recorded their sole album, *Listen To The Silence*, put out later in 1979.

Dumped into the new wave category, the band were hampered by the continual promotion of Valentine as a sex symbol. She's on the album cover, and as a result it was perceived that it wasn't a real band, merely a leader with backing musicians.

But what you hear on the album is the massive impact both Haines and West-Oram had on the sound. It was very synth-oriented; they drew from krautrock, as well as offering nods to Roxy Music and Kate Bush. Tracks such as *Zero Heroes* and *Ce Soir*, *Cheri* have art rock aspirations. Valentine's deliberately brittle vocal style give the songs a left-field pop feel, while Haines' moody patterns are also slightly eerie.

None of the compositions are lengthy, but that adds to the appeal. It says much about The Doll's expertise that they pack so many ideas into a short space of time without ever making the songs sound cluttered.

Credit should also be given to producer John Leckie - who had worked with Pink Floyd and XTC, and later Muse, among many others - for the expert way in which he allowed their music to breathe and expand.

The interplay between Valentine, Haines and West-Oram is impressive. On *Carmina* and *You Used To Be My Hero* they weave around one another, in the process creating their own style. As with Magazine, what The Doll were achieving had nothing to do with punk or new wave, but created an off-the-wall ambience of an entirely different calibre.

Sadly, *Listen To The Silence* was virtually ignored on its release, and there was no further singles success for the band. They split up in the spring of 1980. West-Oram found success in the 80s with The Fixx, and Haines played keyboards for Gary Numan.

Maybe they were just too outré for the era, but yet listening to *...The Silence* today, it fits very nicely into what was going on musically. Reissued in 2011 by Cherry Red, it's an undervalued record that deserves to be heard.

MALCOLM DOME



ALL AROUND THE WORLD

Our far-out trip to far-flung prog



Anna Hardy hopes her fusion of prog with classical music will go global.

PRESS/T. TOMITA/NOUVERNE RECORDS

ANNA HARDY

This Japanese artist was already an accomplished pianist, organist, violinist and flautist before she discovered prog.

► **Multi-instrumentalist Anna** Hardy hadn't encountered prog music until she'd already joined a prog band - an unusual situation, perhaps, but one that illustrates how difficult it can be to discover the genre in her native Japan.

The nation's audiences are renowned for the way in which they connect with artists from overseas; but with so many calls on their attention, some music they might love is inevitably going to pass them by. So it was for Hardy, who'd begun playing piano at the age of three and soon took up violin and later flute as well.

"At high school I started working as the chapel organist," she says, offering a hint of her talents. "My family and friends hadn't been interested in prog so I hadn't listened to any - instead it was classical music like Bach, Sibelius and Liszt." That changed when she joined Japanese prog band Mizuki da Fantasia in 2016, and met producer and journalist Quo Ichiro. "He introduced me to [the music of] Genesis, King Crimson, Rick Wakeman, Renaissance and many more," Hardy says. "As soon as I heard prog I was very interested. I cautiously started

writing songs in consultation with Quo and learned a lot more from studio engineers and other musicians."

The result is her debut solo album, *Lunatic Spells*, recorded as a result of the band going on hold. "I think progressive rock and classical music share the idea that musical expression should be unlimited," she explains. "I aimed for a true fusion with contemporary prog music."

Still, Hardy says it remains hard to gain attention in Japan. "It's not easy where hip hop and dance music are so popular," she says. "Many young people are comfortable with the stereotype that prog music is incomprehensible - I'd like to get rid of that, break that stereotype down."

She describes her experiences so far with Mizuki da Fantasia as exciting and positive. "Vocalist Mizuki and I knew each other before I joined, so it was very natural to play in her band,"

Hardy recalls. "It was fun, and a great way to get to know the world of prog and rock. I hope more people will listen to my music in the future, and I'd like people all over the world to listen too." **MK**

Lunatic Spells is available via nouvernerecords.bandcamp.com.



"I'd like to get rid of prog's stereotype and break it down."

PROG IN BRIEF

Lazuli keyboardist Romain Thoriel is a member of **MAN And The Maniacs** (right), who release their debut album in May. Singer Marina Anne Nolles describes the nine tracks as "protest pop songs about the world today." See www.man-music.com.



Osibisa launch their first new music in two decades when *New Dawn!* arrives on April 9. Original members Teddy Osei and Robert Bailey are joined by long-standing colleague, Gregg Kofi Brown and a "stellar line-up of musicians." See www.osibisa.co.uk.



PHOTO: KALLE-ERIK KOSONEN

Nordic time-travellers Polymoon.

POLYMOON

Finnish space cadets aim to blow your minds and your eardrums.

THERE CAN'T BE many bands that end up releasing their debut album before they've even played a gig, but that's exactly what psychedelic Finnish five-piece Polymoon ended up having to do in 2020.

If they'd had their way, they would have taken their intoxicatingly organic, synth-swathed brand of mind-altering, impressionistic space rock out to the heads of their homeland on a spring tour but, of course, a pandemic firmly put paid to that idea. Instead they introduced themselves to the world via the studio with September's LP, *Caterpillars Of Creation*, before heading out to play a small number of local shows.

That seems quite a shame, since at first glance Polymoon are a band with an arresting visual presence. In refreshing contrast to so many acts featured in these pages, lined up unassumingly in black T-shirts, Polymoon look the way they sound – although all in their 20s, they're covered in hair, vintage patterned shirts and the general air that they wouldn't look out of place passing a spliff around a campfire at a commune in 1972. Not that they're some carefully crafted retro affair, though.

"The basis of our music is in the old prog, psychedelic and krautrock sound," says keys player and singer Kalle-Erik Kosonen, "but we're not worshipping it."

"I think we've made something that combines some old prog sounds with something more modern," agrees guitarist Jesse Jaksola, and there's no doubt that the breathtaking wall of sound they create echoes sonic adventurers from Hawkwind through to the heavy, immersive shoegaze of My Bloody Valentine, where ethereal vocals are almost submerged within the sound to create another impressionistic layer.

"We want the vocals to be one of the instruments," says Jaksola. "A prettier element, perhaps, but it's as important as everything else in the mix rather than a separate thing."

The title of recent single *Malamalama* means 'the light of knowledge', and they have described it as "like a deep feverish dream from which one does not want to escape".

"For me, listening to music is precisely that," says Kosonen. "The instruments create the environment, you just close your eyes and float away, you know?"

If their sound engulfs the listener's ears on record, they plan to make an even more visceral impact when they can finally start gigging properly.

"Loud is the only way we play," says Jaksola. "We are always pushing it. We have these big amps and in the future we are going to make a real impression on people – it's going to be brutal."

"For me, it's a big part of playing music to get that physical feeling in your body," Kosonen adds.

And those amps, of course, have to be analogue. "You can't make proper feedback with those digital models," says Jaksola. "It has to be like the old days, you know?"

There are lyrical themes for those who care to explore further, too, with *Caterpillars Of Creation* concerning "an attempt to climb a mountain at the centre of the universe".

"It's a metaphor for life," says Kosonen. "Having to face obstacles but to continue on, and when, or if, you finally get to the summit, then something will be waiting there."

Now making new friends around their home country (and presumably deafening a few to boot), Polymoon's uphill journey is only just beginning. But they've started in some style. **JS**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Kalle-Erik Kosonen (vocals, synthesiser), **Jesse Jaksola** (guitar), **Otto Kontio** (guitar), **Juuso Valli** (bass), **Tuomas Heikura** (drums)

SOUNDS LIKE

A blissed-out space trip punctuated by hypnotic encounters with meteor storms of psychedelic noise rock. Strap yourselves in

CURRENT RELEASE

Caterpillars Of Creation is out now via Svart

WEBSITE

www.facebook.com/polymooooon



"We've made something that combines old prog sounds with something more modern."



US, THEM & YOU

What got us all grooving this month...

Official Progressive Albums Chart

The prog top 30 albums

January 2021

Compiled by



- 1 TAME IMPALA** The Slow Rush (FICTION)
- 2 JEAN-MICHEL JARRE** Welcome To The Other Side (SONY)
- 3 NIGHTWISH** Human. :II: Nature. (NUCLEAR BLAST)
- 4 BRIAN ENO** Film Music 1976-2020 (UMC)
- 5 HAWKWIND** 50 Live (CHERRY RED)
- 6 BILL NELSON** Transcorder (The Acquitted By Mirrors Recordings) (BILL NELSON)
- 7 DREAM THEATER** Distant Memories - Live In London (INSIDEOUT)
- 8 FLAMING LIPS** American Head (BELLA UNION)
- 9 BILL NELSON** New Vibrato Wonderland (BILL NELSON)
- 10 RUSH** Permanent Waves (MERCURY/UMC)
- 11 RICK WAKEMAN & THE ENGLISH ROCK ENSEMBLE** The Red Planet (R&D MEDIA)
- 12 STEVE HACKETT** Selling England By The Pound And Spectral Mornings: Live (INSIDEOUT)
- 13 JULIANNA BARWICK** Healing Is A Miracle (NINJA TUNE)
- 14 GREG LAKE** The Anthology: A Musical Journey (BMG)
- 15 MARATHON** Mark Kelly's Marathon (EARMUSIC)
- 16 BLACKFIELD** For The Music (PARLOPHONE)
- 17 OZRIC TENTACLES** Space For The Earth (KSCOPE)
- 18 KRAFTWERK** Remixes (PARLOPHONE)
- 19 THE PINEAPPLE THIEF** Versions Of The Truth (KSCOPE)
- 20 MASTODON** Medium Rarities (REPRISE)
- 21 FISH** Weltschmerz (CHOCOLATE FROG)
- 22 FOCUS** 50 Years - Anthology 1970-1976 (RED BULLET)
- 23 THE FLOWER KINGS** Islands (INSIDEOUT)
- 24 FIELD MUSIC** Making A New World (MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES)
- 25 HAWKWIND LIGHT ORCHESTRA** Carnivorous (CHERRY RED)
- 26 ENSLAVED** Utgard (NUCLEAR BLAST)
- 27 TREES** Trees (EARTH)
- 28 FRANK ZAPPA** Hot Rats (UMC)
- 29 FAIRPORT CONVENTION** Fame And Glory (EXPLORE MULTIMEDIA/CHERRY RED)
- 30 HAKEN** Virus (INSIDEOUT)

Find out more at www.officialcharts.com

WIN! RICK WAKEMAN BUNDLE!



It was voted one of the best albums of 2020 by Prog readers and critics, and now we're giving you the chance to win a bumper bundle to celebrate the release of Rick Wakeman's *The Red Planet*. This special prize includes a signed and numbered copy of the album on CD with a bonus DVD presented in deluxe pop-up packaging plus a very limited-edition A3 print of the album artwork, signed by Rick and the artist Martin Cook.

The album is Wakeman's first prog release with The English Rock Ensemble since 2003's *Out There* and it's packed with instrumental pieces dedicated to Mars. The DVD includes video interviews about the album recording as well as promo films for three of the tracks.

To be in with a chance of winning this set, just visit www.bit.ly/Wakeman_Prize and answer the following question:

On *The Red Planet*, Wakeman sets Mars' terrain to music, but which of these isn't a Martian volcano?

- a) Phlius Mons
- b) Asraeus Mons
- c) Pavonis Mons

For more information on Rick Wakeman, visit www.rwcc.com.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This competition will be open from February 9, 2021-March 19, 2021. By entering the competition you agree to our competition rules (available at www.futureplc.com/competition-rules). The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received by the closing date. No employees of Future Publishing or any of its group companies or the employees of any entity which has been involved with the administration of this competition or any member of their households may enter this competition.

Now our turn...

The Editor
Jerry Ewing



LIQUID TENSION EXPERIMENT
LTE3
INSIDEOUT

The Art Guy
Russell Fairbrother



HEDVIG MOLLESTAD TRIO
Ding Dong. You're Dead.
RUNE GRAMMOFON

The Deputy Ed
Natasha Scharf



WARDRUNA
Kvittravn
MUSIC FOR NATIONS

The Musician
Jordan Rudess



HAKEN
Virus
INSIDEOUT

The Writer
Grant Moon



SEAS OF MIRTH
Sub Marine Dreams
EELSHOCK

The Reader
Lucy Phillips



THE PINEAPPLE THIEF
Versions Of The Truth
KSCOPE



pg.lost, L-R: Martin Hjertstedt, Mattias Bhatt, Gustav Almberg, Kristian Karlsson.

PG.LOST

Swedish post-rock crew aim high with latest release.

STARTING WHEN THE members were at school together, pg.lost have enjoyed surprising longevity. Initially the musicians had other projects, as Cult Of Luna bassist Kristian Karlsson explains, “This was a nice jam band, to have a few beers and jam. It was never planned to be the main band, just something fun we had on the side. Slowly all the other bands disappeared, and this was what was left. We didn’t have any rules about how it should sound... we just had fun with it and it slowly evolved.”

Although pg.lost now have a decent profile as the result of a decade’s gradual growth, underground success was slow to arrive. “The first time we went to China was a really special thing,” says Karlsson. “It was such a nervous time because we just had a contact for [the promoter] who put up the tour, and we hadn’t met him, but that ended up being one of the best that we ever had. When we did that first tour it felt that now this was something we should focus on. That was when the band really got serious, because we’d been struggling for a long time in Europe. That tour helped us to believe a little bit more in what we did.”

On their previous album, *Versus*, they took a more decisive step in a post-metal direction. In some ways it makes the layered, more subtle atmosphere on current release *Oscillate* all the more surprising. However, some tracks, such as *Shelter*, still display a strong post-metal influence, but Karlsson says that his joining Cult Of Luna in 2013 marked a turning point: “People said about *Versus* that we were moving into this post-metal

sound and I wanted to try and push it back a bit. Of course [*Oscillate*] has the darkness from the post-metal scene but I wanted to bring in some more indie rock, like Radiohead, those different textures. I don’t want the bands to get too close to each other, it would be boring if pg.lost sounded like an instrumental version of Cult Of Luna.”

For this album, the four-piece were writing and recording remotely, with guitarists Mattias Bhatt in London and Gustav Almberg in Munich.

“The albums before were mainly written in the rehearsal space,” says Karlsson. “This album was the first time we wrote stuff by ourselves and presented it to each other.”

This meant the bassist not only had to take on his usual role of producer, but was also involved in the material being formed in the first place, “I felt that I had to send a lot of new ideas so that we had something to start from.”

The outcome of this remote process was that the band were effectively writing in the studio. This gave them greater freedom to experiment with layers and subtle textures. “I got to focus much more on detail on this album instead of just recording it very basically, and saying, ‘Record your bass, record your guitar,’” agrees Karlsson. “When everything was recorded we had extra time to add small extra stuff all over the place, to find more layers. To my ears it’s a bit more produced, this album. We didn’t want it to sound too rough.” **AL**

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Mattias Bhatt (guitar), **Gustav Almberg** (guitar), **Martin Hjertstedt** (drums), **Kristian Karlsson** (bass, keyboards)

SOUNDS LIKE

Dark, atmospheric post-rock in the style of Mono, Cult Of Luna and Mogwai

CURRENT RELEASE

Oscillate is out now on Pelagic

WEBSITE

www.pglost.com



“We didn’t have any rules about how it should sound. We just had fun with it and it slowly evolved.”

THE EPIC SAGA OF THE BAND THAT CHANGED PROG

Featuring exclusive interviews with some of the band's main protagonists alongside a look back at their key albums – from *Nursery Cryme* to *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* – this is a must-have for all Genesis fans



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SCARDUST

Israeli symphonic prog metallers explore estrangement on their second album.

NOA GRUMAN FINDS her lyrics in some of the most unexpected places. “Most of my inspiration comes from my own past experiences and feelings; those evoke mainly sadness, passion, longing and at times also optimism,” she tells *Prog*. “Another big trigger, which evokes a lot of anger, is racism, objectification and misogyny. I do often find myself getting inspired by things I would have never expected to get inspired by, though... once I was inspired by locking myself outside my apartment!”

She’s poured many of those experiences into the 11 new tracks on Scardust’s latest album, *Strangers*, a conceptual project that deals with estrangement. “This record consists of five different stories, each presenting a different aspect of the concept; being a stranger to someone that you never met before, having a once loved one becoming a stranger, being estranged from the world around you, being estranged from your past, and thinking that you know someone that you actually don’t know anything about,” she says.

“Every story is presented from two perspectives, so for each story, you hear both sides: one on the first half of the album, and the other in the second half. Each story can be played together as two combined songs that are being weaved into one longer piece, or as separate pieces, the listener chooses.”

The vibrant symphonic album also includes a guest appearance from German folk musician Patty Gurdy. Gruman reveals, “Patty first got in touch with me about two years ago, sharing a video of her covering

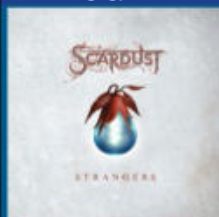
one of our songs from *Sands Of Time* and seeking vocal advice. We started chatting and instantly bonded. Shortly after that, she was a guest at our Berlin show, and we shot a spontaneous duet for *Sands Of Time*, which is on her YouTube channel.”

Although, like so many bands, Scardust found their plans disrupted by Covid-19, they were still able to record *Strangers* in isolation. The album was mixed by Yonatan Kossov (Orphaned Land/Amorphis) and mastered by Jens Bogren (Opeth). Reveals drummer Yoav Weinberg, “Noa managed to travel to England in November 2019 to record the kids’ choir parts before the coronavirus kicked in. Patty’s hurdy-gurdy and vocals had to be recorded independently at her studio in Germany with Noa producing over Zoom because of the travel ban caused by the pandemic.”

With their tour plans also disrupted, Scardust have been left desperate to play their new material live and they spent much of 2020 producing video clips, interacting with fans online and even livestreaming their release party. “Many of our fans are musicians themselves, so we set up the *Mist* cover challenge!” says Gruman. “For this, we invited people from all around the world to play with us [remotely] by providing them with audio files, and playthroughs or tips videos by the bandmembers.”

She adds, “We were very excited to see and hear people playing with us. I think that’s the closest we can get to a live concert in which the crowd is singing along!” **EM**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Noa Gruman (vocals), **Yani Avnet** (bass), **Yadin Moyal** (guitar), **Itai Portugaly** (keyboards), **Yoav Weinberg** (drums)

SOUNDS LIKE

A theatrical jam between Epica and Symphony X

CURRENT RELEASE

Strangers is out now on M-Theory Audio

WEBSITE

www.scardust.co



“Once my lyrics were inspired by locking myself outside my apartment!”

Scardust: no strangers in the dark.



PHOTO: MARIANO GONZALEZ



MARK MANGOLD

From Valhalla to Cher, the New York-based songwriter and keyboard warrior returns to his prog roots with a new American Tears album. He tells *Prog* why he's itching to get back on the road, and why you shouldn't try to silence artists when it comes to politics!

Words: Dave Ling

Following a three-album tenure during the 1970s, keyboard wizard Mark Mangold revived the American Tears brand three years ago, effectively as a solo project. *Free Angel Express*, a third album into the reboot, sees other players added to the mix for the first time. Over 45-plus varied years, Mangold has also worked with the pomp rockers Touch and The Sign and AOR acts Drive, She Said and Flesh & Blood, as well as writing for Cher, Michael Bolton and numerous others.

Your prog roots stretch all the way back to 1969 and the band Valhalla, whose self-titled album is now a collector's item. Have you tried to reclaim the rights?

I believe I own that record, but putting it out again would depend upon the demand. It was made very quickly and the mix isn't brilliant, but if people wanted to hear it, then yeah...

As somebody who experienced prog's dawning era firsthand, how do you now look back at those times?

They were great days, but in some ways kinda divisive because of the Vietnam War and anti-authoritarian sentiments. People were more socially conscious, but musicians just wanted to play. We weren't as beholden to formula. The likes of Jethro Tull and Zeppelin were seeking new sounds and it was very exciting.

You once told *Prog* that you formed American Tears as a "virtuoso band". During concerts you performed handstands on your Hammond organ.

[Laughs] I wish I could still do that. I tried a few months ago and at my age, man, I just can't get up there anymore. Before I die, my goal is to do one more handstand on a Hammond.

The new American Tears album is titled *Free Angel Express*. Why is that?

Those three words came from my subconscious. It felt like they were unrelated but they form a picture. Free – freedom; angel – spiritual, and express about expression. It wasn't until thinking about the cover that I realised, "Holy shit, express is a train." These things unfold in time.

How did bringing in other musicians change the dynamic?

It changed things in a wonderful way. Alex Landenburg [Stratovarius, Kamelot and Rhapsody] recorded his drums at my apartment in New York City. Barry Sparks [Yngwie Malmsteen, Dokken, UFO] is an amazing, virtuoso bass player. There was a bigger budget this time and I'm happy that things are growing for American Tears. Build it and they will come.

Your Touch bandmate Doug Howard also plays some bass, doesn't he?

Dougie and I have been working on a new Touch record for the past two years. On the American Tears record, he's on the track *Glass*. Craig [Brooks, Touch guitarist] and Dougie also sing backgrounds on that one.

After 39 years, that third Touch album is now on the way...

Yeah, it's taken a long fucking time but we're just about done with it. Three songs are mixed and nine more are ready and waiting. Then we've got to figure out who will release it. In fact, it has a song called *Swansong* that's a type of sequel to *Overseas Symphony*, the final track from the *Valhalla* record.

You already revealed a song called *Tomorrow Never Comes*.

Yeah. I feel that's relevant to what we're going through now in all our lives. The limited response we've got so far has been wonderful, but I really don't want Touch to interfere with what I'm doing with American Tears. That's my priority.

So, going back to *Free Angel Express*, why did you decide to bring in another keyboard player, Charlie Calv of Angel and Shotgun Symphony?

Purely for the fun of it. The album is coming out through Charlie's label, Deko, so it was enjoyable to have him on there. Recording alone can be isolating, especially during a pandemic, so it's pleasurable to collaborate. Charlie and I are talking about doing a keyboard band together, but that's in its early stages.

Once again there's no guitar on this album...

These days you can do just about anything on a keyboard. And I don't play guitar, so that's why there's no guitarist in the band. The guitar riffs are played on the Hammond.

Why did you soup up *Blue Rondo À La Turk*, the 1959 jazz standard by Dave Brubeck, popularised by The Nice?

As a keyboard player, I love that type of song and if you notice I stayed with the original 5/4 and 7/4 timing, whereas I think that Keith [Emerson] – who, let me stress, is my hero – kind of homogenised it to 4/4. It's a very complicated song and I love it in its original time signature. It's a forceful song but we stuck to the original arrangement, almost aggressively so.

Your Facebook posts suggest a belief that there's a place in music for artists to address political issues.

Absolutely, there is. Artistry is all about expressing one's thoughts and creativity. Don't tell me what I can talk about or when to shut up. Artists cannot be muzzled – if they could we wouldn't have had *War Pigs* by Black Sabbath, The Who's *Won't Get Fooled Again* or so many other brilliant songs. Nobody gives a shit what I think, but I guess that if you're famous then it can be problematic.

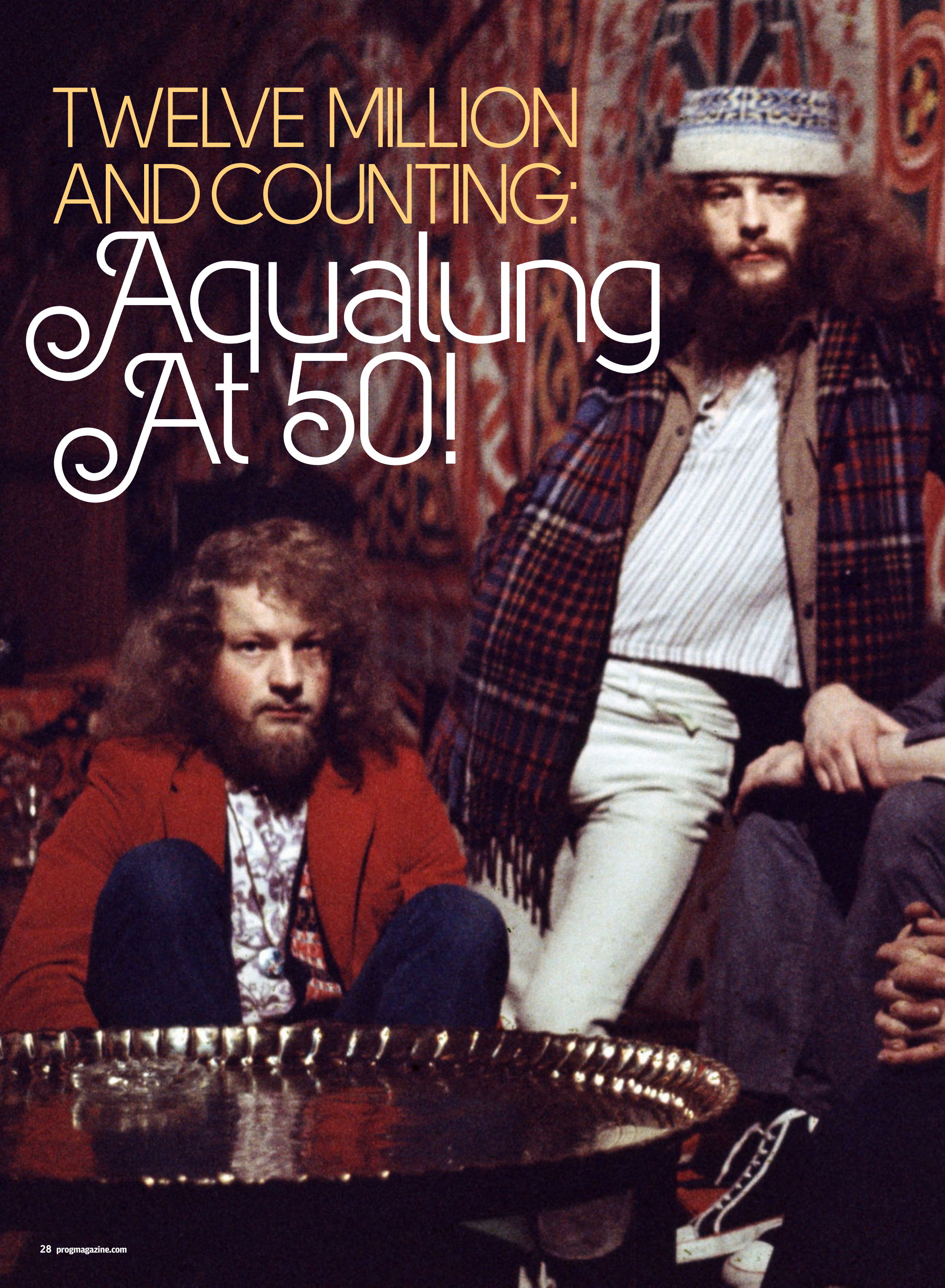
Talking to *Prog* for the last album, you voiced keenness to begin playing live again with American Tears. Sadly, there's little hope of that for foreseeable future.

That's true and it depresses me greatly. However, my living isn't as dependent on touring as for a lot of other artists, and those people are screwed. Millions and millions of performers are screwed. That's a very sad and terrible thing and it's mind-boggling because in a way art is the centre of human existence. Where would we be without it? To think that it could all go away... that's fucked up.

Free Angel Express is out now via Deko Entertainment. See www.facebook.com/AmericanTears for more.

"Before I die, my goal is to do one more handstand on a Hammond."





TWELVE MILLION
AND COUNTING:
Aqualung
At 50!

Half a century on and *Aqualung* is as relevant as ever. **Jethro Tull's** career-defining album explored themes of homelessness, prostitution and religion, yet the band never considered it to be a conceptual release. This year, it celebrates its 50th anniversary, and Ian Anderson and Martin Barre look back on the making of a classic that even caught Jimmy Page's attention.

Sitting On A Park Bench: Malcolm Dome **Images:** Michael Putland/Getty Images

Readers might have thought that after talking about *Aqualung* for half a century, Ian Anderson would be fed up with yet more questions about the album. But that's not so.

"I'm happy to talk about anything," he says in a calmly positive manner. "Of

course, I get asked the same questions over and over again. But it's no problem, because there are always different ways to answer these. Besides, it's a compliment that an album recorded so long ago still holds a fascination for many people. And I am grateful for what *Aqualung* did for Jethro Tull."

Jethro Tull in London, March 11, 1971.

Former guitarist Martin Barre is equally enthused.

"How can I ever get fed up with talking about this album? Both historically and musically, it was so important for the band. I can listen to it now from start to finish, and there's not one weak song. I'll admit some of our other albums do have the occasional track that's not held up well. But *Aqualung* flows from start to finish."

At the moment, both Anderson and Barre are having to deal with the consequences of the pandemic and its devastating effects on the music scene.

"I have to accept that doing live shows before 2022 will not be possible," says the former with a sigh. "Of course, I'm not alone in facing this prospect, but that means losing two years of my

"We had no interest in being rock stars. We didn't want to fly around in private planes and have groupies and drug dealers waiting for us everywhere we went. None of us were bothered with all that nonsense."

Martin Barre



professional life and at my age I may not have many left. This is the new realism we as musicians are coming to terms with."

"I had so many plans for live shows in 2020," adds the latter. "To celebrate my 50 years as a professional musician. All that was cancelled. However, I have to be philosophical about the situation, and when I'm finally able to get back on the road, I intend to perform *Aqualung* in its entirety."

Realism is something that pervades the lyrics on *Aqualung* and these marked out Jethro Tull as a little different from many of their contemporaries. Anderson chose to write about things he'd observed, and he did this in such a way that the songs became mini social documentaries in their own right.

"The world was full of pop stars who wore their hearts on the sleeves. Singers who went on about love, and would only talk about 'me, me, me'. Now, I am not going to knock what



"Still one of my favourites." - *Aqualung* and me.

NEAL MORSE

"When I was 11 or 12 years old, someone brought the *Aqualung* album over to our house in suburban Southern California (as was very common in those days, my friends and I were always bringing our favourite albums over and listening to them over and over) and we listened to the second side first.

"I remember my friend saying, 'Wait for it... Check this out!' setting up the moment when the guitars and the band kick in for *My God* after Ian Anderson sings: 'With his plastic crucifix.' What a killer moment! I was hooked from there on out. I learned to play *Hymn 43* on the piano, and played it a lot in my early teens. When Mike Portnoy suggested that we record a cover version recently I jumped at the chance.

"Side One is great of course, but I always preferred Side Two having not been raised with any sort of religion or spiritual direction I'd hardly thought about God at the time. So I found the lyrics really interesting and compelling as well.

"Still one of my favourites, I found a used vinyl copy in good shape at a thrift store in Southern Oregon while I was on vacation last summer, and bought it once again. A classic!"

they did, because it was perfectly valid. But I wanted to use what I'd seen and knew about, turning these into stories and interpreting life this way."

In some respects, Anderson's lyrical approach reflects what celebrated British moviemakers Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger were doing in the 1940s through such classics as *Black Narcissus*, *A Matter Of Life And Death* and *The Red Shoes*, in that they reflected reality through a prism that offered neither heroes nor villains. Anderson accepts this connection with a comfortable ease.

"A lot of the lyrics I wrote for the album came from visual images. For instance, the person who inspired the title track was a real homeless person. As a photographer, I love walking around taking pictures of interesting people I see or meet. And even when I don't have actual photos of them, I can see these figures in my mind and that's projected into the lyrics.



ULLSTEIN BILD/GETTY IMAGES



**"Tull reached their zenith"
- *Aqualung* and me.**
DEREK SHULMAN (GENTLE GIANT)

"In my opinion Jethro Tull reached their zenith in both creativity and entertainment with *Aqualung*. Together with *Thick As A Brick*, Ian and band were unique in their flawless ability to fuse blues, folk, rock and quasi-classical music wrapped up in a magical period in their career.

"Gentle Giant toured both Europe and North America in 1972 with Tull, and the cheer that went up when Martin Barre played the opening riff to *Aqualung* was always deafening! This still remains one of my favourite prog albums of all time.

"The band's stagecraft was also at its peak during this period, in that rather than appearing like pompous over-practised classical musicians they had fun onstage. This was reflected back from an audience that smiled, laughed and cheered together with, and for, the band."

"What I was observing in the songs for *Aqualung* were not heroes or villains. It's not black and white like that. This is not the way life works, where you divide people into these categories. So, from that point of view, yes my lyricism here did have a relationship to the way certain filmmakers operated."

For Barre this is the album that showed Anderson had emerged as the de facto leader of Jethro Tull.

"Ian had changed a little in the way he drove himself. He was so focused and intense on the songwriting side, and had become a major force. Because of him, this record was a lot more planned-out than our previous three."

Anderson tackled some very contentious issues on this album, and none more so than teenage prostitution on *Cross-Eyed Mary*. Yet, while the subject of a schoolgirl reduced to such circumstances could easily have been a sordid tale, somehow Anderson gives it a sense of innocence.

The Pied Piper and his followers: Ian Anderson onstage in 1971.



The album cover by Burton Silverman.

"It is a compliment that an album recorded so long ago still holds a fascination for many people. And I am grateful for what *Aqualung* did for Jethro Tull."

Ian Anderson

"The subject of paedophilia is, of course, very controversial, as it should be. But I was reminded of something that happened to me when I was a child. There were workmen digging up the road where I lived, and I was invited by one of them to go into their hut for a cup of tea and a biscuit. My mother, though, warned me not to accept the invitation, yet never explained why I shouldn't. I'm not





saying this workman had any sexual designs on me; it could have been literally having tea and biscuits. But my mum had definite concerns, which, at my young age, I couldn't fathom.

**I've lost my keys:
having fun in '71.**



"Forward-thinking" - *Aqualung* and me.

SONJA KRISTINA (CURVED AIR)

"In 1971 Curved Air toured extensively with Jethro Tull, as they promoted *Aqualung* in the US and I got to appreciate how impressive the band were. In recent years I've made guest appearances with the excellent Italian band OAK - a popular Jethro Tull-influenced band. Through them I have listened to *Aqualung* again, and this has reinforced for me just how forward-thinking the songs were. The album underlined that Ian Anderson, a Dickensian hobo/pied piper, was a weaver of intricate, evocative wordy tales."

"When I was growing up you could have a different view of why grown men may stand outside school gates and look at children through the railings without any sexual connotations. It might have been accepted as people gazing at their lost childhood. Of course, so, when I wrote *Cross-Eyed Mary* I did it not tackle it from the point of view of the horrific exploitation of a schoolgirl, but from the angle of the sad and lonely men she met and to whom she gave some comfort.

"These days I couldn't think about writing lyrics with this attitude. It just wouldn't be acceptable. And rightly so. We are living in a world where paedophile behaviour is properly seen as disgusting. But while you can pull down statues of those who are now

seen as representing slavery, for instance Edward Colston in Bristol, and try to airbrush them from history, I cannot rewrite the lyrics for *Cross-Eyed Mary*. They exist for all time the way I did them back then. Not that I would want to do this. I feel people have to understand the story I was relating, and appreciate that in no way was I ever condoning paedophilia."

Barre strongly defends Anderson's lyrical approach on *Cross-Eyed Mary*.

"None of us ever had an issue with Ian's lyrics. We never asked him to change anything. In the early 70s you could write lyrics which were about an underage prostitute and nobody would think it was shocking. Look at a comedy series such as *Fawlty Towers*, and the way they dealt with issues like the Germans.



"A tantalising and relevant album" - *Aqualung* and me.

ARTHUR BROWN

"A *qualung* is still a tantalising album. Still 'in' with cutting-edge views as far as conservative people in the church go, still relevant to social justice today.

"Musically, this has its place in the development of various genres of music, yet it's also a thing unto itself, which can be appreciated from different stylistic viewpoints. It includes classic rock, folk, jazz, heavy metal, blues, classical to name but a few.

"It has enough delicacy for pure folk aficionados, enough oomph to keep the metal fans interested and just a touch of classical. It's lyrically intelligent with an incisive mind, asking intelligent questions and taking a wide spectrum of humanity into account."



All together now...

That was seen as funny back then, with no accusations of racism. Now, it does make you wince a bit. But to use a cliché, these were products of their time. Of course, if you tried to write a song now like *Cross-Eyed Mary* you could have real problems. But you have to put this all into the correct context."

Tull were prepared to talk about issues on *Aqualung* which, if not taboo in that era, were certainly not encouraged. *Cross-Eyed Mary* was one example, but the title song discussed homelessness and *Locomotive Breath* brought population control into focus.

"I found it easier to write about what I observed and experienced, rather than the fantasy world, where other bands preferred to reside," explains Anderson. "I like to think this

"How can I ever get fed up with talking about this album? Both historically and musically, it was so important for the band. I can listen to it now from start to finish, and there's not one weak song."

Martin Barre

approach resonated with the listener and gave the album an extra relevance. Because people knew that I understood the subjects I was talking about. I had firsthand knowledge to buffer me.

"I would never claim to be the first to do this. And personally I'm drawn to others who follow a similar path. You can obviously put Bruce Springsteen's albums into the same category as *Aqualung*, in that he writes about what he knows as well. It's all about New Jersey and the characters he's met. Not that I have ever been tempted to write about the New Jersey shoreline. I know nothing about it, so why would I want to come up with a song about that area? However, we do share this enthusiasm for realism."

Anderson was able to expand Tull's repertoire for the album by bringing in extra influences, as he outlines:

"It was my opportunity to bring in a singer/songwriting style. That was because I was able to do a lot of the writing on my own. In the early days of touring we had to share hotel rooms, which meant of course there was no privacy. We couldn't get away from one another, and as a result I could never sit down and just write



whenever I wanted. But for the tour just before I wrote the songs for *Aqualung*, we finally had the good fortune to be able to afford separate hotel rooms. That was the freedom I needed to sit down and write whenever I wanted, with no interruptions. It meant I could develop ideas for these songs.”

Is it fair to see this album as virtually an Ian Anderson solo album, given that he seems to be the one who wrote the songs and defined the direction? The man himself certainly disagrees with this view.

“It was a band album. But someone had to make sure we didn’t get into a rut, because we’d had a little success already. And that ended up being me. I just seemed to have more determination than the others. But if this had really been a solo record then it would have sounded different, and as a result it may have flopped.

“All of us played a key role. Martin’s guitar work was superb throughout, and John Evan’s keyboards added texture and colour. I never sit down and try to work out exactly why *Aqualung* works so well as an album. There are too many factors involved. But it kicked us into gear, and for the first time made me realise Jethro Tull had a future.



“Christ, they were good!” - *Aqualung* and me. ANDY GLASS (SOLSTICE)

“I first came to the Tull party with *Minstrel In The Gallery* and caught them live at their 1978 Hammersmith Odeon show. Christ, they were good! Ian was at the top of his game and the material was stellar, including, of course, *Aqualung*... twice!

“About 15 years later, I became friends with Mick Abrahams and through him the wonderful Clive Bunker, who later joined Solstice for an album and supporting shows. I was producing a solo album for Mick when I met Ian, who came in for the day to record harmonica and flute parts. Next thing I knew I was Jethro Tull’s front of house sound engineer and spent the next couple of years touring Europe and the States with them.

“They played *Aqualung*, *My God* and *Locomotive Breath* at every one of the 120-plus shows I worked with them. *Cross-Eyed Mary* made regular appearances too. That speaks volumes for the significance of this album, and the ecstatic audience reaction confirmed it every time. I never tired of hearing that incredible band, especially Martin’s playing, but for me personally, *My God* was the track that floored me every single time. What an album!”

“I get why people think it’s my solo album. And because I had a free hand, a lot of the album was done by me on my own. I could go into the studio without the others, and do guitar parts and vocals as I saw fit. Once this was achieved to my satisfaction, then the rest of the band would come in and add

what they needed to do, changing things as they went whenever that felt necessary. So, while I was working a lot of the time on my own, I have never claimed – and never would – that I did this all by myself. It’s the same way that Roger Waters was the man who guided Pink Floyd on a lot of their great albums, but needed the others to step up to the mark, The input from the rest of the band was invaluable in shaping this album. It was a team effort. I was perhaps accepted by all as leading the band, but I was never a dictator.”

Anderson recalls the occasion when he first played passages of the *Aqualung* track to Barre.

“It was in my hotel room while we were on tour in America. I can’t recall now where we were but I had my acoustic guitar with me and played the idea for the big riff in that song to Martin. It sounded very quiet in that room, and took a leap of imagination to appreciate what this could sound like in the studio when performed by a master like Martin. But he got what I was constructing, and did a fine job bringing this to life.”

There were two significant line-up changes in the band. John Evan was brought in as a full-time keyboard



IAN ANDERSON ARCHIVE/AQUALUNG/THE BALLAD OF JETHRO TULL/ROCKET 88

The gatefold and back cover images, painted by Burton Silverman from photographs supplied by Terry Ellis.



"I found it easier to write about what I observed and experienced, rather than the fantasy world, where other bands preferred to reside. I like to think this approach resonated with the listener and gave the album an extra relevance. People knew that I understood the subjects."

Ian Anderson

player, while Jeffrey Hammond replaced Glenn Cornick on bass. Barre recalls Evan with huge respect:

"John had played on *Benefit* as a session musician, so we already knew what he was capable of creating. His addition was such a bonus for us. John was a tour de force as a piano player and also as an arranger. Listen to his work on *My God* and *Locomotive Breath* – it's outstanding. The intro he came up with for the latter track may seem simple. However not only was it appropriate, but later keyboard players we had struggled to recreate what he did. It was very clever and so hard for others to match."



"Still one of my favourite albums from the 70s"
- *Aqualung* and me.
 DAVE OBERLÉ (GRYPHON)

"A *qualung* might have been released in 1971, but I didn't hear it until 1972 after a friend's recommendation.

"I had been a fan of Jethro Tull before this and loved the sound of Ian Anderson's voice and virtuoso flute playing. This album, for me, had the perfect mix of acoustic and electric sounds, and the occasional sound of recorders. I had always been a fan of Clive Bunker's drumming and Martin Barre's great guitar playing. Favourite tracks for me are *Aqualung*, *Mother Goose* and *My God*. It's still one of my favourite albums from that period of the 70s."

Hammond, though, was another matter. Barre remembers that he could barely play the bass when he was hired!

"That's true. Ian and I sat for days at Ian's house in Haverstock Hill, London, and literally taught Jeffrey how to play the bass from scratch."

It now seems incredible for a band of Tull's stature to have a member who was unable to play his instrument. But the guitarist is very forceful in his defence of the decision:

"Jethro Tull were all about character and personality. We were about being different from any other band. There was no way we wanted a virtuoso. What we were after was someone who could adapt and alter his style as we went along."

"Because Jeffrey learnt how to play the bass when he came into Tull that meant he created his own sound. When you hear *Hymn 43* or *Cross-Eyed Mary*, Jeffrey was doing stuff no other bassist would have played. He had a unique style and that suited where we wanted to go. This would never have been possible with an experienced musician."

Barre himself got something of a shock when he did the solo for *Aqualung* at Island Studios in





"It is, without doubt, a masterpiece"
- *Aqualung* and me.
 DAVID LONGDON (BIG BIG TRAIN)

"I've bought *Aqualung* four times during my life. It is, without doubt, a masterpiece. The album captures Tull at their most powerful and cohesive best. It creates a rich environment and offers an intense listening experience with highly articulate lyrics with subject matter that concerns itself with society and religion.

"This was one of the first albums to be recorded at Island Studios, and was done at the same time as Led Zeppelin were recording their fourth album. There were technical teething troubles, and this resulted in the 1971 mix having an unusual timbre to the instruments. The 2011 [Steven Wilson] remix of the album greatly improves upon the listening experience."

London, as Anderson vividly remembers with a chuckle:

"As I think a lot of people know, Led Zeppelin were in Island Studios at the same time as us, working on their *IV* album. They were in the smaller, cosier room, which was in the basement of the building. We were in the bigger room, which was in a converted church. It was very cold and echoing in there. Zeppelin had block-booked their studio, but whenever they took a day off, we were able to use it, which helped with the sound quality.

"Did the two bands meet? Well, only on the stairwell. Personally, I would never have dreamt of going down to where they were to see what was going on. I felt that could be seen as rude by Zeppelin. However, Jimmy Page did come over to where we were once, knocked politely on the door and spent a little time with us.

"Now, Martin was working on his solo for *Aqualung* at the time Jimmy came in. He was actually recording it when he looked up at the control room and saw none other than Jimmy Page in there — listening to what he was doing! I can't imagine what was going through Martin's mind when he realised Jimmy was with the rest of us, and watching every move he made. Talk about being under pressure! But Martin thankfully rose to the occasion, and as we know his solo was wonderful."

"I recall the incident very well," adds Barre. "We barely saw anything of Zeppelin when we were at Island



"Hit me like a bus"
- *Aqualung* and me.
 TROY DONOCKLEY (NIGHTWISH)

"A*qualung*, with its easy, heavy, natural sophistication, hit me like a bus. And it felt like it came from my environment — the sound of the local steelworks to the open drama of the Lake District. *Wond'ring Aloud* and *Slipstream* in particular shone for me; acoustic music rooted in something wonderfully British and romantic. It's also a signpost to the mighty *Songs From The Wood* and *Heavy Horses*."

Martin Barre, possibly making sure Jimmy Page isn't watching.



BARRY PLUMMER

"All of us played a key role. Martin's guitar work was superb throughout, and John Evan's keyboards added texture and colour. I never sit down and try to work out exactly why *Aqualung* works so well as an album. There are too many factors involved. But it kicked us into gear, and for the first time made me realise Jethro Tull had a future."

Ian Anderson

Studios. The only member of that band I met was John Paul Jones, and that was on one occasion in the coffee station. Then, when I was doing that solo for *Aqualung* I did see Jimmy Page waving madly at me from the control room. But I was so into the moment of doing my solo, and didn't want to lose any of the momentum, that I dared not wave back. In fact, I had my back to Jimmy as I carried on, and what you hear was the first take. He probably thought I was rude, so if he reads this I want to say: Jimmy, I apologise, but I'm sure you'll understand that nailing the solo had to be my priority."

While it's now regarded as an iconic album, Anderson freely admits that at the time the band themselves didn't know how *Aqualung* would be received.

"I recall sitting in an all-night café with John Evan just after we'd finished the last recording session for the album. It was about 6am, and I said to John, 'Well, what do you think?' He looked

at me and replied, 'I don't know. What do you think?' We honestly had no clue whether people would be impressed with what we'd done or dismiss it.

"When copies were sent out to the music press, I admit to feelings of trepidation as to what the reception would be. Thankfully, though, as the reviews came in most of them were positive and complimentary. That was such a relief."

"I look back now, and have to admit that when we came into doing this album, all of us in the band were perhaps just a bit too comfortable with where we were," admits Barre. "We'd already had some success. We all had wives or girlfriends, nice houses and cars. And as a result we'd lost our edge. So we struggled a little to kick ourselves into gear to make the best album we could. That's why it was important Ian took control and gave us the wake-up call that was so desperately needed."

BARRIE WENTZELL

Not a wind-up,
this is Tull in 1971.





"An amazing example of individuality within prog" - *Aqualung* and me.

LYNSEY WARD (EXPLORING BIRDSONG)

"For me, *Aqualung* is an amazing example of individuality within progressive rock. It is impossible to listen to the album and not be transported, thanks to Ian Anderson's observational and vivid style of songwriting.

"I feel it's fair to say that writing a song or an album based on a whimsical or fantastical concept is well within the comfort zone of most prog writers, whereas *Aqualung* relentlessly forces you into remembering you're in the real world, and that sometimes the real world can be pretty disgusting! It seems to be up to the listener to decide whether or not the album is a concept that explores the idea of religion versus God. Upon discussion, particularly with my dad, it's Anderson's ability to create a musical argument based on what someone would have to see and hear in everyday life to have these kinds of doubts that sets his writing apart.

"The killer combination of witty lyrics and expertly crafted melodies solidifies *Aqualung* as a triumph in prog, and a masterclass in storytelling."

"Some of the songs here were done virtually by Ian on his own. *Cheap Day Return* is one example. When he played this to the rest of us, it was finished; he'd gone into the studio on his own and done it superbly. There were other songs, though, where we all got

"We were outsiders. We weren't a glam rock band, nor were we heavy rockers like Zeppelin or Deep Purple. If anything, we were anti-heroes who were proudly different to anyone else. We actually had an attitude that I would describe as punk a few years before that became trendy."

Martin Barre

involved, chopping and changing parts around, rearranging the music. *My God* started with an acoustic guitar idea that Ian had. He played this to us, and we all helped to develop it into the song everyone now knows.

"I recall that we struggled to get all the backing tracks done, simply because we were self-satisfied and didn't have the crucial momentum. One thing I recall is that we developed *Locomotive Breath* in the studio from a backing track that was literally a bass drum part played by Ian. That was it!"

Barre played a lot of the guitar parts not through massive amplifiers, but went in the opposite direction, as he now reveals:

"I was experimenting with tiny amps. All of what I did on *Cross-Eyed Mary* was done on a very small amp I bought off



"It changed the world as we know it" - *Aqualung* and me.

JORDAN RUDESS (DREAM THEATER)

"There are only a handful of prog albums which, in my opinion, changed the world as we know it. *Aqualung* is one of them. Jethro Tull introduced an original sound which highlighted Ian Anderson's unique voice and his cutting-edge approach to the flute.

"Not to mention the fact that radio stations picked up on a few of the songs, and exposed their sound to the masses. It was a different time in the music industry, and this album sparked so much creativity and joy in all of us!"

someone in the street. I just happened to see this man walking down the road with a guitar and this tiny amp. I gave him £1 for the amp, and that's what I used a lot in the studio."

There was a serious downside to the usage of this piece of equipment, though. One that very nearly led to a tragedy, as Barre recalls:

"The amp's wiring was poor — I got a major electric shock from it on one occasion. It was when I was doing *Hymn 43* and I screamed loudly. Thankfully, one of the studio engineers reacted very quickly and dealt with the situation."

Royal appointment:
Jethro Tull at the Royal
Albert Hall, London, on
October 13, 1970.



MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES



"A memorable experience" - *Aqualung* and me. TERRY ELLIS

Nobody was closer to Jethro Tull in their formative years than Terry Ellis. He co-produced the band's first seven albums and vividly recalls working on *Aqualung*.

"It was a memorable experience for me, in a very positive sense. I really enjoyed working on this album."

But Ellis wasn't even supposed to be involved with *Aqualung*.

"I was very busy with Chrysalis at the time [the company he co-founded with Chris Wright]. Part of that meant that I was managing the band, and that took up much of my time. So, I said to Ian Anderson that he should produce the album himself and didn't need me."

"But a week after they went into the studio, Ian called and said that it was too much for him to handle. He was finding it tough to be both a member of the band, yet also in the control room at the same time. He needed help, so I agreed to go down to the studio and take some of the pressure off his shoulders."

While *Aqualung* was recorded at Island Studios in west London, there had been some recording done previously at Morgan Studios in north-west London.

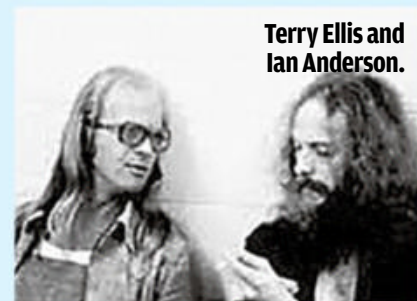
"The first version of *Wond'ring Aloud* was done there. But not for this album. In fact, it was recorded for an earlier one, possibly *Benefit* [released in 1970]. This was the full version of the song, eventually released on the 2016 reissue of the album. But at the time we did this at Morgan, Ian decided he didn't like it, which is why it remained unreleased for a long time. However, by the time the band got into the studio for *Aqualung*, Ian had revisited the song and changed his mind about its quality, which is why we then did an abbreviated rendition."

By this juncture, Anderson seemed to have taken control of Tull, and this is something Ellis sees was necessary to focus their musical development.

"This began happening from the moment guitarist Mick Abrahams left after *This Was* in 1968. When we got to *Aqualung* it was more obvious than ever that Ian was the leader of the band. He had a vision of where he wanted the music to go, and this was important in the ongoing maturing of the band. Instead of asking the other musicians what ideas they had for the music, he would tell them what was in his mind and the way every part should sound."

So, does Ellis agree with those fans who feel this is the most important album Tull have ever recorded?

"I would. I love the fact that they made the jump to introducing acoustic material into their repertoire. Ian was also improving all the time as a writer, and you can hear this throughout the tracks here. Almost every one of these should be regarded as a Tull classic; that of itself is a measure of the album's importance in the band's career." **MD**



Terry Ellis and
Ian Anderson.

COURTESY OF TERRY ELLIS

However, a misunderstanding was coming over the horizon, as some magazines chose to regard *Aqualung* as a concept album. Obviously it's not, and readers might have thought that Anderson would be angry at having to address this issue yet again. But oddly, it's he who brings up this thorny subject, seemingly determined to once more calmly put the conceptual misconception into context.

"I have said this a million times, and would be happy to repeat this a million more times, but *Aqualung* is not a concept album. Yes, there are

themes which link a few songs together. For instance, some of the material deals with religion and my views on this subject. But these are disparate songs which have no overall connection. That was never the plan, and all I can say to those who insist this is conceptual is they have it wrong.

"Perhaps the reason this has persisted is because of the liner notes which were featured on the album. Maybe they gave the impression there was a storyline running through the music. I feel these notes worked out very well, but could have led to a false impression.

"You can never tell how anyone will interpret your songs. In fact, I love keeping things a little open-ended, so there's room for individuals to take what they want from my music. Personally, I love TV shows and movies where you're quite sure what happens next. If you are told everything, it leaves nothing to the imagination and I lose interest."

Barre has his own theory on why some people still see *Aqualung* as a concept album:

"Of course it's not conceptual. But it was banned for a while in Spain, 



"It was love at first listen" - *Aqualung* and me. ROSS JENNINGS (HAKEN)

"I was just 14 when comic actor Owen Wilson, in a scene from Michael Bay's 1998 blockbuster movie *Armageddon*, joked, 'I'll tell you one thing that really drives me nuts is people that think that Jethro Tull is just a person in the band'... only to be given the reply, 'Who is Jethro Tull?'

"My knowledge and interest in rock music beyond Aerosmith had long matured by then, but Tull were not a band I was familiar with yet. From what I could tell at the time, *Aqualung* was generally regarded as the entry point record for anyone who dared explore the world of Tull. Most never look back and, after some back catalogue digging, this was also to be my fate!

"*Aqualung* was love at first listen, and came to me at a very influential period of my life when I was discovering many legendary prog rock bands and albums. It's rich in variety, which makes it progressive yet still strong in its blues influences, which I absolutely adore and probably why it's so widely accessible. The album contains some of Tull's most memorable tunes in my opinion, and it also proved quite boldly that the flute can rock too!

"Fast-forward 20 years from that ill-fated asteroid movie experience, and I happened to catch both *Locomotive Breath* and the title track performed by Martin Barre and his band on Cruise To The Edge; a reminder just how special that record actually is to me. The icing on the cake was meeting Martin briefly as we exited the ship, and discovering what an absolute gentleman he is! Whoever said never meet your heroes was wrong in his case!"

because some of the songs deal with religion and are very critical. Maybe people read that about this and believed the entire album was about religion, and then took it a step further by assuming that it therefore must be a theme that ran through all the songs."

It could also be claimed that part of the reason for the entire conceptual misdirection came about because the band insisted on giving subtitles to each side of the vinyl. So, Side One was dubbed *Aqualung* and Side Two called *My God*.

"When it came to sorting out the track order for LPs, you had to take a lot of different factors into account," says Anderson. "I think there were Tull albums where I got it wrong. But on *Aqualung*, it works very well. I decided to give the two sides those names as it added some enigma to the situation. Did this lead to the misinformation that the album was conceptual? I can't say this has ever occurred to me. It is possible.

"I suppose when it comes to *Aqualung*, this will always be one of the first questions I get asked. It's so embedded in folklore now that however many times I explain why it's not a concept album, this will never satisfy everyone."

The success this album has had might lead readers to presume it was a huge seller from its release in March 1971. But, as Anderson remembers, that wasn't what happened:

"No, it wasn't a big hit straight out of the box. It sold steadily, rather than spectacularly. But it eventually did well enough to lift us to that new level."

In the US, *Aqualung* was the first Tull album to chart in the Top 10, reaching No.7 in the Billboard Charts. To this day, this remains their biggest seller Stateside; the only album to sell more than a million copies. In fact, it's been officially certified as having triple platinum status there, surpassing three million sales. Oddly, in the UK it didn't do as well as the two previous albums. Whereas 1969's *Stand Up* topped the chart and *Benefit* a year later made it to No.3, *Aqualung* stalled at No.4.

Today, the global sales figure for the album is impressive, to say the least, as Anderson reveals:

"I recall reading several years ago about how one of Coldplay's biggest albums – I forget which one – had sold 11 million copies worldwide. That's an incredible number. But when I checked the figures for *Aqualung*, it showed that 12 million copies were sold to that time. Naturally, you have to bear in mind that Coldplay had done it in 12 months, whereas it had taken us about 40 years to reach that landmark, but this proves how big the album was, and how it still sells consistent amounts every year."

Barre dismisses any thoughts that the band were under pressure to come up with a major-selling album:

"We were outsiders. We weren't a glam rock band, nor were we heavy rockers like Zeppelin or Deep Purple. If anything, we were anti-heroes who were proudly different to anyone else. We actually had an attitude that I would describe as punk a few years before that became trendy.

"We had no interest in being rock stars. We didn't want to fly around in private planes and have groupies and drug dealers waiting for us everywhere we went. None of us were bothered with all that nonsense. What mattered was getting musically better with every new album. There was no formula to what we did, and that gave us the freedom to do whatever we felt could work.

"So because we had this approach, there was never any pressure on us to come with a hit single or to sell millions of copies. We were left to our own devices in the studio."

Now, fans take it for granted that the album title is *Aqualung*. But for Barre, there wasn't an obvious choice.

"There was no track on the album which stood out as representing the album, and therefore the one we should pick as the overall title. So when Ian told us he wanted to go with *Aqualung* it's not as if any of us had a convincing alternative."

"I recall reading several years ago about how one of Coldplay's biggest albums – I forget which one – had sold 11 million copies worldwide. That's an incredible number. But when I checked the figures for *Aqualung*, it showed that 12 million copies were sold to that time."

Ian Anderson



"Ian's vocals sound great" - *Aqualung* and me. ROINE STOLT

"A *qualung* came at a time when rock music was definitely expanding. Having followed the band from the very first jazzy/bluesy album, *This Was*, their fourth, *Aqualung*, offered more of everything – definitely riffing from the first bar.

"For me personally, the opening [title] track wasn't the best – it may be the most well known, but what followed was far more interesting as it saw the band exploring both heavy riffs and folky scaled-down tunes, plenty of flute, odd time structures, more acoustic guitar and even some Mellotron!

"Today, I tend to love the acoustic stuff a bit more and not the overblown orchestrations. These have very dynamic arrangements, all the musicians shine and Ian's vocals sound great. As far as I'm concerned, this was the promise that was leading up to *A Passion Play*, in my opinion their best, most solid album.

"Tull definitely had their own sound here – the blend of power trio riffing, some piano and the jazzy flute."

Barre also doesn't believe there's a clear reason as to why the album became such a big seller.

"There wasn't a eureka moment, when all of us knew this was going to be a defining moment in the band's career. It's as simple as being the right album at the right time, and also the fact that there were so many great songs. You have to be a little lucky if you sell as many copies of an album as we did with *Aqualung*. But everything aligned in our favour."

Anderson never underplays the importance of Tull's fourth release in establishing their presence as a major force.

"If you look at what had happened to our previous albums, *This Was* [1968] had some very limited success, but didn't give us any international profile. *Stand Up* [1969] was more successful and allowed us to do our first tours both in Europe and America. And *Benefit* kept it all ticking over nicely.

You could rightly claim that by the time we got to *Aqualung*, the band were at a watershed moment in our young career. We could either reach out to another level, or else resign ourselves to a steady decline from hereon in.”

Thankfully for all of us, the former is what happened. And this is the album that, for many, defines the Jethro Tull sound. While Anderson doesn’t fully accept this, nonetheless he concedes an understanding of why it’s seen this way by fans:

“To me, what we did was a synthesis of all that had gone before. We didn’t lose what we had done previously. So you can still hear elements of the blues on some of the songs, but we also had other stuff brewing in the background. There were heavy riffs, psychedelia and folk. We were expanding our horizons, but from



“Vigour and attitude that was unique” - *Aqualung* and me. SAM VALLEN (CALIGULA’S HORSE)

“**A**lthough not as ambitious as its follow-up, there’s a vigour and attitude to *Aqualung* that was unique in then-nascent progressive rock. The songs are structurally tight and punchy and Anderson’s socially and religiously minded (and often gruesome) lyrics lend a sophistication to the riff-heavy record. Whether it’s a concept album or not, it never feels bloated or pompous, clearly a factor in its significant commercial impact in addition to its lasting stylistic influence.”

stood out because they were different. These could inspire a song idea, as happened with *Aqualung*. But I have always been very mindful of not infringing anyone’s privacy. For instance, I was recently in Hyde Park when I saw a [homeless] lady emerge

when we could start to play very big venues and think about putting on a show for the fans. We took it all in our stride, and it’s only now that I can look back objectively. But I have to admit to getting a thrill when I listen to the album these days. It excites me, because those were amazing times for us. It certainly stands the test of time.

“Ian was at the top of his game. And thank goodness he had the tenacity and vision to push us as far as we could go. Was it an album full of serious social comment? I suppose Ian did have some issues he wanted to tackle and did it all intelligently. But for me, the songs were about being entertaining.

“I can’t say this is the best album we ever did, but it’s certainly the most consistent, and I can see why for many fans, *Aqualung* is the Tull album.”



MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

what was already a firm foundation. That’s what you did as a band. You never want to stand still and repeat yourself. However, you were also aware of what you’d done that worked.

“Was this the blueprint for all that came later? I wouldn’t be as simplistic as that. However, we took aspects of what we did here into later albums. From a lyrical stance, there was a recognition that I could create characters capable of holding the interest. These were taken from observing real people in real places, and making the listener want to know what happened to them. It puts you into a setting and context.

“I developed the notion of carrying my camera with me and snapping photos of anyone I came across who

out of the mist. She was dressed in a, shall we say, careful manner. I was going to take her picture, then I thought to myself that this would be stepping over the mark, so I avoided the temptation and walked away.

“What this approach has meant is that I can immerse myself in the character of those I’m singing about in the lyrics. I become an actor, in the way that David Bowie, Alice Cooper and Alex Harvey did. It’s not Ian Anderson you’re listening to, but the role I’ve adopted. And it really began with this album. I suppose it is fair to say that I found my niche here.”

Barre is still excited when he discusses what *Aqualung* means to him:

“It was not just a step forward for Jethro Tull but also a step up. This is

Ian Anderson, John Evan, Barriemore Barlow and Martin Barre onstage on the *Aqualung* tour.

“The world is very different now from the way it was 1971,” concludes Anderson. “That much is obvious. What *Aqualung* does is allow everyone a glimpse back at a bygone era. However, much of what I talked about in these songs 50 years back remains as relevant now as it was then. If not more relevant. Maybe that’s another reason why the album is not another piece of whimsical nostalgia, but one that connects strongly with audiences of all ages. Not many albums from the early 70s can claim this, however good they are.” 📷

The paperback edition of The Ballad Of Jethro Tull is out now via Rocket 88. See www.jethrotull.com and www.jethrotullbook.com for more.

Man with a vision:
Aurélien Goude.

Last year was one to forget for many, but for French prog rockers **Esthesis** it was one to savour, with their impressive debut, *The Awakening*, helping them ensnare best unsigned band in the *Prog Readers' Poll*. As mainman Aurélien Goude tells us, things are going to get a lot busier.

Words: Chris Cope

Images: Mathilde Collet

Travelling With Sound

"Everyone knows how tough the world of music is, with too many bands to listen to," Esthesis ringleader Aurélien Goude says.

"Fortunately, there are still a lot of people who like to discover new records."

The musician is buoyant, and rightly so, after his band reigned supreme in the unsigned section of Prog's 2020 Readers' Poll. Their win was no fluke. The French quartet's debut, *The Awakening*, is an assured album, as sharp as a handshake with Edward Scissorhands, flitting between the lucid dreaming of Pink Floyd and the angular attack of Porcupine Tree. Its genesis can be traced back to last spring's lockdown, with Goude writing songs in solitude before zapping them over to his bandmates.

"We only saw each other three or four times before recording, but I was so demanding with the band that we worked a lot during these months," he says.

"We recorded guitars, bass, drums and vocals in July and August, in two great recording studios in Toulouse," he continues. "Then I recorded my keyboards in my home studio, because I'm too much of a perfectionist and a control freak!"

Lyrically the six-track record, which is never afraid to freefall into melancholy, pirouettes on the idea of identity. "We live in a society with increasing identity issues," Goude explains. "In a [romantic] relationship, for instance, we can sometimes wonder if we are really our true selves. This is also the case at work or on social networks. The record invites people to ask questions about themselves and their vision of society."

The album follows on from Esthesis' 2019 EP, *Raising Hands*, and it's a tangible step up for the Frenchmen – a bigger budget helped mould the sonics, and the songwriting is afforded space to breathe.

"*The Awakening* is more personal, mature, moody, eclectic, and the piano is very important on the record, unlike the EP," Goude says. "The two next records will be very different from each other, even if they will be a continuation of *The Awakening*. But it won't be a double album, for sure."

Dip into Goude's pool of inspiration and it's like a party of standout musicians from different decades: Steven Wilson chats with Floyd, Kate Bush is over there by the drinks cupboard, Philip Glass and Ennio Morricone are in deep discussion while The Beatles and Massive Attack chow down on some nibbles.

"Many bands have influenced us, but we hope we have succeeded in creating our own identity," he says.

"I constantly listen to old and new music; it's essential for me to discover new records and bands in all genres. For instance, we will release an alternate version of *Still Far To Go* in March. It will be a trip hop version inspired by my taste in Massive Attack and Portishead."

It's clear from the first few seconds of *The Awakening*'s 16-minute opener, *Downstream*, that this band is not all about 100mph fretboard gymnastics. Esthesis' heartbeat is more attuned to aura and feeling, the composition coloured by long brushstrokes.

"The music of Esthesis is primarily based on emotion and ambience," Goude says. "Silences are very important to me in music. Without them, there are no dynamics at all."

"I wanted each song to be like a movie, with very different ambience. Each has its own place in the record, and we paid particular attention to the transitions between tracks. I feel much closer to Pink Floyd, Porcupine Tree and Marillion than Yes or Genesis in our sound."

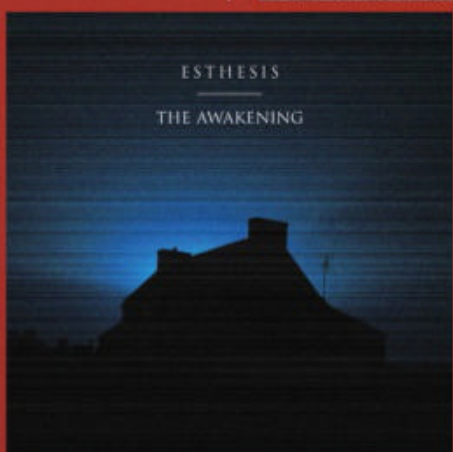


The group are based in Toulouse, although Goude is originally from Paris. While he doesn't regard himself as an expert on France's prog acts, he pinpoints Lazuli and Ange as the country's two "essential" bands in the scene.

"Unfortunately, too many French magazines and radio stations aren't interested in progressive rock," he concedes. "I'm not surprised at all that the majority of our sales are now in foreign countries, even if it's only our debut album."

Goude is more influenced by bands outside his own country – Air being the exception – and when he was a child The Beatles, Sting, Supertramp and Toto filled the airwaves.

"I discovered progressive music at 14, with *The Dark Side Of The Moon* by Pink Floyd."



"Silences are very important to me in music. Without them, there are no dynamics at all in a song".

Goude began writing music in 2013 when he was a student and found a knack for forming a "vision" of a track before sitting down to piece it together. Using Nine Inch Nails and his linchpin Trent Reznor as an inspiration, he describes Esthesis as more of a solo project than a traditional band: "even if I always try to surround myself with great musicians to enrich the songs and add new ideas."

"[Lead guitarist] Baptiste Desmares, [bassist] Marc Anguill and [drummer] Florian Rodrigues are very talented and they all brought their own identity to the record," he continues.

"I met and hired them only several months before the recording process of *The Awakening*. I wanted open-minded and eclectic musicians who were able to play few notes, but the right ones. I can't play with musicians who play too many notes!"

What attracted me directly was the feeling of travelling with sound," he says. "That's what interests me most about progressive music when I write a new song for Esthesis, I want listeners to have the feeling of travelling with the music, and to imagine the stories they want."

The Awakening is a stellar springboard towards a bright future. But whatever happens next, this is a band that won't be sitting still.

"I've already started work on albums two and three," Goude lets slip. "Of course, the pandemic is slowing us down a bit for concerts, but we have many plans to move forward, including a livestream in February with two songs played in live conditions. I don't have time to get bored." 🎵

The Awakening is out now via Bandcamp. See www.esthesismusic.com for more information.

WISH I You Were Here

In his first acoustic album since 2008, **Steve Hackett** has written a love letter to the rich culture of the Mediterranean. After all that's gone on over the last year, it's a more than welcome sojourn. The former Genesis guitarist tells us more about this celebratory album.

Words: Chris Cope

Images: Jo Hackett



“**T**his album is a love affair turned into music, really. I loved doing it. I love every note on it.”

Steve Hackett is full of admiration, and why shouldn't he be? His new album *Under A Mediterranean Sky* is an ethereal affair, led by a marriage of exotic nylon guitar and swathes of orchestration. His live work – plugging into his roots as Genesis' former guitarist – also remains in great demand.

Speaking down the phone from his home in Teddington in south-west London, Hackett is content. “It couldn't be going better,” he replies when asked how his life is right now.

Under A Mediterranean Sky is his first acoustic album since 2008's *Tribute* and it is, in effect, an ode to the rich music and culture of the titular region.

Its instrumental core grabs and nabs inspiration from the countries that surround the Mediterranean Sea, including Spain, Italy, Egypt and Greece – places where he and his wife Jo have travelled both on the job and as tourists. Just like the sea itself, its music can be unpredictable. One moment Hackett can be

throttling his acoustic into a frenzy, accompanied by cinematic strings, the next he can be effusing melodies as soft as the touch of a newborn baby.

“I just love the idea of an imaginary journey that recalls all the other actual journeys that I had made,” he says.

“It's a travelogue, a musical diary perhaps, but it's also a dream 'til we're able to fully engage with the world again.”

There's probably no better tour guide than Hackett, a self-crowned “maniac for music” who doesn't turn down the chance to soak up local tunes when on his travels.

He casts his mind back to travelling to Peru and coming back with an unexpected local instrument in his luggage. “I was given a charango [similar to a lute] as a gift from some fans. I've used it on several albums now.”

“You can't avoid it,” he says as he talks about imbibing local, traditional music. “I was in Andalusia, watching the flamenco dancers,

Steve Hackett
Under A Mediterranean Sky



the possibility of failure, I don't think you get to make that leap to the Moon.”

The album feels timely; it was recorded during a pandemic where travel was restricted, connections across the world scythed apart. “It wasn't lost on me the fact that at the moment all our journeys tend to be virtual,” Hackett says.

So what are the prime places to visit in the Med?

“Italy is a big favourite,” he replies. “I've toured there more probably than any other region in the Mediterranean, but then I did masses of gigs in France. Spain, of course, I love for its music and architecture and all the rest. Greece, I've travelled to more in recent years. I haven't played there, but I've shot a video or two there. It's a hugely mystical place. Pompeii, which I've visited many times, was the inspiration for the track *Casa Del Fauno*.”

There are only a couple of pieces on the album that were already written, “so you could

“It's a travelogue, a musical diary perhaps, but it's also a dream 'til we're able to fully engage with the world again.”

and listening to a flamenco guitarist, who I then started talking to. He showed me some things. For 30 seconds he became my teacher, but I've never had a guitar guru as such.

“I've always wanted to make my own discoveries, and make my own mistakes. It's important to be able to fall flat on your face and say, ‘I don't know anything, I'm completely useless.’ Without exploring

say that a lot of was written to order. But,” Hackett continues, “nobody was twisting my arm. It was a commission in as much it was a self-commission, and things were taking shape while I was doing it.”

The album mercifully avoids falling into the dangerous trap of sounding like a lazy pastiche of other cultures, or easy listening background music; it's well-balanced, tasteful and, most



A trick of the camel's tail in Cairo, Egypt.



Definitely more than seven stones at the Roman ruins of Jerash in Jordan.

importantly, feels authentic. The guitarist worked with longtime collaborator Roger King on the record who, among other things, contributed sweeping string arrangements which add a palatial brushstroke to the canvas.

Completing the musical brew are saxophone and flute cameos, as well as traditional instruments played by musicians from Azerbaijan and Armenia, while Hackett also whips out the charango and Iraqi oud.

“Once every 10 years or so I end up doing a record a bit like it: nylon classical guitar and as much orchestra as I can muster, whether that’s real or imagined or virtual orchestra,” Hackett explains. “I wouldn’t want to confuse the public with the idea of, ‘oh he’s going to do acoustic now, he’s stopped doing rock’n’roll’. It’s not like that. I’m still involved in rock.”

With maturity often comes an acceptance that ego should take a back seat for the greater good. *Under A Mediterranean Sky* feels no

“I just love the idea of an imaginary journey that recalled all the other actual journeys that I had made.”

different, with Hackett happy to take some moments out to let his guests flourish.

“I’m very lucky at this stage of my life to be able to work with such a wealth of talent,” he says. “Some of it’s local, but some of it’s further afield where I just feel as though I’m working with some of the best musicians in the world, and I want to celebrate that. This is why I step back and let others have the limelight... I don’t want to be the only soloist. It’s important to work with other people and to let them shine.”

Hackett turns 71 on February 12, but you’d barely know, going by his fruitful work rate. Kickstarting his acclaimed career following an advert in *Melody Maker*, he played his first gig with Genesis in 1971, and performed on classic albums including *Nursery Cryme* and *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway*. He left the group in 1977 to fly solo, although he later formed GTR alongside Yes stalwart Steve Howe in the 80s.

“I’ve been focused on music ever since I was about two years old,” Hackett says resolutely. It’s a bold claim: most children at two are more likely to be inflicting fear onto their parents by

climbing on chairs and sticking things in places they shouldn’t, but from his sophisticated guitar skills, you wouldn’t disbelieve him.

“My dad played a number of things, usually wind instruments,” Hackett explains. “He gave me a harmonica at the age of two. I’d spend lots of time trying to play it. It all came together when I was about three or four and I was able to play tunes on it, probably to try and please my mother. Guitar didn’t really figure in my life until much later.”

A lesson, then, for all parents: buy your child a harmonica when they’re tiny, and who knows where they might end up later in life.

Hackett describes his beloved guitar as a “means to an end for me; it’s my TARDIS”.

On his new album it’s all about nylon strings and acoustic plucking, rather than a Les Paul. It feels effortlessly comfortable for Hackett, though, who is just at ease finger-picking as he is wailing out a heart-pounding solo.

“There are two gods,” he says. “One is electric and one is acoustic. Sometimes I’m worshipping at the shrine of the electric

Ripples never come back... at Italy’s stunning Lake Garda.



Happy the man who can rest a while at Paris’ Sacré Coeur.



Hackett knows what he likes, and he likes Pordenone, Italy.

demon and other times that very sensitive, beautiful thing that is the nylon guitar. I think it evokes so much of landscapes.”

Hackett compares the possibilities of nylon guitar with that of piano but with the keys you have more depth, and can conjure up “thunder”.

“The secret, I think, is to make the guitar sound limitless in terms of what it could do, and take the fretboard almost by the scruff of the neck and say: ‘You’re not a poor old second cousin to the keyboard,’” he says.

“It’s limitless tonally and sometimes I play it like a piano: sometimes I lay into it and use the rapid fire thing. But I’ve discovered all sorts of ways to arpeggiate. I’ve been working on it for a long time now. I started off as a plectrum player, self-taught, and before too long I realised I wasn’t going to be able to bring it fully alive until I started using the nails.”

Hackett’s indulgence in acoustic was first crystallised on 1983’s classical infused *Bay Of Kings*. More solo albums sporadically followed, including a couple alongside full orchestras. His latest salvo comes around two years after his last rock album, *At The Edge Of Light*, which reached No.28 in the UK chart and continued a prolific run of form on the label InsideOut.

Out on the road and Hackett is continuing to prove a dominant force in prog’s live circles, helped by a willingness to revisit Genesis classics. He has an all-star cast: in recent years

his onstage collaborators have included Roine Stolt, Nick Beggs, Craig Blundell, Nad Sylvan and Marco Minnemann, among others.

When *Prog* yarns with Hackett it’s not long after his latest Genesis Revisited tour was rescheduled to 2021/2022 as a result of Covid. It was the same story with the reunited Collins/Rutherford/Banks Genesis line-up, who also had to put back their highly anticipated tour. There’s a certain irony to Genesis reforming while Hackett is also out there celebrating the band’s back catalogue, but judging by his prolific solo material he shouldn’t need to worry about Collins and co stealing his thunder.

Under A Mediterranean Sky is a fine addition to Hackett’s portfolio, and one for progheads as well as fans of folk, classical and world music.

“Somehow I hope it will do for people what Ravel’s *Bolero* did for me when I was a 12-year-old buying my first album,” he says. “It seemed to conjure so much more than merely a French composer focused on Spain. It seemed to

encapsulate Egypt and all of those kind of things that a young, suggestive 12-year-old brain might take onboard.

“For instance, whenever I heard Ravel’s *Bolero* in those days, it always conjured to mind Cleopatra’s barge coming closer and closer along the Nile.”

The 11 tracks on Hackett’s new album do a stellar job of grabbing the listener’s hand and running off to the Med: dim the lights, cradle a glass of red and you’re almost there. They’re a bold statement from Hackett, who could have easily furrowed down the prog rock path once more. But the chance to do something different, and unexpected, proved to be too alluring.

“Rules are meant to be broken,” he smiles. “If you don’t break rules in music, you might as well throw in the towel.”

Under A Mediterranean Sky is out now via Inside Out. See www.hackettsongs.com for more information.

**A watcher of the skies
in Florence, Italy.**



Thor Erik Helgesen.

Sverdheim 2019

The High Priests

Of Rhythmic Noise



Ring Van Möbius firmly believe that more is always better. After a two-year gestation period the Norwegian classic prog act have returned with their second album, *The 3rd Majesty*. Frontman Thor Erik Helgesen tells *Prog* why he's definitely not holding back.

Words: Dom Lawson
Portraits: Line Sverdheim

Progressive rock is not a genre that tends to reward reticence. If you've got a fantastic, preposterous idea, then the correct way forward is always to pursue it with every fibre of your being. That's definitely the approach that Ring Van Möbius have taken on their second album, *The 3rd Majesty*. The Norwegians have proudly proclaimed their devotion to prog's first wave

from the start: their 2018 debut, *Past The Evening Sun*, was a feast of overdriven organ and power trio fireworks, with a huge and proud debt to ELP and Van der Graaf Generator. The follow-up, which begins with the absurdly opulent sprawl of the 22-minute title track, blows its predecessor out of the water and sounds like the work of band enjoying a dizzying surge of confidence.

"You're onto something there," says founder, frontman and organist Thor Erik Helgesen. 

"We were pretty unafraid of trying new things and I really feel we're not answering to anything or anyone. So we just do crazy stuff, if we think it's good, great, funny or whatever."

"We were pretty unafraid of trying new things and I really feel we're not answering to anything or anyone. So we just do crazy stuff, if we think it's good, great, funny or whatever. After finding our sound on the first album and having the right recording techniques, these two years in between have done us good."

Shortly after the release of their debut, Ring Van Möbius were briefly sidetracked

by another project. In October 2018, at the request of a local horror movie festival Tysvær Skrekkfest, held in the village of Aksdal, the band performed their own soundtrack to Dario Argento's seminal Italian horror flick, *Suspria*. Helgesen

cites the experience as being fundamental to his band's evolution, and a testament to their collective enthusiasm for experimenting.

"That pushed our boundaries. We had to relate to what was happening in the movie and add to those moments, to those feelings on the screen," he says. "None of it was forced. We were willing to go outside of the norm and find new feelings from the same instruments. I think that also made us grow more confident... and weird and crazy! [Laughs.]"

Prog bands are often judged on their epics, and Ring Van Möbius have delivered a mind-expanding colossus with *The 3rd Majesty's* title track. Bursting with deranged ideas, wilful complexity and moments of irresistible beauty, it makes the band's self-proclaimed status as purveyors of "progressive rock straight from 1971, but made today" seem ever-so-slightly reductive. This isn't straightforward, retro prog: this is the real thing, if not beamed here

from five decades ago, then certainly plugged directly into the pure prog mainframe.

"This album is definitely a 'more is more' kind of thing!" Helgesen chuckles. "At one point, I had some ideas for an intermezzo between riffs, and our drummer had another idea too, and it was *always*, 'Why don't we do both?' [Laughs.] It's that kind of album. There's timpani and strings and all these crazy

death of a star. There's a lot of universal ideas connected to it, lyrics-wise. It's a story about something growing too big and becoming overwhelming, and it all goes to hell. It could be about a star, or a leader. It could be about humankind, growing too big and killing the planet. It was written as a story of a star being born, and the life cycle of that star... but that's just a part of the story, I guess!"

Despite impeccable retro credentials, Ring Van Möbius are clearly driven by a shared desire to explore as much new territory as possible. *The 3rd Majesty* is bound to delight fans of the early 70s, but it's performed with a special kind

"This album is definitely a 'more is more' kind of thing! At one point, I had some ideas for an intermezzo between riffs, and our drummer had another idea too, and it was always, 'Why don't we do both?'"

elements. Even the artwork is pompous! If we go any bigger, we might explode!"

Was it particularly satisfying to write something of *Supper's Ready* proportions?

"It took about two years, but yeah, we're very proud of it. Somehow you just know, when you write the first riff, that okay, this is probably going to be a long one, because I feel that these lines I'm writing are part of a bigger whole and I have to tell a story. Of course, it's sometimes hard to get the big waves flowing and to tell the full story. With other songs, I can tell that it's going to be a quickie! [Laughs.]"

According to Helgesen, *The 3rd Majesty* is a concept album about the birth, life and death of a star. Open to interpretation, it's a wilfully trippy conceit that adds extra weight to the sumptuous, over-the-top progress of the whole thing, even if it doesn't necessarily make immediate sense, even to the man who wrote it.

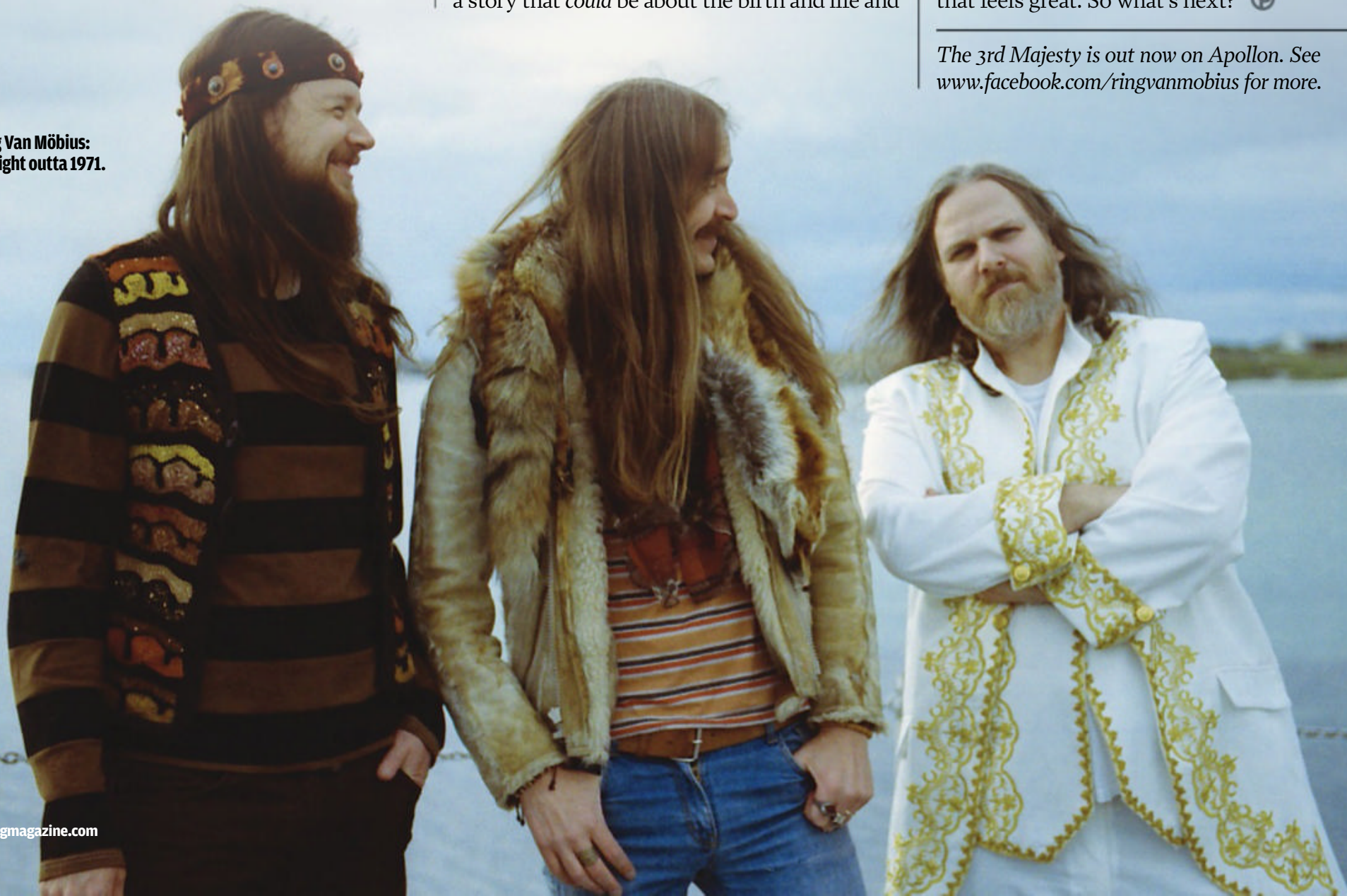
"Man, it is rather abstract!" he chortles. "It's a story that *could* be about the birth and life and

of intensity and gusto, as if the band are racing to get all their best ideas from *right now* out into the open before the next wave arrives. You can almost hear Helgesen's eyes twinkling with delight as he relishes the prospect of getting his hands on the vinyl version of his new record: an enthusiast, in love with progressive rock and hell-bent on making it bigger, better and crazier than ever before.

"Oh man, I can't wait for the vinyl! It's been frustrating but I know that some people have held back on their albums, waiting for the right time. That's not for us. I think it's dangerous to hold music back. I think it should be released as soon as possible, all the time, because then you get to start again with all your new ideas, and the creativity that's been under pressure for so long. Having an album released is very refreshing. Until now we've only listened to our music, trying to notice stuff that needs to be fiddled with, but now it's set in stone and that feels great. So what's next?" 

The 3rd Majesty is out now on Apollon. See www.facebook.com/ringvanmobius for more.

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SLAVE TO THE ALGORITHM

Steven Wilson is no stranger to controversy. Since the early days of Porcupine Tree, he's refused to repeat himself and has followed the same mantra throughout his solo career. His latest release, *The Future Bites*, tackles consumerism, social media and the loss of individuality against an electronic beat. He tells *Prog* why he'll never stop embracing change.

Words: Jerry Ewing **Images:** Lasse Hoile

"I'm not trying to upset people."

Steven Wilson is sat in the spacious lounge of his recently acquired north London home. One of his dogs, Bowie, jumps excitedly around his lap, as Wilson ponders a question concerning fan expectations. In the modern age of the immediacy of the internet, with everyone able to have their say in a public fashion, it's something that now stares all artists directly in the face. Wilson perhaps more than most.

"I understand, in a way, that you walk through a door into a musician's world and that's what you fall in love with and that's what you would always have, in some ways, the most affection for, the first time you discovered an artist," he says. "And even then, you're constantly waiting to recapture that buzz and that feeling you had when you first fell in love with the music. And I'm not a very good artist for catering to that."

Change. Misconception. Expectation. These are the main themes that resonate throughout our conversation as we discuss his latest album, *The Future Bites*, his sixth solo release.

The change is obvious. Musically, Wilson has spread his wings further than ever before. Rooted in dark electronica, *The Future Bites* is probably his most intriguing album, yet it's likely to be his most divisive. It's undoubtedly progressive — the 10-minute Donna-Summer-disco-meets-Tangerine-Dream throb of *Personal Shopper*, the dark moody strains of *King Ghost* and *12 Things I Forgot*, the latter displaying the most typical Wilson tropes from

previous albums — all make this album, as Dave Everley wrote in his review in *Prog* 116, "one of the boldest and best albums Wilson has ever made". But it's not the kind of 'prog' album some of his fanbase want him to make. And thus the now predictable internet shitstorm has kicked off.

"You're constantly now in a situation where you're confronted with your fans' expectations, which I love," Wilson muses. "Part of me kind of enjoys the controversy and divisiveness that I create, but part of me is disappointed that I can't take everyone with me."

"I understand it's part of the deal that if you change what you do, you're going to upset people. I don't like that but I accept it's part of the contract. But some of the comments, I just wonder what planet these people live on."

There's been change on a personal level too. It's all around us. This is the second time *Prog* has been invited to round to his home, during windows of opportunity when Covid restrictions have been relaxed. It's very nice, very comfortable and very homely. It also very subtly betrays the trappings of Wilson's musical success. He proudly showed off his new studio when he'd invited us over in the summer to hear his Dolby Atmos mix of *The Future Bites*. "It's the first time I've had a dedicated studio," he beamed proudly. "Previously it was wherever I put my computer and musical equipment."

There's also a music listening room that houses his impressive record collection, where these two music nerds could have easily spent the rest of the day, picking out releases and enthusing

over them. At heart, Wilson is still the same obsessed music fan he's always been. Having known him for almost 25 years, this writer would venture as far as to say Steven Wilson today is probably happier than he's ever been.

Which leads us to the misconceptions and expectations. Some of the online bile directed at Wilson from certain quarters, as he says, makes you wonder what planet its authors are on. Although that's nothing new. It's largely been going on since the more direct *Hand. Cannot. Erase.*, but increased with the progressive pop of *To The Bone* and has reached fever pitch with *The Future Bites*. Perceived slights range from his success and ubiquity to those who just can't handle the fact that he won't make *The Raven That Refused To Sing* over and over again. There were even one or two keyboard warriors who threw their toys out the pram when he got his hair cut a bit shorter!

"Don't like it? Don't buy it," he counters. "I haven't made a record that appeals to you. Okay, that's my prerogative. The thing I find the most offensive, the only thing I find offensive actually at the end of the day, is the suggestion I've done something wrong by making the record I wanted to make. The point is, I've not done anything wrong, and there's nothing wrong with you not liking it either. That's fine. I've made a record that doesn't appeal to you."

Such sense is unlikely to placate the mob. It rarely does in today's angry internet age. But it shows an almost wilful ignorance of



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the fact that as an artist Wilson has never stood still. His early forays with Porcupine Tree saw him dabble with psychedelia and space rock, before an avowed fondness for Pink Floyd coloured his sound. There have been detours into krautrock and prog metal, at the same time exploring proggy electronica with No-Man and drone and ambient music with Bass Communion and IEM. His own solo work has been even more varied. Everyone seems to forget his 2008 solo debut *Insurgentes* was largely lo-fi sounds and even breakbeats!

"*Insurgentes* is still my favourite of my solo records," he says. "That, *Hand.Cannot.Erase.* and the new one. It's one of the albums that gets forgotten a little bit because it's not generic. The albums that have been most well received with *Prog* readers are the ones that have been the closest, understandably, to the conceptual classic progressive rock blueprints. And part of that is me just thinking to myself: 'I can do this. I can do a record like that as a one-off.' But I kind of made a rod in my own back in doing that in a way."

That he's an artist who has confined himself to just one genre isn't the only misconception of Steven Wilson. A defined online strategy that's understandably developed over his recent albums has seen him embrace social media platforms such as Instagram and even current rage TikTok. Predictably, it's also become a stick with which the more blinkered members of the prog community have also taken up to beat him.

"We had to rethink the whole strategy for releasing the album," he

says with a sigh of the Covid-related delay for the release of *The Future Bites*. "One of the things you'd normally do is tour and do TV, radio and signings. I can't do that. All I've been able to do is maximise what I can do on social media. Which is ironic when you consider the subject matter of the album."

"A lot of it is to do with the more insidious side of social media. So I'm massively open to accusations of hypocrisy which I'm unable to deflect, really. The thing is I'm a professional musician, and one of the things I have to do is I have to embrace social media. Particularly in this time where there is no alternative. I've been on social media for a long time and I've made the most of it."

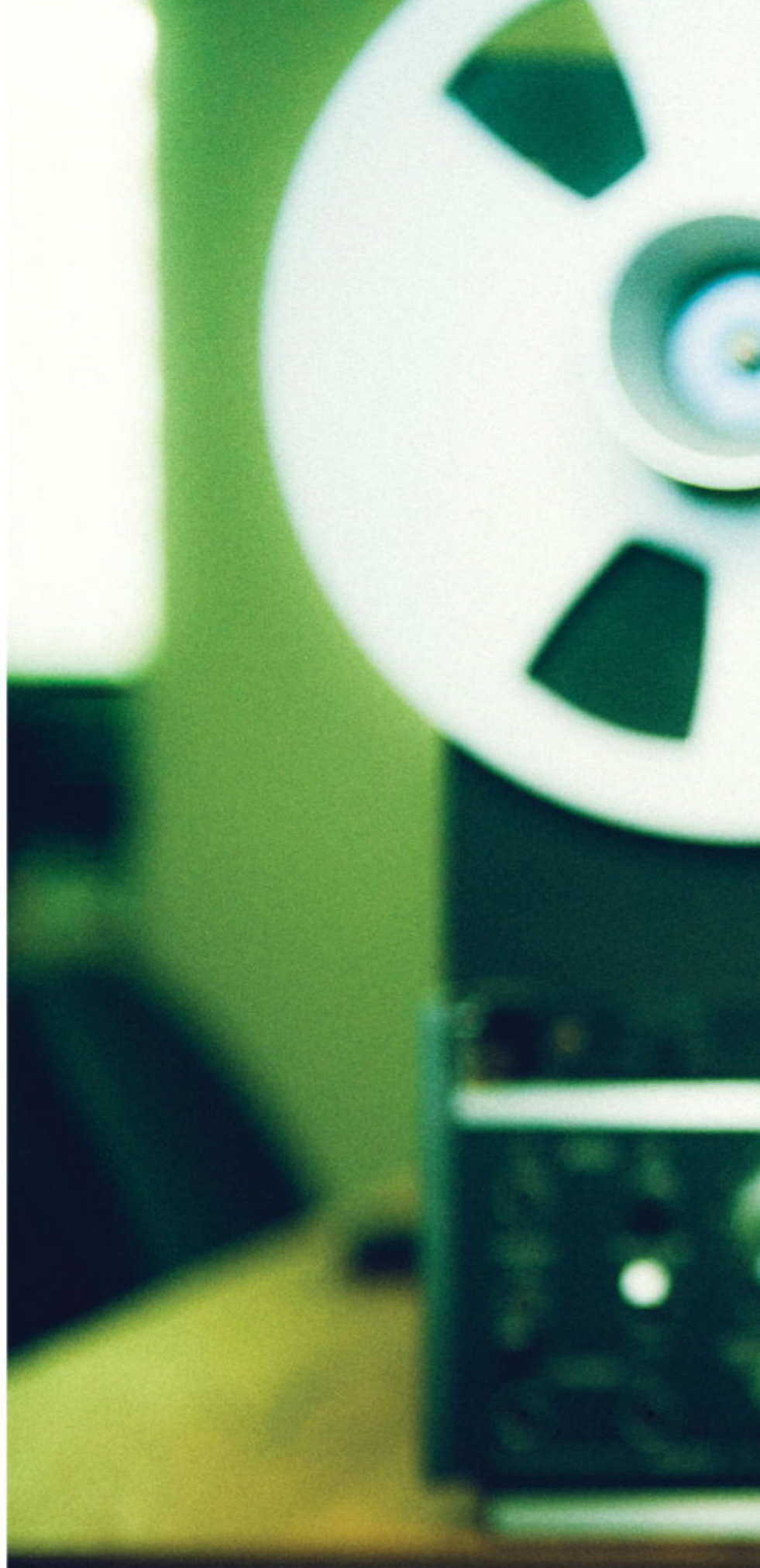
Wilson got married in 2019, a marriage that brought with it two young children. Given his reluctance to offer a window into his private life previously, his evident and perfectly natural delight at getting married has been shared online. Another example of pleasure the changes in his life have brought.

"There are certain things I don't feel comfortable sharing about my private life," he says. "But I posted that picture of my wedding day. I thought that was a big thing, getting married. I wasn't married before, I didn't have kids before, so there wasn't much to say about my private life anyway."

"I occasionally post something if I think it's fun or worth sharing. And you know what? People absolutely love that stuff. It amazes me. I'll post about me releasing an album that I've worked two years of my life on: 100 likes. I post a pictures of me doing silly shit with



Steven Wilson's new album is out now... whether you like it or not.



my kids: 10,000 likes, 500 comments. Unfortunately, I think this is the world we live in. Part of me finds that a lot of fun. And part of me finds it depressing in terms of where the human species has evolved. From people that used to look out into the cosmos and the universe and were curious to the world out there to people who are looking down at their phone to see how many likes their post has gotten."

Is he aware, *Prog* asks, of some of the memes he's inspired? The 'I have four Steven Wilson albums and buy another. What do I have? Depression,' one, or the site devoted to finding pictures of him smiling? He is.

"These people don't know me at all," he chuckles. "Who smiles in a publicity photo anyway? There's always this myth about me and it was always like a compliment to the way I managed my public persona that people had a very



“Most of my albums are only conceptual in the fact they are a group of songs that have a similar subject matter.”

different version of myself from the reality. People thinking I’m depressed, miserable, melancholy: nothing could be further from the truth. And largely this has always been the case. Of course the elephant in the room is that the subject matter of the music has tended towards the melancholic. That’s an area that has fascinated me.”

For those fans prepared to go along with Wilson for *The Future Bites* ride, the album remains as dark and melancholic in places as previous songs about ghosts and serial killers have been. It’s also a bona fide concept album, looking at the infiltration of high concept in modern consumerism.

“The only time that I’ve had a story I wanted to tell right from the beginning was *Hand.Cannot.Erase.*,” he points out. “People think of me as someone who makes concept records, [but] that’s the only record I’ve ever made that had

Steve Wilson: change is the only constant.

a narrative from the beginning to the end in the old-fashioned *The Wall*, *Tommy*, *Quadrophenia* style. Most of my albums are only conceptual in the fact they are a group of songs that have a similar subject matter.”

Where *The Future Bites* takes Wilson in a Covid-damaged world remains to be seen, as does the impact on his career of fans angry that he refuses to share their narrow parameters of what music should be. But as a body of work it should, by rights, give him his biggest success to date.

So where does he go next? We discuss a potential 10th anniversary reissue of the *Storm Corrosion* album he made with his good friend Opeth’s Mikael Åkerfeldt in 2012, for which Wilson has just created a Dolby Atmos remix.

“That could be good time to do another record,” he says. “Obviously, there’s a geographical issue. We can’t

just get together on Tuesdays and jam and we don’t want to do it by email.”

There’s also an official Porcupine Tree book in the pipeline.

“It’s going to be a very unusual musical biography,” he says “I always thought an autobiography would be really boring. In fact, there’s been two or three written rather flatteringly about me in the last couple of years anyway. But it’s going to be a book about my ideas about music and my relationship with my fans.”

Plenty yet to keep the prog contingent in his ever-growing legion happy then. And future music? If anyone is going to surprise people by doing what they least expect it’d be Steven Wilson. Watch this space... 

The Future Bites is out now via Caroline International. For more, see www.stevenwilsonhq.com.

Transatlantic albums come along with only slightly greater frequency than the UK experiencing a total solar eclipse, but with *The Absolute Universe*, they've created a magnum opus that couldn't be contained in just one version. *Prog* talks to three-quarters of the supergroup about grappling with too many ideas, creating their own alternate realities, and the art of not compromising.

Words: David West

Images: Tobias Andersson

A Universe

“Neal and I have very American energies, and Roine is a lot more laidback with his Swedish energy, and Pete’s got a very distinctive English energy, so we all go at different paces.”

Mike Portnoy



Transatlantic, clockwise from
top left: Roine Stolt, Neal Morse,
Pete Trewavas, Mike Portnoy.

of Their Own

“I think it’s a prog fan’s wet dream,” says drummer Mike Portnoy. Seven years after their last album, *Kaleidoscope*, the prog powerhouse that is Transatlantic have reassembled for their most ambitious release yet. The newest work from Portnoy, Marillion’s Pete Trewavas, Neal Morse and Roine Stolt, *The Absolute Universe* nearly proved impossible for its creators to control. It defied their attempts to limit its scope and two distinct versions emerged from the crucible of their musical alchemy: a double disc subtitled *Forevermore* and a single disc, *The Breath Of Life*.

It all began in Fenix Recording Studios, Sweden, in September 2019 when the band reconvened to work on new material. “After the *Kaleidoscope* tour we felt we needed some time away from each other. I won’t go into details, I’m not even sure there are any,”



says Trewavas, laughing. “We decided we’d write a long piece of music, which I was in favour of because it gives a lot of scope for the writing, it allows you to bring themes back and develop music. Undoubtedly, one of our strengths is arranging the music. Neal and I get a lot of fun out of revisiting a piece of music with either completely different chords or some twist so that it’s not quite the same, which trips us up live no end, but is a lot of fun at the time to scratch your head over.”

Transatlantic set up a whiteboard in the studio to list all the ideas everyone brought to the table and set about hashing out which ones they liked. The prolific Mr Stolt came to the session with an hour and a half of music already composed. “I understand we can’t use everything, but if I write one and a half hours of music there’s plenty to pick from,” he says. Morse and Trewavas brought in ideas of their own, and the quartet found their collective creativity undimmed by the six-year break.

“There’s no lack of ideas so it’s easy in the respect that there’s so much to work with,” says Portnoy, “but it’s always a difficult chemistry because of the personalities. The different personalities help make it really special, but sometimes getting to agree on things is a challenge. Neal and I have very American energies, and Roine is a lot more laidback with his Swedish energy, and Pete’s got a very distinctive English energy, so we all go at different paces.”

However, the biggest challenge this time was the sheer volume of music at their disposal, promising to rival 2009’s *The Whirlwind* for grandiosity. Portnoy and Stolt wanted to make a double album; Morse and Trewavas thought it needed a little trim off the top. “We had 10 days there and about seven days in I started to think it was getting a bit long,” says Trewavas. “Some members of the band were like, ‘This is great! How many minutes are we at now? This could be longer than *The Whirlwind*!’”

“I could see this was going to be great and there was a natural flow,” says Stolt. “I felt that we shouldn’t really cut the album, then Neal made a couple of suggestions how he wanted to cut the album and, to my ears, the way he cut it sounded more like a medley or like we were chopping up a sample of themes or ideas more than a song.”

“We ended up with a few stalemates,” confirms Trewavas. “We couldn’t agree on songtitles and we had different lyrics going on as well. At that point Mike said, ‘Would it be crazy to suggest we have two albums? That way we can all be satisfied, we can all have our dream album. There’s enough music here and we’ve got enough variety that if we’re smart about it, we can do this.’”

The result was *Forevermore* and *The Breath Of Life*, which Trewavas calls,

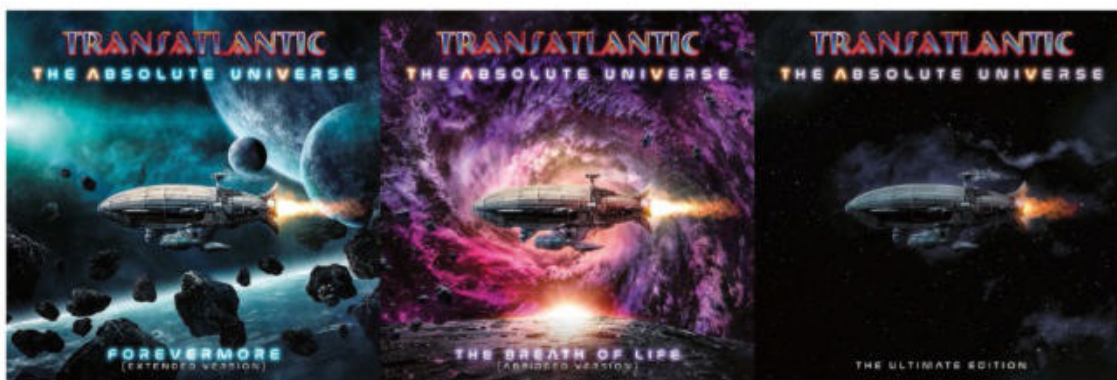
“two experiences of the same journey, which is very cool.” *The Breath Of Life* is not just a slimmed-down version of *Forevermore*, it’s a different album built around the same musical themes.

“That freed up everybody,” says Portnoy. “Normally in the past if Neal wrote a whole set of lyrics to a song and Roine wrote a whole set, you’d have to battle it out. In this case, we can use one set for one version, and one for the other version. That’s the important thing with these albums, the single disc isn’t merely edited down from the double.

They are two alternate realities of each other. There might be the same musical song that appears on both versions, but who’s singing it is going to be different, the lyrics might be different, or we may

However, while *Forevermore* and *The Breath Of Life* might be considered concept albums, they’re not trying to tell a story in the same manner as The Who’s *Tommy* or Queensrÿche’s *Operation: Mindcrime*. “They’re not concept albums in the traditional sense like that,” says Portnoy. “They’re a little bit more broad strokes, it’s more like *The Dark Side Of The Moon* where it’s thematic concepts. It’s not literally a story with a character, it’s more themes, ideas and concepts that interconnect. This album is almost the spiritual sequel to *The Whirlwind* in that respect, talking about different challenges that the world is going through.”

Stolt wrote his lyrics in the summer of 2019, looking at the state of the



“If you listen to the album now, there are actually different songs, so if we label them as 22 songs, then some fans will say, ‘Oh, I don’t like this Transatlantic album as much as I like *The Whirlwind*.’”

Roine Stolt

have additional musical passages, so really this was a way for us to have all these ideas and not have to compromise and utilise them all.”

“It’s more of everything. That’s always been the motto for Transatlantic,” says Stolt, who notes that there’s a level of expectation from the fans that the band will always deliver something on a grand scale. “If Transatlantic had done an album with 12 songs, I think some fans would be disappointed, not by the songs but by the fact that we didn’t do this big epic. If you listen to the album now, there are actually different songs, so if we label them as 22 songs, then some fans will say, ‘Oh, I don’t like this Transatlantic album as much as I like *The Whirlwind*.’”

This enthusiasm for long-form composition began with their second album, *Bridge Across Forever*, in 2001, and has been carried on through each successive opus. “We’ve always worked within that framework where there’s a big overture and melodies and themes are introduced or foreshadowed and then they come back and are reprised later,” says Portnoy. “It’s a great way of writing, especially for progressive music when you’re working on a landscape. It’s written looking at the bigger picture.”

world — the US in particular — and feeling a little disheartened. “We can’t get away from the fact that whatever happens in America happens to the world, and let’s put it this way, the leadership has been sketchy at best,” he says. “I don’t want to offend people, but that’s what it is. It’s scary, watching day by day, how long will this insanity go on? And people just accept it. I haven’t seen a revolution yet. Every morning I wake up, people are just silent and let this madman carry on with all the insults, insulting world leaders, insulting the American people.”

It’s easy to see these notions finding expression in the track *Bully* on *Forevermore*, although the subject of Stolt’s ire is never mentioned by name. He’s keenly aware of the dangers of alienating people and being seen as preachy. “I know it may not always be the most wanted thing to hear when you put on a progressive rock record, to have a sermon,” he says. “I see people like Roger Waters taking stick for writing his leftist lyrics, but I cannot do anything else than be honest. Sometimes I write a love ballad, but it doesn’t happen that often, or something

Transatlantic: a really super supergroup.



about family, I think I've even written a song about food. It's whatever comes naturally. I trust the intuition, rather than thinking what do the fans want to hear? Because if you start listening to the fans too much, then they say, 'Don't write about politics. I don't want religion in the lyrics, I don't want that.' And the next step is, 'I don't like your guitar sound like that', or 'I don't like that synth sound.' Suddenly you're making albums just to please the fans and you lose yourself."

As much as *The Absolute Universe* is all about long-form compositions, revisiting themes, and developing ideas, both albums feature strong melodies. *Rainbow Sky* reveals the influence of The Beatles and the vocal harmonies bring to mind 60s pop and the Beach Boys. "At the end of the day, we have to appeal to the nature of the commercial world to some extent," says Trewavas. "Melody is very important to all of us. I don't know why that is. Even the themes are very strong. The songs are quite hooky."

Originally, the plan was to finish the album by the end of 2019, but without the pressure to cram in making it between everyone's touring commitments, the creative process kept rolling on. "There are parts on this album that were recorded a year apart from each other," says Portnoy, "and we're still literally making tweaks, because there's a 5.1 mix which we call the *Ultimate* version which actually combines both [parts]. It's like 100-minute version of the album, which has everything and the kitchen sink, so that's really a third version."

As if three versions of the music wasn't sufficiently lofty in ambition, Portnoy and mixer Rich Mouser have been kept busy editing tracks for promo videos. "It's a never-ending process," says the drummer. "This project is like the project that will just never end."

On that note, there's a frisson that accompanies each new Transatlantic album because they happen so rarely. "You have four guys that don't always agree, in fact we rarely agree to be honest, but that's what makes it so good in the end, because we all really care," says Portnoy. "We want Transatlantic to be something that people have to look forward to, you don't just get it every year like a normal, full-time band. I think that makes it special and makes what we do so appreciated by the fans because they know when they do get it, it's going to be special."

"It was a long process, but it was worthwhile," says Trewavas. "I'm very excited about it. We're all really proud of this one. If it's not the best thing we've done, it's pretty damn close." 

The Absolute Universe — Forevermore
and *The Absolute Universe* — *The Breath Of Life* are out now via InsideOut.



Aviv Geffen: still doing
it for the music.

“If someone misses the old Steven Wilson from Porcupine Tree, you can only get that now on Blackfield, as he’s moved on to the electro thing.”

Feel The Change

Aviv Geffen has always embraced change and **Blackfield**, his art rock project with Steven Wilson, is evolving. As the pair celebrate 20 years of friendship, Geffen reveals the motivation behind sixth album *For The Music* and tells *Prog* why he'll never give up his dream of peace.

Words: Rich Wilson **Images:** Moshe Nachumovich

There are times in every musician's career where they take a shot at breaking through into the mainstream. Blackfield's music — a harmonious combination of the potent talents of Steven Wilson and Aviv Geffen — has always teetered on the cusp of commercial acceptance. With the latest album *For The Music* having the benefit of major label backing, an articulate sound and keen production, there's a very real chance that Blackfield could finally transcend the confines of the progressive pop genre box and drop into the consciousness of your Average Joe. And it's something that Geffen is acutely aware of.

"Parlophone came to me and said that they truly believe in Blackfield," he reveals from his Tel Aviv home. "They have Coldplay, Blur and Bowie on their label, so for me it was a very moving thing. There are some good signs. I've just heard that the second single, *Under My Skin*, was playlisted on Virgin Radio. That's something that we've never had before. Although the album is very mainstream and poppy it still has the same nostalgic, signature sound of Blackfield. To be honest, if someone misses the old Steven Wilson from Porcupine Tree, you can only get that now on Blackfield, as he's moved on to the electro thing. I think it's good and we should judge the songs and not the genres. I sent over the new Blackfield tracks to Peter Gabriel and Brian Eno and they really liked it. They're prog people and maybe the King of Prog in Peter Gabriel. If he likes it, then I guess we're doing fine."

Geffen has a point. Aside from the identifiable melodies that link the album to

past Blackfield recordings, there are hints of Porcupine Tree's *Lightbulb Sun*-era, which those who have vociferously railed against Wilson's current direction, may find solace in. Although Wilson's input is perhaps less than on previous releases, he remains crucial in fashioning their sound, and has also provided vocals and guitar to a number of tracks.

"I'm always sending all the demos to Steven because we still want to keep the Blackfield DNA," he says. "There are some beautiful songs on this album and Steven sings on three, and the music always goes through me and Steven. There's also a great song on the album called *Falling*, which is an outtake from our second album. We lost the track, so we had to redo everything from scratch. But Steven's one of my best friends and we talk on a daily basis. For me, it was really hard to see the reaction to his new solo songs. I think people have judged him really hard and they should appreciate that he is moving on and support his vision. He's really a pioneer, you know? But on Blackfield you can still get the old and dark Steven. There's great guitar with epic music, and heavy chords."

In what's perhaps an unexpected move — given Wilson's production pedigree — Blackfield have been assisted in honing the music by Trevor Horn and Coldplay producer Rik Simpson. Geffen reveals how such a collaboration come into fruition: "Rik heard some demos and he said, 'Aviv, look, these days you have your fans and your fanbase is wide. But I think you should go wider but keep the dreamy synthpop the same without becoming cheesy. You must have a great



production so that we can get it played on the main radio stations.' I really think that he's right and for me, Rik Simpson is a genius. People can judge Coldplay's music forever, but you can't say that it's not well-produced. So, when he came to me it was like God was knocking on my door.

"The last song on the album is called *It's So Hard* and it was originally in Hebrew. When Trevor Horn heard it, he said, 'It's a crime only to have this in Hebrew. You really must put it into English as it's such a great song.' So, we spent some time in his studio in west London, and I'm so happy that he pushed me to record it. For me, Trevor is like God, he's *the* one. When I've worked with Alan Parsons and [Tony] Visconti in the past, for them, Trevor Horn is the king. He's the man."

Lyrically, Blackfield's new songs flicker between those relating to human emotions, to an outspoken stance that you'd expect from someone as entwined in Israeli politics as Aviv Geffen. Unlike many other musicians from around the globe who have spoken out on the thorny subject of Palestine, Geffen orates with an authority gained from his experiences. Not least his appearance at a peace rally in 1995, where he was invited by then Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to perform. Grainy internet footage shows a heavily madeup Geffen shaking hands with Rabin, shortly before the leader was assassinated. It was an encounter that only solidified his beliefs.

"For me, that really changed all my life," he says with a sense of despair in his voice. "I was one of the last people to talk to him. He invited me to be the headliner at his peace rally. I felt like Forrest Gump; I was at the most historic point in Israel's life and I was a witness to the murder. The killer said that he was my driver and that was why they let him in and to get so close to Rabin. It was a disaster and a terrible time for me. As I'm living here in Israel with this endless conflict, I'm very involved in politics. I think my life is very punk in a way because I'm really against the right wing. I'm making a stand, doing interviews and criticising [current Prime Minister] Benjamin Netanyahu. Now there are huge protests every night and I'm one of the leaders. Israel is really changing. In my early days, I think that I changed a lot of the new generation and now they can vote and try to replace him. It's an immensely powerful thing."

Such a public stance can of course have a real danger. This isn't armchair posturing from a detached musician safely ensconced in a mansion thousands of miles from the location of their ire. Geffen has placed himself well and truly above the parapet, which begs the question of how his protestations are received in his home country?

"I think people appreciate it because before I came in, nobody dared to criticise the government," he suggests thoughtfully. "I try to open the eyes of my fans. I was standing on the stage in front of 30,000 people and I said that people should ask all the time how Netanyahu presents Israel. It has made an impact and now Israel is divided more than ever. Music is a tool to change Israel: if you are in Israel and you are an artist, you *should* deal



"There are some beautiful songs on this album and Steven sings on three. The music always goes through me and Steven."

with the politics. I grew up with Lennon, Bob Dylan, all those people who were brave enough to speak out. I don't want to do cheesy pop songs and I'm not afraid to lose crowds."

With the current lockdown on performing live for large audiences across the world, the future for Blackfield is the same as every other artist. Only the passing of time will confirm when the Wilson-Geffen partnership will be able to tour UK and European stages anytime soon. Geffen clearly hopes that such a tour

may prove to be feasible this year, and confirms that any gap could be filled with further Blackfield releases.

"There could be another album quickly, but we're all hoping that around April or May we'll be able to tour. I really hope that's the case. There are many fans around the world, and I can't wait to play this album for them." 🎧

For *The Music* is out now via Parlophone. See www.blackfield-music.com for more information.

The new songs have even been approved by Gabriel and Eno!

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Old Ways

If any band can transcend the gloom that 2020 left behind, *Prog's* bets are on **Wardruna**. The folk-infused experimental collective might have had their wings clipped with the delayed release of the otherworldly *Kvittravn*, but they're now ready to soar. *Prog* explores old knowledge and new sounds with founder Einar Selvik.

Words: Jonathan Selzer **Images:** Arne Beck

When Wardruna first announced their fifth album, *Kvittravn*, readers could have been forgiven for wondering if the Norse spiritualists were signalling a love of prog's deepest cuts. Released seemingly aeons ago in

a cusp-of-pandemic February last year — three and half months before *Kvittravn* was originally slated for release — the video for the track *Grá*, complete with wolf prowling around frontman Einar Selvik, triggered a sense of familiarity for anyone with an abiding love of krautrock. The song itself was built on

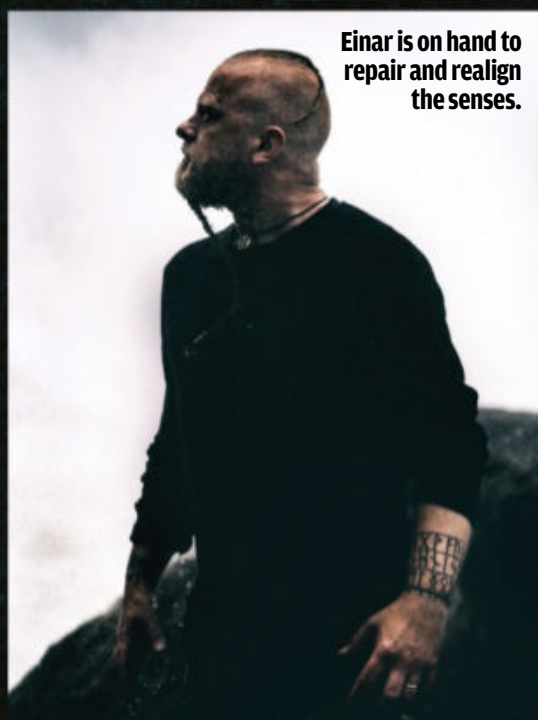
a heartbeat-ratcheting, tribal groove, beaten out on hide drum and bones. It was arrestingly stark yet reached a point of rapt intensity as Lindy Fay Hella's unfettered, ululating chant ignited around Selvik's sonorous incantation, but the song's rolling, traction pull matched, with remarkable precision, Can's tom-tom-driven *Smoke* (*E.F.S. Nr. 59*) from 1976's *Flow Motion*.

Sitting at home with an ancient Nordic lyre propped up behind him, Einar Selvik looks quizzical. "I know Can by name," he offers via Zoom, "but I can't say I know their music."

Dammit. Wardruna, however, for all their roots in pre-Christian Norse culture and beliefs, have an instinctive, boundless capacity for *connecting*, for

“This album explores in much more detail certain concepts around humans and how we view ourselves; how we view our surroundings, and our place within it.”

resonating on the deepest, most personal of levels, irrespective of genre allegiance, age or nationality. Their music is otherworldly yet intimate, calibrated to an internal clock of infinite patience, but one that answers their call. Fans have experienced a host of emotions at their live shows, and one of them is gratitude. From their first outing in 2009 in front of 100, soon-to-be-humbled metalheads at the Viking Ship Museum in Oslo, to sold-out shows at London’s Shepherd’s Bush Empire and around the world; in front of caves, overlooking burial grounds and in the elemental, panoramic surroundings of the Red Rocks Amphitheater in Colorado, their performances have become acts of communion beyond the



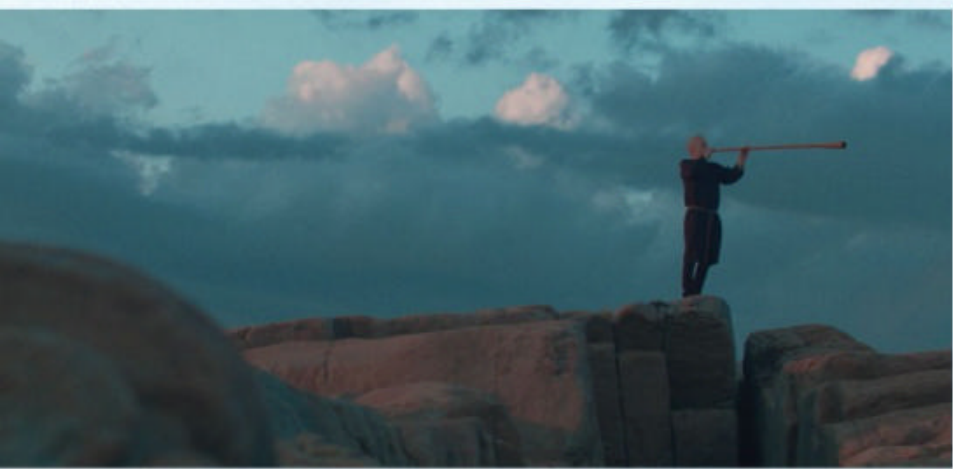
Einar is on hand to repair and realign the senses.

scope of any traditional rock show. They’re consciousness altering not because they scramble the audience’s senses, but because they repair and realign them, put the audience in touch with something that, if esoteric, is only so because it’s something they feel they’ve always known.

In the past, Selvik has talked about Wardruna creating a “solemn space”, one that allows the listener to reflect and come to together, removed from the hyperactive, horizon-constricting demands of the modern age. The band themselves, of course, haven’t been immune. Tours have been postponed, somewhat optimistically, until April and *Kvitrahn* is finally getting a release after a seven-month delay. Nature, 

to which Wardruna are closely bound, abhors a vacuum, however, and the interim produced a new track, *Lyfjaberg* ('Healing-mountain'), with an accompanying epic, exposed-to-the-elements video. With its stern mantras gradually summoning power over eight and a half spellbinding minutes, it's a call for perseverance as the path to liberation (translated: "Leave time behind, and weighty thought... the burden lightens, but heavy is the trail ahead"), adding further proof that we need Wardruna more than ever.

For Einar Selvik, Wardruna have always been a calling.



RAGNAROK FILM

"It was disappointing to have to delay the album," Selvik says, "because there's been a lot of work and a lot of planning around concerts, and it's not only about an album when you release an album, it's tons of other stuff, and we had put a lot of effort into that. Also, the whole creative process was really intensive and we'd been working with *Assassin's Creed* to write music for the game. We thought it was too much work to just put it out there without a proper plan. So delaying was the only right thing to do.

"But then again, in that midst of disappointment there came *Lyfjaberg*, because I really wanted to get some music out, not just for disappointed fans but also for disappointed me. I was still in the creative mode after the album and the thematics and the idea for the song had been there for a long time. Everything just clicked, considering the current situation in the world, and the song just came."

Prog gets the impression that Wardruna songs aren't composed in any regular sense, but that they're

Kvitavn, out now.



Wardruna: the Norwegians' songs aren't so much composed as waiting to be found.

waiting there to be found. *Kvitavn* is no different. Having completed the *Runaljod* trilogy of albums, each one investigating a set of runes from the Elder Futhark, and with the stripped-down, essentially solo album *Skald* affirming the scalable, always potent nature of Selvik's vision, the latest, in true Wardruna fashion, is both a step forward into new territory, and a revisiting of the past. Its themes looser yet more granular in detail, the dynamics of the 11 tracks are more varied than ever before, carrying echoes of what's gone before but reaching a yet higher vantage point from which to reveal their breathtaking scope.

"It dives into a lot of ideas that I have been putting in the drawer for all of these years," say Selvik of the album, "because working on the *Runaljod* trilogy was so all-consuming, so there were a lot of things that were just put aside for later. Although revisiting those ideas was good, it also feel good to start out with a blank sheet. Some of the subjects are already sung about within the trilogy, but here I feel we've zoomed more into the details. I'm old-fashioned in that I like albums, I like painting broadstrokes but building

'White Raven'. It's also not dissimilar to *Kvitavn*, the name Selvik took for himself in his former guise as drummer for black metallers Gorgoroth.

"The ideas that inspired this album came before I named it," Einar reveals, "but it was also taken in part because of my close relation and fascination for ravens in general. So the fact that I'm the blond guy I am, it makes more sense to be a white raven when choosing such a name, but in a way the name chose me. This album goes more in depth on how we've regarded specific aspects of nature, and also ourselves, and the white, ghostly creature is something we find in cultures all over the planet, and they very often represent very similar things. It's very often this messenger that moves beyond the physical world, and it represents renewal and sacredness. I do feel that the return of these, or hosting their return, is quite a symbolic act in itself, especially in the times we're living."

Perhaps it's not so surprising that the immediacy and attention-fragmenting nature of modern life has created a yearning for something more enduring, unbound to the pace of information that's increasingly hijacking our

"It was disappointing to have to delay the album... There's been a lot of work and a lot of planning around concerts, and it's not only about an album when you release an album, it's tons of other stuff, and we had put a lot of effort into that."

with small threads that interact and meet each other.

"In a way, it's more personal also," he continues. "This album explores in much more detail certain concepts around humans and how we view ourselves; how we view our surroundings, and our place within it — of course with a historical point of view also, diving into the traditions of how we perceived these things in the past. In a way, all my music is very animistic in its approach, but here it goes more into the depths of exploring concepts around mankind."

Animism is the age-old belief that the world around us, from animals to trees — and in pagan Norse belief, even runic symbols — possesses an inherent spirit that we can all commune with. It's a practice that runs throughout *Kvitavn*, from the dark feathers adorning album's cover though to the raven squawks, wolf howls and stag calls that permeate the album, to the title itself, translated as

contemporary consciousness. But Wardruna aren't a simple retreat into traditional forms; for all their exclusive use of ancient instruments, their music belongs to the here and now, makes us aware that old knowledge can still guide us. It's a message that's extended beyond the band themselves, having become the epicentre of an ever-growing cadre of bands tuning into the pulse of pagan folk, not least the also wildly successful Heilung, while progressive artists such as Riverside and Lunatic Soul's Mariusz Duda have also turned towards folk's power of repetition as a medium for a wider continuity, where, like Wardruna, simple elements build into something discretely complex: a state of sublime yet earthy equilibrium.

"I think there are several reasons why this has become a movement," says Selvik. "This fascination for the northern traditions doesn't necessarily have anything to do with the northern



KIM OHRLING

traditions, but I think globally people are longing for some form of connectedness. Then what people do is to seek out the animist traditions, and in northern Europe we were lucky enough to keep and preserve ours for a longer time than a lot of other parts in Europe. So the function of Nordic mythology is like a gateway to their own pre-Christian culture, or just a doorway to find that sense of connectedness to nature, because that's very central in this movement. When it comes to the bands, there's a great variation. Some are more into re-enacting the past, but some are more into a deeper understanding. Overall it's good that people are searching for these things. I hope they can find the good answers! [Laughs.]”

To keep a tradition alive is also to renew it, and while Wardruna are based around a core of musicians, *Kvitravn* also looks further afield, bolstering the idea that the band's music is more than the sum of its parts.

“On the last song, *Andevalljod* [‘The Spirit Weavers’], there's a female choir with some prominent traditional singers from Norway, like Kirsten Bråten Berg. She's a pillar in the preservation and keeping of certain traditions alive. So the fact that she and her daughter and two other singers agreed to grace my song is a big thing for me personally. If they aren't doing what they are doing, those traditions are going to die with them. We are going to lose so much with that generation passing if we don't give voice to it and remember it. It goes beyond just music.”

Selvik himself is a renowned scholar in Norse tradition, songs such as *Ni* drawing from numerous obscure sources to distil something universal that resonates in the marrow. Not unexpectedly, the breadth of knowledge encoded into the songs has drawn a small army of detectives attempting to unpack the references with all the fervour of a Thomas Pynchon or David Lynch obsessive. Selvik prefers to rise above the fray.

“I still see a lot of interpretations and people who have really dived into it, and sometimes I'm amazed how much of these references they've actually been able to dig out. Some have been quite impressive I have to say, and in any case, for me it's always going to be

no comment, whether it's good or bad. But that's the beauty of creating this music that's not about preaching some kind of ‘truth’. It's about throwing out questions. There are a lot of open ends that can be interpreted in so many different ways. So I think that's a wonderful thing, how people find what they need to find within them. I see that as a strength.”

In spirit, you don't get much more prog than that. ☺

Kvitravn out now via Music For Nations. See www.wardruna.com for more.

Einar Selvik: keeping the past alive.



Eivør

She joined avant-jazz group Yggdrasil in her early 20s and has since dabbled with folk, tribal rhythms, trip hop, chamber pop and throat singing. A native Faroese artist, she's collaborated with Wardruna's Einar Selvik and her otherworldly vocals can be heard in the opening credits of historical drama *The Last Kingdom*. So we have to ask: **how prog is Eivør Pálsdóttir?** **Words:** Rob Hughes

Pink Floyd at Pompeii. Jean-Michel Jarre at the Giza Plateau. Sigur Rós in an abandoned Icelandic herring factory. Prog has always enjoyed a flair for the dramatic, or at least the downright bizarre, when it comes to live shows. The latest artist to tackle an unexpected venue is singer-songwriter Eivør, who chose to play beneath a tall cliff in a sea-tossed corner of her native Faroe Islands in August 2020.

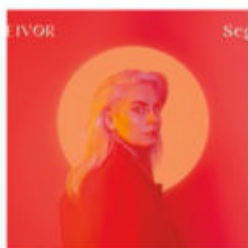
The site in question – Tinghella, a Viking gathering ground from the Middle Ages – is no easy reach. In fact, Eivør had to abseil to the makeshift stage. “I have a friend in the Faroe Islands who’s an adventurer,” she explains. “And she had this idea of me doing a concert at this place, down the cliff. Somehow she managed to talk me into it. I was terrified, but it was fun. We had to get all my gear – speakers, amps, everything – down with a rope. A hundred people came to watch the show and they all abseiled down too. I love crazy stuff like that.”

A taste for adventure has always been part of Eivør Pálsdóttir’s creative life. She was a Faroese TV star at 13, moved to Iceland to study classical singing while still in her teens and ultimately settled in Denmark. The music she made along the way – from traditional folk to trip hop, windswept prog to free jazz – served to echo the restlessness of her physical journey.

The same sense of motion propels *Segl*, her ninth and latest album. Taking its name from the Faroese for ‘sail’, it’s primarily about the search for direction and purpose, while acknowledging fate’s random habit of blowing the best-laid plans off course.

The crucial thing, Eivør’s songs suggest, is to summon the courage to head out in the first place. “*Segl* is such

“This album is so much about a journey and trusting that you’ll get to a place where you’re supposed to be. The wind may change, but all you can do is control your sail. I thought that was a nice metaphor for the album.”



Above: Eivør’s new album, *Segl*.

Below: recording her debut album.

a fitting title,” she says. “This album is so much about a journey and trusting that you’ll get to a place where you’re supposed to be. The wind may change, but all you can do is control your sail. I thought that was a nice metaphor for the album.”

Segl is built from personal experience. Eivør started working on the album four years ago, but was forced to navigate various obstacles that threatened to halt her progress. “There were so many

things that got in the way and I had to stop many times,” she recalls. “It’s been a chaotic period. I changed my management three times over the last four years and I’ve also been very busy writing music for TV shows and video games. I threw myself into doing a lot more collaborations with different people around the world as well. All of these things really affected the sound of the album and the topics of the songs, which became so much about change. It’s been a new chapter for me.”

This newfound freedom is reflected in *Segl*’s music. It’s a rich and thoughtful abstraction of billowy prog folk and moody electronica, mostly shaped by strings, piano and synths, kicked along by programmed beats and trip hop rhythms. Partly guided by her producer/composer husband Tróndur Bogason, Eivør has never sounded so expansive. “I wanted to do it differently this time,” she says. “I wanted to connect with my folky side, but also go all the way with the electronic side of things. Songs like *Stirdur Saknur* and *Gullspunnin* are pointing very much both ways.”

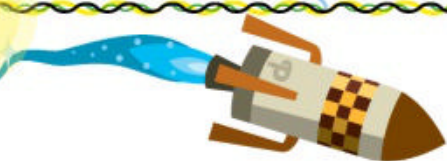
For Eivør, music and landscape are forever intertwined. She may be speaking to *Prog* from her current home in Copenhagen, but the Faroe Islands are never far from her thoughts. It’s somewhere she returns to on a regular basis, for a month at a time. The unique terrain and inconstant climate find expression in the sensory shifts and tones of her work. “I see it as the core of everything I do, in a way,” she offers. “I feel like I’m looking for something within me, a sound or a certain mood. And that’s very much in the landscape of the place I come from. It’s something that becomes part of your inner world. I’ve always been fascinated by strong contrasts, which is very much in the Faroese landscape, filled with light and dark. It does affect people. There’s



Eivør in 2020: plenty
of wind in her sails.



THE OUTER LIMITS



a certain emotion that comes out. Visual artists from the Faroe Islands tend to be very abstract, creating these dark and melancholic paintings.”

Eivør grew up in Syðrugøta, a tiny village at the top of the island chain, facing the North Atlantic. With a population of around 400, community gatherings were a key part of her early life. People would often get together to share stories and play traditional folk music. Nothing was more inspiring, however, than her own family. Her mother sang, her dad wrote poetry.

“My mum would sing in choirs and around the house,” she explains. “She has a beautiful voice, but she never even thought of becoming a professional singer. That just wasn’t something you would consider. It was the same for my father. He worked in the oil business, but when he was at home he’d be painting and writing poems. He never saw himself as a true poet, but to me he was. There was always a lot of creativity going on at home.”

By the age of 11 or 12, Eivør was writing songs and performing them at family gatherings and birthday parties. Her musical diet at that point mainly consisted of traditional Faroese folk tunes, often sung as duets with her great-grandfather: “In our family, singing was a very natural thing to do.”

Music from wider spheres also began to take hold, notably prog. “I absolutely love Pink Floyd,” she says. “I have two brothers who are much older than me. They had huge speakers and they’d crank this music up in their room. Their friends would be over and they’d all be smoking, and I’d be outside their door, listening to this incredible music. Sometimes when they weren’t home I’d go in there, crank it up and go crazy. I love progressive music.”

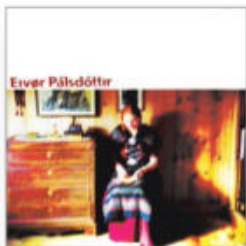
News of Eivør’s rare vocal talent soon got around. A few years after scooping top honours in a national singing contest, she was invited to join a rock band. She was still only 15. “I started as a singer in a band called Clickhaze, which was like a trip-hop-rock band,” she recalls. “That’s when it kind of took off for me. I remember thinking, ‘Oh my God, I want to be a musician!’”

Clickhaze played gigs wherever they could – church halls, caves, rowing boats. Within a year she’d begun recording a debut LP, *Eivør Pálsdóttir*. Issued on Kristian Blak’s Tutl label in 2000, the album was firmly planted in Faroese culture, comprising old and new folk ballads, accompanied by a trio of jazz players that included Blak on double bass. Eivør is pictured on the



A fledgling talent:
Eivør at 11 years old.

Eivør’s first album.
She wore traditional dress for the sleeve.



Eivør with Clickhaze
in 1999.



“I wanted to do it differently this time. I wanted to connect with my folky side, but also go all the way with the electronic side of things.”

sleeve in traditional dress. “It was important to me that I was wearing the national gown,” she says. “And I took the photos for the artwork in the oldest house in my hometown. I really wanted to go back to my roots and bring everything that I knew. Before I made the album I travelled across the Faroe Islands and recorded old people singing traditional folk songs. I was completely obsessed with all that at the time.

“The fact that the Faroe Islands have been so isolated from the rest of the world makes those old songs so unique,” Eivør continues. “Instruments weren’t



Left: Eivør in 2012.
Top: Yggdrasil.
Middle: Eivør as
Marilyn Monroe.
Bottom: as Marilyn,
with the composer
Gavin Bryars.

available until much later, so the melodies of the folk songs are very free. And the same song would be different from village to village, because people would make up their own versions of it. I find that really interesting, because it reminds me of jazz. Everyone is just doing their own interpretation. Plus traditional Faroese music is a lot about stomping into the floor. It's almost like doom metal, super-slow."

The same innate curiosity has served as Eivør's lodestar throughout her career. Alongside her spell in Clickhaze, she's also been a part of Yggdrasil

(Kristian Blak's avant-jazz ensemble), has sung with the Faroese symphony orchestra and collaborated with classical musician Gavin Bryars on a chamber opera based on the life of Marilyn Monroe, for which she played the title role. "I really saw it as a schooling and wanted to try it all," she reasons. "All these elements somehow became part of me and the way I create my own music."

Like all the best prog artists, she's an inveterate explorer. Eivør's albums feature an array of mastered languages – Danish, Icelandic, English, Swedish, Norwegian. Her dedication and work ethic are just as remarkable. In 2017, for example, she recorded an entirely new configuration of *Slør*, originally released in Faroese, for the UK market.

She relocated to Reykjavik in Iceland after leaving school because, she wanted "to learn proper vocal technique, to be classically trained." It was a five-year apprenticeship that continues to pay dividends in the form of her dynamic range and heart-stoppingly gymnastic voice.

Potentially, Eivør is the Faroe Islands' first international superstar. Her songs have been used on the trailer for *Game Of Thrones*, as well as *Homeland*, Sony Playstation flagship *God Of War* (for which she performed to a global audience of 50 million at its launch in LA) and, most recently, BBC/Netflix saga *The Last Kingdom*. "[Series composer] John Lunn contacted me a few years ago," she says. "He'd been looking for a Nordic voice and heard one of my songs, *Trøllabundin*, on YouTube. He asked if I was up for singing on a track that he'd written, so I went to London and we worked together. It was the start of a beautiful collaboration. We're working on season five now."

Given the cinematic sweep of Eivør's music, which reaches its apogee on *Segl*, it's fitting that it takes cues from the medium of film. One of the reasons for the album's long gestation was her involvement with *The Last Kingdom*. "Some of the new songs were inspired by things that I've done for the show," she says. "I'd been writing melodies over droney soundscapes with a deep-sounding drum pulse underneath, which calls for a certain emotion and openness. That whole mood has made its way onto *Segl*. I think music and film make such a strong duo. It's like two dimensions of the same fantasy. That's really where I like to be." 🎧

Segl is out now. See www.eivor.com for more information.



YOUR SHOUT!

From avant-jazz and throat singing, to folk-infused trip hop: is Eivør Pálsdóttir prog or not? Over to you!

"Her music spans folk, jazz, electronic and rock and adds a bit of Kate Bush, so yes, it's progressive for me with a mix of new and traditional sounds. The song *Silvitni* has it all."

Bryan7019

"She is incredible. Is what she does prog? Who cares, frankly. All I know is that her albums are amazing."

Dave Cooper

"In as much as she takes elements of folk, pop, rock, and whatever else... she's certainly progressive."

Graham Tennick

"She's amazing, especially live. Take a listen to *Falling Free* and tell me you don't get shivers down your spine. That voice!"

Mark Tiplady

"A great voice with similarities to Kate Bush. But hardly worthy of inclusion in *Prog*. Listening to *Trøllabundin* on her *Slør* album, I'd compare her to Mari Boine Persen."

Brian Stanbrook

"Who?"

Alan Hyde

"She's an absolute must for me. Wonderful voice with the progressive writing that matches Kate Bush."

John Polston

"She's super-amazing. I hope you'll feature her!!! I'm so looking forward to reading about it."

Miriam Cadoni

"Who? Was that a typing error? Never heard of them."

Steve Harrison

"??? Could be Elbow ???"

James Shardlow

"Another of the crop of amazing women creating barrier-defying music at the moment. I'd file alongside Jane Weaver, Anna von Hausswolff, Susanna Wallumrød, Chelsea Wolfe, Cate Le Bon and more. All musically different, but definitely fitting under the prog umbrella."

Fiona Milsome

"I think she's a bit like Kate Bush on occasion and that's good enough for me."

Ben Wilson

"Why do you feature this rubbish?"

Clive Ekkersley

"I'd not heard of her before but caught a few live streams in lockdown last year after I saw them on the *Prog* website. I now have five of her albums - she certainly fits the prog genre as far as I'm concerned."

Alvin Jones

"She sounds like Kate Bush. I can't stand Kate Bush. Enough said."

Matthew Bevington

"I think she's amazing. Proggy enough for me. Always good to see more and more female artists creeping into the prog world."

Anne Bevan

"Yawns and immediately turns the page to find some proper music!"

Howard Baker

The year was 2004 and Jem Godfrey was enjoying significant commercial success writing for pop acts including Atomic Kitten and Holly Valance. But while a string of hit singles had proved lucrative he felt stifled creatively. He approached Arena/Kino's John Mitchell and the idea for a new progressive project called Frost* was born.

Released in 2006, Frost*'s debut, *Milliontown*, was a groundbreaking album. From opening instrumental romp *Hyperventilate* via the thrilling *Black Light Machine* to the extraordinary 26-minute tour de force of the closing title track, this was prog as never heard before. Indeed, given Godfrey's abhorrence of repeating himself, it's prog as never heard since either.

Frost*'s musical career has since encompassed two further studio albums, 2008's knowingly titled *Experiments In Mass Appeal* and 2016's *Falling Satellites*. Remixed and remastered versions of all three studio albums, together with two live albums,

Fifteen years after its original release, *Milliontown* still sounds fresh and exciting, and serves as an enduring foundation for one of this millennium's most progressive bands. But Godfrey has never taken Frost* too seriously. "There's a degree of irreverence with Frost*," he laughs. "A lot of bands are very serious. We provide an antidote to the tremendous pomposity that progressive rock can suffer from. I hope that we're the Monty Python of prog. It's our mission statement to balance the universe."

That irreverence arguably extends beyond Frost*'s creative endeavours into business matters. "The band are a very expensive hobby," Godfrey admits. "I've never made money out of Frost*. The occasional advance gets spent on making the next album. I looked at my Sony royalty statement yesterday; I'm 30 grand in the hole."

But Frost* were never intended as a money-making enterprise. Instead, Godfrey conceived Frost* as a purely artistically driven counterbalance to his pop music work. Indeed, his original plan was to record a private progressive music project. "The initial plan wasn't to release it," he recalls. "The idea was a guerilla release of 100 CDs – I'd go to a couple of prog gigs, dump the CD, and vanish. In many ways I wish I'd done that because it would've been hilarious."

Instead, Frost* signed a deal with InsideOut (part of Sony) and morphed into a proper band. Has this impacted Godfrey's enjoyment of the group?

"I love Frost* when we record; I hate it when we tour," he replies. "Frost* 



The eight-CD art book, *13 Winters*.

"A lot of bands are very serious. We provide an antidote to the tremendous pomposity that progressive rock can suffer from. I hope that we're the Monty Python of prog. It's our mission statement to balance the universe."

an instrumental version of *Falling Satellites*, last year's *Others* EP and a rarities collection, make up the recently released eight-CD art book, *13 Winters*.

The package features revised and expanded artwork by designer Paul Tippet, aka Vitamin P. "The idea was to have a montage of all the Frost* artwork, put together in a new context," Godfrey explains. "My brief to Paul was that I was remixing and remastering the music and could he do the same with the artwork: pull it apart and put it back together in a slightly different way to give it a new lease of life. He made it quite melancholy, creating this brilliant world that's wintry, dark and lovely. He did an absolutely amazing job."

As such, *13 Winters* documents, sonically and visually, a career that's been both compelling and haphazard, but never dull.



Top left, L-R: John Mitchell, Jem Godfrey, Andy Edwards and John Jowitt in 2006.



Left, L-R: Nathan King, Jem Godfrey, Craig Blundell, John Mitchell.

Below: the three studio albums and EP.



Jem Godfrey, shot
exclusively for *Prog* at
home in November 2020.

SEASON'S END

Now in their 15th year, **Frost*** have earned themselves a place at the table of modern neo prog. Following the release of the *13 Winters* collection, co-founding keyboardist Jem Godfrey surveys the band's history and offers insight into their future.

Words: Nick Shilton **Portraits:** Will Ireland

was designed to be a recording project. *Milliontown* wasn't written to be gigged. It doesn't translate well on the road."

As Prog speaks to him, Godfrey is close to completing work on Frost's fourth album, *Day And Age*, which will open a new era for the band. "I'm having a lovely time currently — it's brilliant fun. But I'm not happy in a rehearsal room in Guildford on a Sunday afternoon when I could be at home having roast chicken. I'm now getting to the point where I'm becoming old and grumpy enough to realise I don't have to gig if I don't want to."

Beyond Godfrey's reluctance towards playing live, he states that Frost* have a finite lifespan. "Way back I said, 'Five albums and out' and I may stick to that."

However, the keyboardist has form for executing the occasional volte face, having dissolved Frost* subsequent to their first tour following the release of *Milliontown*, before hastily reconvening a revised line-up for *Experiments...* "I was definitely manic and wish I'd been less of a hothead at the start," he concedes. "I had youthful impetuosity, if you can still be impetuous aged 35. Deciding to split the band up and then changing my mind

was a direct reaction to the pressure. Second albums always aren't as fun as the first album. I had nine months to do *Experiments...* If I had taken a couple years off after *Milliontown* and then come back to it, *Experiments...* would have been a very different album."

As such, whether Godfrey follows through on calling time on Frost* after another two albums is a moot point.

"Never say never!" he says laughing. "But with the greatest respect to them, Frost* shouldn't be like Yes. I don't want to be banging out albums when I'm 70. One of my biggest prog heroes is Martin Orford. I loved it when he said, 'I've had enough and I'm retiring.' He had really good reasons, stuck by them and went off and did his steam trains. Brilliant! I like the idea of things being finite, because then you can enjoy the journey."

As for that journey, Godfrey insists that Frost* need to continue to break new ground, failing which they become redundant.

"Frost* have got to have something new to say. You should always know when to leave a party and quit while you're ahead, before you're staggering around and can't string a sentence together. I'm not saying it's definitely 'five albums and out'. But when we run out

Godfrey is watched over by a Cyberman at home.



Reimaginings from designer Paul Tippett in the *13 Winters* art book.



of things to say, it would be elegant to do something else.”

There was an eight-year gap between *Experiments...* and *Falling Satellites*. Aside from demands on his professional time from the pop world (including work with Take That’s Gary Barlow), Godfrey won’t make another Frost* album for the sake of it without a clear and fresh musical vision. “People say, ‘Do another *Milliontown!*’ But what’s the point? It’d be like *Tubular Bells 2* — disappointing. I’m not influenced by what I was

“If Frost* were making me a quarter of a million quid a year, it would be my absolute priority. It would be amazing how I could find the time for it! But as an expensive hobby, it gets the time it deserves.”

listening to 10 years ago. New music’s come along, new musicians have arrived. Frost* fanatically try to do what we have not done before. The downside is it takes time to come up with something new to say. Occasionally we piss people off, but our *raison d’être* is always to do something interesting.”

Godfrey’s determination to pickaxe new musical ground means that each of Frost*’s studio albums has a distinctive identity. But it’s taken significant time to forge that identity and Frost* have never been Godfrey’s sole musical focus, which may in turn have limited the band’s progress commercially.

“If Frost* were making me a quarter of a million quid a year, it would be my absolute priority,” Godfrey admits. “It would be amazing how I could find the time for it! But as an expensive hobby, it gets the time it deserves.”

Indeed, Godfrey has been juggling completing *Day And Age* with work for Barlow. “In terms of priority I’ve got to do that because it’s more lucrative. In these Covid times, I’m extremely lucky that I’m a studio-based musician,” he continues. “Frost* will always be the unfortunate runt of the litter in terms of what I do to make a living. What Frost* gives me though, which the other things don’t, is complete artistic freedom. Frost* is really good for my musical mental health. Unfortunately, when other paying work comes in, I have to put Frost* down for a bit.”

Perhaps, consequently, playing live has long been Frost*’s Achilles heel. “We let ourselves down sometimes live,” Godfrey willingly volunteers. “We’ve always been a bit ropey because we’re perennially under-rehearsed.”

The band’s most recent live shows onboard *Cruise To The Edge* in early 2019 saw them performing at their best, notably having rehearsed together for a week. That experience has made Godfrey determined that future Frost* live shows will be more disciplined.

“We’ve never done playing live decently and it’s one of the last things to tick off the list. What irritates me most about the band is that we’re always a bit shit live: we’re a pub band in many respects. It would be nice to get above that and I think we’d be playing bigger venues now if we’d taken gigging more seriously. But I don’t really enjoy it, so it’s a weird tension within myself. However we’re talking about hiring a lighting designer and getting into a production rehearsal.

I’ve already designed a lighting rig. It’s going to cost an arm and a leg, but it’s worth doing properly.”

Before any shows, Godfrey’s focusing not only on *Day And Age* but also on what may — or may not — be Frost*’s fifth and final album, provisionally titled *Uhtceare* (old English apparently for ‘lying in bed at night worrying’).

Godfrey was clearly Frost*’s instigator and he remains their driving force. However, having co-written together for the first time on *Falling Satellites*, he regards guitarist/vocalist and sole other Frost* evergreen John Mitchell (*Lonely Robot/It Bites*) as his key creative partner in the band. “Frost* started off as my thing, still has my name over the door and I’m the one that has to get his wallet out. But it’s now very much me and John, with Nathan King [bass].”

Godfrey and Mitchell each employ a different *modus operandi* when it comes to writing — Godfrey prefers to create, collect and ruminate over ideas for a period, whereas Mitchell writes in a more concertinaed manner. “I still write things on my own, but not as much. John and I have this brilliant writing partnership now. We respect and complement each other very nicely. We brainstorm and debate ideas musically and always hear each other out; he’s a great musical foil for me. We have a very basic maxim, which is ‘serve the song’. That’s what it’s about.”

According to Godfrey, *Day And Age* is a “much more spacious-sounding album.” He adds, “There’s some bits you could drive a bus through! We’ve completely banned soloing and 32nd notes generally. It sounds a lot more grown up. There are clever arrangements but no solos — we would rather do something clever as a band rather than one of us do that.” ☺

13 *Winters* is out now via *InsideOut*. See www.frost.life for more information.

Breaking News



Thirty years into their career, **Jump** have made their most charged album to date. In a candid conversation, John Dexter Jones takes *Prog* to the dark heart of *Breaking Point*.

Words: Grant Moon **Portrait:** Sound Marketing

“We had domestic politics to worry about in Wales in the 80s,” says Jump’s singer and polemicist-in-chief, Bangor-born John Dexter Jones, “with Thatcher and [the Battle of] Orgreave and things like that. I remember predicting, when I was leaving uni in 1984, that, domestically, this would visit us again. But not even I would have anticipated that breakdown of conscience on the world stage.”

Prog is in the throes of an animated conversation about populism, Brexit, Trump, the Middle East — the whole geo-political quagmire we’ve all been in for, well, it seems like forever, doesn’t it? And Jump’s current album, *Breaking Point*, is just steeped in that zeitgeist. “Lots of Jump albums are concept albums,” says Jones, “not in that traditional prog sense, but on this one I wanted us to jump in the swimming pool of prog with both feet. Simply put, it’s about how refugees became pariahs.”

UK readers might remember UKIP’s highly controversial pro-Leave poster campaign during the 2016 EU referendum — the one

featuring a long line of migrants with the words ‘Breaking Point’ emblazoned across it. Jones does, and he was — and remains — absolutely sickened by it: “They were showing pictures of lines of brown refugees on the side of a lorry, for a political argument about Europe. This was coming out of playbooks from before World War II. People say: ‘Nobody’s talking about this in music.’ Yes, they fucking are! Maybe coming from Sting or [Coldplay’s] Chris Martin it’d carry more weight, but I’ve been doing it for 40 years, 30 of them in Jump.”

Recorded remotely by the six members during lockdown, Jump’s 14th album is the heaviest and darkest of their long career. *Breaking Point* simply drips in righteous indignation. Delivered with utter conviction by Jones, its scathing partisan poetry is set to melodic, moody rock that’s nuanced and packed with ideas, heart and guts.

The urgent title track writes the album’s theme in

bus-big letters: ‘Drawbridge up, don’t look down, arrows loosed, there’s so much fear in the walled town [...] See the long lines snaking their way [...] We can’t take you here we’ve got no more space, we’re at breaking point.’ Here and elsewhere Steve Hayes and Ronnie Rundle’s twin guitar lines give the band’s neo-friendly music a hard rock crunch. The metallic, 7/8 lollop of *The Voices* even hints at NWOBHM roots — a little Iron Maiden, but a little Wishbone Ash too.

The Voices was inspired by images of Iraqi troops retreating from Kuwait during the first Gulf War, their convoy obliterated by allied forces.

The Widow considers a veteran of the second Gulf War, his traumatic experience seen from the perspective of his wife back home. A scabrous look at our lords and masters (post-expenses scandal), *The King* sets

Jones’ rancorous wit to a celtic, Fairport-folky beat, while

“Not to kiss anyone’s arse, but *Prog Magazine* has played a fundamental part in connecting bands of our level with the audience. It’s great to go to HRH Prog and play to bigger audiences. Happy days! We’ll stand or fall by how good we are onstage.”



John Dexter Jones and Ronnie Rundle, photographed for *Prog*. The rest of the band were in lockdown so unable to attend the shoot. Sign o’ the times, eh?

The Cellar rests on a big gothic guitar riff that's explicable claustrophobic. "That song could be about Stalingrad," says Jones, "or it could be Homs, but these are people."

"When I was rehearsing in the school hall as a kid, I wasn't wondering if there would be tripwires outside when I went to get water. It's a bit dramatic, but that is what it's like for people. It's about holding this up and saying, 'This is what it seems like to me – what do you think?' There's an artistic duty to do that. A lot of friends of mine are artists – proper ones, as opposed to people who learned to shout! – and the stuff they produce just comes out of them. I do feel a bit like that, and would feel bad if I didn't."

Jump have come a long way. Formed in Buckinghamshire in 1990, they gigged five nights a week for that whole decade, hustling for and dreaming of the fabled Record Deal. Then in the 2000s they stuck to a circuit of



Ronnie and John didn't 'contain' their anger when it came to the new album's lyrics.

"In High Wycombe alone we could play The Nag's Head on Sunday lunchtime, then The Flint Cottage and the Halfway House and the Rose And Crown and the Roundabout, and playing original material in them too. That was true of Reading, Chester, Birkenhead. Then we'd drive home and go to work. It was great fun."

self-organised and self-promoted shows and developed their acoustic act, which meant they could play smaller, unplugged-style shows. Today, new bands struggle to find venues that will let them play their own music but in the 90s, Jones says, it was very different. "In High Wycombe alone we could play The Nag's Head on Sunday lunchtime, then The Flint Cottage

Prog. "Not to kiss anyone's arse," says Jones, "but *Prog* Magazine has played a fundamental part in connecting bands of our level with the audience. It's great to go to HRH Prog and play to bigger audiences. Happy days! We'll stand or fall by how good we are onstage."

The upturn in the scene that's embraced them and Jump's longevity have helped them

Germany, or Poland, or Lithuania, and their newly inked deal with the label F2 should help their word spread further from here on in.

Given this level of connection, how long they've been at it, their high-profile shows and the quality of certain albums (2013's *The Black Pilgrim*, 2010's *The Beachcomber* among them), you can't help but wonder why, in the overall scheme of things, they aren't just a little bigger than they are. "Maybe we're too eclectic," considers Jones, "or have too broad a palette? We're possibly Marmite? Many people are genre-led, but we've never hung our hat on sounding like this or like that. It's always been about what ideas have come into our collective heads. Maybe we should've hustled the media a bit more... but, who? *Kerrang!*? They gave us three out of five stars 'cos we weren't metal!"

And, of course, success is a subjective term, so when people do ask Jones why Jump haven't been more successful he has a stock answer. "I tend to ask them, 'Well, how successful have you been at what you do? Have you got 14 albums out and two live albums that you've sold all the copies of? Have you toured with a few of your heroes? Don't tell me about success.' If you'd told me as a young man in 1982, sitting and having a few pints after the football, that you will play the Forum, you'll play with Marillion, Midge Ure and Fish, and shoot the breeze with Wishbone Ash's drummer Ray Weston..." He trails off with a placating laugh, his point well made.

Clearly there's still plenty of fire in this band's belly. Jump's 2020 anniversary shows were scuppered by you-know-what, and have been tentatively rebooked for November. Whatever the future holds – for them, for the world – Jones for one can't imagine himself not doing this. "We want people to like our music and be moved by it. When you do that – and I know this sounds wanky – it does transcend something, and I want more of that. It's that human connection I want." 🎵

Breaking Point is out now via F2 Music.
See www.jumprock.co.uk for more information.



L-R: John Dexter Jones, Ronnie Rundle, Andy Barker, Mark Pittam, Steve Hayes, Mo.

and the Halfway House and the Rose And Crown and the Roundabout, and playing original material in them too. That was true of Reading, Chester, Birkenhead. Then we'd drive home and go to work. It was great fun."

They've supported Marillion numerous times, and Fish solo too. Over the past decade they've surfed the wave of prog rock's resurgence, with appearances at quality festivals – Winter's End, Summer's End, HRH

achieve modest yet consistent album sales, from formative 1991 debut *The Winds Of Change* to 2016's well-received *Over The Top*, via 1995's *The Myth Of Independence* (produced by Marillion's Mark Kelly, and still their bestseller). Recently a Swiss fan bought their entire catalogue on CD from their Bandcamp site, plus a digital version of each to tide him over until his physical copies arrived. Every now and again they'll shift a box of records in

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AND MORE!

From the front window of his Reykjavík home, Georg Hólm can see a beautiful mountain, just a 15-minute drive away. “There are a lot of desolate, colourful places in Iceland,” he says, “but drive through the landscape and two minutes later you’ll be in lush, soft green colours. Everything here seems like it’s made up of colours and ice.”

Iceland holds a singular place in the world’s cultural imagination. From its geography to its language, its myths to its music, this beautiful and desolate country feels familiar yet strangely alien, and remote almost to the point of aloofness. Sigur Rós couldn’t really have come from anywhere else.

L-R: Georg Hólm, Kjartan Sveinsson, Jónsi, Orri Páll Dýrason.

Hólm’s English is excellent. He gives considered answers in soft yet decisive tones, and when *Prog* broaches the subject of how the band’s cultural identity has informed their music over their 27-year career, the bassist/multi-instrumentalist politely stifles a laugh. “We often get asked this,” he says, “so all of us in the band have been able to contemplate it a lot. Always the environment you’re in will inspire you in some way, maybe not directly, but where you’re brought up – the hours you spend there and the landscape around you – definitely shapes people.”

It’s hard to think of another group that’s shaped such a deeply eclectic and idiosyncratic catalogue, an intelligent, beautiful cross-

Ragnarök 'n' Roll

Written more than 18 years ago, *Odin’s Raven Magic* is the kind of thoughtful slice of Norse mythology only a band like **Sigur Rós** could get away with. In the band’s first interview for *Prog*, bassist Georg Hólm looks back at the making of a remarkable record, their remarkable past, and unclear future.

Words: Grant Moon **Portrait:** Eva Vermandel

“We’ve done so many different albums, it has always come naturally to us. It’s not often we go in and say we want to make *this* kind of record. We just write a bunch of songs and then realise, ‘Oh we have a full record here, we should release it.’”

pollination of genres that’s thrilled audiences and critics alike. Sigur Rós (it means ‘Victory Rose’ in their native tongue) are just at home on the festival stage as in the concert hall.

“That’s an interesting point,” Hólm muses.

“We’ve always tended not to think about it and just do things that we like, but I guess 



not every band has played these prestigious classical music halls and then a rock stage at a festival. It's fun, it's a very broad spectrum of people who seem to like our music. We're all grateful for being where we are – Icelandic boys singing in Icelandic and touring the world, playing in front of people who enjoy it. We treasure it. It's amazing."

Characterised by singer Jónsi's emotional voice and ethereal falsetto, the Sigur Rós sound brings together strands of ambient, post-rock, orchestral/classical, minimalism and alternative music. Take their best-known tune – *Hoppípolla* from 2005's brilliant *Takk...* (52.5 million Spotify plays and rising). This monolithic UK Top 30 hit caught the public's imagination and was synced on everything from trailers for David Attenborough's sweeping natural history series *Planet Earth* to adverts for Oxfam. Not bad for a progressive symphonic piece, sung in Icelandic, and with occasional lines in Vonlenska or 'Hopelandic' – the band's very own artificial language. The only other artists that come to mind that have successfully coined their own dialects are those curators of Kobaian, Magma, and the Cocteau Twins' Elizabeth Fraser (who's a guest on Jónsi's current solo album, *Shiver*).

Like Radiohead, who took Sigur Rós under their wing and on the road in the early 2000s, they resist easy categorisation. Core albums *Takk...*, *Ágætis Byrjun* (1999/2000), *()* (2002) and *Með Suð í Eyrum Við Spilum Endalaust* (2008) show how they can hit a rare sweet spot between otherworldly atmospherics and mournful melodic rock. But there's artistic intransigence to them, too. The abstruse soundtrack to a 24-hour trip around Iceland's main ring road, 2017's *Route One* was a lesson in sonic experimentation. Here their song *Óveður* was randomly reinterpreted by a piece of software that never generated the same version of the tune twice. A groundbreaking and testing listen, it clocked in at 24 hours and 370 tracks; the edited edition was just 40 minutes and eight pieces, their titles taken from geographical coordinates (who can forget the snappy 65°27'29.1"N 15°31'56.0"W?). Listen carefully and you can almost hear the sound of record executives tearing their hair out.

"We've never felt any pressure from any labels," says Hólm with a gentle yet icy firmness. "That's one of the things they know when they take us onboard – they know that we just do what we want to do. We've done so many different albums, it has always come naturally to us. It's not often we go in and say we want to make *this* kind of record. We just write a bunch of songs and then realise, 'Oh we have a full record here, we should release it.'

Core albums: *Ágætis Byrjun* (1999/2000), *()* (2002), *Takk...* (2005) and *Með Suð í Eyrum Við Spilum Endalaust* (2008).



Where the wild roses grow: Sigur Rós are snapped in Reykjavík, Iceland, in 1997.

That's how they each have an exciting feel to them. At the point we were making the last album, *Kveikur* [2013], we thought maybe it should be a little more aggressive, and that was it – we said nothing else and started writing. It's always a natural process."

In 2002 that process led them to collaborate with a fascinating figure in Icelandic culture. Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson is a religious chief in the Ásatrú Fellowship, a heathen religious sect recognised in the country in 1973. (In that capacity he presided over Georg Hólm's marriage to his wife, Svanhvít, in 2005.) But

he's also a cult figure on the Icelandic music scene, composing award-winning film scores and playing in bands such as new wave outfit Peyr and David Tibet's Current 93. An erudite man with progressive, enlightened views, he's actively involved with Iceland's ecological movement too. "Hilmar's a very wise man," says Hólm, "a master of so many things – he's unique. He's a fantastic character – it's great being in the same room as him telling stories about things, he's the best storyteller."

Hilmarsson's talent is rooted in his vast knowledge of Norse mythology and folklore. When Reykjavík Arts Festival approached him to write a piece for their 2002 event, he contacted Sigur Rós with the idea of a work based on *Odin's Raven Magic* (*Hrafnagaldur Óðins*), a poem taken from the Edda, Iceland's rich medieval literary canon. It tells the story of the Norse god Odin sending two ravens across the world, and those birds returning to him with portents of doom that spell the end

Odin's Raven Magic takes flight onstage at La Grande Halle de la Villette, Paris, September in 2004.

PRESS/ MJB STALLMEYER



“Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson is a very wise man, a master of so many things – he’s unique. He’s a fantastic character – it’s great being in the same room as him telling stories about things, he’s the best storyteller.”

Sigur Rós soak up the applause after performing Odin's Raven Magic live.

PRESS/ MJB STALLMEYER



of the worlds of both the gods and mankind.

The poem is part of the Edda’s overarching narrative of *Ragnarök* – a great final battle that will sweep away the old world and make way for the new. While the poem had long been discredited as fake, by 2002 it had been re-evaluated by scholars and readmitted to the canon. “Hilmar had wanted to do something with this poem for a long time,” recalls Hólm, “and it seemed to fit perfectly. We all contributed to the composition, it was a true collaboration. We created little riffs then added to them with strings and a lot of electric instruments, samplers as well as guitar, bass and drums. We felt free, that we could do whatever we wanted to do. A lot of



Odin's Raven Magic.

the ideas came from us playing around with the stone marimba.”

A sonic trademark of *Odin's Raven Magic*, that custom-made marimba was hewn from 70-plus unprocessed pieces of stone by Icelandic artist and sculptor Páll Guðmundsson. Spanning five octaves, it often took Hólm, Hilmarsson, Jónsi and another member of the ensemble to play the

parts. Also on the project was violinist Maria Huld Markan Sigfúsdóttir from Amiina. She and her husband, Sigur Rós’ then-keyboardist Kjartan Sveinsson, took on the lion’s share of arrangement for the orchestra and choir, with lead vocals performed by Steindór Andersen.

A fishing boat captain by trade, Andersen is also a renowned guardian of Icelandic folk

traditions. He had worked with Sigur Rós on the 2001 EP *Rímur*, a selection of chants drawing on epic Icelandic narratives, and he sings the poem here, in the original medieval Icelandic. *Odin's Raven Magic* is an entrancing, highbrow listen, with classical and rock forms colliding as the band, orchestra and choir come together in spinetingling form.

Andersen’s chants top the soaring symphony.

The performance on the album was recorded in 2004 at La Grande Halle de la Villette in Paris, with the choir of the Schola Cantorum of Reykjavík and L’Orchestre des Laureats du Conservatoire National de Paris. The piece debuted at London’s Barbican Centre in April 2002, before transferring to its patron festival in Reykjavík the month after.

“We did two days of rehearsals before The Barbican,” recalls Hólm, “and it didn’t really work as we wanted it – it didn’t flow. At the hotel, Kjartan, Maria and Hilmar were running around, printing new sheet music and tearing their hair out trying to make it work! It was quite stressful. But we got it right and performed it a few times after that. It was hard work, but we never really found the right time to release the music. It was just sitting there.”

Odin's Raven Magic entered Sigur Rós’ lore as a curate’s egg. Clips have existed on YouTube ever since, but Hólm is glad that the definitive version is now available. “We’ve been messing about with it for so long, in the end we just said, ‘Let’s stop thinking about it and let go of it.’ We haven’t released anything in a while either, so it just felt right. I think it’s perfect timing. The world is going to hell, and the poem is about the beginning of the end, it’s about how the gods know that this is the end for everyone! But with every end there’s a beginning. That’s what *Ragnarök* is.”

And what of the band in 2021? In 2019 the Icelandic court dismissed a long-running, six-figure tax evasion case against them but the case was reopened in late 2020 and they’re due in the docks again. Sveinsson left the ranks in 2013 and drummer Orri Páll Dýrason departed ignominiously in 2018 – Hólm and Jónsi are the only full-time bandmembers, and the latter is on the solo trail. Their last new-new material came more than seven years ago, and they haven’t played live in more than three years. Add to that a new generation of musicians sublimating the band’s sweeping soundscape as a template, and is it possible Sigur Rós are facing a *Ragnarök* of their own?

Hólm smiles, fjord-cool about it all. “We won’t be planning anything for a while. Jónsi is busy with his record, I’m working on some music on my own, just playing around. I’m glad to have this break. Listening to the radio sometimes I can hear someone who has been influenced by the music maybe, and that always makes me smile. It’s fantastic if you can inspire someone to create something else. I suppose it is like *Ragnarök* – when something comes to an end something new comes out of it. But that’s not us, not yet. We’re not coming to an end – we’re just getting old...” 🕯

Odin's Raven Magic is out now via Krunck. See www.sigurros.com for more information.

SOLACE IN

With the world at a standstill, Australian band **Teramaze** had nothing left to do but write new music. Together and from afar, this is the story of the making of their most emotionally focused album to date.

Words: Phil Weller

Images: Karina Wells

In June 2019, Teramaze were celebrating the release of their seventh studio album, *Are We Soldiers*. Little could the progressive metal quartet have anticipated that, as they raised a toast to the record, just 16 months later they'd be repeating the process in slightly more surreal circumstances. But if 2020 taught us anything, it's that nothing could be predicted.

"This album [*I Wonder*] poured out of us," recalls the Melbourne band's guitar-slinging founder member, Dean Wells, with an air of disbelief. "We only started writing it in March or April, but we can't leave our homes here so what else were we going to do? I live for writing music and when the inspiration is there you've just got to ride that wave. It's been really nice to keep focused on something positive."

As autumn turned to winter on Australia's south-east coast and the city's golden beaches lay unblemished by footsteps, the band found themselves in a frenzy of creativity. Hunkered down in their respective homes, the band's Dropbox folders filled up with myriad ideas as they sought release through their songwriting.

"It's been a really therapeutic album for me," Wells returns over *Prog*'s video call. "A lot of the melodies and ideas actually came from being so frustrated with all this chaos in the world and not being able to see my family. I'd come into my home studio and sing something just to help relieve whatever I was feeling."

Yet, even for a band whose sound has, since their formation in Geelong in 1993, continually evolved with each release, the writing here feels different. It's emotionally charged, driven

"The record, lyrically, has to do with a friend of mine. He survived living through being sex trafficked in Australia and it's something I didn't realise even existed here."

SOLITUDE

not by its musical content, but by the feelings and the philosophising that were coursing through Wells' head and heart.

"This album is really important to me," he says, becoming more animated as the passion with which he speaks rises. "The record, lyrically, has to do with a friend of mine. He survived living through being sex trafficked in Australia and it's something I didn't realise even existed here. I was recording him at the time, working as producer. He only told me parts of his story but it was so horrific. In just two weeks it changed my life and I wrote all this music off the back of his stories."

The emotional impact his friend's experiences had on Wells scar the record. But that impact doesn't show weakness or pain; it shows strength through survival and sows

hope through its crestfallen foundation.

Between smart, scorching guitar chops and ethereal keyboard lines, the vocals call out from the darkness with a soulful sensitivity.

"I just couldn't get my head around it." Wells looks into the distance as if trying to pluck the right words from the horizon. "His stories blew my mind to how things in the world can seem so different to what they really are. They affected me so much that these songs just came out of me one after the other.

"The whole album isn't about him," he insists, "but it sparked this deeper thinking in me that turned into songs which asked the same questions. And when I shared some of the songs with the other guys they really helped contribute to the emotional side of the record. It was a really heavy album for us" 🕒

Creativity has been pouring out of Teramaze during the pandemic.

“I needed to sing the songs because I was the one affected by this story. I’ve always written the music, I’ve always sung the demos and I’ve always been in the songs doing harmonies and backing, but being *the* singer was a new challenge. But it felt like the right thing to do.”

to do and it took a lot of energy to work on these songs all day, every day, but there was never a point where we felt we didn’t know how to do something. It was almost like there was too much music coming out of us.”

Through the lyrics runs talk of living in fear and dealing with trauma. There are ruminations about the effects our actions can have on others and the desire to save someone from damage already inflicted and being powerless about it. The weight of the lyrics is what makes this record so compelling.

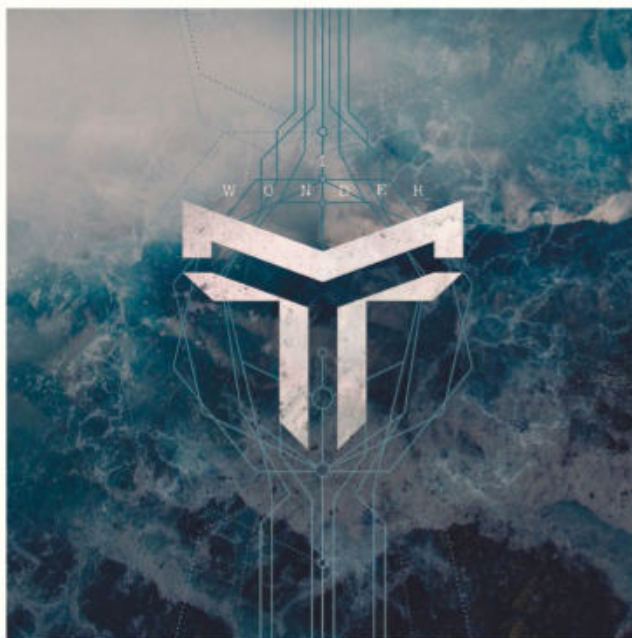
As the writing process gained traction, a crucial decision was made. For the first time in his career, Dean Wells would front the band.

“I wasn’t getting what I wanted from the last singer emotionally [original vocalist Brett Rerekura replaced Nathan Peachey on *Are We Soldiers*],” he adds. “I wasn’t connecting with it. When you have these emotions and someone else is singing it, you can tell them the story and why this song makes you feel a certain way, but it’s never going to feel as legitimate. It’s going to have better conviction to it when you sing it yourself, and the other guys in the band encouraged me to sing on this record.

“I needed to sing the songs because I was the one affected by this story. I’ve always written the music, I’ve always sung the demos and I’ve always been in the songs doing harmonies and backing, but being *the* singer was a new challenge. But it felt like the right thing to do.”

Wells was determined to find hope within the bleakness of some of his subject matter. As he did, he found his new role impacting the way songs were pieced together.

“*Are We Soldiers* was very riff-driven because I wrote those songs [but didn’t sing them]. For *I Wonder* I had to change my approach. I write my vocal melodies almost like a commercial singer where there’s always a very strong vocal



melody at the forefront, so I had to pull back on the riffs and the odd time signatures. I didn’t want to overcomplicate the guitars when I was singing, especially as I’ll have to play and sing at the same time when we can play live again.

“I felt like the vocals should guide the songs, which meant they needed room to breathe. We couldn’t overdo it this time. It was about following the feeling and the emotions of the songs; having space when and where it was needed and stepping it up when it felt right to have the more technical moments.”

Musically, one can hear the grandiosity of Devin Townsend, the glossy production values and vocal melodies of Tesseract and the guitar-propelled grit of Dream Theater, but what’s always prominent is the raw, aching soul of Dean Wells. From the skyscaping *Here To Watch*

You, which takes progressive metal down a hook-strewn path, and the gorgeous, stripped-back *Lake 401*, his voice remains the glistening focal point. By singing these songs, he’s ensured these heartfelt lyrics have been delivered with the warmth and the passion they deserve.

But even with the album in the bag, the band’s creative juices were still flowing.

“We’ve already written the next album,” a smiling Wells discloses. “Once we finished *I Wonder* we had nothing else to do but keep writing. We’ve also got a 25-minute sequel to [2015 album] *Her Halo*, so there’s a big stream of music coming out of us right now.”

Since speaking to Wells, the band have released a standalone single in *Take Your Shot*. Written and recorded in one day and released across streaming platforms less than 24 hours later, the song epitomises the fertility of Teramaze’s purple patch. Propelled by the idea of embracing creativity and positivity during a year that at times has felt bereft of both, the band are evolving exponentially in spite of the atypical backdrop distorting their world.

Under the shadow of these strange, uncertain times, Teramaze are proving that bad news isn’t exclusive. By drawing its music from such a heartfelt place, *I Wonder* can proudly stand as Teramaze’s most poignantly beautiful record to date. Yet, if that shadow had never been cast, this album would never — like lightning bursting from a storm cloud — have illuminated our darkened skyline. ☺

I Wonder is out now. See www.teramaze.com.au for more information.

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THE PROG INTERVIEW

DAVE OBERLÉ

Every month we get inside the mind of one of the biggest names in music. This issue, it's **Dave Oberlé**. As a founder member of **Gryphon**, the percussionist and vocalist was responsible for helping to bring quirkiness and curiosity to the band's musical output. Inspired by medieval and renaissance music, jazz, rock, and folk, Oberlé has remained a constant within the band alongside multi-instrumentalist and vocalist Brian Gulland. He's also guested on albums by Steve Howe, Wire and Gandalf's Fist. He looks back on a life that even led to him working on a metal magazine.

Words: Malcolm Dome

Dave Oberlé is mostly known for being one of the founder members of Gryphon, who were among the truly individual bands on the progressive scene in the 70s. Formed in early 1972, they released five studio albums before splitting up in 1977. While they never enjoyed major commercial success, Gryphon's unique, quirky musical affectations were well received. They also toured incessantly, including the US with Yes in '74.

The percussionist/vocalist has been part of the reactivated band since their reunion in 2015, during which time they've issued two more albums, 2018's *ReInvention* and the recent *Get Out Of My Father's Car!*. And they continue to attract new fans.

Away from Gryphon, Oberlé contributed to the debut album from Wire, 1977's *Pink Flag*, adding backing vocals on the track *Mannequin*. And he was also one of the guest vocalists on Gandalf's Fist's 2014 album *A Forest Of Fey*. Two years later, the band invited him back to sing on *Pastor Simon* from the album *The Clockwork Fable*.

Apart from his musical activities, Oberlé was the first advertising manager of *Kerrang!*

Magazine. In this role, he played a key role in establishing it as the premier heavy metal publication in the 1980s. He was also, until recently, one of the directors of Small Blue, a computer software company.

However, it's his long association with Gryphon that's made Dave Oberlé's reputation in the progressive world. It's astonishing to think the band will celebrate the 50th anniversary of their formation next year!

Do you come from a musical family at all?

Well, my mother played the piano, and that had an influence on me. I recall standing next to her as she played both classical and contemporary stuff.

What was the first instrument you played?

When I was four or five years old, I found a pair of meat skewers in a wooden box and started to use these as makeshift drumsticks. It's fair to say that was my first instrument, and from there I was hooked on the idea of being a drummer.

What appealed to you about becoming a percussionist?

You mean apart from the joy of hitting things?! Well, I had a good sense of rhythm, which I probably inherited

from my mother, and from there I got into how musical sounds were constructed. But from an early age, I knew that I wanted to be a drummer.

Did you have any lessons?

None at all. I am completely self-taught. When I was nine or 10 years old, my parents bought me



Gryphon's latest album, *Get Out Of My Father's Car!*



Dave Oberlé keeping the rhythm in 1972.

“

“We had no plan. It just happened. You could do that sort of thing in the early 70s. The world was our oyster.”

”

a snare and that was my first proper drum. I recall there were always lots of complaints from mum and dad about how loudly I was hitting that snare. Most kids were asked to turn down the stereo or the radio. I was told to dampen the sound of the drum!

Who are your vocal heroes?

I never really had any. To be honest, when I joined Gryphon I didn't even know I could sing. By that I mean I knew I could carry a tune, but had never tried it in public before. Brian Gulland was a trained chorister and had perfect pitch, so he seemed the obvious choice as the band's vocalist. However, it turned out that I had a decent voice, and that's why I ended up doing most of the vocals on our first, self-titled album [released in 1973].

What was your first band?

Well, I was in quite a few while at school. One of them was with Philip Nestor, who was Gryphon's original bassist. I was 13 or 14 years old at the time and we didn't even have a name. I suppose the first proper band I had were called Juggernaut.

Through the looking
glass: Oberlé in 2020.





That was with bloke called Ray Rhoades and we played heavy rock but with progressive moments as well. We were together in 1968, so just a couple of years before Gryphon started.

How did Gryphon get together?

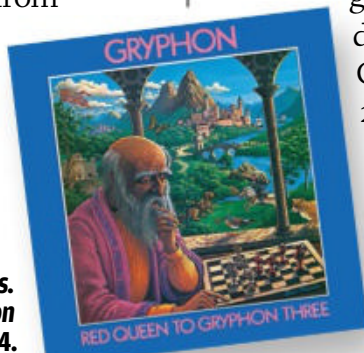
Brian Gulland and Richard Harvey [mandolin, keys, recorder] were studying at the Royal College Of Music in London. They had an interest in folk, medieval and renaissance music, which is what inspired them to form the band. Graeme Taylor joined them two or three months later, and they got me involved a short time after that.

I believe that was part of our appeal: the ability to make our records self-contained, as it were. Yes, you did run the risk of losing some fans along the way, but you also gained new ones.

You toured the USA with Yes. Was this a career highlight?

Absolutely. We went from playing 1,000-to-1,500-capacity venues to performing in the biggest stadia around, before

Top: Midnight Mushrumps. Right: Red Queen To Gryphon Three - both from 1974.



40,000 fans or more. It was definitely career changing. We were promoting *Red Queen To Gryphon Three* at the time, and this got a really good reception.

I think the biggest show we did on that tour was the Houston Astrodome [on December 2, 1974]. Yes headlined, with the Mahavishnu Orchestra second and us as the openers. But the greatest thrill was doing Madison Square Garden [on November 20]. When we came offstage, there was a neon sign flashing across the venue which said, 'New York Welcomes Gryphon'. I recall

Gryphon as they are today.



You had an unusual sound. How was this developed?

We had no plan. It just happened. You could do that sort of thing in the early 70s. The world was our oyster. We began as a folk band, playing all the usual bars and venues on that circuit. The *Gryphon* album was mostly made up of folk songs and medieval dances. *Juniper Suite* was the sole original band composition. That set us off on the path we took.

Do you feel your albums in the 70s captured what the band were about?

The wonderful thing about

this band was that we never recorded an album that sounded like its predecessor. So *Midnight Mushrumps* [1974] didn't sound like the debut, and *Red Queen To Gryphon Three* [also released in '74] was nothing like the first two. We set out to make every album totally different to what had come before. There was no formula involved.



Gryphon's self-titled debut.

“The greatest thrill was doing Madison Square Garden. When we came offstage, there was a neon sign flashing across the venue which said, 'New York Welcomes Gryphon'. I recall thinking to myself, 'We've made it!'”

thinking to myself, 'We've made it!' We did a lot of dates on that tour in a very short space time. And sometimes it would involve travelling a few hundred miles overnight to the next city. It was exhausting but worthwhile.

Why did Gryphon split up in '77?

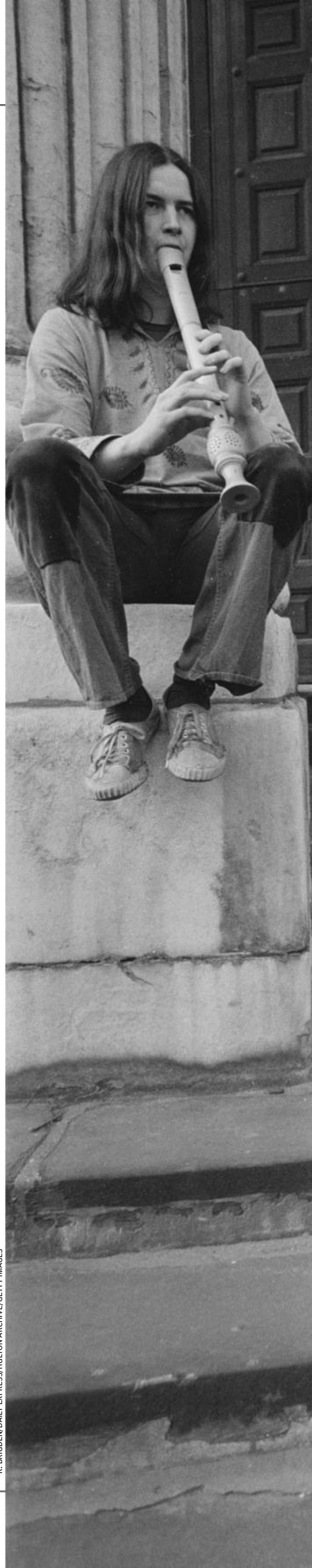
To some extent, this was down to punk coming along. That was such a game-changer for us. People no longer wanted to see a band all dressed up and with a big light show. Now all they wanted were four blokes onstage with one light bulb.

But you'd just signed a new deal with the Harvest label...

Yes, we left Transatlantic, who had put out our four previous albums, and released *Treason* for Harvest. But that wasn't a good period for us. We were managed by Brian Lane, who also represented Yes, and were under a lot of pressure to become more commercial, which wasn't our style at all.

Mike Thorne was the producer for *Treason*, and not only did he also produce the Sex Pistols but also effectively discovered them. We could see there was an

R. BRIGDEN/DAILY EXPRESS/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES





Opening move: Gryphon
outside St Paul's Cathedral,
London in February 1973.

imbalance between what we were doing and what the Pistols were up to. That hammered home that our time was up.

Looking back, if we had started two or three years earlier, then the band may possibly have established itself more and been able to ride out the storm the way Yes, Jethro Tull and Genesis all managed. We were just a little too late coming to the party.

You guested on the first Wire album the same year. How did that come about?

Ironically, that was through Mike Thorne. He produced the *Pink Flag* album and asked me if I'd like to sing on it, and I was happy to.

During the 80s, you were Advertising Manager for Kerrang!. How did you adapt to this change in circumstances?

I'd always been interested in keeping up with what the music press was writing. Having come out of a band it was a big shock to suddenly have to find a job. I worked for *Melody Maker*, then *Sounds* and finally was involved with the launching of *Kerrang!*. I'm extremely proud of my role on that magazine. We had fantastic success, even if we were treated by the publishers as some sort of pariahs. They never seemed to appreciate how much money we were making for them. There was another big plus in being employed. It meant I got a regular income. Anyone who has been in a band will know how perilous that existence can be, and you can struggle to make any money.

When the neo-prog movement sprung up, thanks to bands like Marillion and Pallas, did you start to feel like you wanted to play regularly again?

The arrival of those bands didn't really have much impact on me. I was playing drums for local acts in pubs anyway. Nothing too serious, but it meant that I was keeping my hand in. However, there was no desire from me to go back to being a full-time musician. As I said, I was enjoying having money in my pocket, and why should I give that up to become a full-time musician once more?

Your old Gryphon pal Richard Harvey became a very



successful composer for films and TV shows. Did that ever appeal?

Not at all. It's a lonely existence. You sit in front of a computer composing the music for images you see on the screen, and you're all alone. The only time you'll get to hear what you write being performed is when an orchestra play it in the final version of the movie or TV show. Richard works alongside Hans Zimmer a lot these days, and he has taken to doing live performances to break the monotony of being cooped up composing. That sort of life could never have any appeal for me.

What prompted the one-off Gryphon reunion for a show at Queen Elizabeth Hall, London in 2009?

At the time we had a Gryphon homepage on the internet. It was

our only [online] media outlet. Someone in Portugal set this up for us, and we were amazed to find that there were more than 200,000 hits on the page. We had no idea the band were so popular still. For us it was a revelation. So, as there was never the chance to do a farewell gig once we'd decided to call it a day in 1977, it was felt we should get back together and see how it went.



Treason (1977).

Was it hard work to get back into the Gryphon mindset for this gig?

We'd booked the Queen Elizabeth Hall, and immediately wondered if this was a bad mistake. Would anyone actually buy a ticket to see Gryphon? To our delight we sold out the venue. But we had to work very hard to make sure the band were up to the task.

We brought in Jonathan Davie, who played bass on *Treason*, and Graham Preskett to help us out: two excellent musicians. And we spent a month rehearsing. It was really like being in boot camp but this was necessary, because our music is very complex and it had been so long since we last played together. However, it was all worthwhile, because the gig was a massive success. Better than we could ever have expected. And as a result, there were discussions about the possibility of doing a new album. That seemed to all of us to be a logical move. The enthusiasm we all felt for the band was undeniable and the plan was to take it to the next stage.

So, why didn't it go any further at the time?

The simple answer is that none of us had the time to devote to doing a full-blown reunion and to recording an album. Richard was doing his musical scores and the

other guys also had projects taking up their time. But there were no problems between us at all, and we kept in touch regularly.

You had a computer software company, didn't you?

Well, my partner Sally had the company really. I was a director, but very much in the background. I never got actively involved.

“

“A lot of bands were bigger than us, but few can claim to have such a diverse catalogue of music. When I look back at that alone, I know it's all been worthwhile. I may not have a mansion or a yacht, but in Gryphon we've always been truly creative.”

”

It takes all my ingenuity just to turn on a computer! Ha!

Gryphon properly reformed in 2015. How did that happen?

We were all suddenly available. As I said, all of us had been talking anyway, so as soon as the opportunity arose to do this, everyone was in complete agreement this should happen.

You've also guested on two albums from Gandalf's Fist. How did that come about?

I was asked by Dean Marsh from the band if I'd do some vocals for

L-R: Dave Oberlé, Philip Nestor, Brian Gulland, Graeme Taylor, Richard Harvey.



them. As it turns out, Dean is a big fan of Gryphon. I like Gandalf's Fist and the way they operate, so was happy to help them out. It was a fun thing to do. I get on very well with Dean and also Stefan Hepe. They seem to be very self-contained and understand how to make the band financially viable, and in this day and age that's vital.

Have you had any other offers to guest on albums?

Well, I did guest on Martin Orford's solo album, *The Old Road* [2008]. It was nice to be asked alongside others such as John Wetton, John Mitchell and David Longdon. I'm on the title track. It was Martin's last album before he retired from music. Honestly, he's a kid compared to me, so I hope he'll return to action before too long. Look, if I can still do it at my age [Oberlé is 68], then there's no excuse for him to remain inactive!

Away from Gryphon, what else are you working on?

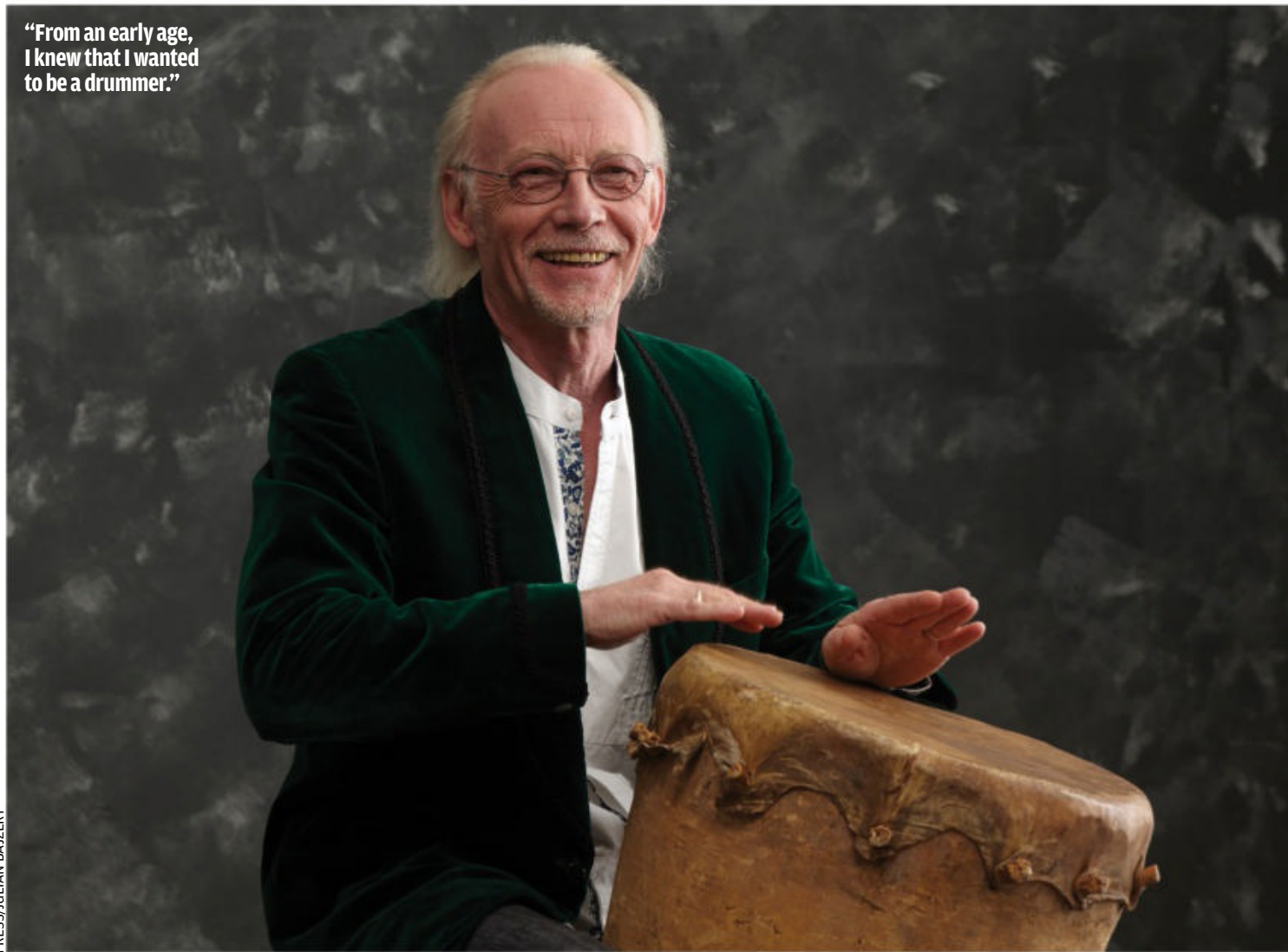
I don't do anything aside from work on Gryphon stuff. It takes up all of my time, because there's so much to do these days.

Gryphon are now very much a cottage industry, aren't you?

We are. We've formed ourselves into a limited company, and do everything ourselves. In the 70s, bands had managers, labels and booking agents. For better or for worse. The prog world was very different back then, and there was so much money involved. Of course, having all these people working on your behalf meant you could sometimes lose track of where all the money went.

"From an early age, I knew that I wanted to be a drummer."

PRESS/JULIAN BAIZERT



Now, we have it all under our own control. We put out albums on our own label. We manage ourselves and also book all the gigs. This way we know what is happening and when. Is it better for the band than the way it was all those years ago? Yes, it is. Why would we need anyone else to look after our affairs? It would have been impractical in the 70s, but the more experience you get being in a band, the more you appreciate having the ability to make your own decisions. There were some terrible choices made on our behalf in the past. Now, we only have ourselves to blame if anything goes wrong.

Are you pleased with the way your new album, *Get Out Of My Father's Car!*, is selling?

Actually, it's doing very well. I can tell you that so far we've sold about 1,500 copies on CD. That may not sound too good, but the era when you thought shifting hundreds of thousands of albums was no more than okay has disappeared. Most bands struggle to sell records in the current era.

Do the band have any plans to mark the 50th anniversary of the original formation?

If only we could do a special gig to celebrate! But who knows? The way things are at the moment, I can't see how it'll be possible for us to do this. And even if we can book a 50th anniversary date, where would that be? So many of the venues where we have played in the recent past may go out of business because of the pandemic. So, while it is a landmark moment to reach a half century, we may have to accept that the new album's release is the only way to tell everyone of this achievement. We could try and do a livestream from somewhere, but it wouldn't be the same.

Yet our problems with trying to celebrate 50 years are nothing when you see the way the entire live scene is facing catastrophe. So we should be grateful that we've been able at least to release

a new album. And one we are very proud of. And isn't the biggest celebration we can offer the fact we are able to record new music that sounds relevant and as good as anything we've ever done?

You have a global fanbase. Why do you think you appeal to so many different nationalities?

Because we're mainly an instrumental band. And that means there are no language barriers. You're right we have fans everywhere, that's something social media has highlighted. Looking at our Facebook page, it's amazing how far our reach is. Once we're able to get back out and tour, it would be wonderful to play in countries we've never been. That sort of thing keeps us all fresh. A new challenge.

What would you say is Gryphon's biggest achievement?

I would have to say the fact we've been able to make every album different and individual. A lot of bands were bigger than us, but few can claim to have such a diverse catalogue of music. When I look back at that alone, I know it's all been worthwhile. I may not have a mansion or a yacht, but in Gryphon we've always been truly creative. 🎵

Get Out Of My Father's Car! is out now. See www.thegryphonpages.com.

Dave Oberlé outside The Houston Astrodome in 1974 during Gryphon's tour with Yes.

PRESS/GRYPHON ARCHIVE



New spins...

THE ANCHORESS

Art-pop chameleon Catherine Anne Davies hits the (wuthering) heights on luminous, literary second album. Existential torment has never sounded so alluring...

Words: Chris Roberts **Illustration:** Leona Beth

Intense, insistent and often inspired, the second album from The Anchoress shows her, on its cover, literally devouring pages and pages of books. Inside, it's generously strewn with epigrammatic quotes, from F Scott Fitzgerald ("Nothing any good isn't hard") to Fernando Pessoa ("I have wanted, like sounds, to live by things and not be theirs") to Joan Didion ("There comes a point at which we must relinquish the dead, let them go, keep them dead"). As you may have gleaned, this isn't a glib, throwaway party pop record.

Yet anybody can try to grab depth by association. Happily – and ultimately there is a hint of happiness despite the album's arm-wrestles with angst – *The Art Of Losing* is rich with its own immersive intricacy and emotions. For all its precision, it feels less considered, less studied than her award-garlanded 2016 debut *Confessions Of A Romance Novelist* and more physical, more affecting. It stares into the most harrowing caves of loss, illness, pain and death, but comes out alive, its flesh and blood triumphing over the cerebral.

Written and produced by Catherine Anne Davies (aka The Anchoress), it marks the culmination of a hectic few years for her, with previous collaborations with Simple Minds and Manic Street Preachers already now overshadowed by her fine recent album with Bernard Butler, *In Memory Of My Feelings*. Closer to home, she's come through a sea of awful personal troubles, and by opposing, ended them. There's a sense that creating this candid, confessional, open-hearted album has been a catharsis and coming to terms. By the time it reaches its midpoint, an accumulative atmosphere has engrossed us. We are in this world, as much as observers can be, as if locked into a dark, intriguing film. The vertigo it imposes on us is strangely intoxicating.

Bookended by piano-based instrumental refrains, it lopes in with a great entrance line: 'Ouch. This is going to hurt'. *Let It Hurt*, a mid-tempo bruiser, builds subtly, the Welsh

The Art Of Losing

KSCOPE



It's rich with immersive intricacy and emotion.

artist's voice dry but yearning. Throughout the album, the vocals are assertive but not overcooked. And when they're cleverly double-tracked, there's something almost Bowie-esque about the charge they carry. There's a crack in that voice, which is, as they say, how the light gets in. This song also unapologetically references 'existential melancholy' and 'narcissistic tendencies', although if it's therapy it seems like it might be enormous fun. Shout, shout, let it all out.

The Exchange, presented as a duet with The Manics' James Dean Bradfield, boasts dazzling keyboard shimmers, and its synth coda is curious and cool (Bradfield very much plays second fiddle here). *Show Your Face* is a mutant strain of 80s Euro-pop adapted by Depeche Mode or Icehouse, but with slashes and twangs of Anna Calvi-like guitar keeping you

apprehensive. Then the title track, loaded with unobvious hooks, quotes poet Elizabeth Bishop while mastering hefty rhythms (Sterling Campbell, former Bowie drummer, guests on this and two other tracks). A relative respite follows, as the mournful Hitchcockian church bells of *All Farewells Should Be Sudden* flow into the interlude of *All Shall Be Well*.

Now things get even more fierce, forlorn, yet stubbornly resilient. *Unravel* moves from Scott Walker chamber pop into a cyclical whirlpool of melodies, before the mysterious half-heard whispers and murmurs of *Paris* give way to *5AM*, arguably the record's crux. It's harrowing and hard to take, this track, and for a male reviewer to 'analyse' the distressing lyrics would seem bumptious to say the least, but they impact stunningly against a lovely vocal and melody. When we reach the tricky, tenacious *My Confessor*, we're beginning to tentatively emerge from the storm into a blazing dawn, only for *With The Boys* to castigate the pressure on women to emulate someone else's concept of "perfect". So there's no facile third-act resolution here, but everyone who's taken the inward trip with *The Anchoress* is stronger and more stoic for having done so.

While some of the lyrical issues raised are categorically addressed from a female perspective, and mentions of wolves and brides call to mind the sinister anti-fairy tales of the author Angela Carter, it'd be trite to trot through tired comparison points like Kate Bush or PJ Harvey here, much as they probably have a place in Davies' subconscious. *The Art Of Losing* is musically diverse, ranging from electronic soundbeds to emo/goth-laced rock tropes, and not limited or aligned to any specific era. And words-wise, it's frank in somewhat the manner of John Grant or Father John Misty. The power and fortitude fuelling the album, however, come from one artist alone. The Anchoress is exorcising ghosts and exercising rights here, and her creativity and talent are not losing but winning.



AMORPHOUS ANDROGYNOUS

We Persuade Ourselves We Are Immortal

FSOLDIGITAL.COM

Peter Hammill leads from front on FSOL offshoot.



Often eschewing the traditional PR circus, The Amorphous Androgynous very much play things by their own rules. So this collaboration with Van der Graaf Generator frontman Peter Hammill may have been something of a soft release, it didn't take long for the prog grapevine to click into gear, alerting fans that this was maybe something worth listening to. And boy, is *We Persuade Ourselves We Are Immortal* worth listening to.

Boy, is *We Persuade Ourselves... worth listening to.*

For those not in the know, The Amorphous Androgynous are the proggy/psych arm of ambient dance outfit The Future Sound Of London, who had a hit with *Papua New Guinea* in 1991. The band's prog credentials were writ large on their excellent 1994 album *Lifeforms*, which featured contributions from Robert Fripp, Klaus Schulze and Ozric Tentacles among others. AA had been active as a more organic progressive offshoot since 1993's *Tales Of Ephidrina*, but began to overshadow FSOL with their series of mix CDs, *A Monstrous Psychedelic Bubble Exploding In Your Mind* creating an inviting pool of prog, psych and ambient hybrids.

We Persuade Ourselves We Are Immortal sees the core AA duo of Garry Cobain and Brian Dougans enlist Hammill, along with saxophonist Brian Hopper, former Ian Gillan Band guitarist Ray Fenwick, Regal Worm's Jarrod Gosling and, perhaps most amazingly, Paul Weller, for a deep dive into some of the most enjoyable prog you'll hear these past 12 months.

The six-track release is built around the central title track, penned with Hammill, Weller and Fenwick. It's a dreamy tune that builds around a highly catchy Hammill vocal refrain, some inspired Floydian sax breaks from Hopper and some deliciously fluid guitar from Weller and Fenwick.

The remaining five tracks act as variations on the main theme. How prog are they? Celestial choirs uplift, swathes of keyboards and strings float you away to far-flung places, and guitar lines reignite the main hook. Over it all, Hammill's stunning and still-youthful vocal reigns supreme. It's an utter delight.

Some may adopt an aloofness considering where Cobain and Dougans served their musical apprenticeship, or at the inclusion of Modfather Weller. In reality you'd have to be a particularly joyless individual, of which social media suggests there may be one or two out there in the prog community, not to find the music here as appealing as the fantastic none-more-prog cover artwork from Gavin Penn.

Do yourself a favour and indulge.

JERRY EWING

TWENTY-FIVE VIEWS OF WORTHING

Twenty-Five Views Of Worthing WINDWAKER RECORDS

Previously unreleased Canterbury-style gem.

First, the good news: it's sometime in 1972 and your band have been signed to Island Records giving you access to the legendary Basing Street Studios where you start to record your debut. Now, the bad news: a year later, Island drop you and the half album you made goes unreleased, unloved, and left to gather dust.

That's what happened to *Twenty-Five Views Of Worthing*. But several decades on and the Island session, along with several other later recordings, have been lovingly gathered to finally see the light of day on a lavish, limited edition, gatefold LP. As detailed in the



accompanying expansive booklet, *The Worthings*, as they were known, paid their dues supporting Amon Düül II, Roxy Music, and others via their connection to Island Records' live agency. Largely instrumental, with keyboards and sax to the fore, not to mention a brief

appearance of a choir, Caravan and Soft Machine provide obvious points of inspiration. Sometimes wistful and boasting oodles of period charm, if parts show their age now and then, the energy and enthusiasm that originally fuelled the London-based quartet, has been deftly rekindled for a brand new 21st century audience. **SS**

ALPHA MALE TEA PARTY

Infinity Stare BIG SCARY MONSTERS

Engrossing if occasionally repetitious return from the UK experimentalists.

Billed as a more sombre and existential follow-up to 2017's *Health*, this fourth LP from math rock trio Alpha Male Tea Party taps into the turmoil of the times. Opener *God UNIT* is a whirlwind of djent dinginess thanks to its crunchy guitar work and disorderly rhythms. Simultaneously fierce and cathartic, it's a strong way to start things off. *Leather Diamond* and *They'd Get The Guillotine* offer similar kinds of in-your-face purification, coming across as a less left-field version of Animals As Leaders and Cynic.

That's not to say all of *Infinity Stare* takes the same tack. *Year Of Winter* and



Sad Balloon focus mostly on restrained percussion and shimmering textures to achieve soothing cosmic vibes. The closing title track even introduces some commanding vocals that would've worked well across more of the album had they opted for this.

That missed opportunity, coupled with the fact that the preceding nine tunes basically fall into one of two overtly samey categories, keeps *Infinity Stare* from being a total knockout. But there's still much to appreciate, and the trio deserve applause for centring on new characteristics as they reflect the gloominess of the era. **JMB**

JASON BIELER & THE BARON VON BIELSKI ORCHESTRA

Songs For The Apocalypse FRONTIERS

Saigon Kick man gets high with a little help from his friends.

Jason Bieler found fame as guitarist and, later, singer with early-90s rockers Saigon Kick, whose sound ranged from riffy metal to power ballads and everything in between.

That 'anything goes' approach has carried through to his second solo album. Bieler has been using the #ProgRock hashtag with his often hilarious social media posts, though *Songs For The Apocalypse* isn't progressive rock. What it offers is a riveting ride of moods and styles, coloured by the irreverent humour of its creator. With typical perversity, Bieler



taps Queensrÿche frontman Todd La Torre as drummer on *Apologise*, while the moreish *Bring Out Your Dead*, is decorated by what sounds like a mini-Moog solo - but turns out to be Devin Townsend letting rip on a guitar.

The album's first-rate audio quality is impressive, considering Bieler made it via his laptop during lockdown, with contributions from past and present members of Guns N' Roses, Megadeth and Sons Of Apollo, among others. It might not be #ProgRock, but *Songs For The Apocalypse* is a slice of glorious lunacy. **DML**

PETER CHILVERS & JON DURANT

Always Golden Sands/Vista ALCHEMY/BANDCAMP

Restorative ambient pensiveness.

A warm, luxurious zen bath of a treat for ambient fans, this. Or, rather: these. *Always Golden Sands* is a 20-minute three-track EP pitched as a starter to the 50-minute *Vista* album's main course. While the EP explores three slightly different, albeit equally melancholy, moods, the album goes even darker in phases. It requires patience, but its subtle shifts and temperature modulations fully reward it.

The pedigree of the pair is as clear as the pristine sound quality. British keyboardist Chilvers has collaborated with Brian Eno and Tim Bowness, while



US guitarist Durant has been hailed for his “cloud guitar” soundscapes. Here, they build on each other's playing, with Durant often embellishing over a Chilvers synth or piano track. It's kind of ECM, and spiritually jazz, yet unconcerned with fitting onto any pegs.

The effortless way *Vista* seems to move from day to night, and through to another morning, is borderline magical. It might be reductive to say it soundtracks our ongoing isolation appropriately, but with a modest degree of sorrowful wallowing leavened by restorative aesthetic charm, it does just that. Contemplative, yet cleansing. **CR**

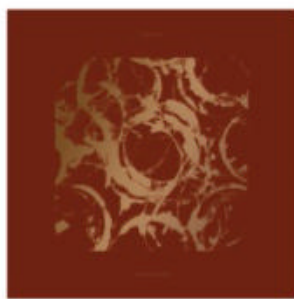
CULT OF LUNA

The Raging River RED CREEK

Sprawling EP heralds new era for Swedish post-metal titans.

The first release on Cult Of Luna's new Red Creek imprint, *The Raging River* picks up where 2019's *A Dawn To Fear* left off. Although it's an EP, its five tracks clock in at nearly 40 minutes, making it the length of some classic LPs.

The key song *Inside Of A Dream*, features a guest vocal from one-time grunge icon Mark Lanegan, which offers a welcome change of pace down from post-metal intensity to something more introspective. Elsewhere there's subtlety among the crashing guitars and savage vocal hooks. There's layers of synths, juxtaposed guitar melodies and constant rhythmic progressions,



but no let-up in intensity, even amid the bombast of the 13-minute closer *Wave After Wave*. This really helps to keep sections fresh. *I Remember* and *What I Leave Behind* are more visceral, with planet-smashing riffs and huge grooves. The latter is the

most concise of the heavy tracks, with squalling guitars emerging out of quieter, rhythm-driven passages.

With the exception of *Inside Of A Dream*, there's not much pause for breath on *The Raging River*, but then again, the clue is in the title. Cult Of Luna are at their best when going full-pelt, so that's hardly a criticism. **AL**

ELEPHANT9

Arrival Of The New Elders RUINE GRAMMOFON

Norwegian trio's introspective journey.

Listeners who want to go in search of adventurous jazz rock should point their compass in the direction of Scandinavia, in particular Norway. Keeping up with all the latest bands can be daunting, but Elephant9 are certainly worth the effort.

Featuring Motorpsycho keyboardist Ståle Storløkken plus bassist Nikolai Hængsleand, and drummer Torstein Lofthus, their mix of powerful instrumental technique and unfettered expression was given full rein in the two volumes of 2019's *Psychedelic Backfire*, on which they placed frenzied blow-outs and open-ended jamming under the spotlight.



In contrast, this new studio release places greater emphasis on carefully articulated compositions that are nonetheless packed with energetic, often high-stake drama. Beaming down through a swirling haze of interlocking synths and gleaming organ chords, the title track's opulent grandeur beds down into a stately march, *Rite Of Accession* pulses with bursts of goosebump inducing Mellotron, while *Tales Of Secrets'* beguiling melody is as haunting as wind whistling through wires on a darkened lonely road. This is music that stays with you for a long time. **SS**

ARC OF LIFE

Arc Of Life FRONTIERS

Yes splinter group make an impactful debut.



It only takes a little eavesdropping on social media to see that it's becoming increasingly difficult for some Yes fans, who've been waiting patiently for new music from the group, to be enthused by their back catalogue being repackaged on yet another live album. Enter Arc Of Life, whose impressive line-up comprises current Yes men Jon Davison on vocals, Billy Sherwood on bass and vocals and Jay Schellen on drums, with Dave Kerzner on keyboards and guitarist Jimmy Haun, who played on with Yes on *Union* and with the supergroup Circa.



A fresh-sounding collection high on songcraft.



Inevitably, expectation and the weight of history hangs heavy on their shoulders, so listeners should do them a favour and try to take this self-titled debut album on its own terms. For, importantly, *Arc Of Life* is a fresh sounding collection high on songcraft and imbued with a subtle complexity. *The Magic Of It All* effectively defines their signature sound with melody lines that keep circling round and a seamless feel to the structures even when they collectively navigate some tricky rhythmic shifts.

There's a lot of incident condensed into that song's four minutes, including some brief but flamboyant outbursts from Haun. But *Arc Of Life* is more about empathetic ensemble playing and less about grandstanding. Sometimes Sherwood's bass sounds like it's in charge, while Schellen plays some tight funky figures punctuated by big, old-school rolls around the toms. Davison often subjects his vocals to effects, and his duet with Sherwood's grainer tones on *I Want To Know You Better* gives extra texture to their most straightforward song. The production is less digitally sharp and in-your-face than one might expect, with the instruments set slightly back in an atmospheric, reverb-heavy haze.

You Make It Real has an 80s pop vibe and an infectious melody, but they deploy more instrumental firepower on *Just In Sight* with its dramatic stops and starts, and stacked-up vocal harmonies. This expansive approach is extended on the near 10-minute *Locked Down*. *Talking With Siri*, is a droll tale of a hapless chap who falls in love with his digital voice assistant, although overall the lyrics carry non-specifically positive sentiments like: 'Chances come once in a lifetime embrace the magic of it all' and: 'We dream therefore we are'.

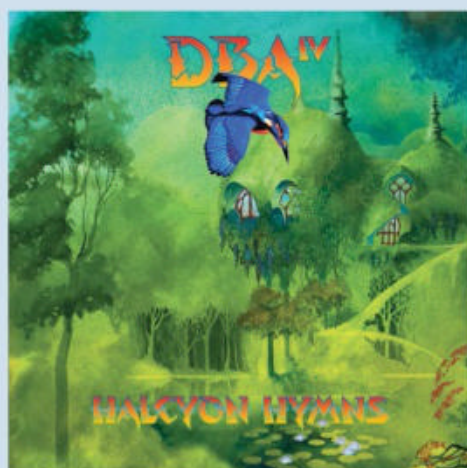
It's quality stuff, but ultimately there's that elephant in the room trumpeting the question: how does this near-relation compare? Let's just say that if this review was appended with a 'Like this? Try this!' recommendation, Arc Of Life fans would be guided in the direction of... Yes.

MIKE BARNES

DOWNES BRAIDE ASSOCIATION

Halcyon Hymns CHERRY RED

Superior concept album revelling in a distant past.



When in 1981 Soft Cell were doing their new wave thing and Geoff Downes had formed Asia with Yes bandmate Steve Howe, the two seemed musically poles apart. Who would have imagined that, one day, Marc Almond would be the catalyst for this fine prog album, made by Downes with Almond's collaborator Chris Braide? As Braide – a super-talented musician and writer – was left high and dry by the pandemic, Almond suggested that he hook up with Downes again to make an album together to lift the malaise. And, with its rich evocation of times past, attention to detail and infectious melodies, *Halcyon Hymns* certainly travels some way to do that.

It feels like a great lost double LP from 1974, in the best way.

Another by-product of the extended lockdown, with Downes in Wales and Braide in Los Angeles, Braide began to work on Downes' previously sketched out ideas. Made throughout summer 2020, *Halcyon Hymns* demonstrates just how far remote recording has come. Supported by Dave Bainbridge on guitar, Andy Hodge on bass and Ash Soan on drums, it seems impossible to consider that, with such a unity of thought and feeling, all these parts were recorded separately and at distance.

With its Roger Dean cover, and the plummy-voiced narration of Barney Ashton-Bullock (sample line: '*Elusive gods and dead heroes jostle in a chirpathon*'), *Halcyon Hymns* feels like a great lost double LP from 1974, in the best way possible. Ashton-Bullock summed up the album as "a fusion of pop, prog and poetry", and it's just that. *Love Among The Ruins* pulls off the feat of feeling simultaneously summery and Christmassy. The breakdown on *King Of The Sunset*, all mandolins and percussion giving way to power chords, is one of the many delights to be found here, as is the incredible 12-string work on *Holding The Heavens*, which evokes Genesis at their acoustic best. Braide's voice is sugar sweet throughout and Downes uses his virtuosity sparingly. When Marc Almond appears on *Warm Summer Sun*, it's a bit like bumping into a friend you didn't expect to see at a party.

With its stately, haunting melodies, and beautiful phrasing, the whole thing is all brought together by the 12-minute *Remembrance* with Ashton-Bullock going hell for leather with memories of summer's past: '*One loved-up summer long ago is the passion of our remembrance.*'

For what is fundamentally a side project for two performers with their fingers in so many pies, it's amazing to realise that *Halcyon Hymns* is the fourth Downes Braide Association studio release. An early contender for album of the year, it would be fabulous to hear it played live when the time comes.

DARYL EASLEA

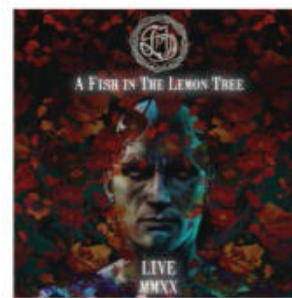
FISH

A Fish In The Lemon Tree - Live MMXX SOUNDCLOUD

Sole live show from last year captured for charity.

Live recordings, and indeed live shows, weren't always such a big deal. But when Fish's tour to celebrate the 30th anniversary of his solo debut had to be cut short after just one gig, and the recording was salvaged, it became something more significant. Now released as a free Soundcloud stream, it comes with an option to donate to a fund in aid of Fish's band and crew, currently enduring enforced unemployment.

And it's certainly worth coughing up to hear the big fella revisiting six of the eight tracks from 1990's *Vigil In A Wilderness Of Mirrors*, interspersed



with three songs from last year's *Weltschmerz* and a couple of Marillion faves.

Weltschmerz centrepiece *Rose Of Damascus* is lent extra poignancy by the story he tells of its inspiration. A piano-accompanied encore of *A Gentlemen's Excuse Me*

is a highlight of the *Vigil...* material, and although these days he'd admit he can't hit the high notes of *He Knows You Know* and *Script For A Jester's Tear*, the lower-key takes on those Marillion gems featured here offer a brooding alternative reading of a young man's 'problems, problems' that's just as valid as the spikier originals. **JS**

FOVEA HEX

The Salt Garden (Landscaped) LES DISQUES DU CREPUSCULE

Steven Wilson-remixed Irish avant-folk sounds, with added Eno.

Clodagh Simonds is best known as vocalist in the early-70s progressive folk band Mellow Candle and for her work with Mike Oldfield, so naturally her ensemble, Fovea Hex, has attracted collaborators from the prog and experimental fields. The *Salt Garden* trilogy of EPs, released on Steven Wilson's Headphone Dust label, feature haunting, slowly unravelling songs, which makes them ideal remix material and these remixes date from 2016. On *Is Lanza Light And Given* piano notes hang in space like Brian Eno's *Neroli*, as keyboards drift across like sheets of mist around Simonds' voice, with



more ominous synths looming in the distance.

On the original instrumental, strings and keyboards ebb and flow followed by periods of silence and Wilson extends these elements into a spartan chamber piece with echoes of Arvo Pärt. The CD

version includes Serbia soundscaper Abul Mogard's beautifully desolate 20-minute *We Dream All The Dark Away* with a series of images sketched out by his synthesiser and Kate Ellis' cello, and vocals by Simonds and Brian Eno. Peter Chilvers also contributes in an exquisite piano-led recasting of the 2015 single *By The Glacial Lake*. **MB**

HEAVE BLOOD AND DIE

Post People FYSISK FORMAT

Post-punk, post-rock and prog collide in Norway.

Their name suggests a sound like a bomb going off in Beelzebub's boudoir, but Heave Blood And Die are much more artful than that. Their third album blurs the lines between cinematic post-rock and brittle post-punk, while summoning textures and tones that feel thrillingly unfamiliar.

There's a fuzzy defiance to *Post People*'s production that makes the turbocharged shoegaze of opener *Radio Silence* sound both bleakly majestic and grimly claustrophobic. *Kawanishi Aeroplane* is a more delicate flower, with a Mogwai-like ebb and flow and some spiky hooks, while *Metropolitan*



Jam is a fizzing krautrock sprint with strong echoes of Wire. They come closest to living up to their name on the rolling psych-storm of *True Believer*, as overdriven guitars and organs fight for dominance, before a skewed but triumphant melodic coda.

Whether wandering through icy, Lynchian fog on the unsettling *Everything Is Now* or setting off for the heart of the sun on the dreamy title track, HBAD sound entirely impervious to the various genre tags people will try to saddle them with. In truth, *Post People* is a genuinely original and frequently startling debut. **DL**

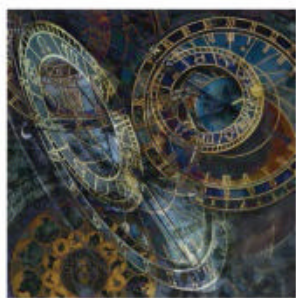
JOHN HOLDEN

Circles In Time JOHNHOLDENMUSIC.COM

Third time's a charm for this English talent magnet and Egyptology buff.

Multi-instrumentalist, composer and producer John Holden employed some well-known prog talent on his 2018 debut *Capture Light* and its follow-up *Rise & Fall*. Many of his guests return for his musically rich and densely atmospheric third.

The final track of *Circles In Time* towers over the other five: KV62 sees Holden indulge his love for Egyptology with a 20-minute delve into Tutankhamun's tomb and the world of Howard Carter. Actor Jeremy Irons adds narration to a colourful exploration of its subject, while guest vocalist Joe Payne relishes the theatricality of it all.



Elsewhere, Tiger Moth Tales' Peter Jones offers vocals and sax on *High Line*, a New York story piece with Steely Dan and Billy Joel flavours.

Circles is brought to life by vocalist Sally Minnear, who also duets with Marc Atkinson on the haunting *The Secret Of Chapel Field*.

Dreams Of Cadiz could be Mike Oldfield dabbling in flamenco, and Jean Pageau brings drama to the lumbering *Avalanche*, a dig at the keyboard warriors of this modern world. With Nick D'Virgilio, Robin Armstrong and Vikram Shankar also among the guests, this is another solid opus from the consistently compelling Holden. **GRM**

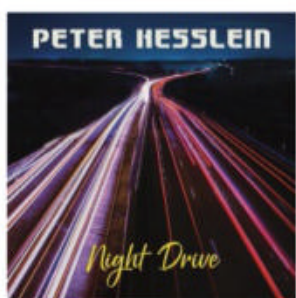
PETER HESSLEIN

Night Drive LUCIFER'S RECORDS/CHERRY RED

Lucifer's Friend guitarist is asleep at the wheel on his solo debut.

Hamburg hard rockers Lucifer's Friend have some superb tunes in their locker: the strident *Ride The Sky*, *Toxic Shadows*, the 12-minute psych opus *Spanish Galleon*.

Having reformed five years ago, their 2019 comeback *Black Moon* showed they still have fuel in their tank. By comparison, the debut solo album from founding guitarist Peter Hesslein sputters and stalls on the hard shoulder. He dedicates *Night Drive* to "all artists who work at night, as their normal working hours, but then have to drive home." There hasn't been too much of that over the past 12 months, and



even if there were, listeners would probably switch back to the World Service a few minutes into this oddity.

Opener *Turn The Radio On* starts with a car engine turning over, and for the next hour you're motoring to fusion-lite instrumentals called *Slow Down A Bit* and

Long Way To Go. Hesslein's guitar is always amiably tuneful, *Winding Road* and *Blinded By The Lights* have a good groove, and *Home Again* is undeniably catchy. Ultimately though, the cheesy, synth-heavy backing tracks, cod Latin beats (*Exit The Highway*) and the ersatz soul vibe (*Getting Tired*) make for a long, uncomfortable ride. **GRM**

HOSIANNA MANTRA

Particle Mythology HOSIANNA-MANTRA.BANDCAMP.COM

Doom metal bassist embarks on cosmic synth odyssey.

Joseph D Rowland is a founder member of Arkansas doomsters Pallbearer, and although that group are more melodic than many of their peers, his first album under the name Hosianna Mantra is a world away, being more akin to Tangerine Dream and Jean-Michel Jarre. That said, it's not quite a full-body immersion into the analogue bubblebat. Rowland also employs newer digital synths alongside the vintage gear, and this combination of timbres puts Hosianna Mantra up there among such modern electronicists Oneohtrix Point Never and Emeralds.



There's a sonic radiance about the album that cuts right through the winter gloom. And while the synthetic percussion rather plods away, slower-moving synth lines give the pieces their bold song-like forms, with a top layer of dancing sequencers. Deep bass

notes usher in a dazzling kaleidoscope of echoed synths on the title track, and although many of the tunes here are under five minutes in length, *Particle Mythology* concludes with 11 mesmeric minutes of *Retinal Echoes*, which builds up from an impressionistic start to gentle pulsing rhythms and synthetic susurrations. **MB**

ANNEKE VAN GIERBERGEN

The Darkest Skies Are The Brightest INSIDEOUT

Dutch singer weaves beauty from personal turmoil.



For a singer whose voice is so distinctive and recognisable, Anneke van Giersbergen remains one of the great chameleons of the progressive world. In 2017, the former The Gathering singer was dishing out the heaviness with her prog metal band VUUR, which was followed by two albums that saw her singing with classical orchestras, 2018's *Symphonized* and 2020's *Let The Light In*.



An intimate soundscape provides a canvas for her lyrics.



With *The Darkest Skies Are The Brightest*, she undertakes another metamorphosis, turning away from both orchestras and metal, and moving closer to the gentle vibe of her 2009 Agua de Annique release, *Pure Air*. There are no electric instruments here at all; instead the sound draws deeply from folk and smaller classical formats with strings, acoustic guitar, percussion, and horns. It's not the full, grandiose sweep of a symphony orchestra, but a more intimate soundscape that provides an entirely fitting canvas for van Giersbergen's boldly confessional lyrics. The album was apparently born out of a period of turbulence in the singer's life, from the financial uncertainties of recording and touring the VUUR album, to doubts about the future of her marriage. Retreating to a house in the forest near Eindhoven, she's channelled the turmoil into her writing.

The record reunites van Giersbergen with Gijs Coolen, who produced her 2013 rock album *Drive*, and the music manages to span a range of moods and emotions while staying true to the overriding aesthetic and sound. Some of the lyrics could fit into VUUR's prog metal as van Giersbergen writes about looking into the abyss in *Hurricane*, and even without conventional drums, there's still a strong sense of pulse and forward momentum in the track.

I Saw A Car begins playfully as van Giersbergen admires an elegant ride, but soon turns darker as she sings, 'I rely on my fear alone, get by on my pain.' There's a folky stomp to the tune, akin to Mumford & Sons perhaps, but far less twee. The song reveals one of the album's main themes, the troubling prospect of divorce, further explored in *My Promise*, in which she defiantly insists she'll fight for her marriage, while *The End* is a plea for renewal and a second chance.

It's almost a break-up album, but van Giersbergen never gives in to despair and there is optimism among the heartache. 'You're not alone' she sings in *Lo And Behold* and the album concludes with the uplifting energy of *Love You Like I Love You*, a reaffirmation of her enduring devotion accompanied by a buoyant string arrangement. *The Darkest Skies Are The Brightest* is a brave, soul-baring experience from one of prog's best voices.

DAVID WEST

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LEAGUE OF LIGHTS

Dreamers Don't Come Down EIGHTSPACE

Third album from Threshold keyman's art-pop duo.

There was always an illicit mutual attraction between 80s synthpop and prog, ever since the days when secret progophiles Howard Jones and Nik Kershaw were in the charts. This project from Threshold's Richard West and wife Farrah - aka League Of Lights - suggests they retain a considerable penchant for the immediacy of that era as well as a cute way with retro-futurist electronic arrangements. The dirty rock riff undercurrents that swam around the duo's self-titled 2011 debut have calmed, replaced by more of the sonic swells that characterised 2019's *In The*



In Between, suggesting an enduring influence of symphonic metal melodrama, particularly in the rousing choruses of *Twenty Twenty One* and *Ghosts*.

There aren't many places to hide when making direct, emotive pop music like this.

Thankfully, League Of Lights serve up top-line melodies, on numerous occasions such as the beautifully featherlight hooks of *With You* and the yearning piano-led power balladry of *I Still Remember*. Pop phobes might find the lack of prog twists a turn-off but there are enough irresistible tunes to reel the more open-minded in. **JS**

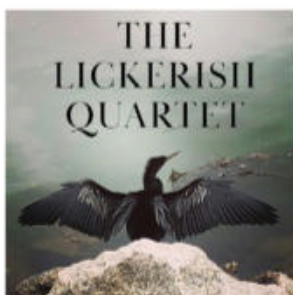
THE LICKERISH QUARTET

Threesome, Vol.2 LOJINX/STRANGER DANGER RECORDS AND TAPES

The filling in ex-Jellyfish men's planned three-EP sandwich.

In these dark times it's good to know we can bask in bright aural sunshine at any point by sticking on *Bellybutton* or *Spilt Milk*, the two studio albums by cult power-poppers Jellyfish. The San Francisco band split years ago, but in 2020 three-quarters of them - Roger Manning Jr, Tim Smith and Eric Dover - returned in reassuringly fine style as The Lickerish Quartet (named after a saucy 70s film).

On first EP *Threesome, Vol.1* they played to the strengths that made their previous band so great: glistening, deceptively tricky music dipped in psych history, packed with musical



references and delivered with a whimsical, weltschmerz-defying smile. And so it is with Vol. 2. The irresistible *The Dream That Took Me Over* owes a real debt to Roxy Music's *Love Is The Drug*, and *Sovereignty Blues* tips the hat as much to Andy

Partridge as to Paul McCartney.

The sumptuous Beach Boys harmonies and vintage-modern sounds are all here. *Do You Feel Better* is trippy pop fun with a great groove and cheeky xylophone and *Snollygoster Goon* is rocky, tuneful and snarky. They make this sunny stuff sound so easy, when in truth it's anything but. **GRM**

ANTONI MAIOVVI & ANTA

Church Of The Second Sun DEATH WALTZ

Sci-fi novella soundtrack pulverises listeners into submission.

High concept album incoming: *Church Of The Second Sun* is the soundtrack to a sci-fi novella by graphic novel writer John Reppion, and sees the return of Bristol's hardcore instrumental prog crew ANTA in collaboration with retro synth/horror OST devotee Antoni Maiovvi.

The story, concerning a space crew's encounter with an ancient off-world religious cult, is intended to be read in tandem with the music - though given Reppion's breathless prose and the high-octane, brain-blasting nature of the soundtrack, that's quite a challenge. *On Rel* launches with a dramatic assault



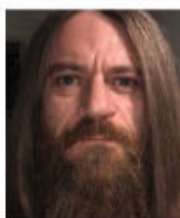
of bass and organ, its huge doomy chords going straight for the jugular. The loping rhythm of *Escape From The White Room* heralds a slow-motion Fripp-esque motif before crashing into another scenery-chewing chord progression, while *March*

Of The Black Knights conveys the terror of being chased through the gloomy passages of an alien spacecraft.

The best and most direct track here is *As Above, So Below*, its churning riff mutating and disassembling, but retaining its power throughout. Like the whole album, it's prog as a visceral, confrontational statement. **JB**

PROGRESSIVE METAL

Dom Lawson buckles up for a delve into the darker, heavier side.



Ingrina's *Siste Lys* (Medication Time) was recorded in lockdown and is a disorientating and claustrophobic trip worthy of these dreadful times. Blurring the lines between monolithic post-metal and seething, lo-fi shoegaze scree, the French quartet seem driven by a profound sense of urgency, or possibly just a collective desire to deafen people with distorted guitars. Either way, the end results are deeply heavy and strange.

Many bizarre things take place near black metal's extreme outer limits, but **Druon Antigone** are arguably operating even further out, lacing their vicious but intricate assaults with waves of mind-expanding electronics, fetid ambient churn and detours into suffocating black holes of noise. In its own terrifying, cosmos-threatening way, *Desontstijging* (Onism Productions) is a striking and immersive introduction to a bold new talent.



Few prog metal fans would question death metal legend Chuck Schuldiner's right to be considered a heavyweight of the genre. A collaboration between Russian metal crew Buicide and a symphony orchestra, **DeathOrchestra's** *Symphony Of Death* (deathorchestra.bandcamp.com) brings the late Death mastermind's most progressive moments (and brutish anthem *Pull The Plug*) vividly back to life in instrumental form, embellished with some stunning orchestral arrangements. A noble endeavour, executed with class, precision and all due respect to the great man himself.



Asgeir Mickelson has played drums with countless Norwegian prog and metal luminaries, including Ihsahn and Spiral Architect. It turns out that he's also a mean guitarist and songwriter, as showcased on **Veil Of Secrets'** superb debut *Dead Poetry* (Crime). With ex-Tristania vocalist Vibeke Stene's ethereal tones ensuring multiple waves of ghostly majesty, Mickelson provides a monumental doom metal backdrop, rich with evocative atmosphere, progressive detours and moments of acoustic fragility. Sophisticated and gloriously dramatic, it's a debut of great distinction. Drummers, eh?



At the more unhinged end of the prog metal spectrum, **Autocatalytica** have been dropping bursts of sanity-defying math metal for a decade. Their latest is *Powerclashing Maximalism* (autocatalytica.bandcamp.com), an aptly-named cacophony of hyperspeed jazz-metal syncopation, unfathomable mazes of riffs and soaring, prog-tinged melodies that appear from nowhere and slap the listener for their bewildered impertinence.

Ostensibly a black metal band, **Urfaust** have long since left Planet Grim and embarked on a wild, cosmic voyage into unimaginable darkness. *Teufelsgeist* (Van) begins with *Offerschaal Der Astrologische Mengvormen*; an extraordinary, 10-minute psychedelic synth rock symphony with an underlying rumble of Lovecraftian dread. The rest of the album is even more unsettling. Only space cadets with strong stomachs need apply.



GOD IS AN ASTRONAUT

Ghost Tapes #10 NAPALM RECORDS

Irish instrumental crew still opening horizons.



Sometimes it's easy to forget just how long any band have been releasing music. God Is An Astronaut are a case in point. Incredibly, this is their 10th album in a career that now spans nearly two decades. The post-rockers have always sounded fresh by keeping on their toes. Because, while their style has consistently been permeated with a trademark density, it has never followed complacent paths. The same is obvious here. *Ghost Tapes #10* offers some familiar guidelines, such as the way Torsten Kinsella and Jamie Dean's intense guitar soundscapes intermingle and fuse, on top of which the pair layer intricate piano motifs, designed to complement this raw fluency. But the band also develop these patterns in excitingly bold directions.



It has depth, virtuosity and genuine character.



Each of the seven tracks here is full of bright individuality, indicating four musicians who revel in expressing freedom of purpose. This much is clear in the delicate allure of *Adrift* and *Burial*. The musical notations glide with an almost peaceful poise, but just beneath the surface lurks a primitive tension brought to fruition by Lloyd Hanney's deliberately jarring drum patterns, ensuring an unease that suits the atmosphere.

Spectres is even more spartan, as the instrumental sounds clash disturbingly, yet at the same time have an elegance bringing to mind the early-60s work of Joe Meek. This innovative producer is more obviously channelled on *Fade*. It has the authentic feel of that bygone era, reminiscent of Meek's work with such significant genre pioneers as Sounds Incorporated. But even here, God Is An Astronaut strike their own chord, and aren't content merely to copy what's been done before. They build on the style first hewn by Meek and his roster of artists, thereby ensuring its relevance to 2021.

There are two significant guest appearances on the album. Jimmy Scanlan provides additional guitar sharpness to *Barren Trees*, thereby adding welcome folk-imbued whimsy, and Jo Quail plays the cello to enormous effect on closing composition *Luminous Waves*, an inspirational way to finish the album.

The band never get carried away, though. None of the tracks are allowed to become overblown; everything is kept tight and disciplined. Such has always been the case with this band. They have never been self indulgent, but steered their creativity on a strictly rationed pathway. This firmly avoids the trap of becoming a bore.

Ghost Tapes #10 is perhaps the band's most accomplished album to date. It has emotional depth, accessible virtuosity and genuine character. A confident, quality statement.

MALCOLM DOME

MEADOWS

Modern Emotions FREYA RECORDS

Solid start for Dutch modern proggers.

It's not often a debut album from an emerging prog band features a guest solo from Haken guitarist Richard Henshall. It's an early statement of intent from hard-edged proggers Meadows, a band who cite beer, whisky and, yes, Haken as their loves in life.



John Petrucci record; lead guitar at times as smooth as butter, while the title track chugs along before dissipating into a serene sojourn that could have come from the hallowed fingers of Mikael Åkerfeldt.

If we're nitpicking, the album's eight tracks can

Worshipping the dark/light dichotomy of their heroes, *Modern Emotions* is, at its best, 21st century prog metal done right: rallying riffs, succulent lead guitar chops and enough hooks to keep boredom at bay. *The Brave* is a triumphant mix of swooping strings and classy songwriting. *Rebecca* even sounds like a B-side from a solo

sometimes be little rough around the edges, lacking some of the grandeur and polish of the genre's heavyweights - not least Haken themselves. The album also, frustratingly, rarely detours off into truly unexpected territory. It's a solid release without being spectacular, but as debut albums go, Meadows have made a flying start. **CC**

NORTHWEST

II TEMPEL ARTS

Second album of intimate neo-classicism from Spanish art duo.

Northwest is the London-based Spanish duo of Mariuca García-Lomas and Ignacio Simón, although given the contents of this entrancing album, it's safe to assume their name refers to somewhere above and to the left of heaven rather than Camden.



Northwest are as much an art project as a band. *Winterland* begins with a plume of frozen strings, progressing as an ice-cold reverie that follows its own twisting logic. The simple piano ballad *All Of A Sudden* shows how García-Lomas is capable of suddenly

Their music is a neo-classical interpretation of the early 4AD catalogue and late-period Talk Talk, beautifully austere and both minimalist and maximalist in its scope. García-Lomas' voice exists in an ethereal zone somewhere between Kate Bush and Liz Fraser, while Simón marshals ghostly ranks of orchestral accompaniment.

taking flight and soaring in an entirely unaffected way. *Before The Spell* is menaced by a brooding convocation of clarinets, while *Wasted Light* is a gloriously yearning lament.

There's an ungraspable quality to this album, the songs both dreamy and voluptuous at the same time. Northwest are a band to fall in love with. **JB**

PLANKTON WAT

Future Times THRILL JOCKEY

Synth-enhanced instrumental psych confronts the American Nightmare.

Plankton Wat is the solo project of Dewey Mahood, guitarist with US heavy psych mainstays Eternal Tapestry. While that group tend towards exploratory maximalism, Mahood strips things back on *Future Times* - there's still plenty of heady fuzz



action here, but it's counterpointed by the chromium sheen of old-style electronica. The album often sounds like the lost soundtrack to some 1970s eco awareness sci-fi movie, though the events that inspired it - pitched battles on the streets while forest fires rage out of control - are all too real. That's not to say the music is entirely apocalyptic -

its beating heart is still Mahood's take on chiming, psychedelic Americana, epitomised by tracks such as *Nightfall* and *Wind Mountain*. But more interesting is what creeps in at the edges of his sounds.

Modern Ruins finds guitar in sad conversation

with itself against a plaintive Mellotron flute, its conclusion humming like a data centre amid the bucolic wilderness. Similarly, guitars cascade over a coldwave rhythm track on *Dark Cities*, while the notes that echo in *Sanctuary* against an eerie backdrop of keening organ suggest it's not paradise after all. **JB**

PAUL SADLER

Soon To Be Absorbed PAUL SADLER PRODUCTIONS

Impressive, thoughtful debut from Spires' frontman.

Three years after Spires' final album to date, *A Parting Gift*, vocalist, guitarist and songwriter Paul Sadler is delivering his first solo record. *Soon To Be Absorbed* isn't a complete departure; it still occupies the crepuscular world where prog meets metal, but here there are plenty of epic, folk-inspired acoustic interludes.

With Konom's Tom Rice on drums and longtime collaborator, bassist Alex Jolley, the trio have made a heavy album with the lightest of touches. Cellist Raphael Weinroth-Browne and Oman-based violin virtuoso Ndrew Allmark add great texture, especially



on closer *Deference*, which utilises every second of its seven minutes. *Sketches Of Nothing* demonstrates Sadler's light touch - even during the loudest sections, it retains a deftness. The guitar solo on *Anyway* - imagine a prog-tinged version of Neil Young's

Down By The River - is mesmerising, and *From Grey To Black*, with its sweet strings and acoustic guitar, is an atmospheric tour de force.

The quality of songwriting is clear throughout, and it's Sadler's focus on emotions along with a reliance on the unpredictable that makes *Soon To Be Absorbed* such a pleasure. **DE**

SAGA

Symmetry EARMUSIC

Maple Leaf pomp merchants unplug the amps.

Saga can never quite manage to call it a day. Having celebrated their 40th anniversary with a 2017 tour called The Final Chapter, the Canadian pomp rockers buckled to fan pressure and now persist with live shows.

Symmetry isn't the latest electrically fuelled display of their technical prowess but an unplugged set. Thankfully, it's no acoustic retread of their greatest hits. Instead, the likes of *Wind Him Up*, *Images (Chapter One)* and *Tired World (Chapter Six)* are cleverly reimagined. The addition of a fiddle to *Pitchman* lends it the air of a hoedown. The same treatment is better suited to



The Perfectionist, moulded into a medley renamed *The Perfect Time To Feel Better* (one of two cross-pollinations of vintage tunes; *The Right Side Of The Other Hall* pairs *Footsteps In The Hall* with *On The Other Side*).

The synth-free format emphasises the full richness and versatility of Michael Sadler's ever-excellent voice, but at around 50 minutes long, the running time could perhaps have been more generous. Also worth a mention is that of three original offerings two are instrumentals, with *La Foret Harmonieuse* featuring spoken word interludes from Sadler. **DML**

J PETER SCHWALM & ARVE HENRIKSEN

Neuzeit RARENOISE

A soundtrack for uncertain times.

With a pedigree that includes work with Eno and improv giants Supersilent, J Peter Schwalm and Arve Henriksen can be relied upon to produce something quietly spectacular. At the heart of this collaboration is a willingness to find new ground. Neither jazz nor electronica, the lush sonics of this album occasionally bring to mind Gil Evans' languorous arrangements created for Miles Davis in the 1950s, albeit in a radically different style.

There's an economy of movement at work, with each player doing relatively little but whose combined actions



amount to something bordering on the grand and profound. Henriksen's trumpets make striking luminous marks against Schwalm's brooding canvases that are awash with intricate textures.

The cumulative effect is powerful and often moving. *Raumzeit*'s descending piano line rubs up against sparse drums, and in a spacey halo of strings as soft as a memory of brushed velvet, Henriksen delivers some of his most plaintive work as he squeezes out every last ounce of emotion. That a thing of such mercurial beauty can emerge from such difficult times feels miraculous. **SS**



POST-ROCK

Alex Lynham guides us through the peaks and valleys of essential post-rock.

Following on from her brilliant July LP, *Healing Is A Miracle*, **Julianna Barwick** has released a new EP built around the track *Inspirit*. In addition to an alternate mix, *Inspirit (Takuya's Ryūteki Dragons)* (Ninja Tune) also contains an extended version of over 10 minutes.

Barwick's minimal instrumentation and layered vocal loops might seem random, but there's power in the conciseness and tight curation of her finished songs. This means alternate takes are interesting, but not as arresting as the tracks on the main release.

Electronic shoegazers **SPC ECO** have been on a roll



recently and have not only put out three new EPs, but also released two singles - the expansive, meditative *A Little Too Much* is the best of those. All three EPs have standout tracks, but it's the gorgeous dreampop of *Can't Breathe* and industrial clatter of *Tied And Twisted* from the 10 月 EP *October EP* (spceco.bandcamp.com)

that command immediate attention. SPC ECO's original plan for 2020 was a track per month, yet their final tally has been nearly 60 in a year. The final EP, 12 月 EP *Dec EP*, has three of the strongest tracks, plus an electrifying parting shot: a cover of Percy Mayfield's *Hit The Road Jack*.

Nils Frahm has a new live album and concert film, *Tripping With Nils Frahm* (Erased Tapes).

Recorded during a four-night residency at Funkhaus Berlin in 2018, it finds him focusing on *All Melody*, the album he refitted out the former East German recording complex to create. *Sunsong*, the title track, and #2 are thrilling in the space.

Funkhaus' natural concrete echo chambers prove the perfect soundstage in which to perform the songs.



Scottish post-rockers **A Sudden Burst of Colour** have



a new double A-side, *Transgressor/Decoder* (asbocmusic.bandcamp.com). *Transgressor* sees the band continuing the path suggested by the *Forever/Captivator* single. Instead of the more frenetic, intricate guitar riffs of their earlier material, it's mid-tempo, atmospheric and sprawling. While it does build to a crescendo-core ending,

it's tastefully done, so far as these things go.

With their *A Year of Wreckage* project, **65daysofstatic** have been releasing an EP per month of algorithmically generated music and B-sides that were all created while writing their album *Replicr*, 2019. 65 have now compiled a physical release, arranging two albums' worth of material in a new master done at Abbey Road. The five-track *Disquiet* (65daysofstatic.bandcamp.com) focuses on the more ambient, cinematic soundscapes rather than anything beat-driven. The 10-track *Utopian Frequencies*, meanwhile, showcases some of the strongest material from this era of the band. Several of ...*Wreckage*'s best songs are also present in the orchestral *A Slight Geometry*, the glitchy *Nines*, static storm of *Ghost Club*, and breakcore rage of *Pollen*. Riveting stuff.



MEER

Playing House KARISMA

Big-hearted Norwegian eight-piece with a more-is-more mentality.



It says a lot about the mercurial creativity that drives Meer's music that the Norwegian band began as a duo. These days, they are eight in number, with violin, viola and an assortment of other eccentric embellishments all adding to a rich ensemble sound. In truth, the songs on *Playing House* may well have begun as delicate, simple things, such as the immediacy and vitality of the melodies that unfurl from these songs like flowers in bloom. But rather than over-egg the pudding, Meer's all-hands-on-deck approach turns some wonderfully memorable songs into sublime mini symphonies, with dazzling musical detail, generous helpings of bluster and a gift for the kind of dynamics that make attentive listeners spit their tea across the room.

Sumptuous songcraft and ecstatic ensemble chemistry.

We learn a lot about Meer from six-minute opener *Picking Up The Pieces*, a song that rides into town with all guns blazing, with huge surges of strings and harmonies erupting all over the place and a brilliantly incisive but charming vocal from Johanne Kippersund, a self-evident prog star in the making. As the song builds to a wonderfully euphoric climax, it's like being plunged into the front row of some mind-frazzling symphonic rock opera, with bells, whistles and kitchen sinks in abundance. At the same time, *Picking Up The Pieces* is also an exquisite, slightly skewed pop song that would sound astonishing on the radio.

Male vocalist Knut Kippersund is an equally great singer, incidentally, and the way the two harmonise blissfully throughout *Playing House* adds another telling weapon to their band's unfairly stuffed arsenal. On the bruised and melancholy *Lay It Down* they provide the soulful glue that holds the song's angular, fidgeting structure together; on the fragile waltz of *All At Sea*, Knut's wistful lead vocal wanders through a dreamy haze before colliding with Johanne for a spinetingling, strings-drenched chorus payoff.

Almost irritatingly gorgeous from start to finish, *Playing House* reaches an obvious peak on the lavish, gently gothic *Honey*; six minutes of absurdly rousing and emotionally potent theatrical rock underpinned by a jarring electronic throb. It's a simply stunning piece of work and may cause otherwise restrained folk to leap to their feet and applaud. And then, after roughly 55 minutes of sumptuous songcraft and ecstatic ensemble chemistry, Meer have the audacity to add cherry to cake with what can only be described as the greatest Whitesnake cover any of us will ever hear in our lives. Like everything else on *Playing House*, the Norwegians' quietly unhinged take on *Here I Go Again* fizzles with wide-eyed delight at music itself. They really are quite the band.

DOM LAWSON

SILENT SKIES

Satellites SWEET LEMON

Chalk and cheese partnership serve up unexpected gem.

Big-on-the-continent, Swedes Evergrey have carved out a 25-year-career on the back of grandiose, prog-tinged Euro metal. But with *Silent Skies*, frontman Tom Englund steps away from the sturm und drang to serve up something unexpectedly low key though no less striking.

Satellites finds Englund teaming up with US piano virtuoso Vikram Shankar. It's an unlikely union, and one with the potential to produce a massive soufflé of sonic ridiculousness. Instead, *Horizons* and *Solitude* find the pair keeping their more bombastic urges in check. Forgoing guitars in favour



of restrained piano and tastefully deployed electronic touches, Shankar weaves delicate melodies and stark atmospheres, allowing Englund to lay bare some unspecified personal turmoil that would have been lost in the clamour of his day job.

Even the obligatory cover version – a restrained take on Eurythmics' moody *Here Comes The Rain* – is entirely in keeping with everything else here.

There's a new Evergrey album arriving soon, allowing Englund to crank the dials back up to 'thunderous'. *Satellites* stands as a brief but frequently dazzling diversion. **DEV**

STEARICA

Golem 2020 MONOTREME

Eerie soundtrack for the silent horror movie.

When the music here was first performed in 2011, it accompanied a screening of *Der Golem, Wie Er In Die Welt Kam*, the classic 1920 German silent horror film. The soundtrack was effective and breathtaking. Now, a decade on, Italy's Stearica have refined the presentation to make it even more rousing and engaging.

While a soundtrack naturally works best in conjunction with visuals, it says a lot for the skills of the musicians that the film's absence isn't damaging to the overall effect. Even without the visuals, the musical journey at times offers a claustrophobic sense of doom, while



at others creates an almost supernatural lightness. *Der Golem...* was based on a fable about a clay statue brought to life in 16th century Prague in order to protect the Jewish community from oppression. The various moods through which the

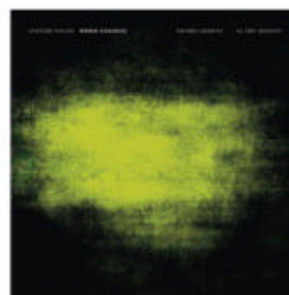
tale twists are wonderfully captured. The way the story moves from fear to hope and then to helplessness is mirrored in the diverse arrangements, with the expert manner that the instruments become interwoven immeasurably adding to the dramatic impact. With or without moving images, this is a formidable piece of work. **MD**

STEPHAN THELEN

World Dialogue RARENOISE

Sonar man's string-driven thing.

Best known for his work with minimalist Swiss rock outfit Sonar, guitarist and composer Stephan Thelen's stock was given a boost when he was invited to write a piece for the revered Kronos Quartet. That piece, *Circular Lines*, opens *World Dialogue*, its propulsive quality finds the quartet adding and subtracting different rhythms that variously nag, gnaw and push against each other. These aren't huge tectonic shifts but a series of small incremental movements, building energy and momentum prompting a chain reaction of rich intensity. The album's remaining three tracks,



Chaconne, *World Dialogue* and *Silesia* are performed by the Al Pari Quartet. Bringing an agile precision to each of the pieces, they weave the knots of counterpoint into a hypnotic patchwork. Although the sound is austere at times, Thelen's

melodic inscriptions surge with passion.

Fans of Sonar should have no difficulty in engaging with this new departure. Thelen says that music has the capacity to lift one "beyond the constraints of space and time into beautiful, strange and unknown worlds." It's a target that *World Dialogue* hits with accuracy. **SS**

THERION

Leviathan NUCLEAR BLAST

Prog metal mainstays scale back the grandiosity.

Even by progressive metal's standards, orchestral Swedes Therion's 2018 album, *Beloved Antichrist*, was OTT. A three-hour rock opera based on a story by philosopher Vladimir Solovyov, it was loaded with 46 songs, 15 vocalists and a full choir.

After that hefty precedent, *Leviathan* is a safe follow-up. At just 45 minutes, it's much less in line with prog's boundary pushing backbone, negating long-running narratives in favour of making each standalone song as bombastic as possible. On that front, it undoubtedly succeeds. Opening anthem



The Leaf On The Oak Of Far commences with simple power chords that subsequently explode into an armada of choral pomp. Ex-Nightwish singer/bassist Marco Hietala adds vocal majesty on *Tuonela*, and *Nocturnal Light* tacks back and forth between vintage

metal riffs and sweeping classical music.

Anyone looking for an equally maximalist continuation of *Beloved Antichrist* will find themselves sorely disappointed. But those seeking a more digestible counterpoint to that which nonetheless refuses to skimp on drama and engaging vocal talents will be very satisfied by *Leviathan*. **MM**

AA WILLIAMS

Songs From Isolation BELLA UNION

Sporadically great covers collection from prog newcomer.

Hot on the heels of her incredible debut LP *Forever Blue*, this covers album offers, on paper, a chance for AA Williams to flex her creative muscle. As it turns out, the results are mixed. When it works, it almost reaches the giddy heights of *Forever Blue*.

When it doesn't, it falls somewhat flat.

Instrumentally, *Songs From Isolation* contains stripped-back, sparse arrangements on guitar and piano, with occasional backing loops. What this means in practice is that the depth and attention to detail of Williams' own compositions is absent. While her voice and playing are excellent throughout,



the world did not need another acoustic cover of Radiohead's *Creep*. Still, *Songs From Isolation* hits its loftiest heights on its most recognisable song: you might expect The Moody Blues' done-to-death *Nights In White Satin* to be a misstep, but her

arrangement is rapturous. Nine Inch Nails' *Every Day Is Exactly The Same* lends itself well to a piano dirge.

Songs From Isolation is pleasant but often unsurprising. The listener is left wondering what Williams could have done with full band arrangements in her style, using the same care she takes over her own music. **AL**

JOE WONG

Nite Creatures DECCA

Soundtrack composer turns his hand to lush retro psychscapes.

L.A.-based polymath Joe Wong is the soundtrack composer for Netflix series *Russian Doll* and also the host of the music podcast *The Trap Set*. He's evidently made a few friends along the way, as his debut LP of conventional songs is assisted by Ex Hex/Helium guitarist Mary Timony, a 16-piece orchestra and guest appearances from the likes of Flaming Lips' Steven Drozd and War On Drugs' Jon Natchez. More impressive still is the psychedelic soundscape he's created with the help of Lips producer Dave Fridmann.

The sumptuous symphonic psych-drama of *Always Alone* echoes David



Axelrod-era Electric Prunes while the title track's transcendent horn sections float up on clouds of chamber pop bliss as Wong channels an echo-drenched, Lee Hazlewood-lite baritone. Even if there's the occasional sense of it being a retro studio experiment,

Nite Creatures is still a gorgeous, if lysergically tinged experience.

At the heart of it all are deceptively simple songs such as the floaty meditations *Minor* and *Sleeping*. 'Always dreaming in fours,' he croons on the latter track, 'your eyes cannot see.' Maybe, but our ears are thoroughly charmed. **JS**



AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Grant Moon has a rummage down the back of the Prog sofa for the ones that nearly got away...

Oddball, vibrant, and made for the sheer love of music, *Sub Marine Dreams* (Eelshock Records) is the latest cracker from **Seas Of Mirth**, the Nottingham collective whose joyful energy, clever silliness and woozy whimsy is served up with extremely accomplished musicianship. *Ink (Do The Blollop)* and *Happy Hour At El Squid Diablo* are just two of the enticing titles on a record stuffed with musical exotica (from bouzouki to xylophone), its rhythms nicked from Latin, disco and prog. It's as if Gogol Bordello and The Lennon Claypool Delirium teamed up to soundtrack *Spongebob Squarepants* – dive in!

Malcolm Galloway is best known as a member of Hats Off Gentlemen It's Adequate, but excels as a classical/minimalist composer in his own right. His three-track EP *Wasp 76b* (malcolmgalloway.bandcamp.com) is another compelling delve into his intricate soundworld where delicate piano, crystal-clear synths and flautando strings abound. His 40-minute piece *The Haber Process* is utterly mesmerising: simple motifs on marimba, keys and guitar rub and chime together, transporting you to another space entirely. You'll wonder where the time went.

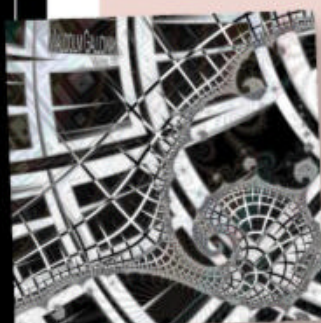
Fife Augury are a young prog rock duo from Marseille whose debut album, *Shape Of A Tree* (self-released), "draws on folk, metal, stoner rock, jazz fusion ambiances". They clearly have grand ambition and there are flashes of real potential here (the heavy 11-minuter *Singularity*; fiddly math rocker *Speed Of Asia*), but they need to relax into their talent – these compositions are overcooked, the vocals effortful and patchy, and the whole thing ultimately a little aimless. Où sont les hooks?

Another French band, **Esthesis** follow their 2019 EP *Raising Hands* with debut long-player, *The Awakening* (esthesis.bandcamp.com). This is modern, melodic and moody stuff, laden with atmosphere and lovingly produced. Founder Aurélien Goude is a wonderfully sensitive keyboardist; his voice is pleasant, mild-mannered and plain under-powered at times, but does work well for his brand of floaty, minor-key prog. This may well appeal to fans of Cosmograf or the omni-influence that is Steven Wilson.

The Reflection Club features Jethro

Tull tribute act singer Paul Forrest, flautist Ulla Harmuth and, doing the work of 10 men, their multi-instrumentalist founder Lutz Meinert. *Still Thick As A Brick* (Madvedge) is – yes you guessed it – the sound of a German band taking on the mantle of Tull circa 1972. This 48-minute, 11-part concept piece is original music, and while it's Tull by design, it works well on its own terms. If nothing else it'll leave you admiring their commitment.

Finally to two mid-90s reissues from Leeds stalwarts **Envizible Orchestra**. Their 1994 debut album *Gadzooks!* and superior follow-up *Of Heaven Born* (Confidential) both have a few ropery moments, but – presented here with a wealth of niche bonus tracks – they showcase the band's likeable, varied approach to jazzy prog/fusion/psych, and Jon Mayson's nimble guitar chops too.



BE-BOP DELUXE

Plastic Fantastic ESOTERIC

Superior collection of Be-Bop's last word.



The sheer volume of material that Be-Bop Deluxe amassed in such a short space of time often seems difficult to assimilate. They were the ultimate square peg in the round hole of the 70s: too glam to be prog, too prog to be punk, they shapeshifted. They could have been Queen, they could have been Roxy Music; they could have been huge. For those who were there, leader Bill Nelson's bony hand was on the tiller of futurism as much as Bowie's.



It demonstrates just how far ahead of the curve they were.



Nelson, by now, was tiring of being a 'guitar hero' and wanted to disband Be-Bop Deluxe after 1976's *Modern Music*, feeling they had run their course. Thankfully, management persuaded him to make a further album. *Drastic Plastic*, released in February 1978, was the result.

When one considers that the last note of the album proper was recorded the previous June, it demonstrates just how far ahead of the curve the group were. *Drastic Plastic* foresees power pop, post-punk and futurism. Recorded at Villa St Georges, Juan-les-Pins, it would be hard to find a less 'south of France' album if you tried. The sound that the group created here presaged co-producer John Leckie's work with XTC and Simple Minds.

From the chopped and looped drumbeats of *Electrical Language* that open the album, to *Love In Flames* and *Superenigmatix* – a track that melds Roxy with the Who – the album points clearly to Nelson's next venture, Red Noise. *Visions Of Endless Hopes* offers atmospheric classical – almost like a sop to those who preferred the group as they were. Of the bonuses, the Juan-les-Pins version of *The Saxophonist* shows Nelson being Django Reinhardt – again, there are just so many ideas coursing through these recordings. The demos included sound exactly like Nelson's early-80s work – one man and his machines.

The live disc, *BBC Sight And Sound In Concert*, is a joy. A becalmed, stunned crowd clearly expecting *Ships In The Night*, seem unable to handle this new material. When *Blazing Apostles* finally closes, the cheer of recognition is palpable. Nelson split the band soon after, and it's impossible to listen to *Drastic Plastic* without a sense of sadness. Although the immediate aftermath found Nelson producing some of the greatest records he ever put his name to, the 'what ifs' course through every listen.

This expanded edition of *Drastic Plastic* has the Esoteric ring of confidence, you know that no stone has been left unturned, or if it *has* been left unturned, there's a jolly good reason for it – the previously released material slotted into the unreleased helps unpack the story of this most curious of albums.

DARYL EASLEA

CURVED AIR

The Albums 1970 - 1973 CHERRY RED

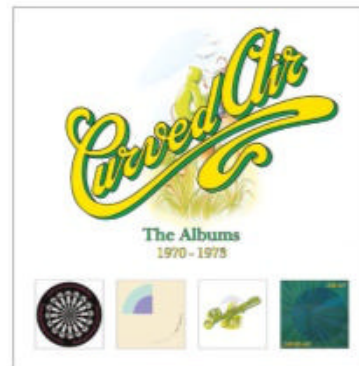
Sonja Kristina and co's first four albums boxed and still mostly splendid.

Curved Air's early albums for Warner Brothers still stand as the finest of their career, and one can surely never grow tired of listening to them. This box set reissue gives fans a chance to celebrate once more the timeless music created by Sonja

Kristina and her bandmates.

Their 1970 debut *Air Conditioning* was renowned as being the first commercially available LP picture disc in the UK. But the musical combination of the five – especially violinist Darryl Way and guitarist/keyboard player Francis Monkman – is stunningly cohesive for such a young band. The self-explanatorily titled *Second Album* in 1971 prospered sales-wise, in no small part due to hit single *Back Street Luv*. Despite the fact there were problems growing between Way and Monkman, the music retained a cultured edge.

The rift between the duo had deepened by the time of third album *Phantasmagoria* in 1972, which was why the former's compositions were all on the first side, while Monkman's graced



the other side. Ironically, despite this schism, this album contains possibly the band's best work during the period. Each of the musicians was pushing the others to improve and the result was a perfectly balanced combination of melody, enlightenment and raw energy.

Air Cut was a very different beast. Released in 1973, it featured just Sonja Kristina and bassist Mike Wedgwood from the previous album. The newly revamped line-up included teenage wunderkind Eddie Jobson on violin and synthesiser, and one cannot readily dismiss any band who are lucky enough to have him in their midst. But this was the sound of Curved Air trying to find their niche while weighed down by the success of the recent past. There are still moments like *Metamorphosis*, though, which shine through, thereby proving the new incarnation could rise to any challenge.

Curved Air are revered as among the best progressive bands during the golden period of the early 70s. These albums reaffirm the point. **MD**

NIRVANA

Songlife 1967-72 MADFISH

Maddeningly enigmatic British pioneers' back catalogues collected.

It's been said so often that it's now become almost a cliché, but late-60s psychedelic pop duo Nirvana should have been massive. The tale of Patrick Campbell-Lyons and Alex Spyropoulos is undeniably one of opportunities wasted, but in their short career

they released five albums full of wonderful and occasionally ambitious music – all of which are collected in this box set, limited to just 1,000 copies.

Never afraid to go out on a limb, Nirvana's 1967 debut, *The Story Of Simon Simopath*, was arguably the first narrative concept album. Combining jazz, classical and folk it was insane enough to grab the attention of clued-in music fans, if not the wider public. Second album *All Of Us* came out in 1968, featuring the minor hit *Rainbow Chaser*. Once more it was determinedly lacking in cohesion yet laced with charm. It was typical of the duo that the album's full title was *The Existence Of Chance Was Everything And Nothing While The Greatest Achievement Is The Living Of Life And So Say All Of Us*.



Signed to Island at the time, their third album, *Black Flower*, was rejected by label boss Chris Blackwell, who claimed it to be lightweight rubbish and dropped them. Eventually released in 1970 by Pye under the title *To Markos III* (supposedly named

after a rich uncle of Spyropoulos who financed the recordings), it has an effective easy listening sensibility. Both 1971's *Local Anaesthetic* and *Songs Of Love And Praise*, released a year later, were made by Campbell-Lyons without his partner. Neither are essential, but have some mature pop-rock moments.

The real discovery here is the long-lost *Secrets*, which Nirvana had planned as a stage musical in the early-70s. Musically, it was freaked-out funk merged with theatrical bar room bombast – thoroughly entertaining. Like everything else in their career, *Secrets* was a game-changer thrown away.

These days, Nirvana remain an idiosyncratic, gifted footnote to the psychedelic era. This set underlines that small but crucial place in history. **MD**

RIVERSIDE

Out Of Myself INSIDEOUT

Revisit Riverside's riveting, remarkable and acutely realised debut outing.

Although they enjoyed a limited release in their Polish homeland, it was Ken Golden's Laser's Edge label, dedicated to finding and promoting obscure bands, who gave Riverside their big break internationally. Debut album *Out Of Myself* immediately garnered plaudits for its quality and ambition. Inhabiting a musical and often thematic space somewhere between Pink Floyd and Porcupine Tree, *Out Of Myself* prompted many to reassess how they perceived prog metal, and it remains as powerful, brilliantly conceived and compelling as did back in 2004.

Twelve-minute opener *The Same River* starts deceptively slowly, with soft synth pads, an almost psychedelic ambience, building and shifting through multiple sections introducing bass, drums and the graceful and aurally luminous guitar work of Piotr Grudziński, whose phrasings and sounds permeate so much here, hitting 'peak Gilmour' on penultimate track *The Curtain Falls*. Mariusz Duda's vocals make a real impact here and across the



album's remaining tracks – displaying the rare skill of fully expressing extremes of emotion through voice. The title track plays with a bubbling, urgent bass riff as a backdrop to Duda's part breathy, part-strident, part-wounded howl delivery, as the rest of the band

build dramatic tension and release. We get the dreamy prog balladry of *I Believe* and the lush textures of *In Two Minds* as well as vivid pictures created in sound by the instrumentals *Reality Dream* and *Reality Dream II*, which showcase pretty much everyone in the band at various points. The ensemble playing is excellent and the sound palettes can envelope the unwary, but *Out Of Myself* also acts as a reminder of what a terrible loss the prog community and the band suffered when guitarist Grudziński died in 2016.

Remastered and reissued for the first time since its original release, this is a sometimes bold, sometimes transcendental album by a band who have rightly turned many heads and challenged musical prejudices. **GMM**

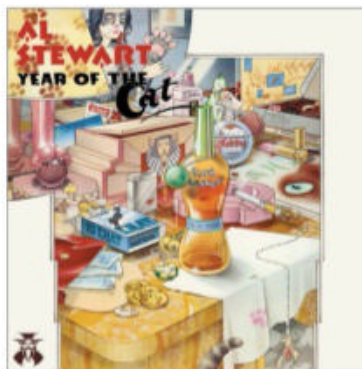
AL STEWART

Year Of The Cat: 45th Anniversary Box Set CHERRY RED

What's new, pussycat? Live albums and new mixes are added to this classic.

That acoustic guitar solo gives way to that electric guitar solo, which in turn gives way to that alto sax solo, as the piano holds the melody together and we ponder Al Stewart's romantic tale of deciding to stay in Africa a little longer with a mysterious woman. Is there a more perfect coda in the history of soft rock than the showboating play-out of *Year Of The Cat*? Exquisite, swoon-inducing, deeply unfashionable, it's perhaps a Marmite moment, its class and politeness anathema to rioting punks. But if you're sold on its beauty it never, ever grows old.

Actually, it turns out it does, as this is the album's 45th anniversary. This limited edition box set adds a new 5.1 surround sound mix – so you hear the deftness of Alan Parsons' production even more clearly – plus two live sets from the accompanying tour, tracked in Seattle in October '76. There's also a contemporaneous Abbey Road track, *Belsize Blues*, wherein Al sings of getting flooded at his home in north-west London.



Yet these extras are just a side-dressing to what remains the main event: Stewart's seventh album, recorded in early '76, and the one that radically reshaped his career from wordy folkie to US radio favourite. He'd worked with Parsons before, on *Modern Times*, but

this was where the marriage of Stewart's feathery songs and gentle vocals and Parsons' cinematic arrangements really blossomed. A Top 5 platinum-seller in the US, its mild-mannered yet come-hither atmosphere reveals secrets gradually. Tunes which seem negligible at first covertly drive hooks into you, the instrumental passages abound with astuteness, and Stewart sings of quiet love, quaint history and, in *Broadway Hotel*, a rendezvous narrated with the sly sleight of hand of a brilliant short story writer. *On The Border*, flecked with flamenco, is a paragon of understated drama. And then that consummate, elegant title track just flows, an easy river, feline groovy. The masterpiece of both singer and producer. **CR**

KAYAK

Phantom Of The Night RENAISSANCE RECORDS

Dabbling with pop music, 70s Dutch proggers go to the dark side.



Highly lauded by fans in their native Netherlands, Kayak recorded eight studio albums before their initial split in 1982. Of those, 1979's *Phantom Of The Night* remains the band's best-selling LP. Given a new lease of life courtesy of a fresh remastering, it's now been released exclusively on pristine, heavyweight vinyl.



A document of a band attempting to access a wider audience.



Although many Kayak hallmarks populate the album, it also acts as a definite contrast between the symphonic and experimental leanings of their previous work. *Phantom Of The Night* marked a directional shift with the band streamlining their writing and aiming for a more mainstream pop demographic, mirroring Genesis and Gentle Giant who had been enjoying success across the North Sea. While tracks like the jaunty *Winning Ways* and *Crime Of Passion* suggest touches of early Supertramp and there are strains of early Yes, Saga, and the Alan Parsons Project, together with some of the quasi-classical influences of previous albums elsewhere, there is something else at work here as well.

Compositionally, there are moments more reminiscent of mid-70s American singer-songwriters – early Billy Joel and Dean Friedman, for instance – than of obvious prog contemporaries. *The Poet And The One Man Band* and *Keep The Change* could very easily have turned up on albums from these artists. This isn't a criticism as much as an observation of the perhaps unacknowledged genre crossovers which were less problematic back when music fans weren't quite so tribal about their affiliations?

Toying with approaches to songwriting also brought the band the well-deserved international single hit *Ruthless Queen* with its lush yet restrained, elegiac instrumentation and gentle hooks. Main songwriter Ton Scherpenzeel could pen a fine poignant ballad, as evidenced by *Ruthless Queen*, as well as *First Signs Of Spring* with its beautiful piano and gorgeous vocal melodies from Edward Reekers on this, his debut with the band, and the first half of *Daphne (Laurel Tree)*. Reekers is terrific throughout providing clean, characterful vocals to pretty much every track. In prog terms, the band saves the best for last as the title track closes the album in real style building steadily from a sparse piano and voice intro the band utilises strings, layered backing vocals, some almost Hackett-esque guitar lines, and stirring hooks to great effect.

Phantom Of The Night isn't the weightiest Kayak album – either musically, conceptually or lyrically – but it works as a charming, warm-hearted document of a 70s prog act attempting to access a wider audience and presumably remain 'relevant' in a changing musical climate.

GARY MACKENZIE

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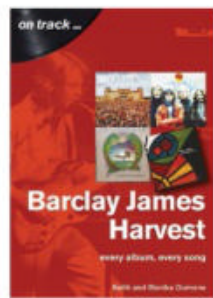
BARCLAY JAMES HARVEST: EVERY ALBUM, EVERY SONG

Keith & Monika Domone SONICBOND

Erudite commentary on BJH's recording career.

Books dedicated to analysing the albums of some of music's most respected bands can come across as dull and lifeless, being no more than a collection of extended album reviews. But the Domones deserve a good deal of credit for making this one entertaining.

The pair have long been respected as experts on BJH, but haven't approached this tome from the standpoint that everything they've done is unconditionally amazing; there's criticism of albums when it's felt necessary. So when praise is given, the reader feels more inclined to accept this as objective and not fandom.



The format is fairly straightforward: each studio album is discussed in the context of how it was recorded and specific problems BJH had to confront at the time. Every track is then pored over, as well as non album recordings from the era. Adding extra colour, the authors extensively draw

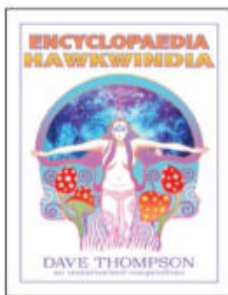
on interviews done with the main protagonists. All records up to 1997's *River of Dreams*, the last to carry the Barclay James Harvest name, get this treatment. There's also a chapter on the live album output, while another features solo albums and associated releases since 1997. **MD**

ENCYCLOPAEDIA HAWKWINDIA - AN UNAUTHORISED COMPENDIUM

Dave Thompson LULU

A book for Hawkwind freaks.

Casual Hawkwind listeners who enjoy the music but have little interest in the detail behind it will doubtless be bored by Dave Thompson's mammoth A-to-Z covering every song, bandmember, festival appearance and so much more that's connected to the Hawkwind universe. But the painstakingly compiled, near-600-page *Encyclopaedia Hawkwindia* will be an essential addition to the bookshelves of devotees who relish the prospect of wandering deep through the minutiae of the veteran space rockers' storied 50-plus-year career. Like any traditional encyclopaedia, it's not the kind of book



to sit down and study for hours, but instead it's one that benefits from dipping into on specific occasions. Thompson has carried out around 70 interviews for the project, and his devotion to the subject is unquestioned, but it must also be mentioned that the text is very dry, which may put a few folk off.

Presumably, the odd Hawkwind diehard will delight in scanning the volume to find omissions, and there are bound to be a few even in a book of this size. For most lovers of the band, though, this will be an encyclopaedia that's as complete as it needs to be. **MD**

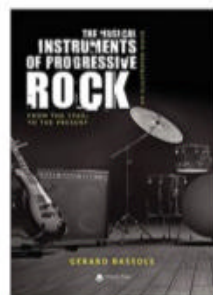
THE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF PROGRESSIVE ROCK

Gerard Bassols GRUPO EDITORIAL CÍRCULO ROJO

Forensic look at the keys, valves and cymbals that soundtracked a movement.

If prog musicians are noted for naming their works as floridly as their muse dictates, this book about the tools of their trade takes the opposite approach. And sure enough, it examines exactly what it says on the cover.

Anyone intrigued to know which generation of Moog or Mellotron is used on the intro to *Watcher Of The Skies* or get an in-depth breakdown of Carl Palmer's rotating stainless steel drumkit, *The Musical Instruments Of Progressive Rock* is the perfect reference. There's still plenty here for non-geeks to wade into, from the history of the synthesiser from the



Hammond Novachord in the 1930s through the rise of the Mellotron and the Moog, and on to the story of how advances in 70s technology overtook the short-lived Birotron and helped bankrupt Rick Wakeman.

Despite great photos and illustrations, it could do with a few quotes from users of these instruments to inspire casual readers to actually seek out the records (or the vintage kit) mentioned, and an accompanying website with sound samples would also be useful. As it is though, prog musos of all stripes will still be thoroughly engrossed. **JS**

ARENA

From The Beginning - A Photographic History Of The First 25 Years! VERGLAS MUSIC

UK proggers' silver jubilee belatedly celebrated in book (and live CD).



Back in 1993, almost a decade after Marillion drummer Mick Pointer had departed the band he founded after playing on their debut album *Script For A Jester's Tear*, the music industry was a long time dead to him. Pointer had been working as a kitchen designer when some Marillion fanzine writers he knew got in touch and told him that Pendragon keyboard player Clive Nolan was interested in forming a new project — could he be persuaded out of retirement to work on some ideas?



Dozens of backstage and studio pictures bring the story to life.



Pointer was and, as luck would have it, someone was around to take a few snaps of those early encounters. They form the first pages of this LP-sized coffee table book tracing Arena's story in pictures, with attendant memories and stories from Pointer and Nolan, who have gone on, of course, to be the band's ever-present linchpins.

The scrapbook-style design assembling jumbled snaps isn't the most promising when you first pick it up, but it turns out to be quite a neat way of decorating an oral history of the band, and for every moody publicity shot there are several dozen backstage and studio pictures helping to bring the story and characters within the band to life.

Yet for all the numerous line-up changes in Arena's history, a warts-and-all story this is not: the personnel changes are generally covered with talk of "parting ways" and "pastures new", so if you're after dirt-digging, this celebration of the good times is probably not the place to look.

By the end of this book, frontman Paul Manzi had become their fourth singer to depart, and before he bowed out after 10 years' service (amicably by all accounts) he lent his formidable pipes for the final time to the Italian festival show captured on the two live CDs that are housed in the back page of this glossy, box-set-sized volume.

Perhaps appropriately, the setlist of CD1 takes the listener on a journey forward through the back catalogue, with *Welcome To The Cage*'s potent melodic immediacy (from 1996) followed by the gripping, rising panic of 1998's *A Crack In The Ice* setting us off through to the dramatic ebb and flow of the 22-minute climax of 2018's *Double Vision, The Legend Of Elijah Shade*. CD2 then heads back again through the years all the way to *Solomon* from 1995 debut *Songs From The Lion's Cage*. It's punchy, incisive stuff imbued with far more energy than men midway through their third decade as a band have any right to be displaying. Even if the hairs are getting greyer throughout the thousands of photos herein, Arena's spirit is clearly evergreen.

JOHNNY SHARP



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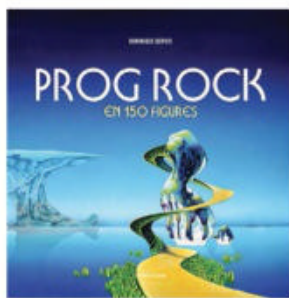
PROG ROCK EN 150 FIGURES

Dominique Dupuis ÉDITIONS DU LAYEUR

A colourful collection of prog artists... in French.

Stinky Toys' ex manager Dominique Dupuis, has always been an avid prog fan. While his friends listened to Led Zeppelin, he was playing *In The Court Of The Crimson King* on repeat.

In his latest hardback, he recounts the origins of prog with Procol Harum and Frank Zappa, charts the golden age with Hawkwind and Gentle Giant, and explores the emergence of krautrock via Kraftwerk and Tangerine Dream. He also looks at French and Italian artists Area and Magma, as well as Dream Theater and Steven Wilson. Dupuis draws from his vast knowledge of each featured artist to explore their



significance in the prog scene with the spotlight on standout albums, artwork and illustrations.

Prog Rock... is a great starting point for beginners and a trip down memory lane for aficionados that features Pink Floyd, Yes and Genesis, as well as Patto,

Third Ear Band, Wigwam, Radiohead, Talk Talk and Mogwai.

Despite the questionable omission of Mike Oldfield and the controversial inclusion of Deep Purple, this hefty compendium is enriched with knowledge and a genuine love of prog. It's the perfect coffee table book for any prog fan's home. **ILD**

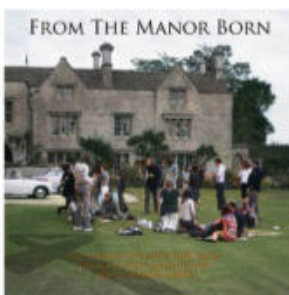
MIKE OLDFIELD

Tubular Bells: From The Manor Born TIGERMOTH

The *Gone With The Wind* of music documentaries.

If the 2013 BBC documentary *Tubular Bells: The Mike Oldfield Story* was the paperback of how Oldfield's phenomenal work came about, then Paul Harris and Robert Reed's *From The Manor Born* is a full encyclopaedia.

The antithesis of current fast-cut, archive-rich BBC or Sky Arts documentaries, this is strictly lots of old boys telling it as it was. And that's not a bad thing. It explores a world of penniless toffs roaming around in the country doing up classic motors and model airplanes; Oldfield's musical vision and Branson's business vision. Some of the stories are very well worn,



but many are not. One absolutely fabulous fact is that producer Tom Newman - an unvarnished geezer, procuring Wimpy chips for starving hippies and full of warm stories - painted a picture that he was hoping to sell to a Beatle.

He and it were taken to

Apple for their rooftop performance in 1969. His picture can clearly be seen behind Ringo Starr.

Non-avids may get a little blurry when the documentary reaches the tech spec part, but, overall, *From The Manor Born* is an essential snapshot of the music business before it became the music industry. **DE**

VAN DER GRAAF GENERATOR: EVERY ALBUM, EVERY SONG

Dan Coffey SONICBOND

Getting to grips with of one of prog's more difficult propositions.

Here Dan Coffey gives us a breakdown of all Van Der Graaf's studio and live albums, as well as a selection of Peter Hammill's 70s solo work. He also chronicles the group's development by drawing on his own interviews with Hammill, Hugh Banton and Guy Evans.

Coffey's enthusiasm for the group's music is tangible, and, at its best, he shows how the lyrics, structure and collective playing combined to make a song special. But it's difficult to keep this many track-by-track entries incisive and fresh, which leads to lengthy running commentaries or perfunctory descriptions, and he



sometimes skates over a song's meaning. Writing about *The Comet*, *The Course*, *The Tail* he makes no mention of the comet Kohoutek, which passed near the Earth in 1973, even though contemporary views on its astronomical and spiritual significance directly inspired Hammill to write

the song. And while he also unearths some nuggets of information, like how Shirley Bassey almost covered *Wilhelmina* in 1974, some analysis of how the musicians' disparate backgrounds informed the music, particularly Hammill's love of blues and soul, would have been welcome. **MB**

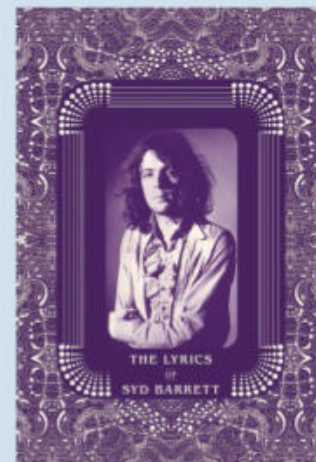
BARRETT: THE DEFINITIVE VISUAL COMPANION

Russell Beecher & Will Shutes ROCKET 88

THE LYRICS OF SYD BARRETT

OMNIBUS PRESS

A celebration of Syd's words and art.



Half a century after he ceased to be a recording artist Syd Barrett continues to loom in our consciousness like a cautionary tale. The young, impishly good-looking songwriter, who became lost and entangled in the dark woods of pop mythology, briefly reemerges as a bald, bloated wreck of his former self, ambling around Abbey Road unrecognised by Pink Floyd then working on *Wish You Were* only to then disappear for good. It's the stuff of legends.



Viewing his later art, it's easy to imagine Syd happy in himself.



We variously juggle with a procession of archetypes and stereotypes: Syd the fool, the magician, the catalyst, the visionary, the acid casualty, the hermit, and, of course, 'mad' Syd. An army of Syd seekers have written about all of these aspects over the years. Perhaps the very best of these is Rob Chapman's 2010 *A Very Irregular Head* and appropriately enough, Chapman provides authoritative commentary in two new additions to the expanding Barrett library.

Beecher and Shutes' exquisite paperback of their highly collectable 2011 hardback edition chronicles Syd's early and post-Floyd artwork. Its meticulously annotated and richly illustrated pages take us deep into Barrett's creativity. Here it's possible to see his musical career as a mere blip. Fizzing with vibrant colour, his paintings encompass charming figurative works, stirring abstracts, pop art japes, and a series of contemplative landscapes and still lives that run up to his death in 2006. Viewing these latter tranquil works it's easy to imagine Barrett happy in his work and in himself thereby adding 'content Syd' to that list of archetypes.

However, seeing his lyrics separated from their original musical settings, laid out on the white slab of a page like an autopsy subject, isn't always a rewarding experience. *The Lyrics Of Syd Barrett* sets out, in alphabetical order and accompanied by photos, the 52 songs published in his lifetime. Rob Chapman's persuasive introduction places Barrett's writing in the same experimental continuum as the poetry underground of the period and in this context helps vivify Barrett's conversational cadences.

However, Chapman's enthusiasm for his subject doesn't blind him to the fraying untidiness of what had once been crisp wordplay and sharp imagery as Barrett the musician and singer approaches the point of no return. Yet whether read or heard, *Opal*'s closing refrain of 'I'm trying to find you' resonates with unbearable poignancy.

SID SMITH

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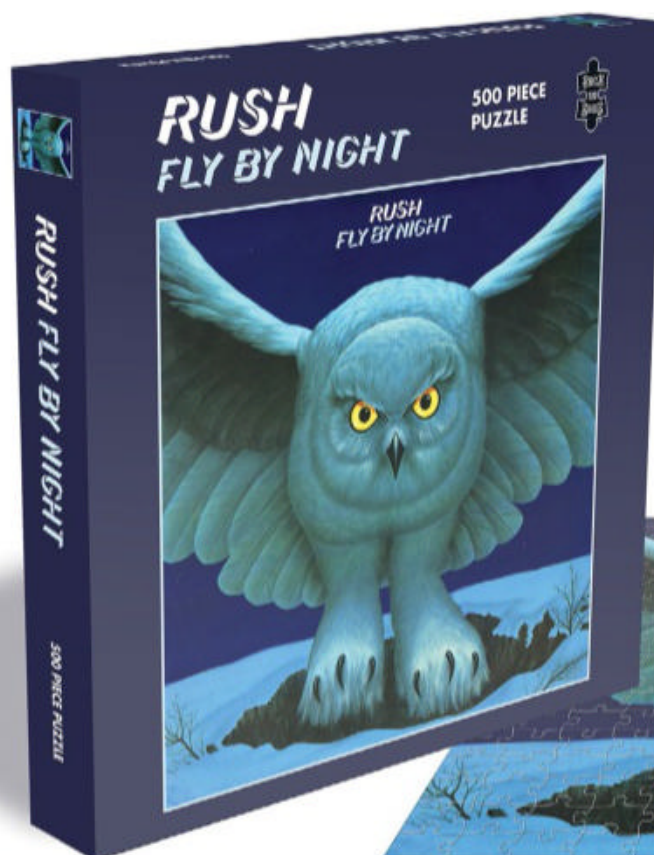
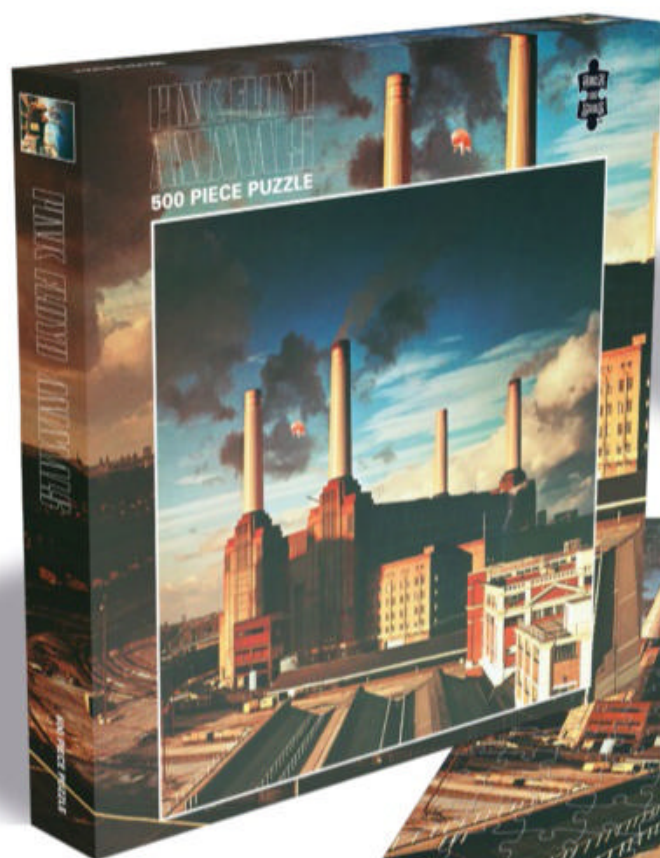
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Where's home?

Bromley in south London for the last 14 years, but I'm from Swansea and like to be near the sea when I can.

Earliest prog memory?

Nine years old, me and my older sister Fiona sitting on the living room floor blasting out *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, *Tubular Bells*, *Close To The Edge* and *Selling England By The Pound* on the family's Pye Black Box hi-fi – my mum still has it!

First prog album you bought?

A Trick Of The Tail by Genesis in 1976, on vinyl.

And the last?

Roger Waters' *Us + Them*, on

digital just a few weeks ago.

First prog gig?

Fiona sneaked me into the Brangwyn Hall, Swansea, in 1977 to see The Enid. I didn't have a ticket! I still love that band. We [Karnataka] did the New Day Festival with them in 2016.

And the latest?

Steve Hackett at Hammersmith Apollo in November 2019, on his *Selling England/Spectral Mornings* tour. Fantastic gig.

The best prog gig you ever saw in your life?

So many great ones over the years, but the Genesis Mama tour was pretty special. I saw them at Birmingham NEC in '84 – a perfect marriage of music and visuals.



PRESS/DANNY CLINCH

Newest prog discovery?

Muse didn't really register on my radar until recently, and I've really enjoyed working through their back catalogue. They cover a lot of ground musically, have their own take not only on progressive influences but a lot more besides.



Ian Jones (Illuminae/Karnataka)

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon**

Guilty musical pleasure?

Pop has always been the mother of invention. I like Sia and Madonna, and I think Imagine Dragons are really inventive. *Evolve* is one my fave albums of the last few years.

Your specialist subject on Mastermind?

The life and times of tiger hunter turned conservationist, Jim Corbett. And if I get to the second round, the history of Moog Taurus Bass pedals, 1975-2010!

Favourite prog venue?

Big, the Royal Albert Hall; small, Union Chapel. Both venues where the auditorium itself becomes part of the show. And if it were still on Wardour Street, the original Marquee – so many great memories...

Your prog hero?

Peter Gabriel for his writing, innovation and uncompromising

single-mindedness. And he takes even longer to release albums than me!

Outside of music what are you into?

I used to fish a lot and became obsessed with a giant river fish called a golden mahseer. I travelled to Karnataka, India in '95 to catch (and return) them. I was stung by a scorpion, got trampled by elephants, and dodged a huge croc! Nowadays, I stick to cinema, photography and Formula One...



"My first prog gig was The Enid in Swansea in 1977. I still love that band."



Have you ever had a prog date?

Yes, and just in case they're reading this we'll move swiftly on – next question!

The most important piece of prog music?

I could give a different answer every day. Today it's *Awaken* by Yes – melodies to die for, complexity, beauty, a musical experience. Yes at their best.

Recommend us a good read.

David Elliott's *1984: British Pop's Dividing Year*. An incredibly detailed and well-researched book about a pivotal year in music history, prog as well as pop. Samplers were becoming mainstream, digital was leaving analogue behind and the role of producer was becoming more prominent.



Prog muso you'd most like to work with?

I worked with some of my heroes on the new *Illuminae* album, but it would be Moya Brennan of Clannad. She has a beautiful, haunting voice, she's a great harpist too, and is not afraid to push the boundaries of the genre she's identified with.



Which proggy album gets you in a good mood?

Friday Night In San Francisco, the 1981 live album from Al Di Meola, John McLaughlin and Paco de Lucía. Recorded in a small theatre, all acoustic, the playing is breathtaking, and there's a lot of humour too. The whole atmosphere is amazing.

Favourite prog album cover?

The Dark Side of The Moon. Simple, iconic, timeless.

What are you up to at the moment?

Agnieszka Swita and I release our new *Illuminae* album, *Dark Horizons*, on February 12, which features Steve Hackett, John Helliwell, Craig Blundell, Luke Machin and Gonzalo Carrera. We've also just finished writing for the new *Karnataka* album and are starting the production, and are working on new *Illuminae* and *Chasing The Monsoon* material, too.

For more, visit www.illuminae.net.

FRANK HOENSCH/REDFERNS VIA GETTY IMAGES

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