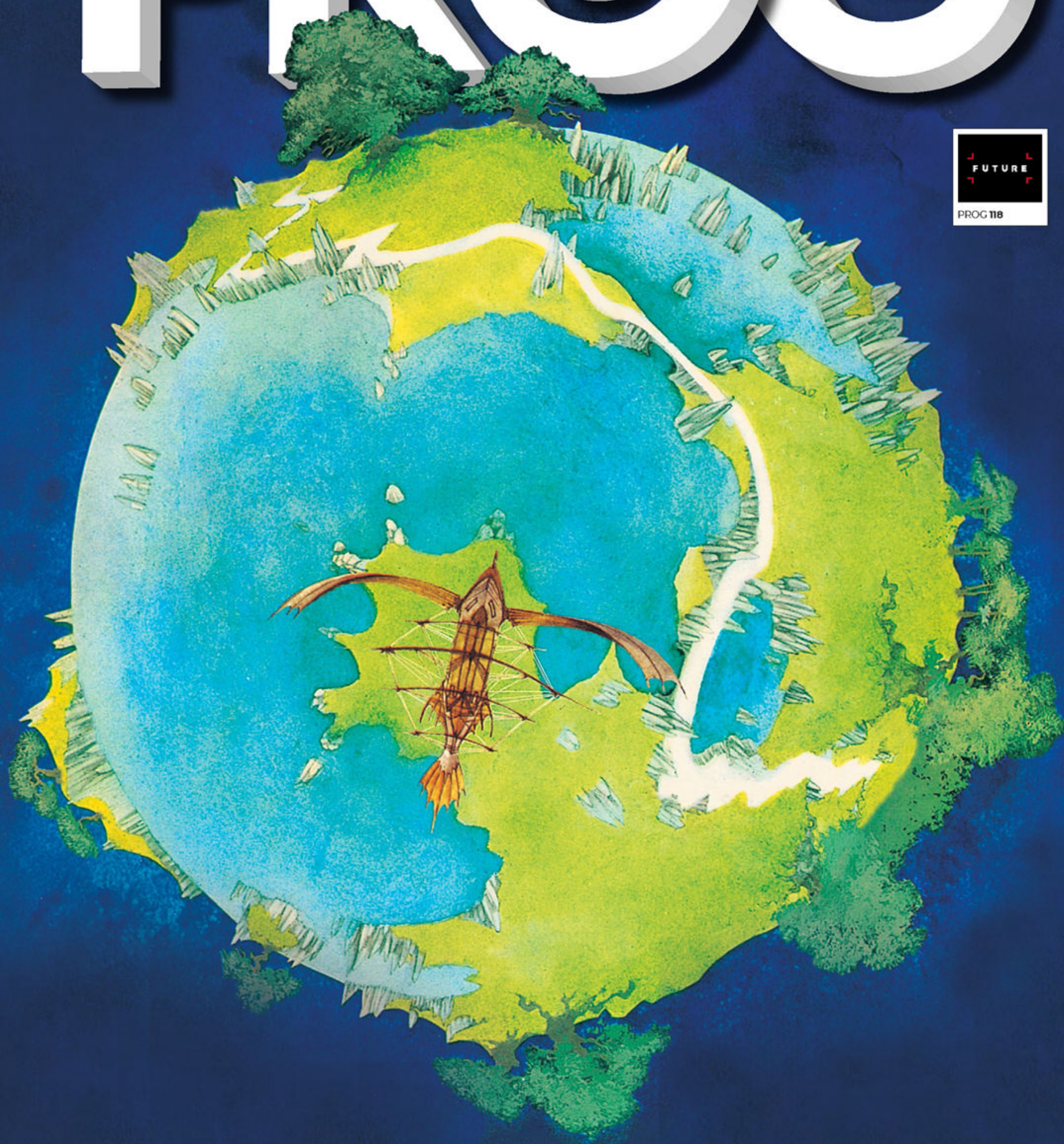


PROG

ASTOUNDING SOUNDS
AMAZING MUSIC



PROG 118



1971: The voyage to *Fragile*

How Yes released two classic albums and shaped the future of prog

CHICK COREA

Remembering the late
jazz fusion maestro

LIQUID TENSION EXPERIMENT

Prog supergroup return
after 22 years

SAGA

Canadians go acoustic
on new studio album

"Becoming Human" could be one of the best progressive rock albums this year. In short, it's a masterpiece
HUNNYPOT

There's no 'retro' prog rock to be found here; this is progressive music for a new decade
VELVET THUNDER



"Becoming Human" is a mature, intelligent, and wondrous release
THE PROG MIND

This masterpiece is well worth the price of admission. Get this album and sit back and let your mind go
PROGRESSIVE ROCK CENTRAL



Now available on CD & DIGITAL or
<https://orcd.co/simuncollins>

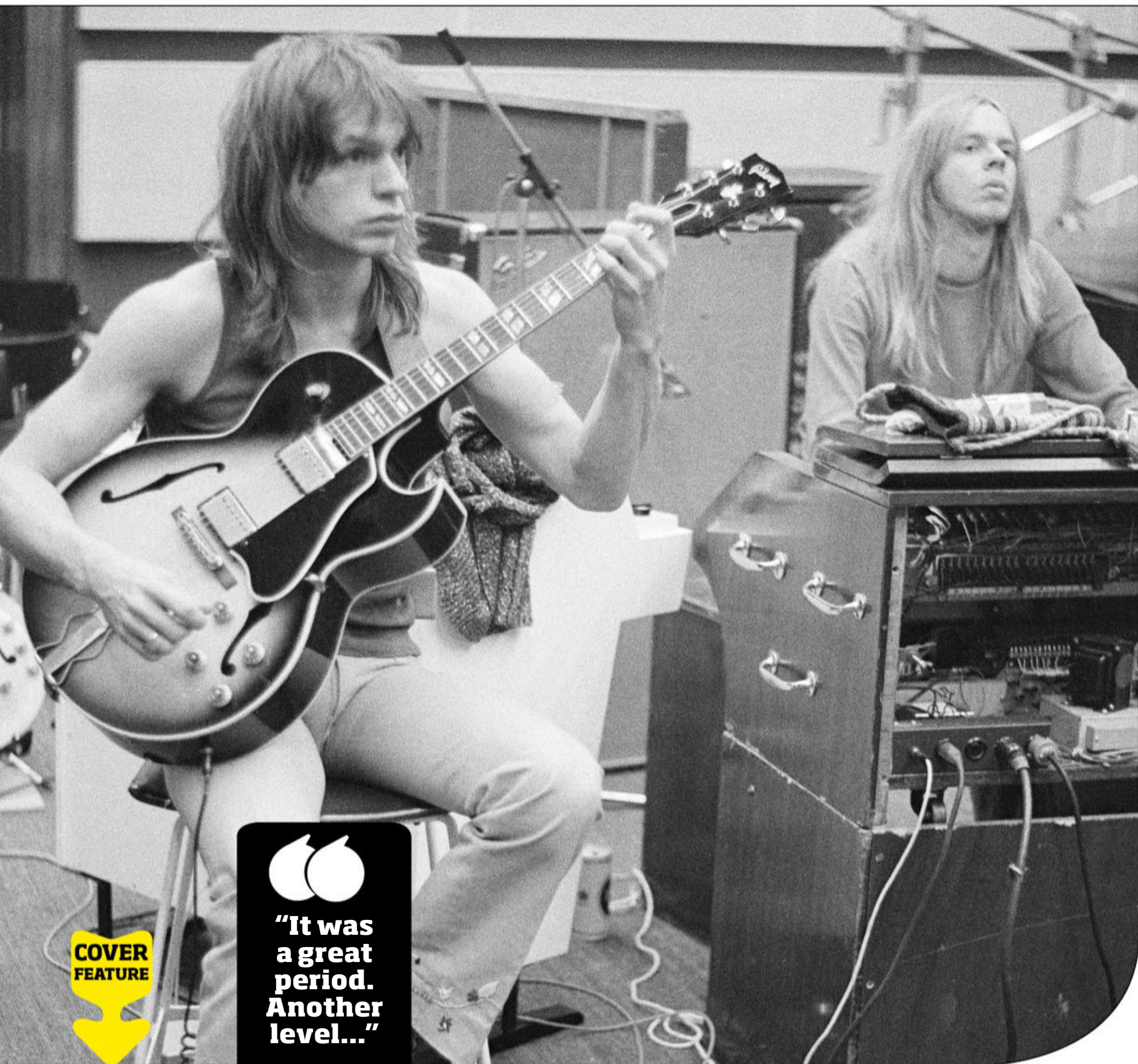


LIGHTYEARS

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ISSUE 118 19.03.21

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MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

COVER
FEATURE



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a great
period.
Another
level..."

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TONY LEVIN JOHN PETRUCCI MIKE PORTNOY JORDAN RUDESS

Liquid Tension EXPERIMENT 3

In Stores 26th March 2021

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John Petrucci, Mike Portnoy, Jordan Rudess & Tony Levin.



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as well as Ltd. 2CD Digipak, Ltd. 2CD + Blu-ray Artbook, Gatefold 2LP + CD & Digital Album.

New Releases

Karisma Records

April / May 2021

Out
09.04!



DOBBELTGJENGER

SMOOTH FAILING

Known as an extremely diverse band, stretching their sound in all directions. "SMOOTH FAILING" is filled to the rim with groove and funky rhythms, and the songs are catchy as hell from start to finish. Dobbeltgjenger is here to bring back the groove and fun in rock music!

Out
07.05!

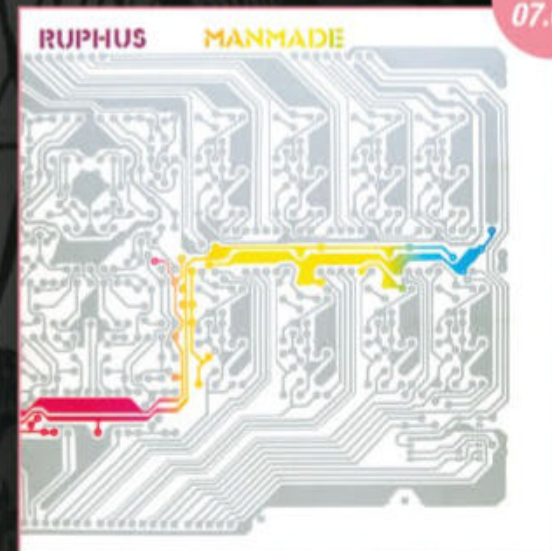


JORDSJØ

PASTORALIA

Jordsjø manages to meld progressive rock with fantastic melodies and a folkish twist. Spanning a musical journey from minimalist mellotron passages to full on rock tempest, Pastoralia is a must for any fan of Scandinavian prog, but also a gem to be discovered by the novice.

Out
07.05!



RUPHUS

MANMADE

"Manmade" was the sixth album from the legendary Norwegian prog/jazz rock band Ruphus, originally released in 1979. A worthy end to a career of a band who made an everlasting catalogue of exciting music, with Gudny Aspaas back on vocals. This is the last album in a series of Ruphus re-issues from Karisma Records, remastered by Jacob Holm-Lupo.

DON'T FORGET THE FIRST FIVE RE-RELEASES FROM RUPHUS - OUT NOW!



RUPHUS

NEW BORN DAY



RUPHUS

RANSART



RUPHUS

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE



RUPHUS

INNER VOICE



RUPHUS

FLYING COLOURS



"Personally, and for all of us, it's an important thing to keep going because we love to play. That kind of balance between the instruments is creatively, artistically something that's of value to all of us, and it's great that people can respond to that and enjoy it."

Jordan Rudess



Ed's Letter



Hello, and welcome to the new issue of *Prog*. I hope this finds you well and perhaps excited about the possibility of a return of live music in some form as restrictions gradually ease. I know we here at *Prog* most definitely are!

It seems astonishing to think that 50 years ago, in February 1971, five men released the first of two albums that have both gone on to be considered classics of the progressive rock genre: *The Yes Album*, followed by *Fragile* a mere nine months later. Between them, they contain *Yours Is No Disgrace*, *Starship Trooper*, *I've Seen All Good People*, *Heart Of The Sunrise*, *Roundabout*, *Long Distance Runaround*. I could go on...

What an astonishing burst of creativity from a group of men in their early 20s, the likes of which is almost unheard of today. It was one that they would further embellish with *Close To The Edge*, *Tales From Topographic Oceans* and *Relayer* as well.

In this issue we discuss the making of Yes' 1971 studio recordings with Steve Howe, Rick Wakeman, Tony Kaye and Bill Bruford, as well as album cover artists Phil Franks and Roger Dean. It was, as they all say, an amazing time for thoughtfully created rock music. I hope you enjoy our coverage – and the unique Roger Dean art prints that come with this issue too.

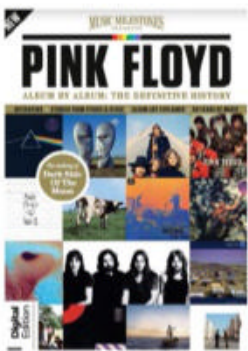
There's also the return of modern prodigies Liquid Tension Experiment after 22 years, Michael Sadler reflects on the career of Canadian prog rockers Saga, and we keep up to speed with the modern day progressive scene with interviews from Anneke van Giersbergen, Rain, The Anchoress, Soen, Jane Weaver, Plini, Wheel, Cobalt Chapel and more. And congratulations to post-rockers Mogwai, also in this issue, for scoring their first ever UK No.1 album with *As The Love Continues*.

Finally, a reminder that to access your free 116-page Pink Floyd eBook, you need to type the bit.ly link into the address bar of your web browser. Enjoy, and until next time, prog on!

Jerry Ewing – Editor



Download the **FREE** 116-page Pink Floyd eBook from www.bit.ly/floyd_bookazine



You can subscribe to *Prog* at www.magazinesdirect.com. See page 112 for further details.

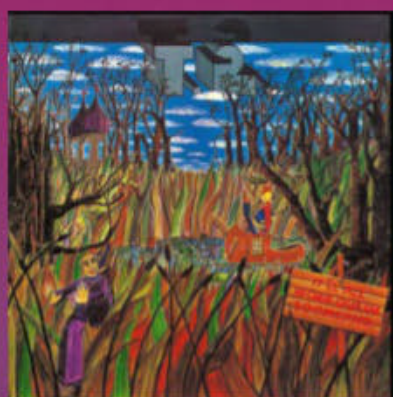


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T2 'IT'LL ALL WORK OUT IN BOOMLAND' (3DVD DIGIPACK)

- Esoteric Recordings are pleased to announce the release of a 3CD digipack edition of the cult 1970 album by Progressive Rock power trio T2.
- Newly re-mastered from the original Decca master tapes and has been expanded by a further two CDs featuring their later recordings made in 1970 and 1971-1972. T2's sole Decca album is presented here as a recognised classic of the era. Open your ears to Boomland!

Release Date 26th March 2021 -
ECLEC32753



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

NEW STUDIO ALBUM



JANE GETTER PREMONITION 'ANOMALIA'

- Esoteric Antenna is delighted to announce the release of the superb new studio album by JANE GETTER PREMONITION,— Anomalia.
- Assembling musicians Adam Holzman (Miles Davis, Steven Wilson), Alex Skolnick (Testament), Chad Wackerman (Frank Zappa), plus Mark Egan (Pat Metheny), Gene Lake (David Sanborn), Stu Hamm (Joe Satrianni), special guests Vernon Reid and singers Randy McStine and Chanda Rule, the album Anomalia is the stunning result of a series of magical recording sessions and is her finest work to date.

Release Date 26th March 2021 - EANTCD1089



JON ANDERSON 'OLIAS OF SUNHILLow'

(2 DISC REMASTERED AND EXPENDED EDITION)

- Esoteric Recordings is proud to announce the release of a new expanded and re-mastered 2 disc edition of the classic debut solo album by YES vocalist JON ANDERSON, "Olias of Sunhillow".
- This expanded edition of "Olias of Sunhillow" features a DVD featuring a high resolution 96 kHz / 24-bit re-master of the stereo mix and also includes a high resolution 5.1 Surround Sound up-mix derived from the original stereo master tapes as an additional feature.

Release Date 26th March 2021 - QECLEC22748

NEW STUDIO ALBUM



STRAWBS 'SETTLEMENT' (180G VINYL LP)

Signed Limited Edition postcards available with pre-orders while stocks last!

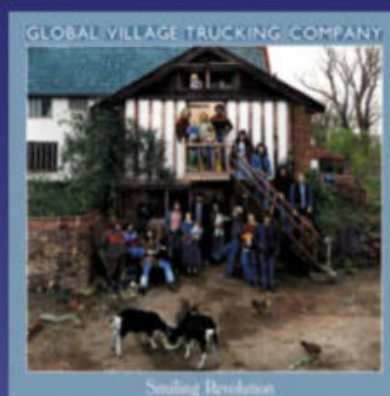
- Esoteric Antenna is delighted to announce the release of the new studio album by the legendary band STRAWBS. Settlement is the latest album recorded by STRAWBS, more than 50 years on from the band's first major label release. The album comes at a time of political and social upheaval, which the lyrics 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!

Release Date 26th February 2021 -
EANTCD1087



GLOBAL VILLAGE TRUCKING COMPANY 'SMILING REVOLUTION' (2CD REMASTERED ANTHOLOGY)

- Esoteric Recordings is pleased to announce the release of a new re-mastered 2 disc anthology by GLOBAL VILLAGE TRUCKING COMPANY, "Smiling Revolution".
- Forty years on, Smiling Revolution has been compiled by the band and gathers together the band's legendary album as originally intended, their tracks from the Greasy Truckers release, John Peel session tracks and other previously unreleased delights, all superbly remastered by acclaimed producer Robin Millar.
- It also features lavishly illustrated booklets and an absorbing essay detailing the story of this unique group.

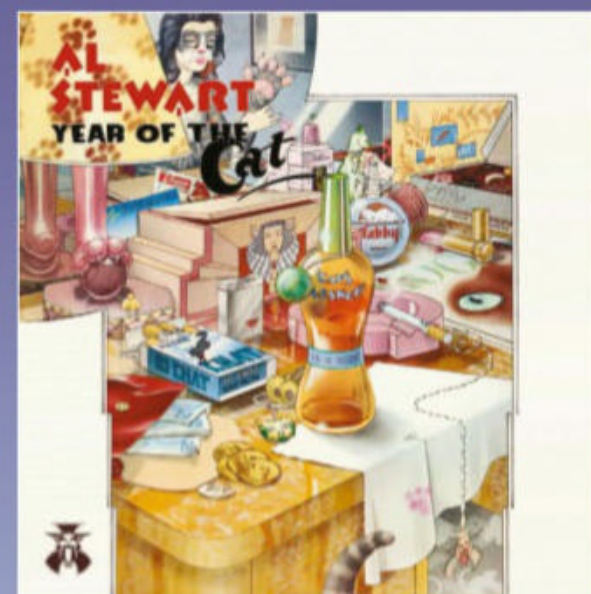
Release Date 26th March 2021
ECLEC22754

- 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

AL STEWART 'YEAR OF THE CAT'

(3CD/1DVD 45TH ANNIVERSARY LIMITED EDITION BOX SET)



ALSO AVAILABLE
(2CD REMASTERED & EXPENDED EDITION)

- 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

Bloody Well Write

Send your letters to us at: *Prog*, Future Publishing, 1-10 Praed Mews, Paddington, London, W2 1QY, or email prog@futurenet.com. Letters may be edited for length. We regret that we cannot reply to phone calls. For more comment and prog news and views, find us on [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/Prog) under *Prog*.

THE MASTER OF PROGRESSION

I was quite critical of Steve Wilson's last album [*To The Bone*], not because it wasn't "progressive enough" but simply because personally I didn't think it was as good as his previous material. I haven't yet heard his newest album [*The Future Bites*] so can't comment on that.

This led me to think about the term 'progressive'. Obviously some people see progressive rock as a genre with a distinctive sound: that sound being Genesis, Yes, Jethro Tull and Pink Floyd but from the 1970s. But the term progressive would imply that music should literally progress. So, progressive bands/artists would include Led Zeppelin. No two albums were the same. Frank Zappa would be the ultimate progressive artist for obvious reasons.

Other obvious artists would include acts like Magma and Scott Walker. Their music constantly changed and explored new ideas.

So, which new artist constantly changes and explores new ideas? Why, Steve Wilson!

So, like me you may not like everything he does, but do not criticise him for no longer being progressive because that is the one thing that you can never accuse him of.

At the end of the day, like art, it is all in the eye of the beholder, or should that be ear? So let's embrace all types of really good musicianship because ultimately that is what gives us readers of *Prog* a real smile on our faces. And let's be honest, in this present climate I thank the musicians who are featured in *Prog* Magazine who are able to record new interesting music.

Nigel Richards, via email

BITING BACK

I remember many years ago someone quipping that if someone put a dead dog onstage and said, "That's Bob Dylan", half the audience would applaud anyway. I wonder if the same has become of Lord Steven Wilson.

It's fair to say — in my humble opinion — that each of his solo albums showed 'progression' and peaked with the genius of *Hand.Cannot.Erase*. but elements of the



Steven Wilson: still exploring new ideas... and dividing opinions!

PRESS/LASSE HOILE

following *To The Bone* were perhaps a warning sign and I recall his demand for the audience to clap/sing along to what even he admitted was an attempt to be a bit 'poppy' simply made a portion of the audience think, "Fuck off! I've paid!" Indeed, money seems to be as equal a driving force to him as commercial success: the relentless pop-ups and pesterings to buy *The Future Bites* stuff have become wearing. But I've bought a ticket for the Manchester Apollo show and I have an open mind, which I hope sees me through.

I hope I don't appear disrespectful — a degree of my terminology is an attempt at humour — but I bet if your roving reporter said to Genesis prior to their first show, "Did you consider adding *Silver Rainbow* to the setlist?" After

a considered pause, Lord Banks would have said, "No, we'll play *Afterglow* instead because it's tons better and the audience go nuts. Now please pass me a chocolate teacake..."

He's a genius — no doubt — but I just don't get the obvious resistance to expand on a winning formula, especially when the result is — to most — just not as good.

Andy Banks, Farnborough

This is just a selection of the letters we've received about Steven Wilson's new album, The Future Bites, since our review in Prog 116 and our feature in Prog 117. Despite it reaching No.4 in the UK charts and No.1 in the official prog charts, it's certainly divided our readers. As Wilson himself said in our feature, he can't take everyone with him — Deputy Ed.

TWEET TALK

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KAVUS TORABI

@Knifeworld

My beautiful Persian santoor is back in play as work continues on the follow up to *Hip To The Jag*. An altogether more upbeat affair



KAVUS TORABI

MIKE PORTNOY

@MikePortnoy

Oh no!!!! So sad to hear of the passing of @ChickCorea One of the pioneers of jazz/fusion keyboards. Return To Forever was one of the first real supergroups and such a huge influence. #RIPChickCorea

DAVE KILMINSTER

@DaveKilminster

9 years ago Keith Emerson took me out & gave me an early birthday present... a Clanger!! It was an inside joke, as we both loved the children's TV series, & used to make 'Clanger' noises at each other during our onstage musical 'duels'... I miss his wacky sense of humour

LETTER



I thoroughly enjoyed Prog 117. The cover story on Jethro Tull's *Aqualung* was fun and informative. Thank you for entertaining content as well as continuing to introduce me (and your readers) to new prog bands. While my musical tastes formed in the 80s with non-stop Rush, The Who, Pink Floyd, Yes, and plenty of the NWOBHM bands, I'm glad to say that through your monthly guidance my musical horizons continue to expand.

Were it not for your magazine I would never have discovered Steven Wilson and



all of his projects (Porcupine Tree, No-Man, and others), Ozric Tentacles, Transatlantic, Robert Reed, Public Service Broadcasting and so many more. I love going into my local record store each month with a list of new CDs to buy based on Prog's reviews and articles. My CD collection grows larger each month. Keep up the great work, I am sure I am not alone

in relying on your magazine for a look back at the prog giants as well as a look into the future of those who will one day become prog giants in their own rights.

Michael Whiteman, Cincinnati, Ohio

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

DISTANT MEMORIES

Like many, lockdown has given me the time and opportunity to go back through my album and CD collection to dig out some lesser-known classics that I haven't played for a long time. I'd like to recommend three that never got the full recognition they deserved at the time of their release.

The Old Road by Martin Orford (IQ) – his second solo album from 2008 – is an absolute tour de force with contributions from John Mitchell, David Longdon, Gary Chandler and the late, great John Wetton. It would probably be in my Top 10 of all time, it's that good! *Mental Notes* by Split Enz from 1975 is another. Before becoming more mainstream when Neil Finn joined the band, the Enz in the hands of Tim Finn and Phil Judd were as wacky and progressive as you could possibly get. Seeing them perform this album live was without doubt one of my Top 10 gig experiences. *Turbulence* (1991) is one of Steve Howe's lesser talked about solo offerings. With significant contributions from Billy Currie and Bill Bruford, this instrumental album has very much a 'band' feel and still sounds

Split Enz: wacky and progressive? Whatever makes you think that?



GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

fresh today. It's outstanding. There's so much great prog out there. In these strange times, never more have we needed to listen to great music.

Jerry Clark, Crowborough, East Sussex

Thank you for sharing three of your favourites with us, Jerry. Have other readers recently rediscovered gems in their music collection? Do let us know! – Deputy Ed.

A GREAT READ

Martin James Willgrass [Prog 117 letters page] might like to know that a book about the Weeley Festival was released in 2017, *The Great British Woodstock* by Ray Clark. It's quite a story.

I wonder if there's anyone about with knowledge of all the gigs I went to at Watford Technical College in the late-60s/early-70s? Family were so loud that we stood outside eventually.

David Holt, via email

START 'EM YOUNG

Yours is the first prog magazine I have read and it covers the genre very well. I'm 70 next year and my granddaughter asked if I would introduce her to rock music. I explained that there are different types and she said, "Please start with the one you like best." Prog rock is my favourite so we have started to get together a bit more often to listen to prog. She seems to like it, so I have helped to make sure that prog has at least one fan in years to come.

Richard Christy, via email

MAKING GOOD PROGRESS

I have always understood the concept of 'prog rock' as the next LP being better than the last one...

CJ Calveley, Wirral

That's certainly one definition we can get behind! – Deputy Ed.

J. WILLGOOSE, ESQ.

@JWillgoose_Esq
Belatedly realising that about 70% of my 'insurmountable' mixing problems can be solved by just turning the drums down a bit. Sorry @psb_wriggles

GEOFFREY DOWNES

@asiageoff
Been an exciting week... Mon - carwash, Tue - supermarket, Wed - new oven & hob, Thu - got pissed, Fri - tip (see pic), tomorrow - Covid jab. Does it get any better? #lockdown



GEOFF DOWNES

MIKE VENNART

@Vennart
I have learned to change tempo within a song in Logic. WHO WILL SURVIVE AND WHAT WILL BE LEFT OF THEM?

PROG

Future PLC, 1-10 Praed Mews, Paddington, London, W2 1QY

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You can also find us on [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/ProgMagazine) under Prog

Editorial

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Contributors

Jeremy Allen (JA), Joe Banks (JB), Mike Barnes (MB), Jordan Blum (JMB), Chris Cope (CC), Stephen Dalton (SD), Isere Lloyd-Davis (ILD), Malcolm Dome (MD), Daryl Easlea (DE), Dave Everley (DEV), Ian Fortnam (IF), Polly Glass (PG), Eleanor Goodman (EG), Rob Hughes (RH), Will Ireland (WI), Emma Johnston (EJ), Jo Kendall (JK), Hannah May Kilroy (HMK), Dom Lawson (DL), Fraser Lewry (FL), Dannii Lievers (DIL), Dave Ling (DML), Alex Lynham (AL), Gary Mackenzie (GMM), Emily MacNevin (EM), Rhodri Marsden (RHM), Julian Marszalek (JM), Giulia Mascheroni (GMA), Chris McGarel (CMG), Grant Moon (CRM), Kris Needs (KN), Kevin Nixon (KNI), Alison Reijman (AR), Chris Roberts (CR), Paul Sexton (PS), Johnny Sharp (JS), Nick Shilton (NS), Sid Smith (SS), Francesca Tyler (FT), Rick Wakeman (RW), Phil Weller (POW), David West (DW), Philip Wilding (PW), Rich Wilson (RW), Holly Wright (HW)

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Advertising

Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**
clare.dove@futurenet.com
Advertising Manager **Helen Hughes**
helen.hughes@futurenet.com
Account Director **Olly Papierowski**
olly.papierowski@futurenet.com
Account Director **Steven Pyatt**
steve.pyatt@futurenet.com

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Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**
licensing@futurenet.com

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UK order line & enquiries **0330 333 1113**
Overseas order line & enquiries **+44 (0) 330 333 1113**
Email enquiries help@magazinesdirect.com
CRM Director **Louise Dudfield**

Circulation

Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

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INTRO

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

PETER HAMMILL FINDS HIMSELF IN TRANSLATION

When the Van der Graaf Generator icon felt lost in Covid confusion, unable to explore his own ideas, a search for cohesion resulted in an album of cover versions.

► **Peter Hammill** will release *In Translation*, his first ever covers album, on May 7. The singer and musician pieced it together between March and December last year, resulting in renditions of works by a wide variety of artists and composers from Gustav Mahler to Leiber and Stoller.

He says that living through turbulent times of the Covid pandemic necessitated the detour into interpreting other people's songs. "Everything was so uncertain last year that I didn't feel in the right mental state to write or say anything from myself," he says. "A month or so after lockdown started, I went into the studio, just for my own interest, and I started doing cover versions."

"It developed over months and months, and this particular group of songs appeared to me to be cohesive together. I wasn't really going at it in an intellectual way, but the musical palate began to form itself and the songs had certain connections between all of them."

As its title suggests, *In Translation* features pieces that Hammill has translated from one European language or another, except for the three that were originally in English. It's familiar territory for him – the Van der Graaf Generator vocalist famously collaborated with Italian proggers Le Orme on the English version of their 1973 classic *Felona e Sorona* – and his sense of kinship with our European neighbours is writ large across the new album.

"A sense of Europeanness is definitely a big part of it," Hammill concurs. "The reason I'm capable of doing all these translations is that I've spent so much time in France, Germany and Italy over the years. I never formally learnt languages, except for a bit of French at school, but my life experience is involved directly in the making of the record."

Not content with delivering a solo record, Hammill will also release a new album with



**"My life
experience is
involved directly
in making
this record."**

Covered up: Peter Hammill translated the lyrics for his new album.

Swedish art rockers Isildurs Bane later this year. The follow-up to 2019's *In Amazonia* is entitled *In Disequilibrium* and it promises to be even stranger than its predecessor.

"It's pretty wacky stuff, obviously!" says Hammill with a laugh. "But it's also quite interesting and challenging, particularly for me to find where the vocal lines work and what it might all be about! There's obviously some common ground between the band and I think we've found that."

Meanwhile, he can also be heard on The Amorphous Androgynous' extraordinary recent release, *We Persuade Ourselves We Are Immortal*. A psychedelic odyssey featuring cameos from Paul Weller, Caravan/Soft Machine alumnus Brian Hopper and a magnificent lead vocal from Hammill himself, it's another unique creative feather in the prolific artist's cap.

"I think it was in 2017 or so, when I originally did the vocals for that," he says. "I'd met Garry [Cobain, The Amorphous Androgynous' main man] years and years ago. He got back in touch and said, 'Here's a piece of music, do you think you can hear anything else on there?' And I did!"

"It's interesting because all three of these records come from completely different musical universes, which is all to the good, I think."

Finally, Hammill will return to live action with Van der Graaf Generator this autumn, all things being well. With European dates rescheduled and UK shows lined up for 2022, the band are looking forward to, as Hammill puts it, "making quite a racket" again.

"Last year we decided on the set we were going to play. That setlist is still on my bedside table and it hasn't moved since I got back!" he says.

"As a lucky rabbit's foot, I'm going to leave it there until we do start up again. One can have a degree of confidence that things will be happening now!"

Visit www.sofasound.com for full details on *In Translation* and Hammill's other musical projects. **DL**

This month, Intro was compiled by

Jeremy Allen
Chris Cope
Jerry Ewing
Dom Lawson
Martin Kielty
Emily MacNevin
Rhodri Marsden
Grant Moon
Alison Reijman
Natasha Scharf
Johnny Sharp
David West
Sid Smith
Phil Weller
David West
Holly Wright

IAN ANDERSON RETITLES TULL'S A

He still regrets not calling 1980 release a solo work as deluxe reissue is detailed.



Jethro Tull's Ian Anderson has announced details of a 40th anniversary edition of the band's 1980 album *A*, retitled *A (A La Mode)*, saying: "If I could rewrite history, it would have been an Ian Anderson solo album."

Arriving on April 16 via Rhino, the triple CD/triple DVD set is remixed and remastered by Steven Wilson, and it's accompanied by unreleased studio tracks plus a full live recording from 1980.

The more electronic direction of *A* was due to it originally being devised as a solo record in collaboration with former Roxy Music man Eddie Jobson. The label persuaded Anderson to release it under the Tull name. "It just would have been better if I stuck to my guns," he says, explaining the move is the reason that long-time colleagues John Evan, Dee Palmer and Barrie Barlow weren't involved – although he didn't intend to fire them. "And then I could have said next year to the others, 'We want to make sure we get going again.'" Instead, the press announced a "big split" and the parting of ways proved permanent.

Meanwhile, online events are also being planned to celebrate *Aqualung*'s 50th anniversary, which include a new video for the title track and an album playback with track-by-track commentary from Anderson.

And as for future Tull live shows, Anderson is hopeful that dates scheduled for September will still go ahead. "I haven't got that many years left," he says, "and I expect to be wearing a mask for the rest of my professional life."

Full details can be found at www.jethrotull.com. **JS**



CLIVE MITTEN'S 40-YEAR WAIT FOR SUITE CRYPTIQUE

Orchestral LP reinterprets Twelfth Night's early work.

Former Twelfth Night member Clive Mitten has reimaged the band's early recordings on his new orchestral album, *Suite Cryptique – Recomposing Twelfth Night 1978–1983*.

The five-part work features reinterpretations from the band's first three vinyl LPs: *Live At The Target*, *Fact And Fiction* and *Live And Let Live*. "For 40 years I wanted to revisit these early years," Mitten says. "I had it in my head that I could do strange and wonderful things with the music – but I set out to do something that was absolutely not rock band with orchestra. I was looking to the world of cinema soundtracks; music that takes you where your head thinks the music is going."

Founder member Andy Revell calls the suite "an absolutely wonderful and incredible achievement," adding: "Clive has captured so much of the spirit and emotion of our music, and given it new life."

Order the album via www.twelfthnight.info, and read our review on page 103. **GRM**



Looking back: Clive Mitten.

PRESS/JAMES SHARROCK

PRESS/CLIVE MITTEN

BIG BIG TRAIN GO BACK TO THE YARD

Extended, remixed version means *The Underfall Yard* will be on vinyl for first time.



Still raising steam: BBT's Greg Spawton and David Longdon.

SOPHOCLES ALEXIOU

Twelve years after its original release, pastoral proggers Big Big Train are reissuing their breakthrough album *The Underfall Yard* in an expanded format.

The new version will be available on April 9 as a double CD via English Electric and triple LP in a trifold cover via Plane Groovy. A limited-edition cherry cola vinyl version matching the artwork will also be on offer.

"We just missed the revived interest in vinyl, which started in about 2011, and we were always a bit miffed that it had never been released in this format," explains Greg Spawton, co-founder, composer and bassist. "A lot of people have been asking us about a vinyl release since then. We thought we would make something more of it, making it available on vinyl as well as reissuing it on CD with some bonus material."

He continues: "As always with us, we begin a certain thought process, then start thinking, 'Wouldn't it be good if we did *that* instead?' So, in the end, it became quite a big project as a complete remix."

"It's very unlikely to be reissued again so we thought, 'Let's make this the definitive version with all that we've learned over the years.'"

The remix, by longtime sound engineer Rob Aubrey, is accompanied by an alternative version featuring 48 minutes of remixed or new material. It includes a previously unreleased brass prelude leading into a 2020 recording of the title track. Francis Dunnery of It Bites fame, who also appeared on the original recording, provides a new guitar solo for the updated version.

The CD also features the *Songs From The Shoreline Suite*, originally intended to appear on the 2009 recording. Big Big Train re-recorded *Victorian Brickwork*, which segues into *Fat Billy Shouts Mine* — a track that had only previously been available on the *Far Skies*, *Deep Time* EP.

Completing the second disc is *Brew And Burgh*, a new song by Spawton, which he wrote specifically as a companion composition for the album's reissue.

Original album artist Jim Trainer has created some new images for its expanded booklet. To accompany the reissue, a lyric video of *The Underfall Yard* directed by Christian Rios is also available. **AR**

For more details on the new edition visit www.bigbigtrain.com. Now turn to page 107 and read our review.

"We thought, 'Let's make this the definitive version with all that we've learned.'"

INTRO extras

HRH PROG NAMES 2022 HEADLINERS

Tangerine Dream, Pendragon and the Earth Band will headline HRH Prog XII at Camp Prog, Great Yarmouth on March 17-20, 2022. As always, the line-up was developed from a fan poll, and also includes Headspace, Solstice, Magenta, Galahad, Godsticks and Abel Ganz. Organisers say that the acts yet to be announced will add up to a bill that's "something to behold." www.hrhprog.com



TERIE VISNES

Surprisingly different: Motorpsycho.

MOTORPSYCHO'S REGAL RELEASE

Trondheim trio get heavier than ever before with *Kingdom Of Oblivion*.

Norwegian prog masterminds Motorpsycho aren't sure how to describe their new album, *Kingdom Of Oblivion*, which is released on April 16 via Stickman Records.

"This is mostly relatively concise stuff for us, but some songs do go on for a bit," says co-founder Bent Sæther. "At one point we thought this would finally be our heavy metal album — and we'd be the first to admit to worshipping at the altar of Tony Iommi — but it kinda mutated and took a left turn somewhere in there, and I don't know quite what to call this!"

The band rehearsed and demoed the music in their hometown of Trondheim, before heading to Black Box Studio in the French countryside, where they'd recorded 2020's *The All Is One*.

"Sonically it's probably more or less the same," says Sæther, "but the album has two new and different major musical threads running concurrently. On the one hand, it's more heavy and riffy than most stuff on *The All Is One*, but on the other, the folk elements are more pronounced. The overall vibe is also surprisingly different, but I can't really describe why that is!"

While the album sees Motorpsycho reunite with guest guitarist Reine Fiske from their previous release, they're not treading water creatively. "We're a musically restless band that thrive on not quite knowing what we're doing," says Sæther. "If it feels somewhat unsafe it usually means that we're onto something good!"

Visit www.motorpsycho.no for full details. **DW**

CLIVE NOLAN AND FRIENDS BRING BEOWULF TO LIFE

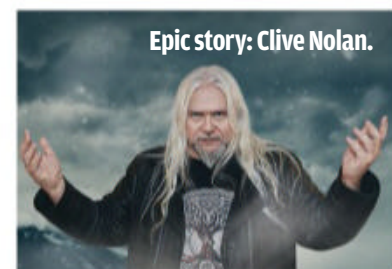
He says *Song Of The Wildlands* has something for everyone.

Arena and Pendragon keyboard wizard Clive Nolan has taken inspiration from classic tale *Beowulf* for his new album, *Song Of The Wildlands*, which is released on May 14 via Crime Records.

The ambitious concept album straddles folk, symphonic rock and classical music while channelling Viking influence too, and it includes a vast guestlist including a 200-voice choir singing in Anglo-Saxon.

"There's some elements in there if you like rock music, if you like musicals, if you like folk music," Nolan says. "I think it has quite a wide appeal — I hope so, anyway." He also hopes the release will prove to be an "experience." He explains: "Probably most people will have heard of *Beowulf*, even if they don't know the full story. Marillion fans will know the bit about Grendel if nothing else. Hopefully it's a chance to revisit this great story. There's a narrator in it, so you get to follow it quite easily."

Visit www.clivenolan.net for full details. **CC**



Epic story: Clive Nolan.

CLIVE NOLAN

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LIFESIGNS AIM HIGH WITH ALTITUDE

Latest line-up weren't able to meet before working on melodic proggers' third album.



Looking up: Lifesigns' Steve Rispin and John Young.

PRESS

► **Lifesigns' newly released** third album, *Altitude*, is a deliberate attempt to aim high in more ways than one, vocalist and keyboardist John Young says.

It's the melodic proggers' first record with drummer Zoltán Csörsz, who replaced Martin 'Frosty' Beadle last year. And although the latest line-up haven't physically met yet, the musical connection was instant and seamless.

"I sent tracks out to a few drummers and most of them said they'd get back to me in a few weeks," Young says. "Zoltán sent his back in three hours. He said, 'You know you're the band I've been looking for?' I said the gig was his."

While Csörsz, bassist Jon Poole and guitarist Dave Bainbridge got to laying down their tracks, Young and sound engineer Steve Rispin spent "months on the minutiae", making sure the spirit of *Altitude* was reflected in a deliberately bright and airy mix. "One of the things we concentrate on is making sure you can focus on any instrument on a song and you'll hear it all the way through," Young says, adding: "The music contains a lot of joy. Even if it's a sad song you get something from it that perks you up."

He's been pleased to read positive reports about the 15-minute title track and the 10-minute *Fortitude*.

"Everybody could solo until the cows come home, but we don't do that," he reports. "You can show what you can do in the songs, but you have to keep it in the songs. And Zoltán got that from day one – he leaves whole sections out where he doesn't play."

In addition to Lifesigns' fan-driven business model leading to Marillion comparisons, the new album also bears similarities to Steely Dan, and Young happily accepts both. "We're trying to do important work," he says, condemning the current fashion of devaluing music. "I've got nothing against technology that delivers the music. But when people ask if I can make my music cheaper, I say, 'Well, I can't just download fuel for my car!' I've even seen musicians recently

saying, 'Well, it should be just a hobby.'

No, it shouldn't. Musicians should make definitive art that's there for the future; that's what we're trying to do."

He hints that a few ideas have already been put aside for a fourth album.

"I compose by a method of channelling. I turn off and it turns up. And the more I turn off, the more stuff turns up." **MK**

To find out more and order *Altitude* see www.lifesignsmusic.co.uk, and turn to page 97 for our review.

"Musicians should make definitive art that's there for the future."

INTRO extras

AMORPHIS GUITARIST'S SOLO DEBUT

Amorphis guitarist

Esa Holopainen has invited some of his friends to add vocals to the nine tracks that will appear on his solo debut, *Silver Lake*, on May 28 via Nuclear Blast. Katatonia's Jonas Renkse, Leprous' Einar Solberg and Anneke van Giersbergen are among the singers helping to form music he describes as "heavy, melodic and even poppy," but which he felt wasn't right for Amorphis. www.facebook.com/SilverLakeEH

Something different: VOLA.

PRESS/NIKOLAI LINARES



VOLA GIVE HIP HOP A TRY ON THIRD ALBUM

Witness is a concerted effort to avoid repeating their past, says Asger Mygind.

► **VOLA say they've** created something of a different flavour from their previous work on their new album *Witness*, which arrives on May 21 via Mascot.

The LP, which follows 2018's *Applause From A Distant Crowd*, marks the first time the Swedish-Danish outfit have worked with a producer to mix and master a record.

"We thought it was time for something different," says Asger Mygind about working with producer and engineer Jacob Hansen. "We like what he's done before – he has this very big hi-fi sound."

The singer describes the new album as being a departure from the "organic, lively" sound of their previous album and a move towards something "sleek" and "produced sounding". He adds: "It wouldn't feel inspiring to create something too similar to *Applause Of A Distant Crowd*."

Drummer Adam Janzi agrees. "I would say it feels like another direction," he reports. "We always try to find new ways, new inspirations and new approaches."

Witness even features a hip hop track, after they worked with Bless from electronic duo Shahmen. "Asger was the first one who heard Shahmen and he sent me a track," explains Janzi. "I was like, 'Damn, that's awesome!'"

Mygind adds: "Bless just did his own thing, writing his own lyrics for it. He sent us three takes of him rapping and it sounded really, really good. I'm very happy we discovered him."

For more details visit www.volaband.com. **HW**

ROSFEST LIVES ON WITH FORMATION OF NEW BOARD

Annual US event had faced collapse as a result of pandemic.

► **The creator of** the annual RoSfest prog event revealed that its future has been secured after a new board of organisers was appointed. George Roldan, who established the US festival in 2004, had previously said it would not return due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Revealing the six-person board, which includes musician Lisa Wetton and co-ordination veterans Octavia Brown and Nick Katona, Roldan says: "The Rites Of Spring Festival has been a treasure in the progressive rock world for the last 17 years and it has been my pride and privilege to create, produce, host and share the experience. I feel honoured to be able to pass the torch to such a dedicated group of musical masters."

Incoming boss John Blangero, a scientist and prog musician, says: "The board represents a wonderful group of highly experienced, talented, dedicated, and selfless individuals whose only desire is to see RoSfest continue and grow."

Details will be revealed at www.rosfest.com. **MK**



PRESS

FAD GADGETS

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

VOC-25

Swedish designer Love Hultén hits the back of the net once again, with this voice synthesiser that comprises



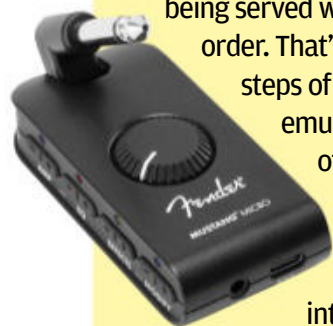
a keyboard, discreet knobs and 25 sets of chattering plastic teeth. Ahhh, oohs and mmms emanate from the disembodied mouths, each of them accompanied by a satisfying clack as

they open and snap shut. Once you've got over the slightly nightmarish vision, it's a truly marvellous thing to behold. Of course, it satisfies no practical purpose whatsoever, but somehow that only makes it more wonderful.

www.lovehulten.com

FENDER MUSTANG MICRO

Back in the day, amplifiers were things that took up way too much cupboard space and were unusable in domestic environments because of the fear of being served with a noise abatement



order. That's all changed. In the steps of similar tiny amp emulators from the likes of Vox comes this new gadget from Fender, which packs 12 amps and 13 effects pedals into a form factor that's about the size of your hand.

It comes with a rechargeable battery, Bluetooth connectivity and the undying gratitude of everyone you live with.

www.fender.com

GEARBOX AUTOMATIC TURNTABLE MKII

Some believe that the inner workings of electronic devices should remain a mystery. Others make a beeline for transparent gadgets. If this record player's see-through body, moving



magnet cartridge and valves doesn't sucker you in, there's the onboard music recognition technology, which magically makes your vinyl records

appear on Spotify playlists. Some might say that just negates the point of having a record player at all, but they're just a bunch of spoilsports.

www.gearboxrecords.com



MY PROG HERO

Inspiring the wider music world...

Past perfect: Peter Gabriel and Genesis influence Steve Lukather (inset) to this day.



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



ALEX SOLCA

STEVE LUKATHER

The Toto guitarist and session veteran explains that prog is in his DNA and reveals he's still a **Peter Gabriel** and **Genesis** fanboy.

“At high school we listened to Yes, Genesis, ELP and all the prog of that time. I really got into Peter Gabriel and Genesis, the original guys who did *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* and *Selling England By The Pound*.”

“Peter is one of the greatest singers from an emotional point of view. He could play all those characters in the songs as well as that fantastic music they all wrote.”

“It's part of my musical DNA and it still inspires me – the music of my youth, when I tried to figure out how to play those Steve Hackett parts!”

“I saw them a couple of times back then. They were astounding, and sounded as good live as they did on the records. I loved all the theatricals because it was so different, and I thought it was cool.”

“Peter is such a good actor and performer in that he sells the song and feels the need to become that character. It's a beautiful thing in the act – he believes in everything he does.”

“Peter's *So* is probably one of the greatest albums ever made. When Toto heard it we were doing our seventh album [*The Seventh One*]

and we were like, ‘Wow’! Talk about a guy who evolves all the time! I always loved the fact he was a trailblazer and always ahead of everybody else. This is the kind of guy you reference when you are making a record and you go like, ‘What would Peter Gabriel do?’

“Peter and all the classic Genesis guys are my heroes even though I don't make music like them. Sometimes, a little bit sneaks in – but that's because it's in my blood.”

“I saw the Genesis reunion in the UK in the 80s when they played out in the mud pit [Milton Keynes Bowl]. We stood out in the rain and cried! We got backstage and met some of the guys. They were so nice. I thought I was standing in the middle of musical royalty.”

“I also met Peter backstage at the Hollywood Bowl when I got to sit down and have a brief conversation with him. He is a wonderful, smart, funny guy. It was an honour to have a little bit of facetime with one of my all-time heroes.” **AR**

Steve Lukather's latest solo album *I Found The Sun Again* is out now via Mascot. For more details, visit www.stevelukather.com.



“Peter's *So* is probably one of the greatest albums ever made.”

PROG IN BRIEF

Kayak (right) launch their 18th studio album *Out Of This World* on May 7 via InsideOut. The band say that, since the return of Hans Eijkenaar, they've never sounded so “balanced and motivated” than they do on the 15-track LP. www.kayakonline.info



Edison's Children bassist **Rick Armstrong's** debut solo album, *Infinite Corridors*, features guest appearances from Steve Rothery, John Mitchell, Tony Levin and others. The exploration of electronica arrives on April 2. rickarmstrong.bandcamp.com

Alex Henry Foster will release live album *Under Bright Lights* on April 16, recorded at the Montreaux Jazz Festival in 2019 with an 11-piece band. He's also working on a concert film and book. www.alexhenryfoster.com

NEW RELEASES FROM APOLLON RECORDS



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2nd album from these melodic
progrgers from Norway



MAJOR PARKINSON
Twilight Cinema

Re-release of this classic
from 2014



CALIGONAUT
Magnified as Giants

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



FATAL FUSION
The Land Of The Sun
Re-release of debut
album from 2010



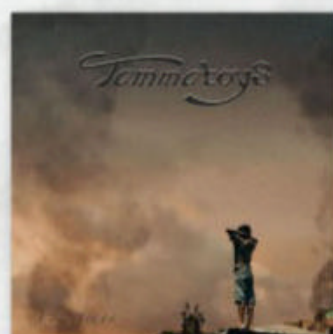
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"Air-keys at the ready, the long-lost TOUCH make a varied and thrilling return".

- Dave Ling PROG Mag

"Stupendous". - Erik Thompson SWEDEN ROCK Mag

"A Great Return". - Howard Johnson ROCK CANDY Mag

"TOUCH in the 21st Century are as good a band as they ever were and they're here to show all those young up-starts just how it's done, an essential album".

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IN OTHER TERRITORIES www.dekoentertainment.com

PAUL SADLER

Meet the Manchester musician trading metal riffs for soul-searching acoustic prog.

FOR ANY CREATIVE person, the diversity of a fresh challenge can work wonders for stimulating the mind and satisfying the soul. Spires frontman and guitarist Paul Sadler has proven just that with his debut solo album, *Soon To Be Absorbed*. After releasing *A Parting Gift* with Spires in 2018, Sadler decided to put the progressive metal band on hold to venture into unknown lands; a decision that saw an idea that had been lurking in the back of his mind for several years brought to the fore.

“If you just do the same projects all the time, no matter how much you love them, it can get a bit tiresome,” says Sadler. “I had tracks that didn’t fit so much with the Spires mould. So, this album was an excuse to get my creative juices moving around something a little different.”

Sadler’s death metal influences were traded for flourishes of Caligula’s Horse and contemporary Opeth, the result is a lighter and more illustrious timbre. Alongside some Bert Jansch-styled finger playing and orchestral embellishments, Sadler has rested upon a sound that puts the weight of emotion and the delicacy of his instrumentation at its core.

“I wanted to have a little less focus on technicality to really concentrate on the emotional resonance of the music and solid songwriting,” he says. “Everything suddenly became a lot more intuitive, there were never any moments when I didn’t know where to take a song.”

Complementing Sadler’s voice and acoustic chord progressions on these songs are four selectively chosen musicians, including Spires’ bassist Alex Jolley and cellist Raphael Weinroth-Browne, best known for his work with Leprous. Their contributions have greatly enhanced the album, with Sadler himself surprised how much of an impact they had.

“The strange thing is, in a way, I probably allowed the other guys to take more creative liberties than I would have allowed in Spires,” he muses. “I think that’s a lesson I should have learned a long time ago: to allow the other musicians freedom and relax some of that control. They were all given their parts to play, but they all went off sheet and did their own thing at points. Raphael layered up some parts to give it that extra orchestral feel and Tom [Rice, drums] really smoothed out a lot of the sections. With Alex, there was a lot of experimenting together in the studio. So, they all really contributed to the creative process with this album. They’re all fantastic players, I trusted in what they were doing and I’m really happy with the record.”

Casting a glance towards the future he adds, “This record has exceeded my expectations, both in terms of how many people have been listening to it and the feedback that I’ve been getting. I’m really inspired by it and it’s making me to want to do more — I already have a big idea for the next album.” **POW**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Paul Sadler (guitars/vocals), **Alex Jolley** (bass), **Raphael Weinroth-Browne** (cello), **Ndrew Allmark** (violin), **Tom Rice** (drums)

SOUNDS LIKE

Delicate acoustic prog peppered with cinematic strings for fans of Opeth’s *Damnation*, *Riverside* and *Pineapple Thief*

CURRENT RELEASE

Soon To Be Absorbed is out now via Bandcamp

WEBSITE

www.paulsadlermusic.bandcamp.com



“I wanted to have a little less focus on technicality to really concentrate on the songwriting.”

Welcome gift: Spires’ frontman Paul Sadler.



PRESS



THIS IS OUR CHANCE TO BUILD BACK BETTER

Prog's News Editor says the pandemic presents a rare opportunity.

Even with the Covid-19 vaccines being rolled out and light appearing at the end of the tunnel, we still have no clue as to when light will return to our stages. There's a long road back to any kind of normality at live shows, and when we get there many of our favourite old faces won't be seen any more. The pandemic has been a disaster for live music, which has always existed in a precarious balance between corporate and artistic interests.

Only a fool would try to take a crystal ball to that side of things. But while stages remain dark, I've been delighted to see light bulbs going off in prog artists' heads. It's one of the perks of this job to have one-on-one conversations with a wide range of musicians and to sometimes see a collective general message.

Before this it was a bit downbeat. Right across the prog spectrum, artists would hint that the inspiration behind their latest work was that something was terribly wrong and needed to be addressed. But what came with it was a sense that the warnings would go unheeded, because they often had before.

By early last year a lot of people I interviewed expressed a desire to do something, but less conviction over what. Then came the toes-in-the-water moments - shows from home, recordings by remote tracking, collaborations that live schedules would previously have made impossible - as everyone learned about the prison our planet had come to feel like.

In recent months, as new album announcements have begun to pile up, many musicians have reported that they'd finally found time to explore an aspect of their art that they'd never got round to before. As we all find the courage to look forward, I'm beginning to detect a new sense of conviction in many quarters. Through the constant daily drag, many of us forgot what mattered to us. With the threat of losing it, we remembered its value.

As prog fans, we all know that uncomfortable feeling of sharing our passion for audio art with music scenes that are more about entertainment. I think that may have changed: I think that, because we've all needed something to look forward to as well as up to, many have silently reconsidered what music means to them, and been reminded of how much it really does.

So, yes, it's going to take a while for us to rejoin the massive crowds we miss, but when we do, we'll appreciate it more than ever. Then, perhaps, we can rebuild the business-art balance better than it was before the lockdowns.

If we take that opportunity seriously, the new normal can be better for everyone. Change is inevitable, and hiding from it doesn't work, so let's own it. That wouldn't just be a happy ending to one of the most challenging chapters in most of our lives - it would be the ending we all deserve.

MARTIN KIELTY

Got an opinion on the matter that you'd like to share? Please email us at: prog@futurenet.com. Opinions expressed in this column aren't necessarily those of the magazine.



ALL AROUND THE WORLD

Our far-out trip to far-flung prog



Worlds collide: Anuryzm make the most of their multinational background.

ANURYZM

With a sound developed in Lebanon, Turkey, Canada and the UAE, this trio prove that travel broadens the ear.

Formed in Lebanon in 2003, and nurtured in Turkey, Canada and the United Arab Emirates, Anuryzm are a well-travelled band.

They've even managed to score support slots with Nightwish, Epica, Orphaned Land and Black Sabbath, among others, and are poised to release their third album this year.

"In Lebanon there are lots of bands and people to support the scene, but the budget for shows is really small," says guitarist John Bakhos, reflecting on the environments where he cut his teeth. "UAE isn't the sort of place that you find progressive metal. But that gave us opportunities - that's how we got to support Black Sabbath and Yngwie Malmsteen."

Employment is part of the reason Anuryzm have moved around so much. "Music becoming your job just isn't a possibility in the Arab world," says keyboardist Jay Jahed.

"My parents would buy me equipment, but tell me to focus on my studies because I needed to grow up to be an engineer."

He adds: "We always look at our audience, so we shifted our style as we travelled. If we were still in Lebanon our sound would be more

thrash metal. In Dubai, because of the other bands around us, we're getting inspired by industrial rhythms."

Vocalist Will Paterson, who joined the line-up in 2019, has followed the band's development for years, and agrees that travel has broadened their collective ear. "I've seen, as a fan, how their sound changed as they moved around," he says. "In Toronto the scene is more hardcore and thrash orientated, so the prog became more of a fringe thing. When they went back to UAE the new environment really polished and differentiated their music."

"Because of our origins, there's an expectation we'd write Arabic metal," Bakhos reported. "But I didn't want my music to be a gimmick of where I was from."

"I've been inspired by bands we've been around," he adds, "I've found myself very inspired by the retro synthwave music that

I'm hearing a lot at the moment. That was the inspiration for our new single, *Ruby Demon*." **POW**

Anuryzm's most recent album is 2015's *All Is Not All*. For details on their upcoming release, visit www.anuryzm.com.

"I didn't want my music to be a gimmick of where I was from."

PROG IN BRIEF

Australians **Acolyte** (right) release second album *Entropy* on May 14. Vocalist Morgan-Leigh Brown says the concept work explores the "emotions experienced while carrying the early weight of trauma." www.acolyte.com.au



Can commence a series of live releases with *Live In Stuttgart 1975* on May 28. The collection features bootlegs "run through the wringer of 21st century technology" by co-founder Irmin Schmidt and producer Rene Tinner. www.spoonrecords.com

Mono release the live album *Beyond The Past* on March 19. The Japanese post-rock pioneers recorded it at their 20th anniversary show in London in 2019, where they performed with the Platinum Anniversary Orchestra. www.monoofjapan.com

Caravan's Jan Schelhaas is the subject of a solo LP reissue series. *Dark Ships* is out now, with *Blue Dot* and *Ghosts* to follow. The latter albums feature bonus tracks recorded with Camel guitarist Andy Latimer. www.officialcaravan.co.uk

ORCHESTRA OF THE UPPER ATMOSPHERE

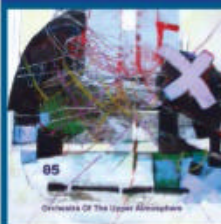
Sheffield collective pull out all the stops with psych-tinged improvisations.

DON'T YOU JUST love it when a plan comes together? In 2010 Sheffield-based instrumentalist Martin Archer and a few mates wanted to create some brand new sounds. Coming from diverse musical backgrounds, including jazz, folk, rock, and electronic music, the collective pooled all of their talents and interests into something deliberately large-scale and ambitious. Orchestra Of The Upper Atmosphere, or the OUA, as they refer to it, released their self-titled double CD set in 2012 (sometimes referred to as *Theta One*), fulfilling their original brief with a cosmic mix that included a string quartet, a 25-piece choir and a horn section.

"It took about two years to make that album," admits Archer, describing their painstaking approach. "I wanted something where the scale of it was an integral part of it, and by scale I mean I wanted it to include improvisation, repetition, a choir – the Juxtavoices choir was formed to sing on that album – and I wanted to write for strings and create a large horn section. Really, I just wanted to see if we were capable of doing it."

Since then, another four albums have emerged, all with different characteristics although the latest, *Theta Five*, may well be their most accessible yet. At a little over 42 minutes, *Pillared Space* is undoubtedly the album's centrepiece. Emerging from grinding, monumental forms, skittering frequencies, and troublesome dissonance, order from chaos is established in the pounding rhythms and otherworldly vocalising. Like all their pieces, it carries a sense of

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Martin Archer (sax, clarinet, flute, organ, Mellotron, voices), **Steve Dinsdale** (drums, synths), **Lorin Halsall** (acoustic and electric bass, electronics), **Yvonna Magda** (violin, electronics), **Andy Peake** (Fender Rhodes, synths), **Walt Shaw** (percussion, electronics), **Jan Todd** (vocals, harp, electronics, guitar), **Terry Todd** (electric bass, acoustic guitar)

SOUNDS LIKE

A cosmic Venn diagram encompassing Alice Coltrane, Terry Riley, Tangerine Dream and motorik rock

CURRENT RELEASE

Theta Five is out now via Discus Music

WEBSITE

www.facebook.com/OrchUAGroup

constant evolution as resonant keyboard tones, swirling minimalist patterns, random Morse code-style signals and ethereal sax all coalesce into a mighty sound.

"That track was the first thing we did out of the two-day session in the studio and quite unusually for us, it came out as quite a complete piece," he explains. "What you hear on the album is largely the way it was played in the studio."

There's no getting away from the ambitious and often epic sonic architecture that the band creates. Over the years they've been compared to some heavyweight names operating in electronic music, jazz, and progressive rock including Terry Riley, Alice Coltrane, as well as Can. While some musicians bristle when their work receives comparisons to others, Archer argues that such references are in fact a useful tool: "Especially when people don't know who you are," he laughs.

His work in the past with other projects has been compared to big canvas pieces such as Centipede's *Septober Energy* and Carla Bley's *Escalator Over The Hill*. He says, "I'm not sure that those comparisons are accurate but when we started OUA we wanted to create music that had repetition at its core with that kind of scale. So comparisons to Magma or Sun Ra are exactly ones we had in mind when we began."

Work is already underway on the OUA's next album and it's likely to be different again: "If nothing changes we'd all get bored and what would be the point of that?" **SS**



"If nothing changes we'd all get bored and what would be the point of that?"

Minstrels in the gallery: Orchestra Of Upper Atmosphere.



PRESS



US, THEM & YOU

What got us all grooving this month...

Official Progressive Albums Chart

The prog top 30 albums

February 2021

Compiled by



- 1 **STEVEN WILSON** *The Future Bites* (CAROLINE INTERNATIONAL)
- 2 **MOGWAI** *As The Love Continues* (ROCK ACTION)
- 3 **TRANSATLANTIC** *The Absolute Universe - Forevermore* (INSIDEOUT)
- 4 **TAME IMPALA** *The Slow Rush* (FICTION)
- 5 **PSYCHEDELIC PORN CRUMPETS** *SHYGA! The Sunlight Mound* (MARATHON ARTISTS)
- 6 **WARDRUNA** *Kvittravn* (MUSIC FOR NATIONS)
- 7 **SOEN** *Imperial* (SILVER LINING MUSIC)
- 8 **RUSH** *Permanent Waves* (MERCURY/UMC)
- 9 **FRANK ZAPPA** *Zappa OST* (UMC)
- 10 **NIGHTWISH** *Human. :II: Nature.* (NUCLEAR BLAST)
- 11 **CULT OF LUNA** *The Raging River* (RED CREEK)
- 12 **JULIANNA BARWICK** *Healing Is A Miracle* (NINJA TUNE)
- 13 **BRIAN ENO** *Film Music 1976-2020* (UMC)
- 14 **FLAMING LIPS** *American Head* (BELLA UNION)
- 15 **BRIAN ENO** *Rams OST* (UMC)
- 16 **HAWKWIND** *50 Live* (CHERRY RED)
- 17 **SIGUR RÓS** *Odin's Raven Magic* (KRUNK)
- 18 **DREAM THEATER** *Distant Memories - Live In London* (INSIDEOUT)
- 19 **PORCUPINE TREE** *In Absentia* (KSCOPE)
- 20 **STEVE HACKETT** *Selling England By The Pound & Spectral Mornings: Live* (INSIDEOUT)
- 21 **RICK WAKEMAN & THE ENGLISH ROCK ENSEMBLE** *The Red Planet* (R&D MEDIA)
- 22 **JEAN-MICHEL JARRE** *Welcome To The Other Side* (SONY)
- 23 **BLACKFIELD** *For The Music* (PARLOPHONE)
- 24 **GREG LAKE** *The Anthology: A Musical Journey* (BMG)
- 25 **THE PINEAPPLE THIEF** *Versions Of The Truth* (KSCOPE)
- 26 **PERIPHERY** *Live In London* (CENTURY MEDIA)
- 27 **TANGERINE DREAM** *Pilots Of Purple Twilight - The Virgin Recordings 1980-1983* (UMC/VIRGIN)
- 28 **LUNATIC SOUL** *Through Shaded Woods* (KSCOPE)
- 29 **MARATHON** *Mark Kelly's Marathon* (EARMUSIC)
- 30 **MASTODON** *Medium Rarities* (REPRISE)

Find out more at www.officialcharts.com

WIN! STEVEN WILSON BUNDLE!



His ode to consumerism might have dismissed it, but Steven Wilson has kindly donated a very desirable limited-edition bundle for this month's competition. *The Future Bites*, which includes the single *Personal Shopper*, is out now, and to celebrate its release *Prog* has received some special goodies for one lucky reader to enjoy. Along with a CD version of the album, there's also a signed white vinyl, limited-edition promotional T-shirt, which the man himself has signed, and handwritten lyrics to an album track of your choice. Teeth whitener and volcano ash soap are not included.

To be in with a chance of winning this bumper prize, visit www.bit.ly/TFB_comp and answer the following question:

The Future Bites is Wilson's sixth solo album, but which of these former collaborators doesn't appear on it?

- a) Nick Beggs
- b) Richard Barbieri
- c) Tony Levin

For more information on Steven Wilson, visit www.stevenwilsonhq.com.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This competition will be open from March 19, 2021-April 23, 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



CAN

Live In Stuttgart 1975
MUTE/SPOON

The Art Guy
Russell Fairbrother



TOMAHAWK

Tonic Immobility
IPECAC RECORDINGS

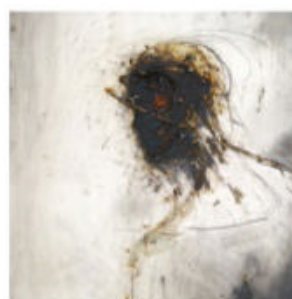
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LUN-MUSIC.BANDCAMP.COM

The Musician
Jerry Richards



PETER GABRIEL

Passion
REAL WORLD

The Writer
Malcolm Dome



CRACK THE SKY

Tribes
CARRY ON MUSIC

The Reader
Julie Stewart



KING CRIMSON

Discipline
EG

Jasmeno's Slavomir Maria Nietupski sniffs out a great tune.

JASMENO

Synthpop-inspired studio project hopes to sniff out success.

JASMENO, FOR READERS not fluent in Esperanto, is the word for 'jasmine' in the world's favourite auxiliary language. "The scent of jasmine is a thing I've always enjoyed," says bandleader Slavomir Maria Nietupski, over the phone from his home near Gdańsk in Poland. "And these days so many band names are already taken, so it was pretty hard to find something unique. I checked it on the internet and nobody had used it before."

If you're seeking something unique, then look no further than Jasmeno. Readers might detect an intoxicating whiff of Jean-Michel Jarre, a subtle bouquet of Pink Floyd, and a top note of Tangerine Dream or Enigma, but Nietupski's music is also otherworldly. What's more, this is a project that very nearly never happened. Nietupski had quit music altogether, moved outside of the city he grew up in, and built a house for his family who he supports with his other job as a graphic designer. It was only when building creative quarters for himself that music called him back to the fold. "I'd been playing for years, often in black metal bands, but I lost my passion and interest, and then more advantages came with the graphic design," he reveals. "I played nothing for 10 years. Then something called me back."

Founded in 2017, Jasmeno is less a band and more a studio project from an artist with a unique vision and an eye for collaborators. Nietupski eschewed the many contacts he'd made in the Polish music industry for a cast of international musicians, many of whom were found online. Like Esperanto, Jasmeno is a universal

project, and the cast of guest musicians come from as far afield as the USA and Australia.

Each recruitment tale is different. For instance, Nietupski designed artwork for Aussie musician Lecia Louise McPhail-Bell from Brisbane, which is how he made her acquaintance, while Italian vocalist and guitar maestro Andrea Boccarusso — a key player on the *Jasmeno* album — had wowed him online.

"I knew that I needed a vocalist," he says, "and I'd checked out as many as 50 singers. There was this one Italian guy, Fabio, and we talked and talked but he would go missing for weeks and I lost half a year just talking about nothing, so I had to cut him loose."

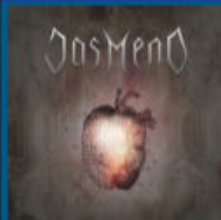
Then he chanced upon another Italian, Andrea Boccarusso, singing a Pearl Jam cover on YouTube. Boccarusso turned out to be a great guitarist too.

"There's something in his voice that drives me crazy! I realised this was the guy and I had to ask him. He's a really talented multi-instrumentalist — he has a very active YouTube channel where he's playing a million solos. It was so fortuitous to find these solutions in one person."

The pair spent a year working together, sending tracks back and forth electronically and talking on the phone, although Nietupski and Boccarusso are yet to meet in person.

"A year ago I was in Milan with my wife for a couple of days, but he's a very busy guy and we couldn't arrange the time to meet for a beer or a coffee." Not even for a jasmine tea! **JA**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Slavomir Maria Nietupski (keyboards, synths), **Andrea Boccarusso** (lead vocals, guitars)

SOUNDS LIKE

Moody sci-fi fantasy meets 80s synthpop, with lashings of unashamed guitar theatrics and full-throated warbling

CURRENT RELEASE

Jasmeno is out now via Lynx Music

WEBSITE

www.facebook.com/jasmenoofficial



"I had lost my passion for music. Then something called me back."

ILLUMINAE

— Ian Jones // Agnieszka Swita —



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GABRIEL AGUDO

In Continuum vocalist takes experimental prog to new heights with his solo project.

“KNOWING THAT PROG DNA is mainly British, I decided to write and sing in English, which is my second language. Many people thought I was crazy and laughed at me but they helped me push my limits,” admits Argentinian Gabriel Agudo, who’s always dreamed of being part of the prog world. “My first supporters in the business were Steve Rothery and Larry Morand [from Cruise To The Edge] and they’ve believed in me since the beginning”.

Prog readers might know Agudo as the vocalist with Bad Dreams and In Continuum, but he’s gone solo for debut album *New Life*. It’s been in the pipeline for two years and gets things off to a fine start with appearances from Rothery, Clive Nolan and Dave Kerzner, among others. “It was based on the experience of trying to reach all the different aspects of resilience after the battle my family fought against with my mother’s disease [Alzheimer’s] until her death,” he explains. “It’s my spiritual map.

“I’m a strong believer that creativity is an unconscious process. *New Life* has a sort of 70s/80s classic prog sound. This was my first record so I didn’t want to be catalogued or trapped. The way that Genesis, Pink Floyd and Marillion all combine different colours and textures inside a song format with a huge emotional impact is priceless and I love the work of Peter Gabriel, Fish, and Steve Hogarth as well,” Agudo says of his influences. “I love to experiment with sound textures and styles that’s why I love prog so much – it’s a big ocean and a fountain of infinite resources.”

Agudo also worked with musician René Bosc on the project: “We’ve known each other for five years and share the same passion and taste about life and music. He’s a phenomenal orchestra conductor, musician, and skilled multi-instrumentalist. We started working together on a special *Supper’s Ready* revisited version [released in August 2020] with an international team of musicians from the classical and prog world. It has drumming by Jan-Vincent Velazco [Pendragon] and a solo from Steve Rothery.

“After *New Life*, we started working on revisiting one of our favourite Genesis albums, *Foxtrot*. René has proven to be a great source of inspiration and support. I wrote all the songs two years ago so when I decided to make the album, it was a natural decision to work with him and Steve.”

Although Agudo’s live plans for 2020, which included *Cruise To The Edge*, *Night Of The Prog* and a co-headline tour with John Hackett, were cancelled due to the pandemic, it didn’t slow him down creatively. Instead, he took advantage of the unplanned downtime with more studio work, including vocals for In Continuum’s next album, *Acceleration Theory 3*, and he’s showing no signs of slowing down.

“I released a new single, *A Last Chance*, inspired by the pandemic,” he enthuses. “I’ve written all the songs for my new album and I also recently recorded vocals for the next Clive Nolan album *Song Of The Wildland*, which is based on *Beowulf*.” **EM**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Gabriel Agudo (lead vocals, acoustic guitar)

SOUNDS LIKE

An emotional powerhouse full of whimsical instrumental layers and melodic grooves that nods towards classic prog

CURRENT RELEASE

New Life is out now via Bandcamp

WEBSITE

www.facebook.com/newlifegabriel



“My first supporters were Steve Rothery and Larry Morand and they’ve believed in me since the beginning.”

Gabriel Agudo took a leap into prog’s ocean on *New Life*.



TREY GUNN

From King Crimson to touring with Brian Eno, the Texan instrumentalist has enjoyed a rich career so far, and now he's ready to show off a different side of his creativity. He talks about playing with Jerry Marotta and taking things to a new level on his latest recordings.

Words: Sid Smith **Portrait:** Anita Nowakca

Since leaving King Crimson in 2003, Trey Gunn has worked in a variety of diverse settings including The Security Project interpreting music from Peter Gabriel's first four albums and the fusion-orientated crossover ensemble, Deep Energy Orchestra. A keen practitioner of the martial arts, during lockdown Gunn has also been running a series of successful music coaching courses over the internet and has just released two new albums which, he tells *Prog*, he never intended to make.

***Punkt 1* and *Firma* were each recorded on two separate nights in March 2020. What's the story behind them?**

It's funny. I never intended to make these records. They happened while I was meant to be doing another thing. In lockdown, I moved my guitar playing from my studio in the basement of my house to upstairs, just to get some light and to get away from the computer. I was working on a different project where I'm writing an entirely composed piece as though I'm one of the instruments in a string quartet, which has the working title of *Gravities*. But when I got upstairs and started doing one or two things I was surprised by what happened. I was like, 'Oh shit, this isn't what I was expecting.'

So I ran back downstairs and got my recorder and set it going for three hours and that was what became the *Punkt 1* record. Then the next night it was *Firma*. What's interesting is that the initial idea just got the wheels turning and once it got going the thing took on a life of its own and the second record went in a totally different direction.

So these were completely freely improvised?

Yes, but as I say this wasn't what I'd intended to do. I mean, I improvise a lot and of course, when

I was in King Crimson and we broke down into smaller 'research and development' units that we called the ProjeKcts, we used to improvise out the wazoo every night. But funnily enough, I'm not really interested in free improvisation as a listener. However, something just got sparked in me with these albums. With *Punkt 1* it's more about the gesture than the notes. I was following the thread of notes almost like listening to a monologue or something. There were three or four hours of music for each album so it took me about six weeks to go through it all, figuring out what the fuck was there, figuring out where the beginning and the end was, how long they might be, and even if it was a good idea.

These albums both sound very different from what people might normally hear from you.

I was worried about putting too much music in this collection. It's not an easy listen and on the first listen you can easily be defocused by all this abstractness but the more I listened to it the internal logic became clear. Both albums are pretty short but from my perspective, the length of the piece is just right because it's long enough to hold you and maintain your focus. If they were each an hour long I'm not sure it could do that. At this point in my musical career, I'd say phrasing is the shit. You can improvise, you can have all these crazy sounds, but what makes something interesting is how you make your sentences and that's where there's uniqueness. We all use the same words but the rhythm of the sentences and how this one's longer or you choose to use shorter ones, phrasing is key. So that's kind of how I was playing with this.

Since 2012 you've been touring with The Security Project consisting of Peter Gabriel alumnus drummer Jerry Marotta, and playing material primarily from Peter's first four solo albums. What's been the most surprising aspect of working with that music for you?

I love that music. The third and fourth records, *Peter Gabriel III* [*Melt*] and *Peter Gabriel IV* [*Security*], they're equal to King Crimson's *Discipline* for me. That third record just seemed to come from outer space. I didn't know anything about it. I don't even know how I came across it. I might've just bought it 'cos of the record cover, you know? What was fascinating is how strange the music actually was when you pulled all the sounds away. I'm talking about the actual structure of some of those tunes was much stranger than I thought, and then one of the big surprising things to me was Jerry Marotta. I just assumed that it's Peter's record and okay, it's a band and whatnot, and Jerry's a great drummer and he came up with crazy stuff. That's cool too. But the first time we played *The Rhythm Of The Heat*, yeah, it's a totally simple drum beat and anybody could play it, but *nobody* plays it like Jerry does.

What plans have you got for the future?

Well, I was going to go to Prague last November to play with Pat Mastelotto, Tony Levin and Markus Reuter but the pandemic put that on hold. [The Crimson Marathon show has been rescheduled to October 2021.] I guess the good part for me is that my coaching programme has just exploded since the lockdown so I'm seeing people on a daily basis. Not always teaching but working with people who are writing, composing, recording or people working on their musical vocabulary. I freaking love it. It's totally going way under the hood of the creative process and seeing it form in a kind of a raw way. I really love it. There's also a book [*The Discipline Era Transcriptions*] of musical transcriptions of 80s period King Crimson. Every fucking note on *Discipline*, *Beat*, and *Three Of A Perfect Pair* with tabs and full drum transcriptions.

It's been 18 years since you quit King Crimson. A good calling card or a millstone?

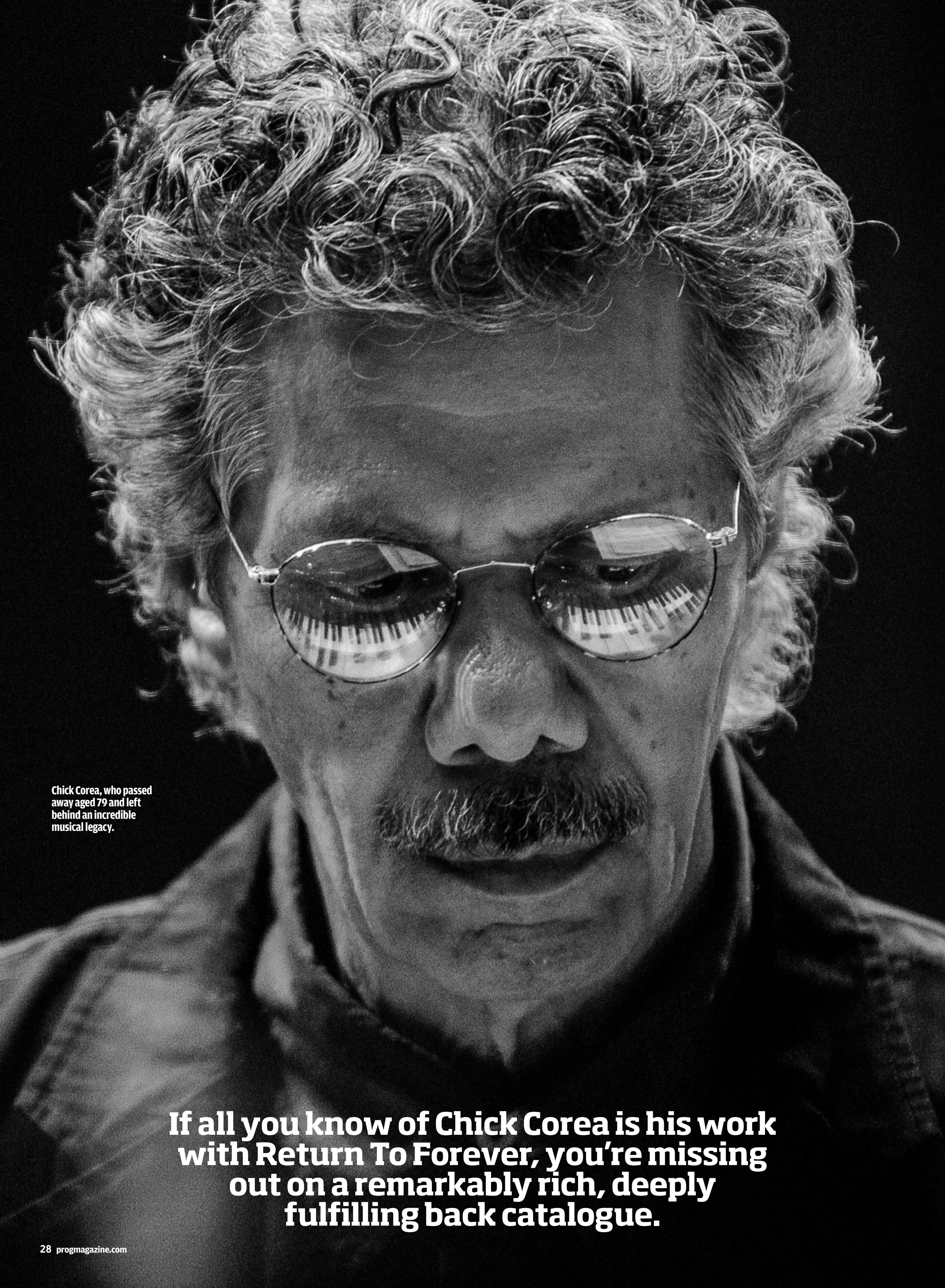
It's not worth much money [laughs] but being an ex-King Crimson member is the best calling card there is.

Punkt 1 and *Firma* are out now. See www.treygunn.com for more info.



"Being an ex-King Crimson member is the best calling card there is."





Chick Corea, who passed away aged 79 and left behind an incredible musical legacy.

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CHICK COREA REMEMBERED 1941-2021

500 Miles High

The death of composer, keyboardist and bandleader **Chick Corea** has robbed the worlds of jazz and prog of one of their finest talents. *Prog* pays tribute to his genius and casts an eye over the albums that made him such an important figure in progressive music.

Words: Sid Smith **Portrait:** Pavel Korbut

In the aftermath of Chick Corea's untimely death — he died of what was officially described as a rare form of cancer on February 9 — many fans struggled to process the loss. One reason for this was that Corea had continued to be vital and active right up until the end. Some artists slow down, kick back, retreat from public performance. Not Corea. A creative dynamo with a prodigious output that runs into hundreds of releases, Corea didn't seem to get the memo that players on the cusp of being an octogenarian should be taking things easy. Corea was genuinely inquisitive and had an interest in music that took him far beyond the boundaries of his chosen field. That was why listeners never quite knew what to expect with him.

Already a rising star and composer of note, he joined Miles Davis' band in the late-60s. He first appeared in the post-bop *Filles De Kilimanjaro* line-up in 1968 where he added his pungent electric piano as the Davis ensemble underwent a chrysalis-like development. Corea stayed to contribute extra colour to 1969's classic *In A Silent Way* and the ground-shaking *Bitches Brew*. That electric-era Miles threw the switch on a plethora of players that would shape the world of fusion, including Corea. Record companies were eager to back the next big thing and musicians blessed with remarkable instrumental skills were also keen to play to the ever-expanding youth rock audience. Early adopters of the jazz-rock direction included Joe Zawinul and Wayne Shorter who launched Weather Report in 1970,

Herbie Hancock and his Afro-space fusion release *Mwandishi* and the funk-orientated *Headhunters* in 1971 and 1973 respectively, and, somewhat overshadowing them all, John McLaughlin going full supernova with Mahavishnu Orchestra in 1971.

Corea, by comparison, was late to the plugged-in party, having spent part of that period with an acoustic Return To Forever, who released two Latin-infused albums that included sax player Joe Farrell and vocalist Flora Purim. Admirers at their 1972 Carnegie Hall shows reportedly comprised legendary bassist and bandleader Charles Mingus at one end of the spectrum and Mick Jagger at the other.

Having seen the huge audiences that were flocking to Mahavishnu shows, Corea was inspired by what McLaughlin was doing. Speaking to *DownBeat* magazine in 1988, Chick explained his change in direction. "John's band, more than my experience with Miles, led me to want to turn the volume up and write music that was more dramatic and made your hair move." With Return To Forever's 1973 album, *Hymn Of The Seventh Galaxy*, he more than achieved that goal. Stanley Clarke, who had been on the previous two records, added an electric bass that drilled deep into the pianist's quicksilver compositions. Beautifully underpinned by the incoming Lenny White, whose drumming had also been part of Miles' electric entourage, the album's real secret weapon was guitarist Bill Connors. His muscular style and melodic phrasing meshed with Corea's ornate and sometimes circuitous compositions gave RTF both body and a distinctive edge.



Left: Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew*. Below: Davis plays his trumpet at the Newport Jazz Festival in July 1969 in Newport, Rhode Island with Chick Corea on keys.



TOM COPI/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Connors bailed after that album but Corea found an able replacement in the then-19-year-old Al Di Meola. Corea wasn't interested in RTF as a vehicle for jamming, but rather a place to extend instrumental ambition and expand the scale of his writing. Across the albums *Where Have I Known You Before* (1974), *No Mystery* (1975) and arguably the artistic height of the period, 1976's *Romantic Warrior*, they raced over jazz, rock and classical forms with the skill of a surgeon and the speed of a jet fighter. That combination of adrenalised velocity could sometimes be overpowering and the band drew some criticism for the elevation of technique above substance. Not that the public seemed bothered. Corea, as with one or two of his fellow brothers and travellers in the electric diaspora, became that rare thing: a jazz player with a certified Gold disc under his arm.

At the height of their powers, Return To Forever's hectic musical direction probably had more in common with some of progressive rock's headliners, such as ELP and Yes, than their jazz-rock brethren, often maintaining only a slender tether to their jazz origins as they throttled up in search of escape velocity. By 1977's *Musicmagic*, although the core

Return To Forever's *Hymn Of The Seventh Galaxy* (1973) and *Romantic Warrior* (1976).



CHICK COREA REMEMBERED 1941-2021



Return To Forever's early 70s line-up.



Return To Forever IV: Lenny White, Jean-Luc Ponty, Chick Corea, Stanley Clarke and Frank Gambale on February 12, 2011.



RTF having a blast: Chick Corea (left) onstage with Al Di Meola, Lenny White and Stanley Clarke at the Auditorium Theater in Chicago, Illinois on March 22, 1983.

quartet had burned out, Stanley Clarke was still onboard for a group augmented by horns and Corea's wife, Gayle Moran, a noted keyboardist and one-time member of the late-period Mahavishnu Orchestra.

From 1982, RTF became an occasional vehicle, although the results of their reunions sometimes lacked the burn and drive of the past. Their 2008 ill-tempered reprise saw them part company with Di Meola and was thankfully eclipsed by a spectacular tour in 2011 with guitarist Frank Gambale and violinist Jean-Luc Ponty joining forces with Corea, Clarke and Lenny White. Although now in their 50s and 60s, their playing was up to the demands of the repertoire, albeit at a slightly slower, and more enjoyable tempo. Highlights were captured on 2012's live set *The Mothership Returns*; a bravura performance, filled with a freewheeling expressiveness and a surprisingly nimble reinvention of the RTF brand.

Regardless of whether he was working in rock or more conventional pianistic settings as a composer, Corea never stopped pushing and stretching his writing. Both 1983's *Lyric Suite For Sextet* and 1985's *Septet* contain his urgent, propulsive melodies set into motion by a string quartet, the former augmented by Gary Burton's vibraphone and the latter by flute and French horn string players. These pieces are especially convincing as classical music in their own right.

What Chick Corea had in abundance was energy and range. He'd investigate a different take on fusion with The Elektric Band in the 90s and straddle straight ahead jazz and rockish audacity with the Five Peace Band in the 2000s, tag-teaming with John McLaughlin once again. In the 2010s, he revisited the piano trio

format with *Trilogy* featuring bassist Christian McBride and drummer Brian Blade. Skipping between joyous improvisation and tight melodic and structural control, the results are especially lucid.

There's simply not enough space here to list the diversity of styles that Corea embraced, explored, and made his own across more than six decades as a pioneering musician. If all you know of Chick Corea is his work with Return To Forever, you're missing out on a remarkably rich and deeply fulfilling back catalogue.

Highlights from a storied career that should not be overlooked or underestimated include 1968's *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs*, an astonishing trio with future Weather Report bassist Miroslav Vitouš and Roy Haynes' intricate drumming. The works of Circle for the Blue Note label and 1971's *Paris Concert* with Anthony Braxton go deep into experimental playing where listening is as vital as any notes that might be played. About as far removed from jazz-rock, they nevertheless burn with a truly fierce originality that shows another facet of Chick Corea's artistic restlessness, creativity and expressive depth.

Although the man himself may be gone, Corea leaves behind an impressive body of work. Quick to smile and blessed with an inquisitiveness that never seemed to dim or give way to cynicism, his portrait would often grace an album sleeve. Oddly enough, when this writer thinks of Chick Corea it's the cover of Return To Forever's self-titled debut on ECM (left) in 1972 that almost immediately comes to mind. Instead of a photo of the pianist, it's



a portrait of a sea bird, wings spread wide, cutting through the air, blurred in flight above a surging, blue ocean and a sliver of land receding to the vanishing point. It seems emblematic of Corea, a spirit in flight, searching for a new horizon. ☺

See www.chickcorea.com for more on Chick Corea's legacy.

At the height of their powers, Return To Forever's hectic musical direction probably had more in common with some of progressive rock's headliners, such as ELP and Yes, than their jazz-rock brethren.



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"Yes bore no resemblance to anything else that was about at the time and I thought, 'Shit, this is going to be a great band.'"

Rick Wakeman



Starship Troopers

Fifty years ago, **Yes** unexpectedly discovered the path to stardom and embarked on a magical journey that led to them becoming one of the biggest progressive rock bands in the world.

Prog invites Bill Bruford, Tony Kaye, Rick Wakeman, Steve Howe, Phil Franks and Roger Dean to explore the journey up to and beyond the band's annus mirabilis: 1971.

He's seen all good people: Sid Smith

Images: Ron Howard/Redferns/Getty Images



n the morning that *Prog* speaks to Rick Wakeman, the veteran keyboard player is in a very good mood and about as far removed from his 'Grumpy Old Rick' Twitter handle as is possible to imagine. The reason? "I'm going to get my [Covid vaccine] jab this morning," he says with some enthusiasm. It's also possible another reason the 71-year-old is so chipper is that he's talking about the events of 1971, a year that saw his career coincidentally given a massive shot in the arm after joining Yes.

In February 1971, *The Yes Album* was released and, nine months



later, *Fragile*: two remarkable albums representing the survival and arrival of a progressive rock institution. The first secured their future, protecting them from the whims of record label executives. The second was a new integrated unit marching in lockstep that defined their own destiny on their own terms. Both records were, in part, the result of a catalyst; two new members whose contributions brought about a decisive change. Both enabled Yes to finally slip into another league entirely after nearly three years of commercial stalemate and the looming threat of obscurity.

Taken together, those two albums last a little over 81 minutes and stand as a testament to tenacity, decisiveness, and a remarkable flowering of creativity. With them, the transition from earnest hopefuls to bona fide stars was achieved. Yes would soon be able to say goodbye to gigs at Portsmouth Poly and bask in FM Radio's heavy rotation in sun-drenched California and beyond.

"It was a great period. A time of tour, record and tour some more... it was another level... everybody was playing in a way they'd never played before," recalls Wakeman, an astonished tone animating his voice, as if he still can't quite believe his luck.

"Being in a band is sometimes like being in a family, you know, you're living cheek by jowl especially in the early days of the group, and plenty of bands have had problems dealing with each other possibly because it is that family thing," says Yes' first keyboard player, Tony Kaye, speaking from his home in Florida.

In any family, there will be times of joy, excitement, disappointments, and loss. Alongside the support, respect and regard between siblings, thorny rivalries may grow, some left unresolved, or even undeclared for decades. Resentment for slights, both real and imagined, unfurl in the undergrowth and along the branches of the family tree. Like some pernicious knotweed, they slowly choke the life, trust and joy out of their interactions.

Tony Kaye, reflecting on the band he helped to found in 1968 and which he first left in 1971, experienced all this, and probably more internecine adventures than he cares to remember or talk about. Yet Kaye's enduring enthusiasm for the group is such that he returned to the family fold for 1983's *90125* and once again in 2018 as a guest on the 50th anniversary tour.

Yes are now a firmly established musical dynasty with a fanbase broad and deep-pocketed enough to sustain two different groupings, not only in the late-80s with Yes versus AWBHH but again around



GEORGE WILKES/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

"I'd seen Steve Howe playing with Bodast probably on one of my visits to Speakeasy and I remember telling Chris and Jon I thought he would make a good replacement for Peter Banks."

Tony Kaye

the 50th anniversary with Yes running alongside Yes Featuring Anderson Rabin Wakeman (aka ARW). None of that and none of what's been achieved over the last five decades and more could have possible had it not been for Yes' very own annus mirabilis in 1971. The events that made 1971 so vital to Yes' success had their origins in the previous year, and even go back further back.

In truth, 'overnight success' doesn't really exist. Yes had slogged away paying their dues in thankless support gigs including, most famously perhaps, Cream's farewell concert at the Royal Albert Hall in November 1968. "I think

we kind of took it in our stride," says Kaye. "Obviously, it was a pretty big deal for the band. We certainly weren't very popular at that time. I guess it was between our manager Roy Flynn and Robert Stigwood who managed Cream to swing that for the band. And of course, yes, it was a bit intimidating."

Just how intimidating was seared into the then 19-year-old Bill Bruford's memory after dropping a stick in the opening moments of their cover of Leonard Bernstein's *Something's Coming* from *West Side Story*. There, literally in the shadow of Ginger Baker's huge Ludwig double bass drums, he lost his

Yes' eponymous debut album, released in 1969.





housed in a striking comic book speech bubble and delivered a simple but effective graphic impact. As Yes grew in stature, such illustrations would become more elaborate and, to some extent, echo the complexity of the music. Musically, the band could sometimes be heard punching above their weight and this established quite early on another aspect of their personality. Despite their winning formula, not enough people went out and bought the album and it failed to reach the UK Top 40. Fortunately in those days, that didn't matter too much as record labels were often prepared to give bands longer to find out what worked best. For now, Atlantic were happy.

Used to being the centre of attention onstage, Banks' misgivings about being sidelined in the studio were a source of grief. He felt the mix didn't always pay him as much attention as he would have liked and, although he didn't know it at the time, he was establishing a disputatious template that would accompany most of Yes' album mixing sessions. In the years to come, individuals would variously demand more bass, more keyboards, more guitar, more drums, more voice, and, well, just more. Regardless of Banks' displeasure with the finished album, there are plenty of moments where his thunder, far from being stolen, is well to the fore. The frantic free-falling solo during their inspired version of Buffalo

Vested interest:
Tony Kaye onstage
in London.



MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

grip on his stick. "I can assure you, the sound of a drumstick clattering and rattling down over a bass drum to the hard wooden floor of a silent and packed Albert Hall is absolutely the loudest sound I shall ever hear," he'd later write.

For Kaye, further embarrassments are brought to mind. He laughs when he remembers his early career. "I used to try and disguise my Vox Continental with a three-sided wooden plyboard stand that was laid around the front so it looked a little more like a Hammond. It was pretty bad," he admits.

Although barely known beyond a rat run of college gigs and clubs, Yes were signed to Atlantic Records, which conferred both status and prestige on this band of hustlers living in communal near-penury. "Being on Atlantic lifted the band to another level," agrees Kaye, relishing the freedom the band experienced in the making of the album. "I guess it was specific to that particular time that they kind of let us do whatever we wanted to do, you know? You don't really see that anymore."

Released in the summer of 1969, the band's self-titled debut album was

Yes in August 1969,
L-R: Chris Squire,
Jon Anderson, Tony
Kaye, Peter Banks,
Bill Bruford.

Time And A Word, 1970.



On their 1970 follow-up *Time And A Word*, Yes needed to try something else. Maintaining a steady-as-she-goes course wasn't something that singer Jon Anderson was content with when it came to recording their second album. Not for nothing did Anderson pick up the nickname 'Napoleon' from his bandmates due to his small stature and autocratic tendencies. If their debut had been a good calling card for Yes the next album had to be better, Anderson argued. There was no point in treading water and simply repeating the formula that worked well enough the first time around. Adding an orchestra might help that process imbuing the songs with an added sparkle.

Recording sessions were grabbed in between gigs during the winter of 1969 and early 1970 at Advision Studios, but as the songs became upholstered with a string and brass trimming, guitarist Peter Banks was at odds with his colleagues over the direction. Personal differences between Banks and producer Tony Colton only increased the tension.

Springfield's *Everydays*, a cover that far outstrips the laconic original, demonstrates Banks' brand of dazzling bravery that veers between frenzied excitement and reckless abandonment.

Yes have since garnered a reputation for being ruthless when dealing with personnel issues over the years, ousting members or managers with the ease by which one might slip off a burdensome overcoat that no longer fits. What do you do when someone in the band isn't keen on the proposed direction? Most of the time that band will make compromises and accommodations to avoid conflict but when that doesn't work, what then? Just two months after the completion of *Time And A Word* the answer to those questions came at the end of a gig in Luton on April 18, 1970. The band were backstage when Anderson and Squire told Banks he was out. Tony Kaye claims today that the precise reasons for Banks' sacking in 1970 remain a mystery to him and that neither he nor Bruford was even aware it was coming.

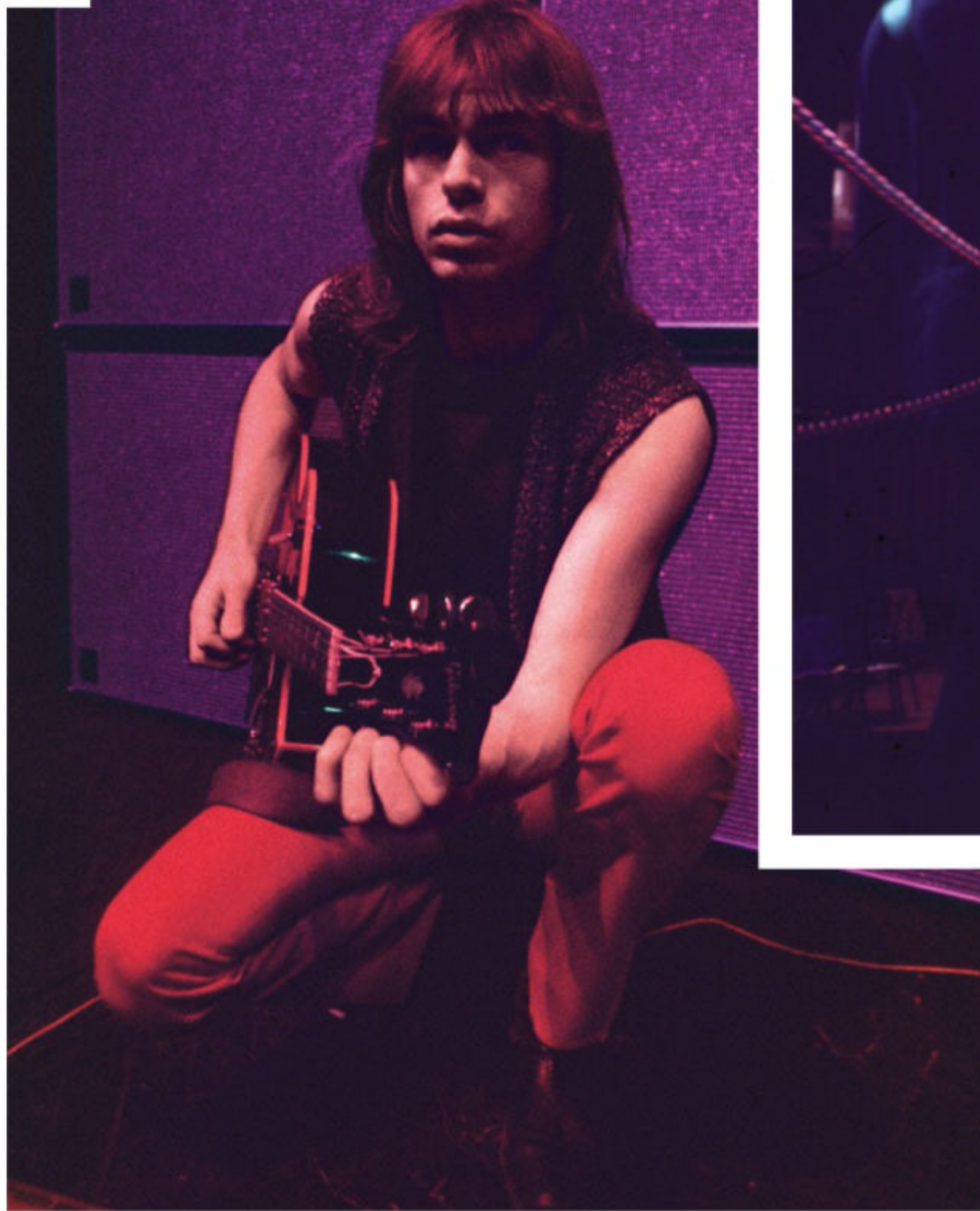
"Pete was a top guitarist. He loved Pete Townshend and he loved that



kind of extreme, loud rock'n'roll," he recalls, "I recently saw some old videos of that time and both of us, we were pretty energetic... Pete was putting his guitar through the ceiling on certain club stages and just kind of doing a Townshend thing. I never really understood at the time why he was fired. It wasn't really explained, but I guess in retrospect that had something to do with it: the band wanted something different I guess. Pete was not very enthusiastic about the orchestral addition and it was something that Jon was very into. And of course, the band went in that direction but it wasn't really my direction either. I thought it was a good combo that the band had together at that time but it was not to be."

Finding a suitable new guitarist wasn't the only problem Yes were facing. Although *Time And Word* had scraped in the lower end of the charts it hadn't really made much of a difference to the band's prospects. "There'd been nothing but big promises about how great we were going to be, but we were going round and round in ever-smaller circles. The gigs weren't getting much better and we were running out of money. We were signed at the same time as Led Zeppelin and they were doing pretty well and King Crimson had this astonishing first album, we were just knocked backwards by that and jealous as heck. There we were in our little damp farmhouse with 50 quid [to our name]. That was two and half years or something into the band's life and we'd singly failed to produce," says Bruford summing up the prevailing mood.

Having a vision and acting upon it requires a significant degree of commitment. In parting company with Peter Banks so suddenly, so decisively,



Yes had displayed a willingness to do whatever it would take to make that vision a reality. There wasn't really any room for passengers. It was that simple.

"Bodast were a rockin' band," recalls Tony Kaye. "I'd seen Steve Howe playing with them probably on one of my visits to [London music venue] Speakeasy and I remember telling Chris and Jon I thought he would make a good replacement for Peter Banks."

Kaye was right. In Steve Howe, they had found a guitarist who brought another level of technical skill and compositional flair to the group. However, perhaps most importantly of all, Howe wasn't interested in any old gig to tide him over. "Basically, I was very hungry for success and extremely ambitious. I was 23 when I joined, so I guess I was in a new place because my son, Dylan, had just been born so



Phil Franks' shots of Yes soundchecking at the Lyceum ahead of the album shoot in 1971.

"Everything was always just in the nick of time with Yes. We only just got to the gig in the nick of time, only just got a new manager in the nick of time, you know? It was all but over. People have forgotten just how critical a time it was then."

Bill Bruford



that was really a kind of wake-up call. So I suddenly had so many reasons to want to give my best to my work, for my family really."

Reasoning that he'd upped his game touring as part of PP Arnold's backing band, where on the Delaney And Bonnie tour he'd rubbed shoulders with Eric Clapton and George Harrison, Howe was looking for a group that were equal to his ambition. In meeting Yes, he knew he'd found them. What he didn't know was how precarious their future actually was.

Having decamped to Devon, the band initially sequestered themselves in a cottage but that proved unworkable. They received complaints from the neighbours who, understandably, weren't so keen on the sound of the group reinventing themselves after nightfall, and the guys subsequently

found themselves at Langley Farm, near South Molton and splendidly isolated.

Despite manager Roy Flynn visiting in the writing process to tell them he could no longer afford to keep bankrolling the band, thus bringing their association to an end, Yes' creativity increased. Howe is sure the very surroundings had a significant impact. "It was very much like The Band," Howe says. "One of the good things about going to the country is, of course, there are no distractions [unlike] working for, like, three hours in Soho or something and going, 'Oh my God, I gotta get outta here!'"

Tony Kaye also has fond memories of the period and recalls the late-night journeys through tiny country lanes. "Steve and I used to go out and I used to drive around Devon. Steve and his guitar [would] create a lot of what

COVER STORIES

Phil Franks discusses the making of *The Yes Album* cover.



PHIL FRANKS BY DAVID REDDM

"At the time I was working a lot on *Friends Magazine* with the late Jon Goodchild, who'd come over from the States from *Rolling Stone*. He was their art director at the time. Out of the blue, he asked me to do some stuff for this upcoming Yes album, which they were recording at the time.

"He, being a designer, had this idea of getting the band against a white backdrop. He'd got some Marshall stacks sent to him in this photographic studio and we had the band's name stencilled on the back and the plan was that we'd stand the band around them and we'd start from there.

"We got set up and waited for ages. We checked our setup and checked it all again for something to do. Eventually, well past the agreed time, the band turned up with one of them [Tony Kaye] with his leg in plaster. They were on their way back from a gig the night before and they'd had a terrible car crash. They'd just come to the studio in Westbourne Grove straight from the hospital.

"I loved the music. Still do. *Starship Trooper* is my favourite but there's a whole load of stuff on it I love."

"We got them arranged but the studio lights suddenly wouldn't work! We checked the fuses, the power was okay, but we had no idea why they weren't working. I hated working in studios anyway so I said, 'Let's get everybody to my flat on Portobello Road.' The flat was a shithole and had once been used as a squat. As we got out of the cabs, I noticed that somebody had thrown a polystyrene head out on the street, probably from a hairdresser's shop, so I grabbed it. I've no idea why. I never liked setting stuff up. Whenever I was sent to photograph people, I'd just sort of be there. I let them be themselves. I never told people to do this or do that.

"So, I put some tea on and told them to make themselves at home. I cleared the kitchen table out of the way and we tried some shots with this roll of infrared film and some filters I had. The polystyrene head we hung from the ceiling with some fishing wire and took a shot or two. I went to Advision Studios and spent pretty much a whole night there with them. It was fluorescent lighting so again it had a greenish hue. I also shot them at the Lyceum in a soundcheck rather than the actual concert.

"I have very fond memories of that cover. I was paid £140, which was a lot of money for me back then. I used it to go to San Francisco and ended up working for *Rolling Stone* and other things for several months. I loved the music. Still do. *Starship Trooper* is my favourite but there's a whole load of stuff on it I love." **SS**

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eventually turned up on *The Yes Album*. Steve and I were pretty close at that time and a lot of good collaboration came out of it down there.”

Almost from the off the new incarnation of the group caused a stir. The vigour and exuberant confidence was palpable. One person who was impressed was the keyboard player from support act Strawbs. “It was a show in Hull and after we’d done our set I went into the audience and watched Yes. It was an eye-opener,” Rick Wakeman recalls. “I’d never seen a drummer mic up all his drums before or tune them like Bill did. Most bass players used big Marshall stacks and played a Fender jazz bass. Chris came up with some amp that I’d never heard of and a Rickenbacker that was so out of fashion it was unbelievable. Then, there was Steve and when most guitarists were using Strats, Telecasters and big Marshall stacks, he had a couple of little Fender Twin amps and was playing a semi-acoustic Gibson. Most singers at that time were

having got as far as the outskirts of Basingstoke, their luck ran out.

“It was tough driving in all kinds of conditions up and down the M1 and everywhere,” Tony Kaye remembers. “We hit a truck head-on in the pouring rain. I was in the passenger seat, the rest of the band were in the back. It was a full-on impact and the engine of our vehicle was pushed back into the cabin and broke my foot. It was scary.” The accident left Kaye’s foot in plaster and the rest of the band treated for shock and minor injuries. The aftermath is captured on *The Yes Album*’s front cover, with the band having been released from the hospital that very morning.

“Everything was always just in the nick of time with Yes,” reflects Bruford. “We only just got to the gig in the nick of time, only just got a new manager in the nick of time, you know? It was all but over. People have forgotten just how critical a time it was then. We weren’t costing a lot – the rent of a house and a bit of food to keep body and soul together – but Roy Flynn had done that for a while, bless him, and we were in deep trouble.”

“They argued fiercely, but what they came up with, the two of them playing together, I don’t think I’ve ever worked with a drum bass combination, quite as incredible as Bill and Chris.”

Rick Wakeman

six-foot-three [with] long greasy hair and tenor voices, and on comes this diminutive little pixie, with an alto voice who looked tiny against Chris, Steve and Bill who were all six-footers. The only person that I suppose looked normal for a rock band was Tony Kaye, who had a Hammond organ. I was so knocked out with how they played, the arrangements, and their style. They bore no resemblance to anything else that was about at the time and I thought, ‘Shit, this is going to be a great band.’”

It’s sobering to think they nearly went from a great band to being a late band. Instead of a career spanning more than half a century, 1971 could have been marked by the posthumous release of their third and final album. Driving themselves to and from gigs, and falling asleep at the wheel on the return journey was almost an occupational hazard. Bill Bruford recalls he often sat in the front maintaining a constant barrage of questions in order to keep Jon Anderson or Chris Squire from dozing off. After a show in Plymouth,

Naturally, says Bruford, the band were concerned, but sometimes in the face of such a crisis you find the reserves of courage and self-belief to turn the situation around. “It was really Jon Anderson who drove it, though. It was Jon who was always on the phone, always hustling gigs, it was Jon who managed to find [film production and distribution company] Hemdale, who were then employing Brian Lane. Brian was like a branch of the social services,” he says with a laugh. Lane’s influx of financial support enabled the band to grab time at Advision Studios. Lane’s background as a record plugger was also invaluable when it came to the release of the record.

“There’s another thing I remember about the release of *The Yes Album*, which was an incredibly serendipitous series of events,” he continues. “Between January and March 1971 there was a national postal strike, which meant that the *Melody Maker* chart had to be suspended because they weren’t getting the returns back from the shops to be able to compile a chart. Who



Tony Kaye's last gig with Yes, at London's Crystal Palace Bowl on July 31, 1971.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES



FRAGILE

should step into the breach but a young Richard Branson who had a chart and so the newspapers of the day started printing Richard Branson's Virgin chart. The guy who owns the charts puts in what he wants. Brian Lane said he'd get us in the charts. People talk, a couple of hundred quid changes hands and before you know it, you're in the charts. It's *that* that got Yes going."

Whatever dark deeds may have been indulged in, *The Yes Album* broke through at No.7. It was the first time a record by Yes had entered the UK Top 40 and it went on to reach No.4 in the Official UK Charts.

"Up until Yes, I'd known nothing but serious letdowns that I don't even care to talk about; being left flat here, being turned down there, being accused of this here, being fired there, you know, losing out," says Steve Howe from his home in Devon, in the very property where the band created *The Yes Album* just over 50 years ago. "So when I joined Yes it was all musically very exciting. Although I enjoyed cover versions, I couldn't see a career being built out of them."

Howe argued it was better to expend energy on original material rather than someone else's songs. If that was true for *The Yes Album* it would certainly be true for the songs that would become part of their next album.

The success of their third album, released in February 1971, gave Yes the chance they were looking for. It was an opportunity they consolidated with live tours in Europe and, crucially, in June, their first North American tour supporting Jethro Tull. It was on that first date, in Edmonton in Canada, that Bruford recalls thinking, "At last, we're in the right place."

In those bracing times of survival and arrival that characterised 1971 for Yes, the continuing expectations surrounding musical growth and evolution meant there was no time to rest on their laurels. If anything, their first real taste of commercial success demanded that they press on, taking advantage of record company largesse to pursue their own artistic goals. Why do more of the same when you could do something you'd not previously tried? Tony Kaye, by his own admission, pushed back against

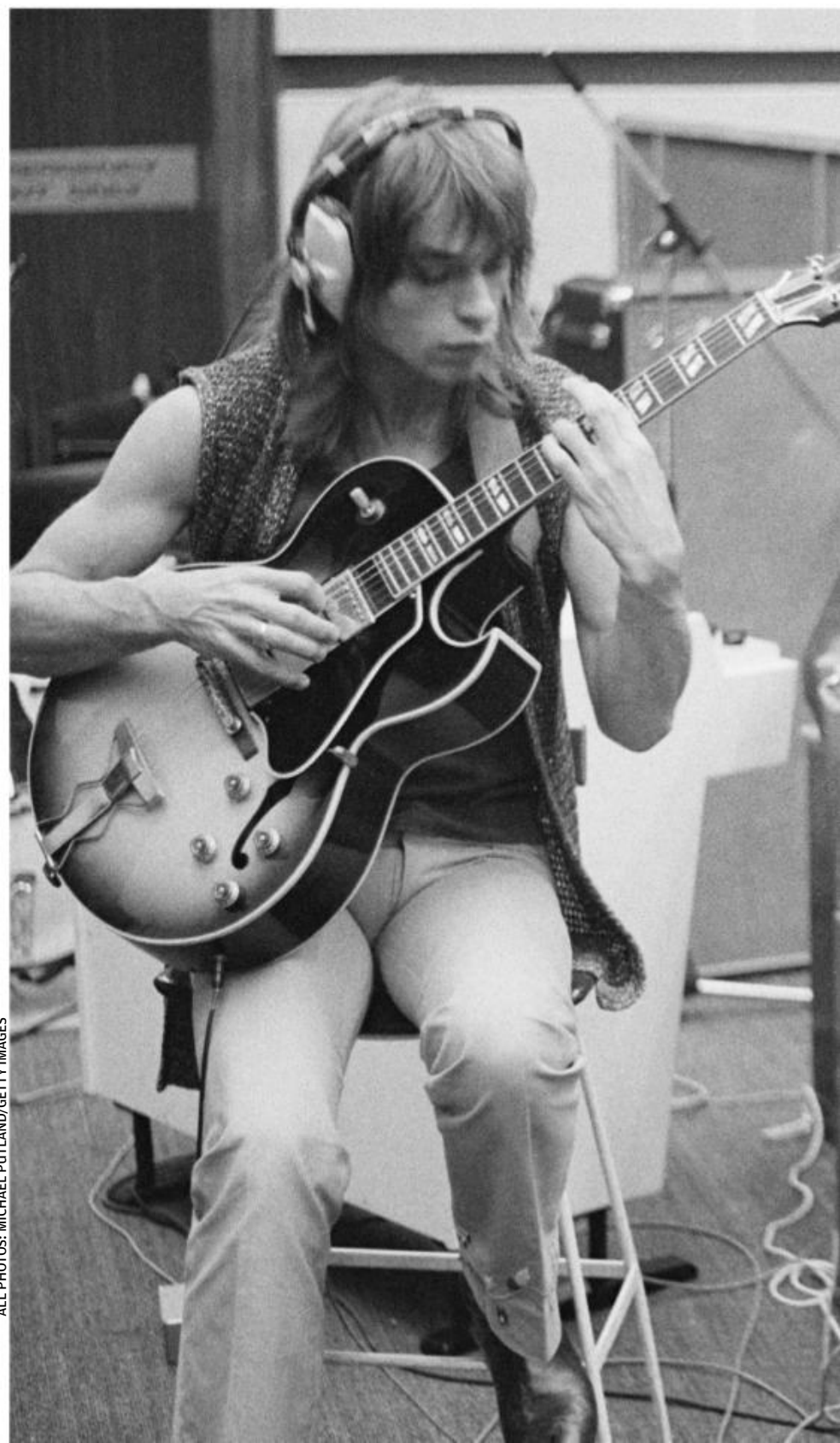


August 20, 1971:
Yes recording *Fragile*
at Advision Studios
in London.



Anderson's continuing demands for a grander, broader sound primarily being generated by the keyboards: "It's a fact that I love the Hammond and piano and I was a purist on that level. It's been said that I didn't want to use the Moog or Mellotron although, of course, I used both in *Badger* [Kaye's first post-Yes venture]. I was very concerned that keeping either of those two instruments in tune was a problem. The sound of the Mellotron trying to emulate orchestral strings was a little bit biting for me. The Moog was the beginning of a lot of things of course, and it wasn't that I was completely against using them, but it's true they were not my favourite instruments."

Steve Howe still admires Kaye's dedication: "Listen, I've got to say, Tony is such a great player. On the first three albums, he's the only player who could have done that stuff. He plays some absolutely brilliant things but



ALL PHOTOS: MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

"They were very special times because although we didn't know it at the time, it became harder and harder to create that kind of environment."

Steve Howe



we were we already going to go hell for leather wanting to get all the textures and be this kind of orchestral sort of group. So when the idea came that there was someone more versatile and willing, that's where we went."

Kaye played his last gig with Yes on July 31, 1971 at the Crystal Palace Bowl. It was just over a year since Peter Banks' departure, although he'd return to the Yes family some 11 years later.

Yes knew exactly who to call in order to supply the kinds of textural sounds they were so keen for the newly emerging music to include. In an interview with journalist Penny Valentine in 1970, Wakeman had bemoaned the state of keyboards, particularly the use of piano and organ onstage, citing Keith Emerson and Tony Kaye as the only two in the field who were truly exploring the organ's possibilities. "I have always tried to play something nobody else can play, I think I've based all my organ work on that kind of attitude," he told the journalist. Some 50 years on he's sure that Yes had seen the interview and marked him out as a person of interest. When the call did eventually come from Chris Squire asking if he'd like to come along to a rehearsal, it was at 2am, and an exhausted Wakeman, who'd just rolled into bed after

COVER STORIES

How Roger Dean entered the world of Yes and changed it forever...



"Phil Carson, the then-boss of Atlantic Records in England, introduced me to the band at Advision Studios. I went there with my massively decorated copy of *Parsifal* illustrated by Willy Pogany. The illustrations, decorations and the text were very intense. I said to the band it would be fantastic to have this magical story in this

sort of form. Of course, we couldn't put out an album that was like an old book but there's a little attempt at that in printing on the brown paper on the inside and having that booklet within it. So it was the faintest of faintest shadows of how it might have been.

"The gatefold cover I saw as a story, a fantasy. It wasn't symbolic of anything. It was part of a story within a story, a creation myth. The idea of it being a glimpse of an epic narrative was there from the beginning. We see [that on] the covers of *Close To The Edge* and the paintings on *Yessongs*, and others that revisit that world.

"I hadn't heard any of the music on *Fragile* before starting on it because I usually finish the cover long before the music is done. That's the way the logistics of print works. I had to finish before

"They'd already just done *The Yes Album* and I was completely blown away with *Würm* from *Starship Trooper* which is amazing."

the band, so I never got to listen to the album they were making. But they'd already just done *The Yes Album* and I was completely blown away with *Würm* from *Starship Trooper* which is amazing.

"Rick Wakeman and I started working with Yes at about the same time. He knew when they'd be recording or on tour because he was with the band. But I wasn't. There'd be a period of perhaps six or nine months between delivering *Fragile* and talking to them about *Close To The Edge*. In that time I was doing other things but hoping I'd work with them again because the music was fantastic.

"I designed a Yes logo after I'd finished *Fragile*. Nobody asked me to do it. No one had logos in those days but I did it because I thought I could. But I had no idea, no realistic expectation, that they would ask me to do another sleeve. It wasn't a given that I would. So the logo was kind of done in midair as it were, with the hope that they would ask me. And they did.

"I saw Bill Bruford, bless him, in a BBC interview years later talking about the cover to *Fragile*, saying that I'd misunderstood the brief because they'd had this idea of having the cover look like a flight case with the 'Fragile' stickers all over it. I never misunderstood - I just thought we could do better. [Laughs.] **SS**

See www.rogerdean.com for more information.

a long recording session, firmly and unambiguously said, "No!"

Having already decided to leave Strawbs and go back to session work he wasn't interested in joining another band. But having seen Yes previously and liked their material, he decided to go along to a rehearsal and see what they were up to. Where's the harm, he thought... it might even be fun. It was interesting, he says, because he'd never worked on a song the way Yes did. In Strawbs, Dave Cousins would usually supply a song more or less complete, with only the arrangement to be worked on by the band. With Yes, things were very different, he says. "I can remember, for example, Chris coming in and he'd been listening to King Crimson's *21st Century Schizoid Man* in his car on the way up. He said, 'You know, I've been working on an idea for a bassline', and he played the line that opens *Heart Of The Sunrise* but that was it. I thought, 'What's that all about?' Then Steve said, 'Does it work coming down the other way?' Which he did. Then Chris said, 'Well, what about if we go up another octave?' So, I said, 'Well, what if I come down while you lot are going up?' And so we spent about an hour working on all the different ways that we could do this run, which was really interesting and with different sounds and Bill working on different patterns that he could do with it. I thought it was fascinating.

"I remember the first time I heard *The Yes Album* on a test pressing, I thought we sounded weird, even to me. But when *Roundabout* got going when we first heard it, I was like, 'Oh my God, this is tight!'"

Steve Howe

We spent two or three hours doing that, and then after we'd done it loads and loads and loads of times, I think Jon said, 'Well, what do we do? What's next then?' Steve had that line, so we put that together and shoved that on the end the whole thing started building around that. I came up with the weird chords that sort of come up underneath it, which became the chords for the song. By the end of the day, we'd put 60 per cent of *Heart Of The Sunrise* together. I thought this was absolutely fantastic!"

At the end of an enjoyable day Wakeman still hadn't intended to join the group but after giving Howe a lift home, without thinking, Howe asked if Rick could pick him up at 10 the next morning. "So I picked him up at 10 the

next morning and we just carried on like that. *Roundabout* appeared in the same way. All the things for *Fragile* were done that way. It was quite an eye-opener and very exciting."

Without intending to, Rick Wakeman had apparently joined another group and he went on to play a key role on Yes' fourth album, *Fragile*.

When Steve Howe closes his eyes today, he can still see small cameos from all the years he spent in Advision Studios, especially in relation to the making of *Fragile*. Some of those mental snapshots he carries from a lifetime spent within such cloistered spaces include: the control room, with the ever-present engineer, Eddie Offord at the controls; being sat in a broad semicircle in the large studio where they spent so much time, often from the middle of the afternoon and on into the early hours. He also recalls looking through the window of the separation booth as Jon Anderson sang, choosing which guitar to add to a track, and Bill Bruford attempting to conduct the band.

Bruford's suggestion for the album was that each individual member of the band would take responsibility for the musical direction of a particular track, in effect becoming the 'conductor' of an 'orchestra' comprising the other members of the group. You can hear

elements of it on Bruford's *Five Per Cent For Nothing* and to a lesser extent, Chris Squire's solo in *The Fish (Schindleria Praematurus)*, but Howe, Anderson, and Wakeman took the chance to make their own distinctive solo statements.

"I saw my natural step as doing *Mood For A Day*," explains Howe. "Rick and Jon also kind of did their own thing. That's what makes *Five Per Cent For Nothing* so perfect because that was really where Bill was heading. Things like my solo and Rick's solo, in a way, make *Fragile* about those steep, steep contrasts."

Mired in a tangle of contractual problems, Wakeman was prevented from adding his own composition. Instead, he opted for a copyright-free arrangement of the third movement of

Taking five:
Chris Squire in 1971.



Busy bee: Steve Howe
in 1971, working on
his honeycomb of
tones and texture.



ALL PHOTOS: © ROGER DEAN 1971/2021

Brahms' *Fourth Symphony*. Having only monophonic synthesisers, he spent hours painstakingly building up the electronic textures and layering within the piece, not unlike Wendy Carlos' *Switched-On Bach* pieces. "So of course you had your headphones on listening to the track while you put the next bit on it. It took ages on the days in the studio when I was doing it. It was probably it was Bill who would say 'Oh, I think Rick's doing cans and Brahms.'"

Despite being a full member at the time, Wakeman received no writing credits for contributions such as the extended piano suite that makes *South Side Of The Sky* so effective in its use of space and dynamic colour because of those publishing wrangles. "You didn't stop to fight about it with management because that would have held things up, and you were so keen just being there. They said it would all get sorted out and I'd get my writing credits but I never did," he laughs ruefully.

As the 'new boy' of the band Wakeman observed the interactions and roles within the group and their outcomes within the emergent music. "Bill was fantastic and worked so closely with Chris Squire. They argued fiercely, but what they came up with, the two of them playing together... I don't think I've ever worked with a drum/bass combination quite as incredible as Bill and Chris. The outcome was just always sensational. Steve played guitar like nobody else I'd ever known. He just had a completely different sound to everybody I'd ever played with. He played in a different way and it was quite incredible and inspiring because it left a lot of gaps for me to put things in and do things, which was fantastic."

Bill Bruford once observed that one of the best musicians he'd worked with was Jon Anderson, despite the fact the singer had little in the way of instrumental technique. Wakeman agrees with his judgement: "Jon was a musician in his head and that's something quite unique. He could hear things but he needed a band to get them across. It worked really well if you had the right line-up to do it. It was like, I suppose, five architects in the same room trying to build one amazing building."

Assiduously crafting songs from a disparate collection of runs, riffs, fragments, rhythmic patterns and other musical bricolage isn't easy or quick, yet the sessions for *Fragile* were incredibly productive. Sometimes emerging themes received attention but never quite landed. Some of the ideas created during *Fragile* would later be recycled as *Siberian Khattru* and *The Revealing Science Of God*. The ones that did make it to the final album stand



as classics in the Yes catalogue, with *Roundabout* and *Heart Of The Sunrise*, being particularly outstanding. Listening to them is akin to witnessing an intricate mechanism, each cog and wheel interlocking to propel the various movements and sections. Bruford's sturdy yet always elegant drumming; Chris Squire's brightly lit, rasping bass; Wakeman's dramatic keyboards; Howe's intricate honeycomb of tones and texture; and Anderson's soaring vocals all added up to something that was substantial, authoritative and original. In the beginning, Yes had sounded like one of many bands out in the field. But just nine months after the release of *The Yes Album*, and with *Fragile* now under their belt, it was clear that nobody else sounded like Yes.

Howe recalls the buzz of excitement on the first playback of a freshly minted test pressing of *Fragile* in the studios. "Somebody brought a sound system down from upstairs. I remember the first time I heard *The Yes Album* on a test pressing there, I thought we sounded weird, even to me. But when *Roundabout* got going when we first heard [*Fragile*], I was like, 'Oh my God, this is tight!' I could hear the harmonics and the vocal harmonies and I thought, 'Jesus Christ this sounds really good!' I could revel in it for a second and say this is *really* good."

Wakeman believes that *Fragile* worked so well because of the commitment each of them had to each other playing at a level they'd not previously achieved. Nevertheless, the degree of success initially took them all by surprise.

"You could laze by the pool on the top of the Sheraton Manhattan and hear *Roundabout* on WNEW-FM every 45 minutes. My world was all 'heavy rotation' and Billboard placings interlaced with enormous salads and suntans. Much more of that and I would have turned into a rock star."

Bill Bruford

"I remember being in [the US] before it came out in England and we started getting messages that it was selling incredibly well. We went, 'Oh, really?' and we sort of came home to find we'd got a hit album."

Howe says they were acutely aware that this was their moment. "The second time we went back with *Fragile* we told Atlantic to really get behind it while we were out on tour. We had that self-belief and confidence because music will give you that. We really liked it, really believed in it. I mean, we liked *The Yes Album* quite a bit as well, but at that time *Fragile* took things to another level."

Bill Bruford recalls being somewhat taken aback by the way *Roundabout* suddenly became *the* track that every DJ wanted to play when he returned to the States, and by association, just how successful the band was. "You could laze by the pool on the top of the Sheraton Manhattan and hear it on

Above left: Rick Wakeman with a four-legged friend.

Above: The reel thing - Jon Anderson.

WNEW-FM every 45 minutes. My world was all 'heavy rotation' and Billboard placings interlaced with enormous salads and suntans. Much more of that and I would have turned into a rock star."

Fragile was the first album by Yes to go in the US chart at No.4, eventually going Platinum in the UK and double-Platinum in the US. It's remarkable just how commercially successful Yes' 1971 albums were. Their songs were mostly complex and their lyrics anything but straightforward – even the man responsible for writing them admits they defy any definitive interpretation. In fact, when Jon Anderson sang, 'You'll see *perpetual change*' it wasn't just a line from a song; it was a manifesto for the new Yes and a state of revolution that began with *The Yes Album* and continued through a run of releases that constantly upped the band's game and sometimes even tested fans' patience to the limit.



ALL PHOTOS: ©ROGER DEAN 1971/2021

The Yes Album and *Fragile* completely transformed the fortunes of the group but in an alternative universe, had *The Yes Album* failed to sell Yes would have been dropped. What would have happened then? Would another label have taken up their cause? Perhaps they would have broken up and gone their separate ways? Maybe even the passing of a few decades would have burnished their three albums with a cultish gleam as they became the stuff of collectors' dreams, mint copies going for more cash than the band ever earned for doing a gig?

Back in the real world, things got increasingly surreal. Bruford, Howe and Wakeman all agree that the band's artwork was a key part of the change in how Yes were perceived. If the mysterious, urban confinement of *The Yes Album*'s cover belied the pastoral surroundings of its creation, *Fragile* took them to a very different space; albeit one that was remarkably in

simpatico with its contents. Roger Dean's artwork might have been seen gracing the covers of other artists of the day – namely Osibisa – but the deeper symbiosis between the worlds he was creating on canvas was most securely rooted in Yes' albums.

"Roger's work for the band was amazing," says Wakeman. "We felt it reflected the music. You look at it and say, 'That's Yes!' When we first saw the cover to *Fragile* we all went, 'That's it!' Roger was the artistic sixth member of the band in the same way that George Martin was the fifth Beatle."

Howe emphatically agrees: "*Fragile* set such a high standard. Bang! There it was. It felt like it was ours as much as Roger's. I mean, we didn't design it but we kind of adapted Roger's works into our music. It's amazing how tight the two entities are."

Whether you've rolled a joint on it or not, gazing at the mysterious world of Roger Dean's art is illuminating. In

Beat boy: Bill Bruford in 1971.

those sparsely populated and gravity defying worlds, mountains really did come out of the sky and stand there. If the cover was a multicoloured fantasy then the music had a cinematic echo in its pristine, beautifully crafted sonic clarity. Suddenly Yes albums didn't only look great, they sounded great too.

As the band's momentum increased and the conceptual ideas got bigger, their albums took on lives of their own, becoming voracious monsters greedily living almost exclusively on precious metals of silver, gold and platinum. Concert halls grew in tandem, eventually only arenas would do. And when those weren't big enough, stadiums were added in order to accommodate the hordes after a hot ticket. The unstoppable gush of income gave their accountants three-day migraines as they tried to tot it all up. Band management and record label executives became minor potentates. Even once-broke ex-managers got to dine on the royalty overrides and other contractual crumbs that fell from the groaning table. And the members of the band? Success of this magnitude ripples like an unseen gravity field affecting those under its influence in profound, unpredictable ways. They had the freedom to do whatever they wanted and they did it. But where once individuals worked closely, over time, in these strange and rarified times they grow apart. Closeness replaced by distance. And sometimes, a sharp distance at that.

Howe reminisces over the first rehearsals as the band made *Fragile*. "They were very special times because, although we didn't know it, it became harder and harder to create that kind of environment. In other words, the rehearsals that were inspiring were the ones where we were all in the right frame of mind, where somebody has an idea and we didn't chuck it out because we didn't like it. We said, 'Well, there's something in there, what's going on? Show us it.' They'd show you the tune and you'd work things in around it."

Working with goodwill and able to compromise, and see a piece possibly go off in a direction they hadn't anticipated can be incredibly creative but it takes time, he says. "All the difficulties you might encounter along the way in that process are essential to the outcome of there being an album. If you're going to accept a wishy-washy outcome then you can just float along with it but being in a band is about ideas... It can be tough. It's about making decisions when it comes down to it." 🎵

Yes are working on a new recording and new imagery with Roger Dean. Head to www.yesworld.com for more information.



On their official second album, **Cobalt Chapel** take listeners on a psychedelic journey through the history and folklore of Yorkshire. Cecilia Fage and Jarrod Gosling tell a curious *Prog* how they turned an ill-fated music festival, lark song and a disused railway tunnel into a dreamy concept record.

Words: Rob Hughes **Images:** Alex Lake

British rock festivals have always been slaves to bad weather. Bickershaw, Deeply Vale and the Glastonbury mudbath of 2005 immediately spring to mind.

But by far the worst casualty was 1970's Krumlin Festival, a three-day event held on a hillside above Halifax. Torrential storms devastated the site, tearing down stone walls and electricity cables, with only the stage left upright. The final day was cancelled altogether. Hundreds of people were treated for exposure, having huddled for warmth in orange plastic bags. One promoter was supposedly found days later, wandering the moors in a semi-catatonic state.

The ill-fated festival feeds directly into *Orange Synthetic*, the title track from Cobalt Chapel's latest album. It also serves as an end-of-days metaphor for uncertain times. "It's that thing about starting out with a dream and ending up wrapped in a survival blanket," says vocalist and woodwind player, Cecilia Fage. "A great idea that ends up being disastrous, with people confused about what's happening next. We actually finished the album at the end of 2019 and had no idea what was coming. So it was quite odd when 2020 happened: 'Okay, we didn't mean *that* apocalyptic!'"

Stay Off The Moors

The album cover itself continues the motif. Fage and multi-instrumentalist Jarrod Gosling are pictured on desolate Yorkshire moorland, wrapped only in orange sheeting. “That was actually taken last winter in the field above my house in Cragg Vale,” adds Fage. “It was absolutely freezing.”

This is all part of the duo’s wider narrative. *Orange Synthetic* is a concept album about Yorkshire, reaching deep into local folklore and myth, its themes and protagonists rooted in the surrounding landscape. These are often unsettling tales: murdered sheep farmers, cursed villages, struggling families, bloody Civil War executions, weird surveillance stations in the back of beyond.

“It happened organically,” Fage explains. “We started with the idea of the North, then it became more



Cobalt Chapel get wrapped in plastic for *Orange Synthetic*.

Jarrod Gosling and Cecilia Fage.

focused. The stories we find most interesting concern the darker side of life and we realised they were based on what was around us. There’s definitely a bleak edge to it, especially as a lot of them delve into history. It’s the weird and wonderful, the unexplained.”

Adds Gosling: “Dark music is just what we do. We’re not Ace Of Base.”

Orange Synthetic is a significant forward step for Cobalt Chapel. Their wondrous self-titled debut of 2017 was built around Gosling’s swirling array of vintage organ sounds and Fage’s choral vocal arrangements, making for a spectral kind of psychedelic folk. A reimagined version of the album, *Variants*, landed in early 2019, although the follow-up proper feels much more expansive and ambitious.

Fage has brought along clarinets and recorders this time, part of her repertoire with Matt Berry & The Maypoles. Gosling, also known for his work in I Monster and Regal Worm (incidentally, he reveals, a new Regal Worm album, *The Hideous Goblin*, is due soon), adds guitars to his dizzying arsenal of electric pianos, effects, tape loops, Mellotron and percussion.

“The original idea behind Cobalt Chapel was just to do something around organs and bass pedals,” explains Gosling. “[Twisted Nerve Records co-founder] Andy Votel meant it as a compliment when he called our music ‘Vertigo-go’, as in the Vertigo swirl label – very 1970 psychedelic into progressive. But there’s a limit to what you can do with that format and we wanted to keep it fresh. Having different instruments makes you write in a different way. *Orange Synthetic* still has vintage equipment, but sounds more modern.”

The duo’s reference points for the album range wildly, from Sandy Denny to Flying Lotus, Basil Kirchin to Beach House, Mandrake Memorial to the Bulgarian State Television Female Choir. “We both love

a bit of Vaughan Williams too,” says Fage. “There’s a very English quality to that music. One of the songs, *Cry A Spiral*, was inspired by a walk on the moors near Hebden Bridge. I heard this weird, all-encompassing noise up there and couldn’t understand where it was coming from. What I didn’t realise was that the skylarks were all nesting in the grass. Then they fly up and make another noise to protect their position. I’ve called it a chorus of psychedelic penny whistles. So I was listening a lot to [Vaughan Williams’] *The Lark Ascending* and thinking about that.”

Another key song, the majestic *Our Angel Polygon*, was inspired by RAF Fylingdales, an imposing radar base and early warning system that dates back to the early 60s. Situated on the North York Moors, its distinctive white geodesic domes have since been replaced by a vast pyramid structure. “Being from Sheffield, we used to go over there quite a lot when I was younger,” Gosling recalls. “I remember the giant golf balls and how amazing they looked. It’s not quite the same without them, but it still has that eerie, Cold War/*Doctor Who* kind of vibe. I can imagine Jon Pertwee being up there, surrounded by people in white coats. We just started talking about what a really bizarre place it is, looming over the moors. It’s surreal.”

Our Angel Polygon’s chilly choir effects were created in a disused tunnel on the Trans Pennine Trail, where the duo set up their recording equipment to capture its sustained echo. “The sound in there is huge,” notes Gosling, “like St Paul’s Cathedral.” Thematically too, the song manages to reflect both Cold War paranoia and modern-day qualms about new technology. Like everything on *Orange Synthetic*, it mines the past to amplify the present, raising questions about fear, insecurity and freedom. Similarly, other songs address justice, working life and the value of compassion.

Fage moved from London to West Yorkshire with her family only fairly recently, but instantly fell in love with the place. She still has the enthusiasm of a tourist for her adopted home. “There’s something very solid about Yorkshire,” she concludes. “The stories on the album are all about the permanence of things, rather than the frenzied panic that revolves around so many things now. I think that’s what we’re kind of attracted to – that sort of reassurance, the idea that something has endured for hundreds of years. In that way, *Orange Synthetic* is actually kind of escapist.”

“Dark music is just what we do. We’re not Ace Of Base.”

Jarrod Gosling

Orange Synthetic is out now via Klove. See www.bit.ly/cobalt_chapel for more.

BREAKING. THE Tension

After two decades apart, the instrumental heavyweights are poised to unleash their long-awaited third album. Jordan Rudess and John Petrucci talk to *Prog* about picking up where they left off in 1999, the importance of staying hungry as musicians, and the unique chemistry that powers **Liquid Tension Experiment**.

Words: David West **Images:** Tony Levin

“**T**here’s definitely magic and chemistry with this group of guys, that’s undeniable,” says Jordan Rudess. “Even the first day when we started to jam, oh yeah, we’re back.” The group of guys in question is Rudess, guitar monster John Petrucci, master of the bass and Chapman Stick Tony Levin, and prog’s reigning drum champ Mike Portnoy, known together as Liquid Tension Experiment. The last time this quartet released an album Bill Clinton was in the White House, the euro had just debuted as an international currency, and *The Matrix* was in cinemas. It’s taken a long time to get the band back together, a situation no doubt complicated by Portnoy’s departure from Dream Theater back in 2010, but then last year the drummer played on Petrucci’s solo album, *Terminal Velocity*.

“If it wasn’t for music as a creative outlet, I think I’d go completely mad,” says Petrucci when asked how he’s coping with being off the road for so long. But the upside to the suspension of touring has been the opportunity to resurrect the long-dormant LTE.

“It didn’t take this long because of lack of desire,” he reveals. “Those first

two albums were a lot of fun, but man, everybody is just so busy. It was even hard for me to find the time to do a solo album, after 15 years I finally did a second solo album, so the silver lining of this horrible pandemic is everybody was home, not on tour, and had time.”

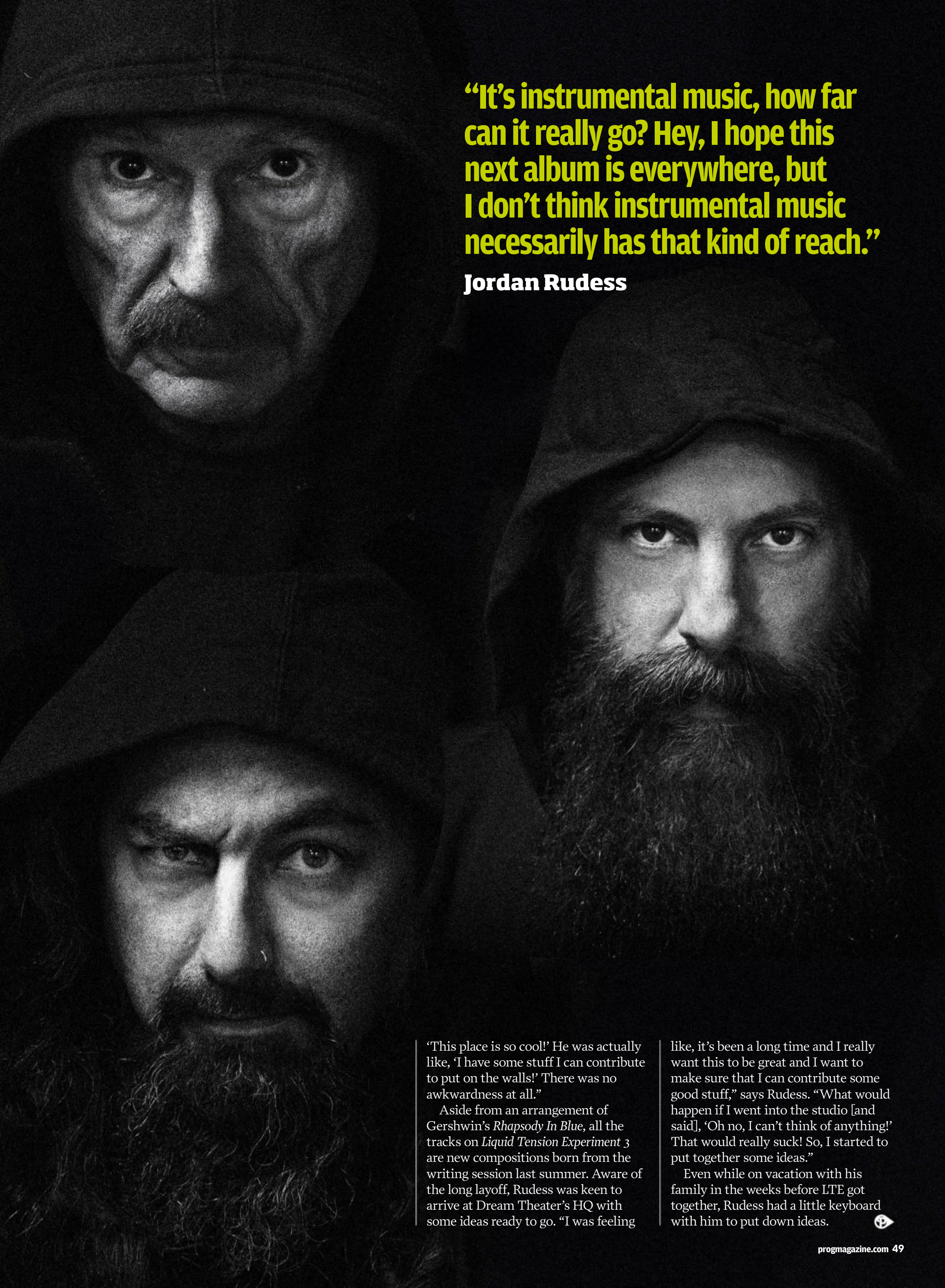
“The other big part of it certainly was that we went through a turbulent time in the Dream Theater world when Mike left, we couldn’t do it in that period because there was just so much going on,” says Rudess. “Quite honestly, I’ve been a big proponent of doing this whenever it was possible. I’d always say to everybody every now and then, ‘Hey, we should really do LTE. Come on guys, let’s do it!’”

While Petrucci and Portnoy were working on *Terminal Velocity*, texts started flying back and forth about regrouping LTE. “We keep talking about it, I said, ‘Sure, as soon as I’m done with my album,’” says Petrucci. “I don’t think they believed me, but I kept my promise. Eventually there were no more excuses. Pandemic, everything’s shut down, everyone’s home, no tours. ‘Guys, let’s do it’, life’s too short.”

So, in the summer of 2020, for the first time in more than two decades,

LTE: bro-hemian rhapsodies.

Liquid Tension Experiment reassembled to write new music. The venue they chose was Dream Theater’s HQ in New York, which might have been awkward for a certain ex-Dream Theater drummer, but that wasn’t the case at all. “He actually recorded drums for my solo album here,” says Petrucci. “I think he was genuinely excited. When he was in the band, we talked about building something like this, but we were never able to do it, so he came in, he was like,



“It’s instrumental music, how far can it really go? Hey, I hope this next album is everywhere, but I don’t think instrumental music necessarily has that kind of reach.”

Jordan Rudess

“This place is so cool!” He was actually like, ‘I have some stuff I can contribute to put on the walls!’ There was no awkwardness at all.”

Aside from an arrangement of Gershwin’s *Rhapsody In Blue*, all the tracks on *Liquid Tension Experiment 3* are new compositions born from the writing session last summer. Aware of the long layoff, Rudess was keen to arrive at Dream Theater’s HQ with some ideas ready to go. “I was feeling

like, it’s been a long time and I really want this to be great and I want to make sure that I can contribute some good stuff,” says Rudess. “What would happen if I went into the studio [and said], ‘Oh no, I can’t think of anything!’ That would really suck! So, I started to put together some ideas.”

Even while on vacation with his family in the weeks before LTE got together, Rudess had a little keyboard with him to put down ideas.





“While they were playing in the sun, I was at this keyboard,” he says. “I was inspired because I knew it was coming and my objective was to come up with some stuff, but mostly I wanted to make sure that we covered that melodic side of LTE. Every day I’d put down ideas, four measures, eight measures, then I felt like I was prepared at least to offer something just in case I couldn’t think of anything in the moment.”

Happily, the years apart had done nothing to diminish the creative and personal dynamism between the players. “It couldn’t have been smoother and easier,” says Petrucci. “It’s like we never left. On the first two albums, Tony brought in his espresso machine, he’d make espressos for everybody, so he brought it in again. The next thing you know we’re jamming, and it was like no time had passed. There was no weirdness or anxiety, it was completely smooth, the chemistry was all there.”

LTE’s writing process is based around improvisation. The guys jam and record everything they play, then listen to what they’ve done to pick out their favourite ideas. “Jams are funny,” says Petrucci. “Somebody has an idea and you start to hear everybody understand the idea. It starts out of focus then it slowly comes into focus and, as you’re jamming,

people start to understand the groove. Then you have to take it and say, ‘Let’s see, what was I doing there, how can I make this into an actual part?’”

Rudess picks out the tune *Beating The Odds* as a salient example of how an LTE track is delivered into the world. It began with a riff from Petrucci. “It seemed almost like a commercial guitar riff, if you will,” says Rudess, “Really rocking, not necessarily prog but he was doing

are subtleties. That’s a long period of time for musicians to develop their style and craft. I think there are things that really didn’t change on some level, like everybody’s musical personalities are very much intact, but I don’t know. Maybe everybody got better? There was just a lot of collaboration, songwriting confidence, and Tony was bringing in more ideas than ever before. We honed and developed our

“It didn’t take this long because of lack of desire. Those first two albums were a lot of fun, but man, everybody is just so busy.”

John Petrucci

something with the time signature that we were all blinking, going, ‘What? What are you doing?’ It made us smile, at first it was a little bit of a challenge to understand what was happening but once we got it, we laughed and started to play, like ‘That’s really cool!’”

Asked how everyone had developed as musicians over the intervening years and how the chemistry had evolved, Petrucci replies, “It’s hard to say. There

sounds. In other ways, nothing changed. The drum kit Mike used was my drum kit that he got for me, for my home studio. For my solo album he couldn’t get drums here because of the pandemic, so I’m like, ‘I’ll just bring this Tama kit that you got me’, so I was the drum roadie. Then he brought in supplemental drums, like old Dream Theater Octobans [tube toms], so in some ways nothing changed at all.”



One constant that remains is the desire to improve, something shared among the four members of the supergroup. While they might not be the young lions who cut the first two LTE records, they're still hungry for a challenge and looking for growth. "I'm always thinking I've got to really practise," says Rudess, noting the two different sides to his musical identity. "I use music as a healing force personally. I can settle into that space where I'm comfortable making the music and letting it out. There's that comfort part, but there's also the part that's always reaching for more and is never truly comfortable and never going to say, 'Okay, I've already proved myself so there's nothing left for me to do.'"

It's a sentiment shared by Petrucci, who's not content to rest on his laurels and *LTE3* is a reminder of the prodigious talents of everyone involved, from the blistering onslaught of *Hypersonic* to the richness of the arrangement in *Key To The Imagination*. "The funny thing about all of us is we never stop wanting to challenge ourselves. Nobody is lazy in that sense," he says. "I always think your music and what you put out should always try to grow and get better and

better, the sound of your recordings, the sound of your guitar tone, your playing, your songwriting, and this was no different. Nobody was in any way, shape or form complacent or lazy. In fact, everybody is even more toned. You've got 74/75-year-old Tony Levin playing like a 20-year-old on the Stick and upright bass. The guy has no limits, so it's awesome."

When LTE emerged in the late-1990s, instrumental prog was something of a niche within the genre. Nowadays, from The Aristocrats to Plini, intense instrumental music is a growing movement, but can LTE ever match the popularity of the members' better-known bands?

"LTE is a very unusual group as far as the kind of reach that we have," says Rudess. "Through all the years hearing how many musicians were influenced by LTE, I hear from all these new bands, 'Oh yeah, LTE is what got me into it.' It's pretty amazing. But that said, it's instrumental music so I don't think it's really possible to have it be as wide-reaching as something with vocals like Dream Theater. It's instrumental music, how far can it really go? Hey, I hope this next album is everywhere, but I don't think instrumental music necessarily has that kind of reach."

LTE, L-R: Tony Levin, Jordan Rudess, John Petrucci, Mike Portnoy.

"We don't have any false hopes, 'Oh, how are we going to sell a million?'" says Petrucci. "The cool thing is that within the community we're in with the Dream Theater fanbase and Mike's fans, Tony's unbelievably illustrious career and fanbase, people know about it. The word gets out, in fact so much so that there is no central Liquid Tension Experiment website or anything, it's all done on our own platforms and the record label's. We all agreed that's the best way, just let people know it's there."

"Personally, and for all of us, it's an important thing to keep going because we love to play," says Rudess. "That kind of balance between the instruments is creatively, artistically something that's of value to all of us, and it's great that people can respond to that and enjoy it."

"It's not really a focus of something like this," says Petrucci about the commercial potential of LTE, "but who doesn't want their music to be heard by as many people as possible for the sheer reason it's about sharing? Especially when you're proud of something, I really want you to hear this." 🙌

LTE3 is released via InsideOut on March 26. See www.facebook.com/ltexperiment for more information.

It's been a long time coming but Catherine Anne Davies has finally released her second album as **The Anchoress**. *The Art Of Losing* takes listeners through some of the toughest periods of the musician's life as she explores grief, trauma and loss with raw emotion. Davies tells *Prog* how it's helped her to heal and why she now feels more confident than ever.

Words: Rob Hughes **Portrait:** Roberto Foddai

For Catherine Anne Davies, the writing and recording of her new album presented a distinct challenge: how much of herself to reveal. "I've always been an incredibly private person," the singer and multi-instrumentalist tells *Prog*. "I never would've chosen to share any of these details publicly or even to write songs about them, so it's strange to me that I've made a record about it all. But when things accumulate to such a level, it becomes impossible for it not to spill out."

The Art Of Losing, her second album as The Anchoress, is a richly intense work, rooted in Davies' personal experience of grief, trauma and loss. It's also often extraordinarily beautiful. Her lyrical eloquence and raw emotive power are measured in vivid arrangements that shift between whispers and tempests, carrying with them gusts of prog, folk, experimental rock and semi-classical music. Like all the best albums, this one feels like it maps out its own unique world.

"It's kind of bookended, at the beginning, by my dad's death," Davies explains of the album's subject matter and chronology. "That would be the prologue. He was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour [her father died during the recording of her 2016 debut, *Confessions Of A Romance*]

Catherine Anne Davies reframes pain and grief on *The Anchoress*' powerful new album.

The HURT



**"I want to
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It's bullshit,
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Novelist]. Not long after that I began my journey through baby loss, with the first of many miscarriages. And I guess the other bookend was very unexpectedly being told that I had cervical cancer a couple of days before Christmas. That really was the straw that broke the camel's back. I'd just lost another baby and had another operation — because it was a very complicated loss — and it was just too much. I was so angry, just railing against the unfairness of it all.”

Diagnosed with complex PTSD, Davies underwent trauma therapy. It's been a long process, she says, but she committed herself to it fully. Creating songs was essential to her restoration.

“It's this idea of crystallising your experiences so that you're transforming them in some way,” she reasons. “And that you're making sense of what happened by writing or thinking about it. I also want to explode the myth that going through something awful makes you write great records. It's bullshit, because when I was at my worst I couldn't even get out of fucking bed. A lot of the work was done in the pockets between the worst parts of it, so it was done in spite of it, not because of it. I don't want people to have this idea that I was really sad writing all these songs.”

The Art Of Losing was actually completed in the spring of 2019, but Davies deliberately held back for a while. “I needed some time to physically and mentally heal and also just be in a place where I could talk about it,” she says. Last year's lockdowns, and the ensuing disruption of the live music scene, only delayed its release further. She's happy, if a little trepidatious, for the album to finally see light of day.

Music has always been a central force in Davies' life. Born in Wales, she grew up listening to her parents' record collection: Simon & Garfunkel, Joni Mitchell, James Taylor, Carole King, The Carpenters. She was an obsessive listener, especially when it came to the latter. “The Carpenters were a huge presence in my life, which I definitely think goes some way to explaining my vocal thing,” she says. “You can't spend all those years listening to Karen Carpenter without picking up something of her timbre.”

Her mum loved Motown, while her dad was “much more of a progger. He was really into Rick Wakeman and Yes.” In fact, as a paramedic who also had a thing for amateur theatre, he once took charge of lighting for a local Wakeman gig.

At school, Davies discovered a natural aptitude for music. She ended up playing flute in the National Youth Orchestra, but packed it in at 15 to take up guitar instead. “I never sang at all really until I was probably about 16,” she recalls. “And I didn't start playing piano until I was at university. I have quite obsessive tendencies as a person. I have Asperger's, which makes me very good at focused and concentrated tasks. And I think music became a real conduit for that. It transported me from what was not a particularly happy existence, for lots of reasons, into an alternative space.”

While music continues to sustain her, Davies admits she's always felt like she doesn't belong anywhere. One of the songs on *The Art Of Losing* is *The Heart Is A Lonesome Hunter*, named in reference to Carson McCullers' 1940 novel *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter*, which charts the plight of various misfits in smalltown Georgia.

“I think you can surmise a lot about a person's background and personality from the title of their PhD,” posits Davies, who holds hers in English Literature. “Mine was



Becoming The Anchoress has given Davies the freedom to be more experimental.

Bottom right: new album, *The Art Of Losing*.

entitled *Putting My Queer Shoulder To The Wheel: America's Homosexual Epics*. It was all about the disenfranchised seizing the voice of authority and speaking to the nation. I remember one of the professors saying to me, 'Why did you pick this?' And me thinking, 'Because I feel like an outsider, I feel strange. I feel like I don't fit.' The difference now is that as you get older you don't care anymore. I don't think it's a coincidence that there's a lot of women – Hannah Peel, Jane Weaver, Mary Epworth, Bishi; all of whom are my friends – who are making music on their own. And we all tend to be producing our own work too."

Davies is nevertheless partial to collaboration. While completing her PhD, she became the 'Emerging Artist in Residence' at London's Southbank Centre, where she worked with Nitin Sawhney and the London Philharmonic. She was once a member of supergroup The Dark Flowers, whose ranks included Bauhaus frontman Peter Murphy and Simple Minds' Jim Kerr. Indeed, the Simple Minds connection was so strong that Davies recorded and toured as part of the band for five years. There have also been recordings with Steven Wilson, The Pineapple Thief, Paul Draper, Manic Street Preachers and Bernard Butler. Her and Butler's studio album, *In Memory Of My Feelings*, came out last year.

Davies' solo career began amid all this, in 2011, billed as Catherine AD. Today, she's pretty dismissive of that phase in her creative life. "I don't think Catherine AD ever really existed for me in a public sense," she says. "I was just pissing around in my bedroom, doing these demos. When I was making *Confessions...* I needed something between me and other people, as a buffer. And that was The Anchoress. I felt more of an affinity with people like St Vincent, who'd taken on this moniker and had a kind of persona around them that enabled them, creatively, to be more experimental."

Confessions... was evidence of a very singular talent. A conceptual piece about "deconstructing normative ideas of love and romance", as narrated by a bunch of different fictional characters, its highly literate premise was shot through with pathos, black humour and vengeful intent. The Cure's Robert Smith was so impressed that he invited her to play at the Meltdown festival. She also ended up touring with one of her formative heroes, Manic Street Preachers, going on to appear on 2018's *Resistance Is Futile*. Around the same time, while attending a King Crimson gig, Davies bumped into Robert Fripp and Toyah, who declared themselves fans: "I was like, 'What!'"

It was so weird that they even knew who I was, never mind saying to me: 'We love your record.'" She also won the Limelight Award at the Prog Awards in 2016.

All of this means that expectation has been unusually high for *The Art Of Losing*. Fortunately, Davies has delivered. And more. Its complex and infinitely varied musical language is a reflection of her lyrical themes. Recurring behavioural patterns are signified by



ISABELLA CHARLESWORTH



"I'm such a perfectionist that I look back at my debut and cringe. And I think that's healthy, because you have to feel like you're progressing."

cyclical motifs; pockets of calm are conveyed by serene piano; anguish finds expression in jolting avant-rock; emotional release comes in rapturous clouds of synths and strings.

"I wanted it to be quite cinematic," she says. "A lot of it was about manipulating sound in space, so something I used an awful lot was the Leslie cabinet. The rotating speaker is quite disorientating in terms of what it does, physically, to sound particles. I don't know if I consciously thought of it at the time, but looking back I realise that a lot of the techniques I was using in post-production were about distorting and creating chaos and a sense of fragmentation, which is the language of trauma."

The most traumatic moment arrives in the form of *5am*. The song addresses a number of harrowing episodes in Davies' life, not least sexual assault, which she suffered as a teenager. "I want to reframe this idea of what we're shocked by and why," she says. "And I wanted to bring a sense of how it feels when these things keep happening in your life. I wanted to talk about bodily fluids and the viscosity and physicality of it. And I guess to challenge the listener a little, rather than tie it all up in this neat little package that we tend to talk about: 'How tragic, how sad, how shocking.' Fuck that. Let's talk about *why* this is happening."

"The numbers are shocking," Davies expands. "And sadly, it would be more shocking for me to discover that one of my friends *hasn't* experienced this. It was definitely a song that I wasn't sure I would release or play to anyone. I did a version in Studio Two at Abbey Road last year with two good friends, who are string players. And we all had to have a moment and stop recording, because it was too much. And I think it's about embracing that, rather than shying away from it. Maybe that's what the whole record is about – that it's okay to be upset by these things."

Davies hasn't been alone in the realisation of *The Art Of Losing*. James Dean Bradfield adds distinctive guitar to *Show Your Face* and joins Davies for a duet on *The Exchange*. Given that the Manics' *Holy Bible* is a key influence on the album, it's entirely fitting. The same goes for drummer Sterling Campbell and mixer

Mario McNulty, both of whom were regular David Bowie contributors during his last few decades. Certainly, the Bowie of *The Next Day* and *Blackstar* is keenly felt in *The Art Of Losing*, as is the work of Kate Bush, Björk and Scott Walker.

Rightly, Davies considers the album a major leap. "I'm such a perfectionist that I look back at my debut and cringe," she says. "And I think that's healthy, because you have to feel like you're progressing: sonically, lyrically and technically. I'm just so much more confident now. I'm not looking to someone else to underwrite the choices I'm making. And that's a big shift in the way I think about things. This record feels like a springboard to the next thing." 🎧

The Art Of Losing is out now via Kscope.
See www.theanchoress.co.uk for more information.

Quintet

Hope



Mogwai: masters of the wall of sound.

“I think everybody feels really isolated at the moment, and especially with music, it’s such a social thing. It’s so much about human connection. It’s nice to be able to share with people what we’ve made.”



They were one of the most influential post-rock groups to emerge from the 1990s, and now **Mogwai** are rising above the confines of the genre with their UK No.1 album *As The Love Continues*. Guitarist Stuart Braithwaite tells *Prog* about the band’s different approach with this record and explains why he’s hopeful for the future.

Words: Alex Lynham **Images:** Anthony Crook

Like many bands that have defined a genre, over time Mogwai have come to transcend it. Their widescreen, wall-of-sound anthems defined the second wave of post-rock, and, more than any other band became the template for what was to follow. The innovation that led them to be so influential didn’t stop in the late 90s, however, and they’ve continued to push themselves since. They’ve been prolific in recent years, releasing two soundtracks — *Kin* and *ZeroZeroZero* — since the release of their last studio album, *Every Country’s Sun* in 2017. Their new record, *As The Love Continues*, shows off not just their knack for great riffs, but also for witty songtitles, with *To The Bin My Friend*, *Tonight We Vacate Earth* and album standout *Fuck Off Money* the highlights. “It’s a phrase that comes up when you’re talking about contracts, and it’s not ‘fuck off’ as in, really big, but ‘fuck off’ as in, just money to fuck off,” laughs guitarist Stuart Braithwaite down the phone, “I can’t actually remember which one the song is though, ’cos to be honest we only gave the songs titles a couple of weeks ago!”

Given how serious and, at times, melodramatic their music is, it’s refreshing that the band don’t take themselves too seriously. This dry sense of humour and bemusement pervades not only Braithwaite’s approach to talking about their music, but also the music itself. Even in the depths of one of the strangest years anybody can remember, Braithwaite talks of the feeling of “hopefulness” he’s trying to impart with his compositions on the new album, and that releasing music — in this case, lead single *Dry Fantasy* — is something of a triumph in the face of adversity.

“It was really nice to release music [last autumn],” says Stuart, “because I think everybody feels really isolated at the moment, and especially with music, it’s such a social thing. It’s so much about human connection. It’s nice to be able to share with people what we’ve made.”

As The Love Continues is starry-eyed yet serious, the polar opposite of their soundtrack album for *ZeroZeroZero*, which was icy, and stressful. Those sparse compositions were driven by

a desire from the commissioning directors for more keyboard-driven material, and yet the resulting tracks that make up the OST are a blend of organic instrumentation and electronics, arranged in a sparse, tense patchwork that feels like nothing so much as a rising flood.

“The atmosphere of the show was always grim and stressful, whereas *Kin* had some lighter moments. It’s not been shown here [*The show began on Sky Atlantic in February — Ed.*], so it’s weird talking about it. If you’d seen it, it’d be obvious, as it’s really violent and heavy. We had to probably turn up how aggressive and heavy our music was [at times], rather than tone it down.”

Very little of the tone of *ZeroZeroZero* has carried over to *As The Love Continues* and it’s unusual how little crossover there is between the two projects. Braithwaite reflects that this may well be a function of how the music was composed, as it’s “a very different process”. He describes *ZeroZeroZero* feeling like a “conveyor belt”. Where previous projects such as the *Kin* soundtrack were contained to the maximum length of the film itself, *ZeroZeroZero* required almost eight hours of music. As a result, the process of writing and recording was often heavily expedited. “Quite a lot of the songs on that, from dreaming it up to recording it, was like a few hours.”

Mogwai’s soundtrack for *Kin* was driven by a need for very specific music for specific cues, whereas across the three directors of *ZeroZeroZero* there were different levels of attention to detail. At times, the band were even left to their own devices. Braithwaite says that their general philosophy on soundtracks is well-established at this point. He’s not a believer in complex music being used to accompany action onscreen: “When you’re watching a film, you don’t want to be overwhelmed by melodies and different rhythm changes, and all these things. [Our] tracks for film and TV tend to generally be simple. I think when people try to over-complicate it, it doesn’t work so well. You’re trying to purposefully keep it minimal.” This is very at odds with their approach for songs on a Mogwai album. “The way I see it is that you have to be able to not require anything else for the piece of music to work”



on its own,” explains Braithwaite — a song for a Mogwai album “has to work as a standalone rock song”.

The writing processes for *ZeroZeroZero* and *As The Love Continues* were also polar opposites. Where one was deliberately streamlined and intuitive, with a degree of external direction, the other was a lengthy, detail-oriented process, driven from within by the band alone, influenced to no small degree by the pandemic itself. “We really threw ourselves into writing music, and making the best of the situation we were in.”

The writing process for *As The Love Continues* took “about a year”, before additional delays were caused by the Covid-19 outbreak, just as the band were gearing up to hit the studio. “We were meant to record it in May, but we ended up not going in until August,” recalls Braithwaite. The upside was that just at the point they had demoed all the tracks for the album, they had time to hit the brakes and consider the material before they went into the studio. “I think this [album is] maybe a bit more fully formed, I don’t know. Maybe because of the pandemic and having months and months of just sitting in the house.

I’d make a playlist of the demos of the album and play it over and over again... with this one we were more prepared.”

Mogwai’s bassist and keyboard player Barry Burns has been living in Berlin for several years, so they were already well used to working remotely. Once the initial shock of lockdown had worn off, the band threw themselves even more into the writing and refining process. They’d written far more material for the album than needed, and had identified a few tracks that seemed too soundtrack-like to consign to the “demo bin”. At this point they did something unusual: they sought an outside opinion. “We’d written an awful lot of songs, so we had to narrow it down. [Producer] Dave Fridmann was involved in that process, and there were actually a couple of songs that ended up on the album that Dave rescued, so to speak. The last song, *It’s What I Want To Do, Mum* and *Here We, Here We, Here We Go Forever*, he thought they were really good ones and told us to go and work on them some more. And he’s right — they both turned out really well, I think. That was a change, I don’t think we’ve ever had anybody outside the band involved in that process.”

Sign of the times: studio time, Covid-style.

Poles apart: new studio album *As The Love Continues* and the soundtrack to *ZeroZeroZero*.



Braithwaite’s keen to stress that although the album was materially affected by the pandemic, he doesn’t think that it influenced the themes, if, indeed, it has any. “I guess that’s one thing about our music: it’s completely subjective. The songs I wrote have a quiet hopefulness to them. It feels like a record of this time, it’s obviously quite a strange period we’re all going through, but I’m not sure it has any [concrete] themes.” There’s some darker moments, and *Fuck Off Money* or *Midnight Flit* are the closest the album comes to the tone of *ZeroZeroZero*. On the whole though, the mood is optimistic, and even hopeful. This may be due to the band being able to gather and create something positive in such an isolated and dark time for many.

Though there was a brief scare that Burns wouldn’t be able to travel to participate in the recording, the band were able to decamp to Vada Studios in Worcestershire for the recording sessions. “It’s not where I’d dreamt of spending this summer, but the weather was a lot better than Glasgow,” laughs Stuart, explaining that apart from a brief trip just before the pandemic, it’s the furthest from his

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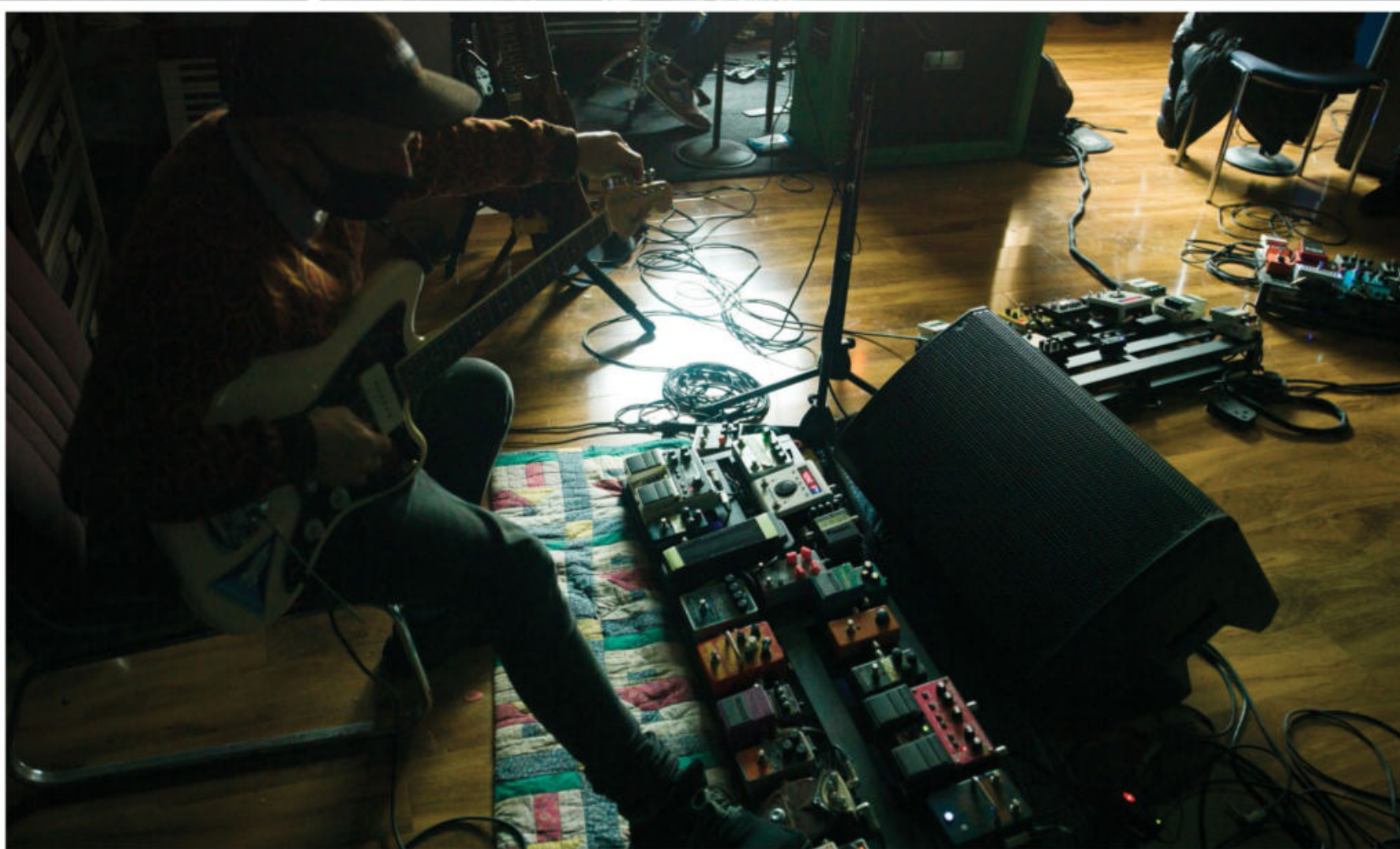
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flat that he went in 2020. “It was a blast,” he says, “because we’d been in lockdown all year, it kind of felt like a holiday as well... maybe this is just me, and the rest of the band have a different memory, but I had a really good time.” As the individual bandmembers had been in various states of lockdown, coming together

“I guess that’s one thing about our music: it’s completely subjective. The songs that I wrote have a quiet hopefulness to them. It feels like a record of this time.”

was an immensely positive experience that Stuart describes as a “big holiday”.

There were some logistical difficulties, however. Dave Fridmann wasn’t able to travel, so the sessions had to be run remotely. They called upon longtime collaborator Tony Doogan,

who runs Castle Of Doom Studios in Glasgow, to physically run the sessions and engineer, while Fridmann dialled in from the US. They set up iPads and devices all over the studios so that he could observe bandmembers while tracking, and while it sounds complex, Braithwaite insists that it worked: “It was weird, but it was totally fine... it worked really well and I don’t think it impeded the process... the weird thing was the time difference. We’d maybe do some overdubs in the morning but then we wouldn’t really start full band stuff until Dave got up at like two in the afternoon, so we ended up doing some pretty late nights, but that was fine.”

Since longtime member John Cummings left in 2015, Braithwaite’s been the sole full-time guitarist in the band, and his role has changed over time. On *Every Country’s Sun*, he describes a process of feeling like he was making it up as he went along in the studio, with the caveat: “we didn’t write *Every Country’s Sun* in the studio, but I think that a lot of the parts were made up at the last minute. We’d written it before that, that’s an expense that we try and avoid. Studios cost a lot more than rehearsal rooms!”

In the past, “when there were two guitar players I’d definitely think, ‘Well, John will think of something else.’ Now, unless a song is obviously super-keyboard-heavy, then I’ll have to think of some more guitar parts.” Then again, this has turned out to not be much of an imposition. “That’s been a lot of fun, to be honest,” he adds. “I like playing guitar... it’s probably the thing about being in a band I like the most!”

Although Mogwai have weathered this unusual year, it hasn’t all been plain sailing. Touring has been a bust, and the prospect of not being able to promote their album by going on the road isn’t ideal either from a financial or boredom perspective: “It’s not been great for us, but I’ve got other friends, obviously music promoters, roadies, pretty much anyone that makes a living from gigs, and it’s been catastrophic for them. I feel a bit bad moaning about our situation.” Instead, Braithwaite remains quietly optimistic. “I’d like to think at some point [this year] we’ll be able to get back out and play.” 🕊

As *The Love Continues* is out now via Rock Action. See www.mogwai.scot for more information.

There's a new supergroup in town and they're hoping to make a big splash with their debut album, *Singularity*. Prog catches up with **Rain**'s Andy Edwards and John Jowitt who, between them, have played with IQ, Frost*, Arena, Jadis and Robert Plant – and we find out the story behind their melodic new project.

Words: Nick Shilton **Images:** Rob Groucutt

WEATHER Systems

Clear skies ahead
for Rain!

“We’re really onto something with Rain,” drummer Andy Edwards enthuses via Zoom. “I hope we’ll give prog a bit of a shot in the arm.”

That’s a bold statement, but Edwards is far from a naïve newcomer to the progressive rock scene. His musical CV documents stints drumming for prog stalwarts IQ and Frost* and, less proggy but most prominently, Robert Plant. And bassist John Jowitt is a bona fide prog veteran, who cut his progressive teeth way back in May 1975, seeing Gryphon support Yes at Stoke City football club.

This millennium has seen Edwards and Jowitt intersect in IQ (for *Frequency*) and Frost* (for *Milliontown* and *Experiments In Mass Appeal*). However, they had subsequently ploughed disparate creative furrows.

Their reunion came in 2019 when Quill – the enduring Birmingham-based folk rockers featuring former Electric Light Orchestra drummer Bev Bevan – sought a new bass player. Having joined Quill in 2016 to play alongside Bevan, Edwards swiftly recruited his former bandmate Jowitt.

“I hadn’t seen Andy for 10 years,” Jowitt says. “But when we met up, after a five-minute

hug and a kiss, we remembered that we’ve got a great relationship playing together.”

“We started to discuss the possibility of doing a prog thing again,” Edwards continues. “John hadn’t done any prog in a long time. I started playing him some of the songs I had written and he said they were great.”

Edwards and Jowitt explored forming a band with Bevan and Quill vocalist Joy Strachan-Brain. According to Jowitt, that configuration faltered at the writing and rehearsal stage: “It didn’t quite gel. The complexity of the music didn’t suit that line-up.”

However, their abortive endeavours not only solidified the Jowitt/Edwards rhythm section once more, but also supplied a band name, with Bevan having suggested Reign, which subsequently morphed into Rain.

The quartet are completed by vocalist/guitarist/keyboardist Rob Groucutt and vocalist/guitarist Mirron Webb. Since previously largely stepping back from the

“We wanted to stretch things. Prog doesn’t have to be a particular sound. Rain’s music is prog, but that doesn’t mean it has to sound like a particular bag of clichés.”

John Jowitt

progressive scene post IQ and Frost*, Edwards has focused principally on his career in musical education in Kidderminster in the West Midlands, and as a result has worked alongside Groucutt and taught Webb.

“I’d been itching to do something with Rob and we had chatted about doing some proper prog, but also having all those vocals and harmonies like Yes do,” Edwards explains. Groucutt is the son of late ELO bassist Kelly Groucutt, and Edwards also cites ELO as one of the inspirational touchstones for Rain. “From playing with Bev, I listened again to ELO. ELO are prog, but they’ve got these very beautiful vocal harmonies and strong melodies.”

Edwards’ teaching at Kidderminster College also introduced him to Webb. “I’ve had hundreds of students over the years, but Mirron is a genius. He’s an incredible singer, writer and guitarist. When he came under my wing at age 16, I played him Frank Zappa, Genesis, Yes, King Crimson and he soaked it all up. He brings in a real progressive attitude – his ideas are off the chart.”

Jowitt’s first exposure to Webb occurred when the bassist was backing Tim Bowness at a show in Worcester in May 2019. The support band was Webb’s Hey Jester. Jowitt was impressed by both Webb’s material



and his personality: “Mirron struck me as a tremendous guitarist and his band’s songs seemed like a cross between Led Zeppelin and King Crimson in terms of the arrangements. He also seemed really confident for his age.”

Webb also brings some youthfulness to Rain. “The main reason we brought Mirron in was to bring down the age profile!” jokes Jowitt.

Edwards also identified significant potential in combining two contrasting vocalists in Groucutt and Webb. “Pink Floyd had two fantastic singers and I started to think about what makes a lot of the classic prog bands great. The answer is that you can bring all these different elements together.”

Having previously jammed and made some rough recordings, the first UK lockdown in 2020 served as the catalyst to expedite Rain’s debut album. Or as Jowitt pithily puts it, “Every situation has its consolations.”

Progress was swift, with Edwards, Groucutt and Webb all recording in their respective existing home studios, while Jowitt had to be inducted into the world of home recording.

With Groucutt and Webb possessing backgrounds that strongly contrast with those of the rhythm section, *Singularity* is a highly distinctive set of five lengthy songs that unashamedly navigate numerous stylistic twists and sonic turns.

“In the old days, the whole point of prog was that bands could do whatever they wanted to do. Prog to me is bands like Gentle Giant, Yes and King Crimson,” Edwards states. “They’re wild, crazy and outlandish and they blow your mind! We wanted to make an album that did all of that. So with Rain, what you’re hearing is lots of different prog influences and not a band just trying to be like Genesis or like Yes. IQ were a big influence for me on the album too.

“From playing with Bev Bevan, I listened again to ELO. ELO are prog, but they’ve got these very beautiful vocal harmonies and strong melodies.”

Andy Edwards

What made it work is that Mirron and Rob are coming from a different place. Having all these different skills seemed to fill the gaps.”

“We approached the songs in a very prog way,” Jowitt continues. “We wanted to stretch things. Prog is about how you arrange songs. It’s not straight verse/chorus/verse/chorus/bridge/whatever. It’s about where you can take a song. And prog doesn’t have to be a particular sound. Rain’s music is prog, but that doesn’t mean it has to sound like a particular bag of clichés. Mark Westwood, who played with me in Dirtbox, did the production and his approach is much more hard-edged.”

By way of example, *Singularity*’s opening track *Devils Will Reign* is initially light, melodic and very accessible before taking a sharp left turn. The song is a neat summation of the diverse melting pot of Rain’s music. It was also the first one that Edwards circulated for his bandmates to work on.

Jowitt celebrates an unintended consequence of being forced to record remotely, as he, Groucutt and Webb independently added their parts in isolation before returning them to Edwards. “One of the joys being able to record this way, which I’ve not experienced

before, is the freedom it gives you. I’m so used to sitting in a studio where I’m putting a part down, the clock is ticking and people are watching you.”

As such, the songs on *Singularity* evolved during the recording process, resulting in a diverse listening experience. “The whole album was made on a very agreeable basis,” Jowitt continues. “Andy’s done such a lot of work putting it all together. Usually when somebody’s in that position, they say, ‘No, I want it to be like this.’ But Andy hasn’t done that. It’s the acceptance of ideas that’s made it work. It’s been about saying yes to things rather than protecting one’s own position. And that’s been quite a revelation.”

For Edwards, Rain has been cathartic. “Usually in prog bands one person is basically running it and has final say. That can be great, but because I play all the instruments and I write, I’ve sometimes found it frustrating just being the drummer in a band. I realised I needed my own band where I could write and it’s been a real revelation.” ☺

Singularity is out now via Giant Electric Pea. See www.facebook.com/RAINprogband for more.



L-R: Andy Edwards, Mirron Webb, John Jowitt, Rob Groucutt.

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Andy Bell

He co-founded 90s shoegazers Ride and Hurricane #1, was a member of Britpoppers Oasis, and even worked with Be-Bop Deluxe and XTC producer John Leckie. His debut solo album brings his love of psych and krautrock to the fore, so it's time we asked: **How prog is Andy Bell?** **Words:** Rob Hughes.

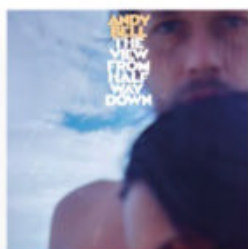
Andy Bell answered a knock on his door the other day. There stood Pink Floyd's manager, who gifted him a copy of the Record Store Day 2020 single, *Arnold Layne Live 2007*. Not only was it a wholly unexpected surprise, but it also brought back vivid memories of a treasured moment in Bell's career.

In May 2007, a host of big names gathered at London's Barbican Hall for The Madcap's Last Laugh, a tribute gig in honour of Syd Barrett, who'd passed away the previous year. The surviving members of Pink Floyd were there, as were special turns Kevin Ayers, John Paul Jones, Robyn Hitchcock, Damon Albarn, Chrissie Hynde and Captain Sensible. To close proceedings, Pink Floyd reunited (minus Roger Waters) to play *Arnold Layne*, the single that sent the original line-up on its way some 40 years earlier.

Bell happened to be onstage with them that night. "It was the greatest thing ever," he recalls. "I'd been called in to play bass in the house band for the concert. Nick Laird-Clowes from The Dream Academy was the bandleader and we became the musical core for all the guests. During our final rehearsal, this guy close to the Floyd camp had popped his head in to listen to us. The next morning I got a call from Nick, who told me that the Floyd really approved of what was going on and wanted to do a tune: 'Roger is going to be there, but he won't play with them. So will you be Roger?' I didn't even hesitate."

Bell didn't actually meet the band until the first half of the show was complete. "I got pulled into a side room at the Barbican and they were all in there," he continues. "David Gilmour had his Strat unplugged and turned to me: 'We're just making sure you know what we're going to do here. Let's run through it quickly.' What was really cool

"I'm partial to the odd 20-minute track, so there's definitely a love for that music in there. I like a lot of stuff you'd label prog."



Andy Bell's new solo album, *The View From Halfway Down*

onstage was that Nick [Mason] didn't count in the song with his sticks. Instead, David Gilmour walked over to me and went [in an impossibly polite voice]: 'One, two, three, four...' It was all done in this lovely, very English way."

Performing with Pink Floyd is just one side of the lesser-known Andy Bell. This is, after all, someone chiefly known as guitarist with 90s shoegaze types Ride. And, later, bassist with Oasis and guitarist in Liam Gallagher's Beady Eye. But when he wasn't packing out stadiums with those bands, you'd find him playing guitar for obscure electro-house artists in Sweden. Or popping up on recordings by acid jazz outfit Mother Earth. Or, as he did in 2010, adding drones to pieces by London

Oasis in 2006, L-R: Noel Gallagher, Andy Bell, Liam Gallagher.



MIKE CLARKE/AEP VIA GETTY IMAGES

spaceheads SPC ECO. There's even his alter ego, GLOK, under whose banner he released 2019's pulsing *Dissident*.

Named after a misspelling of the German word for bell, GLOK was a repository for his love of all things experimental and electronic. Bell fused elements of minimalism, soundtrack work and ambient techno to create something quietly spectacular. It's easy to discern the influence of bands like Neu!, Can and Tangerine Dream amid GLOK's otherworldly soundscape. "I suppose a lot of that's like German prog," he ponders. "I'm partial to the odd 20-minute track myself, so there's definitely a love for that music in there. I actually like a lot of stuff that you'd label prog: Aphrodite's Child, Mighty Baby and krautrock of course."

Now comes the first solo album under Bell's own name. Four years in the making, *The View From Halfway Down* is very much a labour of love, recorded between the GLOK sessions and a highly successful Ride reunion.

"I'd been telling everyone forever that I was going to do a solo album," he explains. "I've always been someone who's recorded a lot of demos, so if I'm working on a Ride album a lot of stuff is maybe in the wrong mood. That's one of the reasons why I ended up doing an electronic album as GLOK. It's all really part of the same thing. But then there's another flavour of it, which is stuff that feels maybe too folky for the Ride sound. So this album allows me to indulge my full inner Beatles and Stone Roses obsessions."

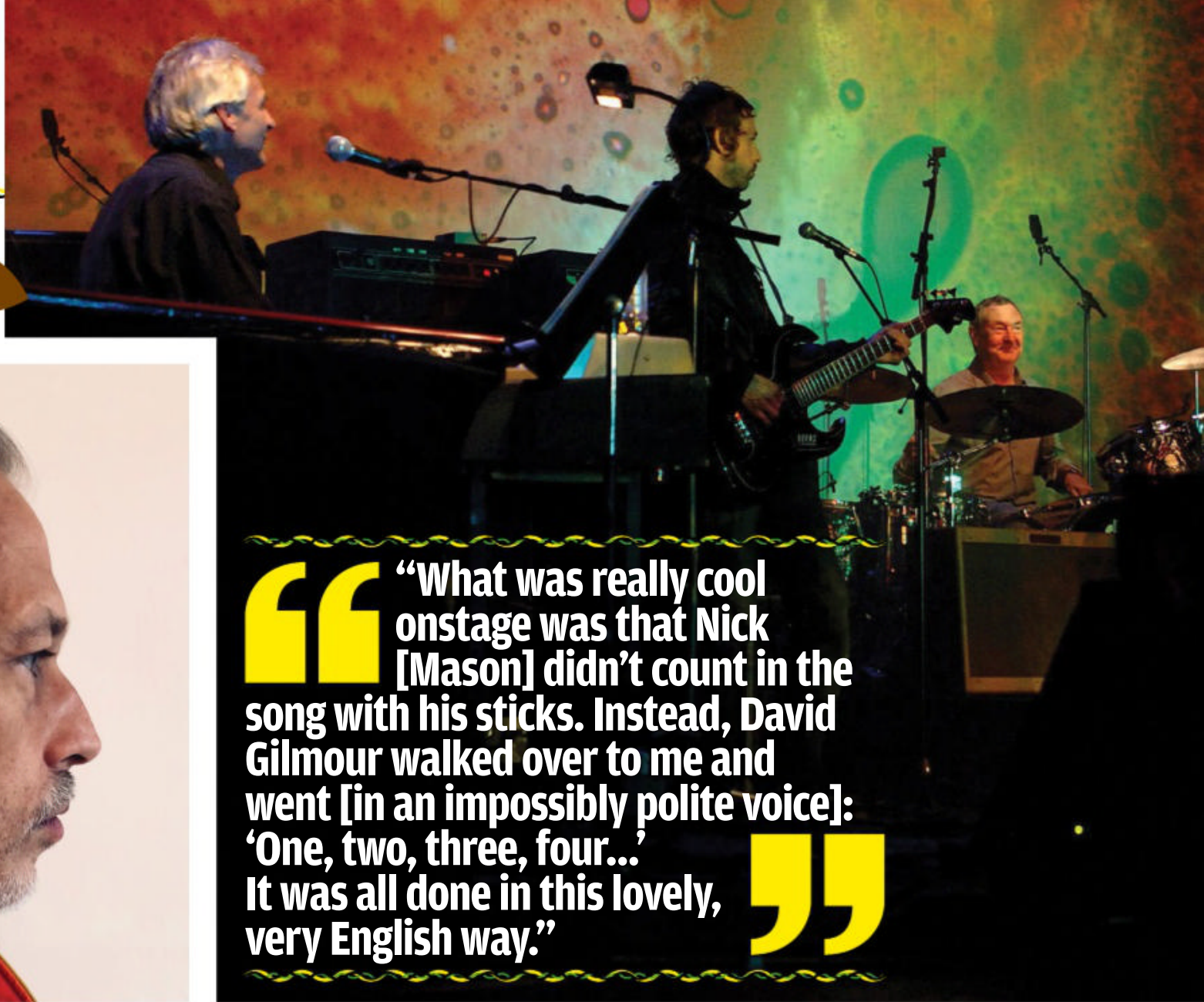
Crucially, *The View From Halfway Down* doesn't concern itself with songwriting in the classic sense. Listeners won't find many choruses, verses or middle eights. Bell instead puts the emphasis on sound and texture. "It's definitely more of a listening experience," he says. "A lot of the songs have just one chord

PRESS/SHARRA BELL



Andy Bell, a self-professed
“sunny” guy.

THE OUTER LIMITS



“What was really cool onstage was that Nick [Mason] didn’t count in the song with his sticks. Instead, David Gilmour walked over to me and went [in an impossibly polite voice]: ‘One, two, three, four...’ It was all done in this lovely, very English way.”



PRESS/SHARRA BELL

and a few have two. That’s the way I like it. Someone asked me to describe it in three words and I came up with the phrase ‘shoegaze barbecue music’. It’s like something you put on when you’re sitting around in the sun with friends.”

The View From Halfway Down has a wonderful sense of motion. Taken as a whole, it’s possible to view the album as an extended groove that takes a variety of fascinating detours: the psychedelic rush of *Love Comes In Waves*, the trippy loops that give *Indica* its wheels, *Skywalker*’s vampy space-funk, the meditative electronic shimmer of *Heat Haze On Weyland Road*.

The latter illustrates the cryptic autobiography in some of these pieces. Rather than a straight narrative, *Heat Haze On Weyland Road* is a sensory impression from Bell’s childhood. “I was born in Cardiff, but we moved to Oxford in 1971,” he says. “Weyland Road was the street we lived on from when I was one ’til I was 10. And one of my earliest memories is the heat haze of ’76. I have a pretty strong memory of the smell of the tarmac, then looking over the road and just seeing the wobbly air and asking mum what it was. I mean, that’s pretty trippy for a six-year-old, right?”

Other compositions are more abstract, like the enigmatic, psych-dreaming *Aubrey Drylands Gladwell*. “It’s just a made-up name,” Bell offers. “That song is very much like early Tame Impala through the lens of Pink Floyd. It’s a real throwback, almost a Dukes Of Stratosphear type thing, because it’s not totally retro, but it has a fair amount of 1967 in it. It’s the idea of someone from that [fashionable

London boutique] Granny Takes A Trip era, with the Victoriana military look.”

The View From Halfway Down is all the more remarkable for the fact that it’s entirely Bell’s own work. He’s responsible for everything you hear — vocals, guitars, bass, drums, keyboards, programming and the rest — while under the stewardship of engineer Gem Archer, his ex-bandmate from Oasis and Beady Eye.

Archer’s studio provided the initial outlet for these songs, but the catalyst was David Bowie’s unexpected demise in January 2016. “His death had an effect on me in terms of who I am, musically,” Bell explains. “Because he’d released a really good album in *Blackstar* and was still a vital force, it felt like Bowie had been ripped away much too soon. I’d never met him — I’m just a fan — but it

Andy Bell with Pink Floyd at The Madcap’s Last Laugh, May 2007.

just really got to me. And my wife as well. I found myself driving around listening to *Lazarus*, from *Blackstar*, which starts with the line ‘Look up here I’m in heaven.’ It was a very dark, cloudy morning and as I was blasting it in the car the sun broke through the clouds and I jokingly said, ‘Alright, Dave!’

“It all got me thinking about my own mortality and what I’m going to leave behind,” he continues. “It just felt like the right time to make a solo album. So I was articulating all this to Gem Archer in my kitchen soon after and asked if I might be able to get into his studio for a few days. That’s how it all started.”

Bell came away from Archer’s studio with 15 to 20 minimal, folk-centric tunes, a deliberate departure from the Ride wall of sound. World tours and a couple of new Ride albums (2017’s

Ride, L-R: Laurence Colbert, Steve Queralt, Mark Gardener and Andy Bell in Oxford, August 1990.



JOE DILWORTH/PHOTOSHOT/GETTY IMAGES



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Beady Eye in 2013: Liam Gallagher, Andy Bell and Gem Archer.



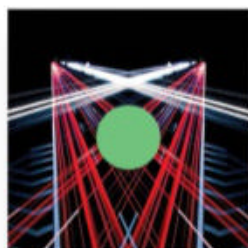
GEORGE FAIRBAIRN/TOTAL GUITAR MAGAZINE/FUTURE OWNS

Weather Diaries and, two years later, *This Is Not A Safe Place*) meant that the solo project was put on hold. It wasn't until Bell got a call from Nat Cramp, owner of the Sonic Cathedral label, that he came back to it. Cramp explained that he was preparing some releases as part of the Sonic Cathedral Singles Club and asked Bell if he had anything.

"I picked out a couple of atmospheric tunes, *Plastic Bag* and *The Commune*," he says. "Neither of them are on the album, but they feel like the first real steps towards it."

Andy Bell in 2015.

GLOK album *Dissident*.



Reinvigorated, Bell proposed a 12-inch single for the label as a follow-up: "I was working on two long tracks. I wanted to do something like Spacemen 3's *Big City* [1991], tracks that could've been on [parent album] *Recurring* – long and a little dancey, but with vocals and a psychedelic mood. They became *Indica* and *Heat Haze On Weyland Road*."

As lockdown bit hard last spring, Bell used the free time to complete the album. The recent Ride activity, along with the GLOK experience, fed directly into the nature of the solo songs. "The minimal idea went out the window somewhere along the way," says Bell. "Doing the Ride and GLOK albums all helped me understand how to colour in the edges and different parts of it."

Timing was key. As Bell approached his half century – he was 50 last August – thoughts turned back to mortality and an episode of *BoJack Horseman*, the animated TV series that he'd seen while touring the US with Ride in 2019. The show referred to someone who'd taken their own life by jumping from a building, only to regret it halfway down.

"It's a really important moment in the story," says Bell. "The idea being that if you could see the view from halfway down, you wouldn't jump in the first place. But by then it's too late to do anything about it. So it's trying to imagine, to anyone who might be having dark thoughts, how you'd feel in that everything-flashing-before-your-eyes moment. I'm quite a sunny person – I've never suffered from suicidal thoughts or feelings – but I felt that it was apt. My gran died aged 104, so if I have the same genes I'll be here for another 50 years. In that context, this album is my view from halfway down."

The View From Halfway Down is available now on *Sonic Cathedral*. Three new EPs are released from April onwards. See www.facebook.com/AndyBellMusician.

YOUR SHOUT!



He's played with members of Pink Floyd and acid jazz outfit Mother Earth, and his solo album has been heavily influenced by his love of psychedelica. Is Andy Bell worth of carrying the prog mantle though? It's over to you!

"Wasn't Ride an indie band from the early-90s? Regardless, their song *Leave Them All Behind* had a monumental bassline."

Rob Holloway

"Shoegaze should not be in the same room as prog. So that's a no from me."

Steve Harrison

"I disagree. Shoegaze is an offshoot of prog. Many artists labelled as shoegaze are influenced by prog bands and produce music in that genre as part of their repertoire."

Steve Thomson

"*The View From Halfway Down* is a fantastic album! Having said that, if The Flaming Lips and Tame Impala are welcome to wander in and around the realms of prog then I would say that Andy Bell is more than welcome."

Danny Cavazzi

"An album with an older feel - some tracks wouldn't sound out of place in any decade from the 60s until now but that's no bad thing. Nothing against Andy's voice but I'm drawn mostly to the tracks *Aubrey Drylands Gladwell* and *Heat Haze On Weyland Road* as they're the most proggy."

Darren Ardon

"Interesting choice. The Floyd connection was a new one on me. I know he performed as part of reformed 60s psych rock band The Creation. [Bell played guitar when the band supported Oasis at The Hacienda in Manchester on September 5, 1994.] His 'day job' with Ride has produced a wealth of music that certainly tickles my prog bone, particularly *Going Blank Again* and *Weather Diaries*; *Nowhere*, the previous EPs and parts of *Carnival Of Light* too. And not forgetting Hurricane #1 - the second album particularly has an experimental feel that transcends genres. I need to check out that solo album..."

Andy Morton

"How prog were Oasis? He was in them too!"

Leslie Moyes

"Shoegaze was always music the goths listen to who didn't want to admit to being goth."

Matthew North

"Ride were awesome and his new solo stuff is excellent."

The Fierce & The Dead

"Andy is brilliant, and as well as releasing the best album of last year, in my opinion, his work with Ride, especially in recent years with their excellent 'comeback' albums certainly has a prog feel. And his place in the all-time prog hall of fame is cemented by his one night only spell as Pink Floyd's bassist for their last ever gig in 2007."

Ronan Casey

"Just listened to a bit of his stuff. That really isn't prog as I know it."

Jeff Walker

"The genre krautrock makes me nervous."

Brendon Loy

The Dark Antagonists

A decade into their career, **Soen** have decided to take a different approach on their fifth album. More honest and raw, its underlying message is clear and concise. Martín López and Joel Ekelöf tell *Prog* why they got angry on *Imperial*.

Words: Holly Wright

Main Image: Ola Lewitschnik

It's a winter evening and two members of prog metal outfit Soen should be regaling *Prog* with anecdotes from their very first Latin America tour, but instead drummer Martín López is questioning his life choices.

"I've been a musician for 25 years and I realised that in one day it can all disappear and there's nothing to fall back on," he ponders.

Like everyone else, the ex-Opeth sticksman didn't have the best 2020. Last March Soen managed to squeeze in a few gigs in Mexico City before Covid-19 was declared a pandemic and the rest of their tour, which was meant to extend across South America, got canned.

As the virus tore through continents leaving fatalities and job losses in its dust, suddenly artists were feeling the brunt of this economic recession and this particular musician, who's had the luxury of playing on seminal prog metal albums and touring the world, is holed up in Stockholm fearing the worst.

"It's not the same for architects and doctors; for musicians it doesn't matter how good you are, no one's really got your back," he says.

But there's a glimmer of hope. Soen have a new album out entitled *Imperial*, the follow-up to the acclaimed *Lotus*, which surprised and impressed prog and metal fans alike with its solid maturity and glossy songcraft. In the comfort of their homes in Stockholm, López and frontman Joel Ekelöf are here to talk about *Imperial* and, because it can't be avoided, reflect on the current state of the world.

"We're actually 300 metres away from each other," says López while Ekelöf fixes his headphones. "We live really close to each other but not in the same house, thank God. But because of the pandemic, we can't meet."

For a brief moment López's dog makes a cameo on the video call and a little later family members crop up in the background. It all feels very homely and a world away from rock'n'roll stories of summer festivals and exotic tours. But now *Imperial* is finally out López and Ekelöf, despite the impediments of social distancing, are buoyant about their latest creation.

"This one feels more straight, like we're not hiding behind cheap technicality," says López. "It's a really strong album; it's straight to the point but also the message is clearer and it's more honest. I don't feel the need to complicate things, I just wanted music straight from the heart and this is how it turned out. I think it's raw and better than *Lotus* in many ways."

A prog band not trying to be complicated? Is this really what we've come to expect from the musician who supplied the drums on *Ghost Reveries* and *Blackwater Park*? It's true that when comparing *Imperial* with Soen's 2012 debut *Cognitive*, for example, there are immediate and stark differences. In their early work, listeners

will find the typical, syncopated tropes of progressive metal, imbibing the staccato-like semi-urgency of Tool while their freshest material presents a hulking mass of honed riffs and smoother-than-smooth vocals. It might have something to do with their new producer, Kane Churko.

"We've been working with David Castillo for many years," says Ekelöf about the respected producer who's also worked with Katatonia. "He's a great companion of ours and he did an excellent job on *Lotus*. He's a prog master now and has worked with bands like Leprous but did we really want to make another album like that, with the same recipe and the same guy? No, we were going to do something with an American producer."

López elaborates, "We didn't really have a plan but after we wrote the album and recorded it, we felt like it had this really heavy character and that we should go for a more American sound, instead of what we usually have, which is very Swedish. We felt like this album should have an extra punch so we started looking around for decent American producers that are really different. That's where we found Kane."

Canadian-born Churko, who is better known for his work with beefy bro-metal heavyweights Five Finger Death Punch and Disturbed, is a pivotal figure in Soen's latest chapter. Having mixed and mastered every track on *Imperial*, his chunky, in-your-face approach to Soen's apparently typical 'Swedish' sound has become the vehicle for the band's simmering vitriol towards the world and their steadfast intent to make a statement. López knew they'd be taking a gamble: "It's kind of a risky album for us, which we love. It's easy to fall asleep in that comfortable chair and



Soen are angry as hell.

Soen are bringing back the
“old, rebellious vibe”.

**“I think the mood of the album
reflects the tension in the world.
It’s a pretty angry album!”**

Joel Ekelöf



repeat the same formula but on this album we felt like we wanted to cook something new.”

Soen’s thirst for the new is dispatched in the lead weight riffs of opener *Lumerian* and from there they set about balancing skilful arrangements and Ekelöf’s maturing vocals with overdriven guitar tones and López’s skin-pounding ferocity to create a cohesive, solid collection of songs. About *Imperial*, López says, “It’s a lot less polished. Instead of going into the details of every instrument, you just get the raw emotion of the song.”



Martín López: “In one day it can all disappear and there’s nothing to fall back on.”

PRESS Ekelöf concurs, “Some fans might say that you can’t separate the instruments in this record but we love it.”

It seems like Soen are closer than they’ve ever been to realising their vision. They admit that in the past they’ve been guilty of focusing too heavily on technicality but by introducing a more holistic approach to songcraft it’s allowed the vibe, rather than the virtuosity, to shine through. “We have become very, very confident in what we do, and that we’re good musicians,” adds Ekelöf. “We can really stand for the music that we do, and that means that we don’t have to show it off in every second. We know we’re good, we know it’s going to come through, we know the music is good.”

The upside of spending less time on the finer details of the musicality is that Soen get to spend more time on the lyrics. Unsurprisingly, front page news is their reservoir of inspiration.

“The pandemic gave us more time to write, which is a good thing, but also more time to reflect. Either you work as a team or you drown and die,” says López morbidly. “I saw all these things going on around the world, like Germany taking in infected people from Italy. Beautiful gestures. But I also saw politicians attacking each other and manipulating the number of people who have died just to gain something. These fucking guys at the top are ready to milk any situation just to gain a bit more power. All of this stuff has ended up in our lyrics.”

Finding fertile ground with the injustices of the world, Soen’s video for *Antagonist* takes aim at the powermongers through the depiction of a dystopian future. Lifted from an album laden with frustration and anger at the world, it’s no wonder that the coronavirus has amped up Soen’s awareness of hierarchical powers. Even the album’s title is a nod to social ranks.

Joel Ekelöf: “We have become very, very confident in what we do.”



PRESS/INAKI MARCONI

“I think the mood of the album reflects the tension in the world. It’s a pretty angry album!” Ekelöf remarks. “We looked at how polarised the world is right now and, although it wasn’t necessarily intentional at the time to have this theme running through all of

the songs, it just sort of came with the times.”

López also recognises the fire currently raging in Soen. “I think we just get angrier and angrier every year and I don’t think it’s strange at all with how the world looks today. That all goes through our music. I think, in that sense we try to stick to what it originally meant to be progressive like being anti-government. We think about the people at the beginning

life in fact, and it’s what I listen to myself. For me, Pink Floyd is my favourite band ever.” He recalls the days when he used to listen to *The Wall* with his dad. “I remember he got some earphones and for the first time ever I had earphones in my hands. I just listened to it for months, everyday, a couple of hours a day, because it was something so magical for me.”

For Ekelöf the memories are just as visceral, with his father also playing a pivotal role in shaping his musical tastes. “I grew up with only my dad, and he was a huge prog fan. He had a vinyl player and a big stereo and when it was four o’clock and he was starting to prepare for the evening he used to put on his vinyl records. We lived in an apartment but it was always at a loud volume, and you couldn’t get away from it, but that was just his way. He would get his daily fix of music like you would get your morning milk!” And Ekelöf senior’s records of choice? “It was Genesis, Jethro Tull,

“We play all the prog festivals and see all these bands and it just feels like it’s more about intellectuality, the cosmos and poetry but I don’t see that old, rebellious vibe.”

Martín López

who sought justice, like the hippies in the 70s. I actually think a lot of that is lost in new prog if you compare it to the old bands of the 70s.”

He continues, “I feel like the new wave of progressive bands don’t want to get involved in anything. I’m not naming any bands but I just get that vibe. We play all the prog festivals and see all these bands and it just feels like it’s more about intellectuality, the cosmos and poetry but I don’t see that old, rebellious vibe.”

Finding something to kick against, even if the object is prog itself, has Soen fired up. That is until, a conversational deviation suddenly has them misty-eyed over the genre.

“I’m really attached to prog,” states the Soen drummer. “It was the stuff that I’d listen to with my father when I was a kid. It’s the stuff that I played for many, many years, my whole

King Crimson, Kate Bush... you name it, we had all that stuff. And it’s in my DNA now.”

“I think I can relate to their way of making music more than I can with new stuff. If you take Genesis, for example, and an album like *Selling England By The Pound*, they create these huge landscapes and it’s like an adventure to listen to their music. It’s not about how fast they play, or what kind of techniques they are using, it’s all about the songs, they are really strong songs, and I love that!”

From a band that was hyped up as a supergroup to then be knocked down as Tool copycats, Soen haven’t had the easiest ride, but with each record they are getting closer to hitting their stride. And if *Imperial* can take even the tiniest slice of influence from *Selling England By The Pound* or *The Wall* then Soen are definitely onto a good thing. 🤘

Imperial is out now via *Silver Linings*.
See www.soenmusic.com for more information.

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The life of a professional musician can seem pretty rosy from the outside. When the musician in question is Anneke van Giersbergen – voice of an angel, smile that would light up a windowless tomb – one could assume that the Dutch singer has been having the time of her life for more than two decades. With numerous solo albums and collaborative projects to her name, not least an enduring creative partnership with Devin Townsend, she's become a much-loved and respected figure in the prog, alt-rock and metal worlds.

Unfortunately, real life has a tendency to interfere with just about everything, and van Giersbergen's new album, *The Darkest Skies Are The Brightest* tells the rather more complicated and heartrending story of perhaps the toughest period in her career to date. Primarily acoustic, wonderfully delicate and full of songs of love and its highs and lows, it's the most honest and intimate record she has ever made.

Of course, van Giersbergen's last project was utterly different from the soft, thoughtful and elegant songs on *The Darkest Skies Are The Brightest*. Launched in 2016, VUUR was a full-bore prog metal band, steeped in technicality and bombast, but as fiercely melodic as one might expect from the singer. They released their debut album, *In This Moment We Are Free – Cities*, in the autumn of 2017, receiving widespread positive reviews. Unfortunately, as van Giersbergen recalls to *Prog*, the overall response from her fanbase was somewhat less enthusiastic, with many complaining that the new music

didn't "sound like The Gathering!" (the Dutch prog veterans, with whom she released six albums between 1995 and 2006). Meanwhile, a more personal storm was brewing.

"I said, 'I'm forming my own metal band', and I showed people little excerpts of the songs online, and still everyone was thinking, 'Oh, it's gonna be like The Gathering!'" she says with a sigh. "I never compared it to The Gathering openly, it just didn't occur to me. So a lot of people were displeased when VUUR came out! I was so surprised, but I put everything into it, my time and energy, my love, my money... more than all my money! So when we did the first tour, I knew that this wasn't going to be an overnight sensation and I had to work super-hard to get it going. The thing is, we'd been working super-hard for the last 20 years. We were just so tired."

With typical honesty, van Giersbergen has made no bones about the fact that *The Darkest Skies Are The Brightest* was partly inspired by a rocky period in her marriage to musician Rob Snijders. Again, the widespread perception that professional artists are living the dream makes no allowances for the fact that touring, recording, creating

and the unerring need for them to be seen and heard can hardly fail to put a strain on any relationship. As she fought to achieve her goals with VUUR, something had to give.

"I remember being on the tourbus and talking to the head of our label. He says, 'How's it going?' and I just started crying!" she grins. "I mean, he sees me crying every year! [Laughs.] But I'd put everything into it, 🙄

"There's so much bullshit in the world, and now I'm thinking, 'Oh, I'm releasing an album about love and I'm not sure that people will give a shit, to be honest!'"

TOUGH LOVE

Anneke van Giersbergen's back catalogue is rich and varied. She's recorded pop and metal albums, even sung with John Wetton, Devin Townsend and Arjen Lucassen, but until now, she'd never made an acoustic record. Her latest, *The Darkest Skies Are The Brightest*, is an intimate recording that explores love and heartbreak. She gives *Prog* the lowdown on it and tackles those rumours about a new VUUR album.

Words: Dom Lawson **Images:** Mark Uyl

Anneke van Giersbergen
finds her silver lining.



and it just wasn't falling the right way with the crowds. I realised I had to come up with the second album immediately and keep pushing, because I believed in it so much. The band was fantastic, the best metal players in all of Holland, you know? So I was exhausted from all of that, and that all led to a point where everything started to fall apart around me, and us, and in our marriage. It kind of surprised me because we'd been together for so long and we're each other's big loves. Oh, and we were moving house at the same time..."

That probably didn't help...

"Exactly. It's on the top three most stressful things ever! And then Rob's parents got ill. I was gone all the time, touring..."

Is the nature of what you do always going to cause problems like that? Did it cause those problems before?

"That's a good question. I think that's why it took us by surprise, because we'd been together for more than 24 years, I think. I was in The Gathering and he was in bands and we were both touring and it was a natural thing for us. We don't mind, because we like to be together and we like to be alone. But we were running in different directions a little bit, and we kind of lost each other. It took us by surprise and then it was a bit too late, like, 'Holy shit, what's going on?' After that realisation and all the hard work, we had to come up with a plan to fight for the marriage, right?"

The good news for all concerned is that van Giersbergen and Snijders have worked through their problems and are firmly united once more. The *other* good news is that the resultant album is an absolute stunner. Composed in isolation and recorded in collaboration with producer Gijs Coolen, *The Darkest Skies Are The Brightest* is a warm, organic and beautiful record that is, at times, unbearably bittersweet and poignant. Frankly, it's exactly the album van Giersbergen needed to make at this point in her career, not least due to its emotional backdrop. Unfortunately, as she fought to save her marriage, it was generally expected that she would be writing a new VUUR album instead.

"Jord [Otto], VUUR's guitar player, started writing for the

album and he came up with amazing riffs and songs and structures and ideas," she recalls. "I had all these lyrics pouring out of me, but none of them fitted with a heavy metal song. So I started writing with an acoustic guitar and different kinds of songs started coming out. After a few weeks I had to tell the band that I don't think I can do another VUUR album. It was really strange, things were coming out of me and I couldn't control it. Obviously they weren't pleased! I guess I could've put it all aside and made a VUUR album but it wouldn't have been an honest one. So I put the whole thing on the back burner."

Of course, even the most devoted fans can be fickle. Just as soon as she had made the decision to put VUUR on ice, van Giersbergen noticed a sudden change in people's opinions on her latest endeavour.

"In the process of me writing this album, people started saying, 'So when's the new VUUR album coming?' They have faith in what I do, so they gave VUUR another chance. In the meantime, I'm in this whole other process in my music and my life. I rented a little cabin in the woods, in my hometown. I was totally alone. I was not eating, not sleeping, only writing, for days on end. I saw online, 'We can't wait for a new VUUR album!' It was so weird, but I couldn't stop, so you're going to get a really quiet, acoustic album now. Sorry!"

With wonderfully subtle but rich arrangements and the unbeatable sound of van

Giersbergen harmonising with herself, *The Darkest Skies Are The Brightest* is arguably the album fans have wanted her to make for a long time. Renowned for her intimate acoustic shows, she has always had a strong and visible relationship with acoustic music, and it's clearly something that's very close to her heart.

"I played a lot of acoustic shows during the time I was doing the VUUR stuff, partly to make money to help the band. It's a good way to make the bread! But I love it. I always do the acoustic stuff in between everything I do, I've just never had an acoustic album. Everywhere I go and I play acoustic shows everywhere, and people ask 'I loved the show, where can I buy your album?' Well, I've got a metal album and I have a pop album and a rock album, so I thought it was just time to put out some quiet, introspective stuff."

Prog wonders if it feels a little exposing for van Giersbergen to be writing so honestly about her own life?

"To be honest, yeah, it's about the search and love and the whole thing, and therefore it's very personal. But then we came into the coronavirus crisis, and then there's Black Lives Matter and conspiracy theories everywhere and there's so much bullshit in the world, and now I'm thinking,

"Oh, I'm releasing an album about love and I'm not sure that people will give a shit, to be honest!'. But I did one new song on the livestream, and then there was a huge reaction, like 'Ah, I feel the same!' and 'Me and my husband have been going through the same thing!'"

A particularly sparkly gem of a song, on an album full of such things, *The Soul Knows* stands out as a key moment on *The Darkest Skies Are The Brightest*. With faint echoes of Robert Plant's recent explorations and a melody that will scalp listeners from 100 yards away, it's almost painfully raw and vulnerable, with van Giersbergen's cry of

'I don't believe in silence any more' its spine-tingling apex.

"That's one of the key songs, indeed. Rob and I came to this conclusion that our marriage was going the wrong way. You can put everything under a blanket of love and press on, act like nothing is wrong. But you can also sit down, across from each other and talk. You know when you're going to do that and you're really super-honest with each other, you're going to hear some stuff that you're not going to like. You're confronted with your good things but also your weaknesses. So that line is saying that we should take this head on, otherwise we will be totally damned."

The Darkest Skies Are The Brightest is an album borne of turmoil and matters of the heart. It's a deeply personal statement that reaffirms the determination that's propelled van Giersbergen to this point. Whether in music or love, she continues to fight for what she believes in. Even if circumstances continue to be a pain.

"The love was still there, so Rob and I decided to fight," she reveals. "We did the whole thing, the couples therapy, we read the books, did all the talking sessions. We watched documentaries, we went on dates together. We did the whole thing, and then we knew there was way more than enough there to hold us together. Then Covid came and we were stuck together in one house! I know a lot of couples split up in lockdown. But we're okay, so phew!" 🎧

The Darkest Skies Are The Brightest is out now via InsideOut. See www.annevangiersbergen.com for more information.



Intimate and honest, this is the album Anneke van Giersbergen's wanted to make for a while.

"I never compared my own metal band to The Gathering openly, it just didn't occur to me. So a lot of people were displeased when VUUR came out! I was so surprised."

One man and his guitar:
Plini Roessler-Holgate.



Universal Harmony

Returning with his second full-length record, Australian guitar prodigy **Plini** has found himself in the centre of a metal-versus-pop drama. But instead of fuelling the fire, with *Impulse Voices*, he tells *Prog* he's ceaselessly melding genres to help unify the music world once and for all.

Words: Phil Weller **Images:** Chad Dao

Three weeks before the release of *Impulse Voices*, Plini's phone blew up with angry messages from his fans. During the MTV EMAs, American singer and rapper Doja Cat had surprised viewers with a version of her hit *Say So* and people were quick to notice similarities to the song's newly added guitar solo and the title track from Plini's 2016 album, *Handmade Cities*.

"I was sent the video by a bunch of different fans," the Sydney-based guitarist Plini Roessler-Holgate recalls. "Some of them were outraged and some were curious. I watched it and I thought, 'Hey, that is similar' Then I watched it again and I was like, 'Hey, that's *really* similar.'"

Agreeing with his fans, he sought more information.

"I tried to find out who the band was but some fans did the research for me and found the musical director, who claims to be a big fan of mine. So I found that it *was* directly inspired, which I actually thought that was pretty cool.

"I think there was enough keyboard warrior outrage," Plini adds, "that it became an issue even if I didn't necessarily think it was a huge issue anymore. I just thought it was hilarious. Doja Cat sent me a big apology on Instagram. She said if the musical director was such a big fan of mine to take a chunk out my song then he should have just hit me up to collaborate on it. And that was sort of that.

"It was the perfect timing for this album's press campaign," he continues with a cheeky smile. "I mean what better way to get thousands of people who've never listened to instrumental prog to at least check it out because their favourite artist is in a headline?"

Plini's humble and relaxed handling of the controversy epitomises his career to date.

A guitarist with an immeasurable amount of talent and an immaculate ear for melodies, he's always gone about his business without fuss or drama, instead, his music — and heavy touring — has always done the talking.

He released *Impulse Voices* late last year without any record label support and it garnered one million streams in a mere 60 hours. He also sold out of the numerous vinyl pressings and merch bundles in the process. All from an artist who doesn't play up to hype and for whom 'overblown' isn't a word in his vocabulary. Quietly but assuredly, he's become one of the most celebrated young guitarists of the 21st century not through egoism or

do come, they're still inherently musical and feverishly addictive.

"A lot of the music that I listen to is very simple harmonically and that's what sounds good to me," he adds. "I have a lot of simple progressions, but then for each chord I'll find a new way to play that chord that I haven't done before and by that time I've built it into a new place it might sound a little bit more abstract. And then there are some parts which were more just trying to figure out how to get as weird as possible while still sounding pleasant. But I try to make as much room for moments like simple melodies as I do have moments of: 'Check out this sick lick.'"

Plini's music has always been wildly, but tastefully diverse. Yet *Impulse Voices*, an album born out of a most unusual 12 months, takes steps in so many different directions. Much of that diversity can be traced back to having much more time on this record.

Says Plini: "I appreciated having the extra time to work on the music. I tend to be a bit

optimistic with my time management, so it was ultimately a positive thing, just in terms of having a lot of extra time I didn't think I'd have. It took maybe six or seven months in all, rather than the three I initially planned for, and I had a lot of fun with it. I let everything rest; going into a lot of detail with everything and having it sound exactly how I wanted it to be before releasing it.

"I've listened to so much different music in the last few years," he continues, "especially a lot of electronic stuff which started sneaking its way into my music. I'd just think, 'Fuck it, I'm gonna put in a dance beat in this section I like', or 'There's going to be a disco beat in 19/8 and we'll just make it as musical as possible.' I'd learn from the experience."

"I've listened to so much different music in the last few years. Especially a lot of electronic stuff, which started sneaking its way into my music."

clever media management, but through the quality of his music and his easygoing, friendly demeanour.

"I usually write everything but the melody first," he says of his creative process, "and then the melody is sort of the lowest common denominator. Once I have something in a stupid time signature with chords all over the place, I'll think of what is the simplest thing that I can overlay on top of that to remember that it is a song and not a math exercise."

This is why his music resonates so well. For a musician labelled a virtuoso in his craft, a title that can often lead to derivative acrobatic one-upmanship, Plini's music is sweet with melodies and ripe with accessibility. Even when the flips and tricks

Plini's days were split between tinkering in his home studio and getting fresh air away from his instrument. "Thankfully, living in a really beautiful part of the world where the weather's usually good, I could just wander around with my headphones in when I wanted time away from writing," he says.

The album press release cites podcasts were a major part of what snaked through his headphones on those walks, yet Plini assures *Prog* that wasn't always the case. "Don't get me wrong," he smiles, "I listened to a lot of Meshuggah records as well. I know some people don't like to listen to other music while they're working on their own stuff because they want to avoid anything seeping in, but I've found almost the opposite. So as well as the podcasts, which I felt was something to keep my brain doing new things, I was listening to a lot of different music and that actually really helped with the process. I'd find a little production trick I wanted to use in this song, or a structure I could use to help with that song I'm stuck at three minutes with. So listening to all this music was a constant research process."

What's even more impressive than the record's diversity is how effortlessly Plini flits

between styles. For a musician whose horizons already stretched far beyond where the naked eye can see, *Impulse Voices* now reaches distant galaxies. Featuring his most delicate playing as well as his most rampant riffing, the album explores so much between those extremes. From saxophone and electric harp solos to 90s dance breakouts among sprinklings of his archetypal sweet-toothed, smiling melodies, *Impulse Voices* is a celebration of musicality over self-flattery. Its variance helps give it a greater sense of scope, but the guitarist also makes all these different genres feel like kindred spirits rather than bitter rivals.

As the dust settles down on the Doja Cat drama, Plini welcomes the idea of metal and pop embracing again, for the good of music and for the good of the world:

"I think it's awesome that a whole minute of the Doja Cat arrangement was guitar solos," he grins. "And hopefully more and more pop songs will get rearranged in different ways. Then all we need is for it to happen with metal songs too. Eventually we'll no longer have genres and it'll be a happy, happy world." 🤖

Impulse Voices is out now.

See www.plini.co for more information.

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Once You Pop

She's the darling of the UK's modern psychedelic movement, but **Jane Weaver**'s latest album sees her dive headfirst into pop. Produced on a diet of bygone Lebanese torch songs, 1980s Russian aerobics records and Australian punk, *Flock* retraces some of her earliest influences. She tells *Prog* why it was time to change pace.

Words: Dom Lawson **Images:** Nic Chapman

"I remember I had brown corduroy dungarees on and I was playing a Bontempi organ in front of the TV, trying to play along with Tubeway Army!"

four lord and saviour Steven Wilson has taught us anything in recent times, it's that pop music is nothing to be scared of. The history of pop is liberally strewn with artists who pursued a progressive path, whether overt or otherwise. Similarly, progressive rock has *always* had room for a catchy melody.

Despite an increasingly impressive catalogue that proclaims a devotion to everything from wistful, acoustic folk to skull-rattling space rock, Jane Weaver is also a huge fan of pop. It's a fact that her latest album, *Flock*, screams from the rooftops, albeit accompanied by plenty of the psychedelic songwriter's trademark rushes of modular synth. A snappy and shiny collection of absurdly memorable pop earworms, *Flock* eschews the trippy meanderings of 2019's *Loops In The Secret Society* and its cosmic antecedents *Modern Kosmology* and *The Silver Globe*. Instead, it conjures an uplifting and futuristic vision of pop, wherein the magic of the pop music that Weaver grew up listening to is reimagined with all the dazzling sonic colours of the modern age. Speaking to *Prog*, Weaver explains how childhood musical memories have informed her progress as an artist to this day.

"When I was little there were a lot of music shows on TV, or at least there seemed to be," she says. "I must have been quite young, because I remember I had brown corduroy dungarees on and I was playing a Bontempi organ in front of the TV, trying to play along with Tubeway Army! So that's an important early memory, of watching *Top Of The Pops*, which was everything and anything, a massive all-encompassing show. You know that song *Twilight Café* by Susan Fassbender? Well, it was a huge hit [in 1981], and sadly she killed herself in her 30s, but I just remember that kind of electronic pop sound, and there was glam and disco, too. It was such a mixed bag at that time, and I'm quite happy to have grown up in that era."

Having moved away from her early musical endeavours with indie rock bands and then, as a solo artist in a more folk-orientated domain, Jane Weaver has now firmly established herself as one of modern psychedelia's finest and most idiosyncratic exponents. As a result, her version of pop music is every bit as singular as longtime fans may expect. But while the magical sounds of 70s pop may not have been employed in a particularly direct or obvious way on the irresistibly catchy likes of *Heartlow* and *Sunset Dreams*, anyone who lived through the era when ABBA and ELO were seemingly *always* on the radio and television will definitely spot a few telling references here and there.



Jane Weaver:
“I’m always optimistic!”

“Yeah, yeah, for sure!” says Weaver, sounding delighted. “[I had a] friend, who lived across the road, we’d hang out in her bedroom. Her brothers were 10 years older than us so we’d go and look through all their LPs and it was always ELO, and Pink Floyd too. The boys were rockers and they had cut-off denims with patches on them, and they were kinda nerdy middle-class boys but they had good records! [Laughs.] I just used to look all the artwork on those sleeves and think, ‘This is amazing!’”

One thing that *Flock* hammers home with haughty flourish is that pop music is often at its best when it’s also fairly weird. Fittingly, Weaver cites Kate Bush as the most important influence on her life as a musician and music fan, noting the enduring power of a love established in childhood and how, particularly during troubled times, that initial spark of inspiration still drives her forward.

“It always goes back to Kate Bush and *The Kick Inside*,” she says. “Hearing it for the first time was a crazy ‘Woah!’ moment. Whenever I’m in a deep funk and I don’t know what to do, I always go back to that initial inspiration. I think, ‘Remember that you wanted to do this because of when you saw Kate

It’s quite impressive that it all hangs together so well, despite being so different from previous records. One track, *Solarised*, even sounds like Kylie Minogue, in the best way possible.

“Yeah, it’s so weird! That was one of those songs that I keep writing in my head. I was thinking, ‘I really should do that song’ because it won’t go away and keeps popping up. ‘Remember me!’ So that’s why I did that one. It’s from a different angle, writing metaphorically about my experiences and what’s going on in my life. It’s pretty uncomfortable, really. Not that my life’s uncomfortable, but it’s strange to be writing about myself and not somebody much cooler.”

Perhaps more in keeping with Weaver’s burgeoning reputation as a psychedelic soothsayer, recent single *The Revolution Of Super Visions* stands out as the new album’s most lyrically lysergic moment. Ostensibly about changing the world via the means of communal thought and will, it’s also an extremely poignant glimpse into Weaver’s worldview, and her understandable frustration at the dismal state of things in 2021.

“Oh yeah, it’s definitely coloured by all of that. I guess since 2016 there’s been that feeling of being unable to

or a NWOBHM album, that’s fine too. I just like a lot of different kinds of music. There are certain things I’m not that bothered about, but who knows? Making this album was great but anything can happen.”

Like everybody else, Jane Weaver’s plans to take *Flock* on the road have been thrown into (hopefully temporary) disarray. Fortunately, she’s been a master of DIY resourcefulness for a long time, and has purposefully stayed away from the mainstream music industry. As a result, while she admits to still suffering financially in the current climate, Weaver is philosophical about the way forward.

“I’ve only been playing shows for the last five years properly anyway, so all of that is relatively new to me,” she notes. “Any independent success I’ve had has been recent, and now I’m 48, you know? But when I was 19 [as a member of indie rock band Kill Laura], I did get a deal and it was on an independent label, through a major, and we got a publishing deal as well. So I started off in that world, of how record labels work, and I saw the horrible side of it. We recorded an album, our A&R guy got sacked and then we got shelved. Then it was like, ‘You know those

“It always goes back to Kate Bush and *The Kick Inside*. Hearing it for the first time was a crazy ‘Woah!’ moment.”

Bush on *Top Of The Pops*...’ So that’s my reminder, I think of that initial ‘Wow’ moment and that keeps me on the straight and narrow.”

Although still recognisably Weaver’s work, *Flock* is an unquestionable change of pace and tone. In stark contrast with the metaphorical opacity of *Modern Kosmology*, the new songs’ musical simplicity is very nearly matched by the directness of their lyrics. We’re still a long way from a full confessional here, but *Flock* seems to be a more personal and intimate work than anything Weaver has done since embracing psychedelia and synths on *The Fallen By Watch Bird* a decade ago.

“Yeah, since around 2010 when I did *The Fallen By Watch Bird*, everything has been conceptual and each album is about a thing or a subject that isn’t necessarily to do with me, even though I’m always in there lyrically, somewhere. I find it easy to talk about other subjects and explore particular worlds, as if it’s a study. I go into that zone and it’s all marvellous, but this time I thought I should try to do something different and make a collection of pop songs that don’t necessarily all fit within a particular genre. They’re all linked together, obviously, because it’s me.”

make an impact or not being in control of what’s happening in society,” she sighs. “Obviously I believe in community and people power, but some things are simply not working, so I was trying to think of a supernatural way to get around it. If we all think the same thing, therefore the thing happens! Because attempts to do things legitimately are often just brushed under the carpet. I just hate unfairness and inequality, so that’s my bright idea. Something needs to happen, even if it’s supernatural!”

Now that she’s mastered progressive pop, Jane Weaver’s next move promises to be fascinating. She already has a wide-ranging remit earned through her diverse catalogue and through other projects, ambient pop soundtrack unit Fenella (featuring Peter Philipson and Raz Ullah from Weaver’s live band) included. But confronted with the idea of making, you know, more of the same, she recoils in mock horror.

“Well, I honestly don’t know what I’ll do next,” she chuckles. “I think that one of the things I’ve gleaned from being a bit of an outsider and being an independent artist since I was 16, is that I try not to hold myself to *anything*. If the next album is a space rock album, fair enough! Or if I do an R’n’B album

songs that you recorded, well you’re not allowed to release them unless you pay us...’ So I knew early on about the cruelty of the music industry and how it chews people up and spits them out.”

Too full of ideas to let a lack of gigs get in her way, Weaver is already working on a variety of future projects. With a home studio setup for “fairly crappy demos” and the studio that she uses to record albums “just ’round the corner”, she’s making the most of lockdown to do a lot more of what she loves best. Whether it be razor-sharp psych-pop or some colossal space rock symphony, Jane Weaver’s next move promises to be unique, fascinating and created entirely on her own terms.

“The pandemic situation is definitely bringing the hustler out of us all, musicians and artists,” she concludes. “Up until the point when it becomes clear what we can actually do, I’m going to keep on writing. I’ve got a naïve, childish optimism sometimes. I’ve spent a lot of my life staring out of windows and daydreaming, instead of concentrating, so I think that part of my personality is very helpful in a crisis. I’m always optimistic!” 🌀

Flock is out now via Fire Records. See www.janeweavermusic.com for more.

On A Roll

Anglo-Finnish group **Wheel** are back with their second album, which explores the divisions in our society. Vocalist and guitarist James Lascelles describes *Resident Human* as having a “humanistic vibe” and, he tells *Prog*, it really showcases the band’s hypnotic sound.

Words: Hannah May Kilroy

Images: Ville Juurikkala

“I think it’s a reasonable discussion to have: how do you advance society in a way that progresses towards equality and other values that people care about?”

James Lascelles is discussing his band Wheel’s new second album, *Resident Human*, that examines modern humanity and calls for change. Lascelles himself knows about the positivity that change can bring, given the fact that he left his home country of the UK to move to Finland on a whim 10 years ago, and played on pop music reality shows before forming Wheel in 2015.

“I was playing in a prog band in the UK but was going broke and thinking about quitting music,” Lascelles recalls. “A friend had moved to Finland and won the *Idols* competition [the Finnish version of *Pop Idol*], and he started inviting me over to play guitar with him and sing backing vocals. I took the plunge and decided to move there.”

Lascelles laughs at the memory of the music world he found himself in: “It was pop so not my scene at all, but some of it was fun! I enjoyed looking at things like harmony arrangements, but the musical style didn’t do much for me.

“We ended up on a show called *Tartu Mikkiin*, which translates to ‘Grab That Mic’, which is like a karaoke competition in Finland. I met the guitarist in that house band, who was Saku Mattila, the other founding member of Wheel.”

In this unlikely setting, Lascelles and Mattila discovered a mutual love for prog and metal, and formed Wheel. Mattila left the band amicably in 2018,

and while there have been numerous line-up changes since, Lascelles has remained at the helm. And as Wheel’s sound demonstrates, he’s come a long way from pop music reality shows. Their debut album, *Moving Backwards*, was released in 2019 and garnered them comparisons to Tool and Karnivool, and 2020 should have been their year: they started working on a new album back in November 2019, and had their first headline tours booked, as well as dates supporting Meshuggah and Devin Townsend. And of course, we all know what happened next.

“I’m a massive Meshuggah fan,” Lascelles says, showing *Prog* his Meshuggah T-shirt over Skype. “That tour was with Devin Townsend, who we also love, and it got cancelled. That would have been incredible. But in all honestly, I think the pandemic saved the album,” Lascelles admits. “We were rushing it big-time. Don’t get me wrong, the instrumentation would have been the same, but for me, vocally and lyrically, the extra time was enormously beneficial.

“I completely burned out at the start of the summer; I hit a wall, I felt awful, I couldn’t make anything good happen. I started trying to take better care of myself, meditation, a bit of yoga and exercise, and it made a big difference. Once I started doing that, this floodgate of inspiration hit me.”

Wheel had already started the music for *Resident Human*, and in keeping with the album’s title, Lascelles was aiming for a “humanistic vibe”: “I think [*Moving Backwards*] was more processed,” Lascelles says, “but it fit

the material. It was a stylistic choice; it’s not about good and bad.

“We’re living in a time where you can correct everything if you choose to: you can line up every strike of a drum, or pluck a string up to a grid and get it perfectly mathematically correct. It’s great we can do that. But for this album we really tried to pull back. It’s a much more kind of honest version of what we sound like.”

The idea of honesty is one that’s explored in the subject matter of the album, as the songs delve deep into the foibles and fragility of the human condition, often through events of 2020: from social media (*Ascend*) to the pandemic (*Fugue*) to the death of George Floyd, the African American man who was killed by a police officer in Minneapolis last summer (*Movement*), that sparked protests around the world.

“*Movement* is about the rhetoric after George Floyd was [killed], and the reaction that followed,” Lascelles explains. “How quickly it went from someone getting killed in broad daylight by the authorities that are supposed to protect the public, to a polarising and negative rhetoric dehumanising him, saying he was on drugs, things like that.”

Lascelles released a video on YouTube where he discussed the lyrics behind *Movement* and, as he expected, there were some negative remarks in the comments section.

“I feel like no one wants a reasonable discussion, we’ve been divided into these two factions warring with each other,” he says. “I think that getting out of our own echo chamber and

Wheel aren’t going to stay still for long!



"I always wanted to make progressive music, because you're not tied to this verse-chorus-verse-chorus-middle-eight-chorus format. I like the fact we can turn the whole thing on its head, and challenge it."

“In all honestly, I think the pandemic saved the album. We were rushing it big-time.”

talking to people on the other side is crucial. We’ve always had that; I think social media and internet algorithms have added to this division.”

Speaking as someone in a band, Lascelles finds social media a necessary evil. “It’s really brutal the critique you can get online,” he admits, “and if you start letting it get into your head, I think it messes with your ability to create. I saw an interview with Steven Wilson recently and he said you’ve got to accept the good and the bad, and as long as both are there, it’s kind of okay. I think that’s a much healthier way to look at it.”

Lascelles addresses some of the negatives on the song *Ascend*, in particular the ‘copy and paste’ culture of social media.

“You see a lot of people just sharing posts others have done, and I think that’s become a replacement for trying to find our own words to express difficult things,” he says. “You could argue this has been done since the dawn of time through storytelling. But I think the internet has distorted things, we end up losing nuance

and are left with these really broad sweeping brushes to cover everything. I think it’s making us less satisfied as a society, and worse at communication.

“One of the great advantages of being a musician is that we get to travel the world and meet people,” Lascelles says. “You realise then that the stuff most people care about is the same. We fixate on difference, but there’s a lot of symmetry to the human condition: we all want a roof over our heads, we want to do something we care about, to love who we love. All that’s fundamental to the human condition, as fundamental as our desire to cheat death.”

Closing the circle on the idea of the human condition, Lascelles also explores death on the 12-minute song *Hyperion*. The inspiration came from reading the sci-fi series *Hyperion Cantos* by Dan Simmons.

“I just came across the books, and they blew my mind,” he says. “It’s set in the future, but there are elements of our world, and the third and fourth books really contemplate the notions of mortality and death. We try to defeat it, spiritually, medically, but

it’s unavoidable. I think as soon as you make peace with that, you’re just left with this sense of gratitude that we get to experience any of this, that we can have this conversation, that anyone cares about us.”

Wheel have managed to achieve the seemingly impossible: winning over both proggers and metalheads. When *Prog* asks Lascelles how he thinks he’s managed that, he laughs.

“I guess it’s because we don’t fit perfectly into either world,” he says. “We’re a bit heavy for prog rock, a bit melodic for prog metal. I always wanted to make progressive music, because you’re not tied to this verse-chorus-verse-chorus-middle-eight-chorus format. I like the fact we can turn the whole thing on its head, and challenge it. Like with *Movement*, we were like, how crazy can we make something that’s four and a half minutes long? We just make the music we like, and we’ve made the album that we really wanted to make.” 🎧

L-R: Jussi Turunen, James Lascelles, Santeri Saksala, Aki Virta.

Resident Human is out on March 26 via Odyssey Music. See www.wheelband.net.





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THE PROG INTERVIEW

MICHAEL SADLER

Every month, we get inside the mind of one of the biggest names in music. This issue it's **Saga's Michael Sadler**. The Welsh-born singer and songwriter has played a key role in the Canadian band since their formation in 1977 and he's appeared on all their studio albums bar one. Although the band were due to retire after their 40th anniversary in 2017, they recently released a new acoustic album, *Symmetry* – their first studio recording in seven years. Here the vocalist looks back over the years and tells Prog why he's not ready to hang up his microphone yet.

Words: Dave Ling

"Saga's biggest problem is that we occupy a grey area," admits Michael Sadler. "We're not quite prog enough for the purists, and not heavy enough for the hard rock crowd. We're too tough to pigeonhole."

Although his observation holds water, it didn't prevent Saga from

becoming cult heroes and selling millions of records around the world.

First known as Pockets, Saga were formed in Oakville, Ontario, by vocalist/keyboardist Sadler along with the Crichton brothers Ian (guitar) and Jim (bass, keyboards), keyboardist Peter Rochon (later replaced by multi-

instrumentalist Jim Gilmour) and drummer Steve Negus.

Readers may well be thinking: "That's a lot of keyboardists", and they'd be right. The band's hook-friendly sound was literally *drenched* in keys, carefully balanced by the stuttering, staccato yet deeply melodic soloing of Ian Crichton. With certain songs written in the form of chapters, though not revealed

chronologically, Saga's command of words was complemented by a fondness of obtuse arrangements. Advanced levels of musicianship allowed them to swap instruments onstage.

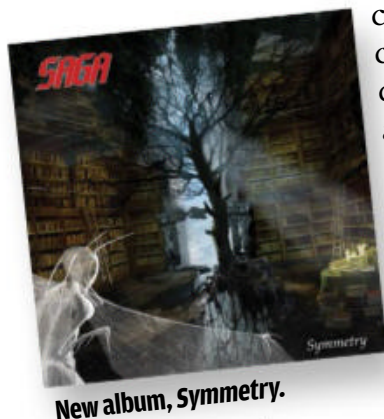
"The lights would dim and when they came back up again everyone was playing something

different," Jim Crichton joked to *Prog* several years ago. "It was the most amazing yet inexpensive special effect."

Saga forged a strong identity with their first six albums, two of which were made with Rush producer Rupert Hine, before the late-80s departures of Jim Gilmour and Steve Negus caused their own *...And Then There Were Three...*-style crisis as the two of them formed GNP (the Gilmour-Negus Project).

With same pair back onboard in the 90s, the music gradually regained its progressive edge. Citing family reasons, in 2007 Sadler quit Saga for what turned out to be four years, with Canadian Rob Moratti taking his place for *The Human Condition* in 2009. Three years after *Sagacity*, the band's 21st studio set, it was announced that Saga would retire following a 40th anniversary tour dubbed The Final Chapter, although they have since backtracked to continue with live performances.

Prog talks to Michael Sadler about the saga of Saga and its latest chapter: *Symmetry*, an unplugged set.



New album, *Symmetry*.

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"Gentle Giant and early Genesis, early Yes and Tull were our influences. As a fan of Led Zeppelin, Ian [Crichton] brought in rockier elements, while Steve [Negus] had a thing for R&B."

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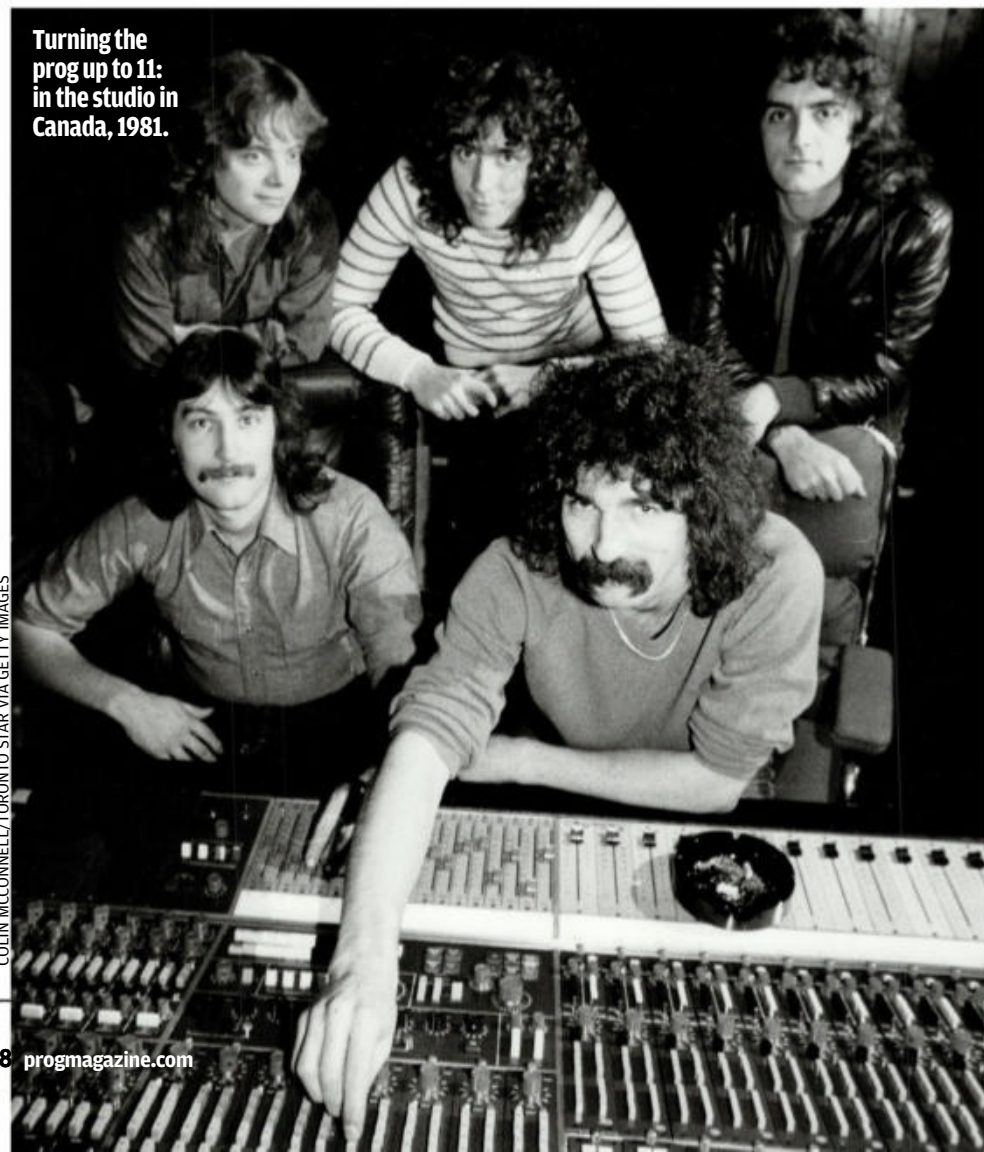
What goals did Saga have when getting together 44 years ago?

We wanted to create something that was cool and original, and to keep doing that for as long as possible. But realistically it was to get paid for our efforts [chuckles]. World domination was right at the back of our minds.

How much progressive rock had gone into the melting pot?

Jim [Crichton] and I had the biggest backgrounds in prog. Gentle Giant and early Genesis, early Yes and Tull were our influences. As a fan of Led Zeppelin, Ian [Crichton] brought in rockier elements, while Steve [Negus] had a thing for R&B. Steve and I wrote syncopated things together, which added the funk that confused the

Turning the prog up to 11: in the studio in Canada, 1981.





Michael Sadler today.
He still keeps a beady
eye on the prog scene.



Fingers crossed for some UK shows from these guys.

reviewers, it all helped to create the enigma that was Saga.

That appreciation of Gentle Giant influenced Saga's interchanging of instruments onstage.

Some of that was out of necessity. As a lead singer, I was stuck behind the keyboards for a lot of the night. So Jim and I switched for two or three songs, that's how it all started.

You know, I still recall hearing Gentle Giant for the first time. The drummer of a band I was in brought home an album and put on side one. We listened to it in silence and he flipped it over. We listened to side two – again, silence. At the end I said: "I don't know what that is, but I want to make music like that." The album was [1972's] *Three Friends*.

Saga's style is characterised by highs and lows of intensity and sudden changes of tempo. Jim Crichton once jokingly termed the style as "Bambi versus Godzilla"...

Yeah, we do like to pull the rug out from beneath the listener. It's fun to keep them on their toes [laughs].

How did it feel to realise that fans in Germany were buying the first, self-titled album (released in 1978) in huge amounts?

It was surreal. It was more about the "Why?" than "How many?".



Saga's debut, eponymous album.

At almost the same time we were taking off in Puerto Rico, and that was just as strange. These were two completely different places

whose cultures couldn't have been any more different. The only explanation I could come up with was that our classical side appealed to the Europeans, while the funky element was what drew us to the Puerto Ricans.

During Saga's first trip to Puerto Rico, is it true that fans used sledgehammers to smash their way into a sold-out show?

That's true! 15,000 tickets had sold out in seconds. And in Germany they were wanting us to go over for a tour. Meanwhile, at home...

Yeah, back in Canada things were more of a struggle.

I wouldn't say we couldn't get arrested because people knew our name, but during a phone-in on a rock station someone said they

thought Saga was from Germany – and this was *in our home town*. That's when we knew we had some work to do. It was time to get out there and wave the flag.

Here in the UK, Saga managed to carve a comfortable niche, beginning with a multiple-night spot opening for Styx in 1980, then headlining the Hammersmith Odeon five years later for the sixth album, *Behaviour*...

We did, and I even lived in Putney for a while so it was a great feeling to be able to do that. On that tour we had our massive [illuminated chequerboard] backdrop, which I loved, though the road crew were less fond of it.

Did you have to bite your tongue when English critics started labelling Saga as pomp rock?

Not at all. In my earlier days that label might have connected a bit more but by then I didn't care, so long as they spelled the band's name right.

The fourth album, 1981's *Worlds Apart*, is considered by some fans to be the band's high water mark. It was made in the UK with producer Rupert Hine, who would later work with Rush.

That's true, and we loved working with Rupert. He really brought out the best in us.

Didn't Rupert, who died last year, challenge you to sing *On The Loose* on the roof of The Farmyard in Buckinghamshire?

Not the actual roof, no. We were working in a barn that had been converted into a massive live room. It had these massive cross-beams. Rupert was looking for a sense of urgency so he made me go up. There's a photo on the inner sleeve of me sitting there with headphones and a massive beard.

The other unusual thing Rupert did was with *Wind Him Up*. He wanted a certain attitude. One morning I was half-asleep in bed and I sensed the door open. There was no knock. In walked the tape op with a boom stand, a mic and headphones. The voice from the control room said, "You know the song, there's a four bar intro and away you go." I sang it once, the tape-op vanished and I lay there thinking, "What the hell just happened?" When they played it back, it sounded perfect... I had sung it in just the voice he wanted, without overthinking.



Sticking it to 'em: Michael Sadler live in Hamburg, Germany in May 1985.

PG BRUNELL/CONICPIX



Sadler in 1982. That's one way to get an unusual vocal effect...

How satisfying or otherwise were the years during which Saga smoothed out the jagged edges of their sound? Were you in pursuit of the AOR dream?

Probably, but we were really thinking, "Let's play like this for a while and see

Worlds Apart, 1981.



how it feels." We set out to do what we wanted in the way we liked. We were testing ourselves to make things smoother, as you put it, and see whether people liked it. I don't pretend everything we've done is great, but [that era] was an important thing for

Saga to have done. Afterwards we came back [to the original proggy sound] and started using a hybrid [of the two styles].

Is it fair to say Saga rediscovered their mojo in the mid-90s with their 11th album, *Generation 13*?

I think so. Being a concept album [based on the 1993 book *13th Gen: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail?* by US

writers Neil Howe and William Strauss] that one was a real jigsaw puzzle. The creative juices had to be on full alert and I found it really satisfying. That album put us back in the [progressive] mindset, taking all that we'd done in the past and moving on with it.

As an album it had a real bite.

Yeah, very much so. But not only was it a concept album, it was a very good collection of songs. It had an edge that been missing.

Given the heights ascended by Saga during the 80s, a dismally attended show at London's Garage in 2006 must have felt like a kick in the teeth?

[Sighing deeply] There are reasons for that that would take

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"We're not quite prog enough for the purists, and not heavy enough for the hard rock crowd. We are too tough to pigeonhole."

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until the cows come home to explain. The hardest part is that we were right at the tail of what had been a tremendous tour [for the album *Trust*]. The whole thing had been very successful and we were riding an 'end of tour' high. We'd played Munich the night before, which is Saga's home away from home. We'd slain the place and our attitude was, "Okay cool, now we get to go to London where we haven't been for a long time."

We had no clue that the promoter hadn't done their job. There was no talk, no posters, no adverts – nothing. We later spoke to fans who said they'd had no idea that we were playing. And let's not get into subject of the backstage area...

DPA PICTURE ALLIANCE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



The only positive of that show was that two members of Iron Maiden, Steve Harris and Nicko McBrain, were there. Hearing that those guys were big Saga fans and had had a wonderful time helped to diminish the sting. We always do what we do whether there's any audience of 12 people or 20,000, but of course it was a huge disappointment.



1995's *Generation 13* album.

the end of the 2017 tour. We crunched some numbers and spoke to a few people but it didn't happen, though not for the want of trying.

You left the group for family reasons in 2007, returning four years later. Why was that?

We had reached the 30th anniversary and the timing for me to take some time out was

It must have been a rather weird experience?

It was *too* weird. After three or four songs I had to leave, and not out of thinking, "This sounds horrible" or, "My God, they're sunk now." I just couldn't watch it. I became emotional, and not in a predictable way. I didn't want to sit there and try to find fault because that wasn't my intention. I realised, "Okay, that's Saga now and God bless them." I had made my decision [to quit the band].

another was never in question. But after we said we were no longer going out [as a live band] we started getting more offers than ever before. And even more lucrative ones... it was incredible. But let me stress it [retiring from the road] was not a ploy.

The new Saga album, *Symmetry*, is an unplugged set. For most bands that's simply an excuse to strip down their greatest hits...

[Laughing] Yep. I get that. They do tend to be 'filler' albums between



"I had made a statement that we were putting the brakes on live touring – at least for now. At no time did I say that Saga was packing it in [completely]. I guess the waters were a little cloudy but we had no intention of quitting."



Sadler: a big fan of the intense hoedown genre.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, that Garage gig was the band's last on UK soil. Was that intentional?

Well, there were attempts to come back. It comes down to economics and we've reached a stage in our career where we don't pay to play anymore. Unless it's the Super Bowl, which people don't realise artists must pay to appear at – even if you are The Rolling Stones. As time went by we realised that we would need to be on some kind of package tour, and with the right promoter. It became harder and harder. I made a personal attempt to include some shows at

perfect. My wife became pregnant within a month and a half, and I got to experience my son's first years. That's when she told me, "It's time to go back to work."

Is it true that during the sabbatical you actually attended a Saga gig incognito?

I did, and after being with the band for 30 years can you blame me? I went out of curiosity, just to see the guys play. But I also wanted to see someone else doing my job. So I snuck into this small theatre, donning a baseball cap as a disguise. Of course I got spotted.

Having celebrated your 40th anniversary with a 2017 tour called *The Final Chapter*, Saga acceded to fanbase pressure and began playing live again...

There's a bit of confusion around that whole time period, but it really was the fans [that brought us back]. I had made a statement that we were putting the brakes on live touring – at least for now. At no time did I say that Saga was packing it in [completely]. I guess the waters were a little cloudy but we had no intention of quitting. The idea of us not making new music or interacting with one

studio records, don't they? I know the fans don't usually say, "Oh, we're dying to hear that."

Saga, on the other hand, have stripped down the signature element of the keyboards and rebuilt the arrangements from the ground up. The song *Pitchman*, for instance, became a hoedown.

It's a very intense hoedown [laughs]. The biggest challenge was to kick out the keyboards, especially with the up tempo parts. You can't replace them with a piano and play the same

parts because it's not the same song anymore.

How was the experience of recording *Symmetry* in isolation?

In a way it was almost easier. Sitting down in the same room and working on a tune together wouldn't have worked here because the connecting vibe was gone. This way we had to personally attack our own parts, and to dissect and approach them in a whole different way. That can only be done alone.

Could there be an all-new studio record from Saga?

Oh, 100 per cent. Every cloud has a silver lining and with everyone at home in lockdown the material is there. It's just a case of timing and when it feels right to make it. There will be at least one more studio album.

If you could go back in time and 'fix' one important mistake from Saga's career, what would it be?

I won't give you a lame response about the importance of making

could have done. But I can't say too much more than that because it would cause too many problems.

Is there a prog artist that you'd like to make a record with?

Actually, there are two of them – Freddie Mercury or Peter Gabriel, for different reasons. Peter's approach to live performance was always very, very cool. At the start of my own career I used to go out onstage with the florescent eyes, the makeup and costumes, I swear to God. And if he wasn't

progressive music out there, and I like that there's a lot of rock in it.

Are Saga the band that refuses to die?

Oh, I don't know about that, but I can tell you that we will continue to make music as long as we're having fun and our heart is in it. The day the passion goes is the day that we stop because there's no longer any point. It wouldn't be fair to me or the audience.

From a live point of view, the day that I don't get nervous

1982: you – yes, you – need style tips from these guys.



DPA PICTURE ALLIANCE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The biggest challenges were for Ian [Crichton] and myself. As a singer, I had to overcome that the melodies to songs like *Wind Him Up* and *Images – Chapter 1* were changed; the instrumentation was softer and much less supportive. I had to be careful with the octaves, which sometimes meant going into semi-falsetto. For Ian, going from electric to acoustic, the adjustment was large. He had to get intense and play fast. That's hard to do on acoustic. He said it felt like construction work.

errors and reacting to and learning from them, I will give you an honest answer. I can't be too specific, but there was an agreement signed that really shouldn't have been, especially at the time we signed it. We should have been paying way more attention to the situation.

Are you perhaps talking about the much-touted 'management issues' that forced Jim Gilmour and Steve Negus out of the band?

No. This was more a specific business agreement. And it was not the smartest thing that we

dead then I'd love to have done something with Freddie because he was one of the greatest entertainers of all time.

Progressive music has undergone a massive rebirth in popularity. Do you keep an eye on the scene?

Absolutely, I do. Probably because of the musicians I've worked with in other projects I have more connections now with the prog community than ever before. I'm well aware of people like Steven Wilson and I really like the Norwegian band Gazpacho. There's some very diverse

before walking onstage is when I pack it in, if it became a job or a chore. At the moment I couldn't be any further from that. I do hope that one day we find ourselves on a British stage again, I really do. But post-Covid, what is the live scene even going to be like? Will the venues survive? A lot of bands will go to the wall. There are just so many unanswered questions, it's unfortunate.

Symmetry is out now via earMUSIC. Head to www.sagagen.com for more information.

New spins...

LIQUID TENSION EXPERIMENT

The gang's back together: Mike Portnoy, John Petrucci, Jordan Rudess and Tony Levin reunite the dream team for LTE's first new album of instrumental prog genius in 22 years.

Words: Dave Ling **Illustration:** Jonathan Edwards

The rebirth of all-instrumental prog rock supergroup Liquid Tension Experiment feels like an unexpected visit from an old friend – and it comes as a welcome surprise. Last seen on a 10th anniversary tour in 2008, much has happened in the interim years, chiefly founder Mike Portnoy's exit from his main band Dream Theater in 2010 (something that made the prospect of a reunion with fellow DT members John Petrucci and Jordan Rudess under the LTE banner unlikely).

Liquid Tension Experiment's history is inextricably entwined with that of the prog metal giants. Formed in 1997 by Portnoy, the two albums LTE released at the end of that decade, *LTE1* and *LTE2*, featured Petrucci and Rudess alongside bassist and Chapman Stick maestro Tony Levin. The chemistry generated by the quartet during the recording of the second album in 1999 prompted Rudess to finally accept Portnoy and Petrucci's overtures to join Dream Theater, despite the keyboard player having previously rebuffed them.

Assorted permutations followed the initial incarnation: Liquid Trio Experiment (Portnoy, Rudess and Levin, minus Petrucci) and Liquid Trio Experiment 2 (Portnoy, Petrucci and Levin, mostly minus Rudess), as well as that anniversary tour from the original line-up. But then Portnoy's split with his Dream Theater bandmates seemingly put an end to it all.

Until now. The aftershocks of his departure have finally settled. Even before Portnoy added drums to Petrucci's 2020 solo album, *Terminal Velocity*, all four LTE members had expressed a wish to renew their collaboration. But it took Covid and a wiping-out of everybody's schedules to get them together in a studio again – socially distanced, naturally – for the first time in more than two decades.

And so here we are, with *LTE3*, an album that sticks to the blueprint of its predecessors with four fully composed tracks, a pair of duets and an on-the-fly jam, plus a retooled cover version.



It lands a punch and never looks back.

Like all great prizefighters, LTE land a knockout punch in the first round and never look back. Opening number *Hypersonic* delivers a similar sensation to a deep glug of super-strong coffee. Its core ingredients – Petrucci's fluent skylark melodies, Rudess' classical keyboard embellishments, Levin's low Chapman Stick frequencies and Portnoy's everything-including-the-kitchen-sink drumming – are separable from each other yet all part of one gigantic, multitempoed, earthquake-inducing whole.

The 'Wow!' that concludes *Hypersonic* is the sole human voice throughout, but don't let that serve as an obstacle. These songs are daubed in melodies handed down by the instrumental players. *Beating The Odds* sees Petrucci and Rudess run riot through painting a triumphant tidal wave of colour and notes.

Bass players tend to sit in the background and follow the drummer. Not Levin, who adds a supple, fleet-fingered spine to the jazz-flavoured *Liquid Evolution*, and also excels with Portnoy via the brooding, stripped-down duet *Chris & Kevin's Amazing Odyssey* (a continuing in-joke that extends back to the first album when a photographer got the pair's names wrong). It's downright insidious.

The band's avant-garde side is further revealed by their reinterpretation of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody In Blue*. Performed on past tours, here they tear it apart over the course of 13 minutes, throwing away the instruction manual and proceeding to rebuild the parts with the carefree disrespect of such past progressive giants as The Nice and ELP.

The sentimental *Shades Of Hope* provides Petrucci with a showcase of his own, another reminder that he can play with real passion and finesse (incredibly, this song was captured in a single take). Those same qualities are further rammed home as the guitarist and Rudess barrel extravagantly through another 13-minute epic, *Key To The Imagination*.

Elsewhere, LTE go up through the gears together on the band's first ever entirely group-written track, *Passage Of Time*, Rudess dominating the song's latter stages with a section of true orchestral-flavoured beauty before everyone combines to drive the song past the finish line.

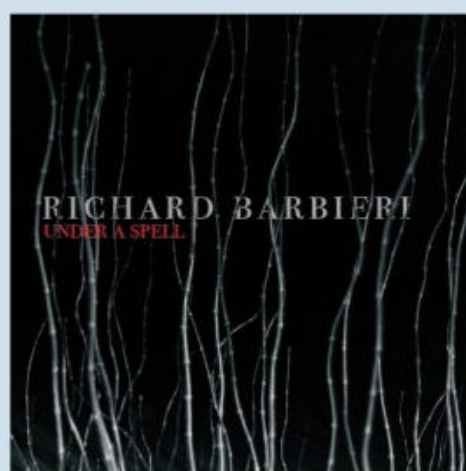
The artistic success of *LTE3* will doubtless prompt Dream Theater fans to wonder if a reunion with the band's original drummer is on the cards. Speaking to this correspondent recently, Petrucci headed the idea off at the pass. "Please don't speculate beyond that. I feel spoiled because I get to play with both Mikes," referring to Portnoy and current DT sticksman Mike Mangini. And in truth, this isn't an album to encourage 'what ifs'. Rather, *LTE3* is a deeply satisfying listening experience that should be filed in an extremely small folder that's marked: 'Positive outcomes of the coronavirus.'



RICHARD BARBIERI

Under A Spell KSCOPE

Ex-Japan/Porcupine Tree keyboardist explores altered states of mind.



Richard Barbieri has said that due to restrictions imposed last year, with *Under A Spell* he was less concerned about creating compositional form and melody and more intent on trying to capture in music the feeling of disconnection and “bizarre recurring dreams” that arose from his physical isolation. In fact, he manages both.



He captures the disconnection and dreams of isolation.



This is only his fourth solo album in a career that stretches back to 1976 and the signature style he latterly established on *Planets + Persona*, released in 2017, was of subtle and intricate activity taking place on multiple levels, with a shifting fluidity of atmosphere and some uncanny moods. *Under A Spell* expands upon its predecessor’s eerie strangeness.

Barbieri played in Porcupine Tree until 2010 and he has – rather modestly – assessed his role in that group as a non-musician rather than a virtuoso, a kind of Eno figure creating abstract sound and texture. But while the title track opens the album with a slowly developing melodic theme that perambulates along in an Eno-esque manner, it soon becomes augmented by chattering rhythms, ominous keyboard motifs and the ghostly wisps of Luca Calabrese’s trumpet.

As on *Planets + Persona*, Barbieri takes guest voices and heavily processes them, producing a strangely moving effect. *A Star Light* is co-composed by Swedish jazz singer Lisen Rylander Löve and her lonely, disintegrated voice ushers in a soundscape of nebulous electronics, trumpet and twinkling piano lines. Barbieri last collaborated with Marillion vocalist Steve Hogarth on the song-based mini-album *Arc Light* in 2014. But when his voice appears here it sounds like someone whose words are dissolving as he’s singing them.

On *Sketch 6*, expansive keyboard themes loom up over trip-hoppy grooves. *Serpentine* has a more restless, agitated feel as it initially rides out on an old-school drum machine before modern programmed drums take over. Barbieri’s ominous piano chords are caressed by Percy Jones’ purring bass and his vibraphone-like keyboard lines give the piece a chilly beauty. It’s a typically complex mix with all the elements moving through the soundfield in a dubby fashion.

The twitchy, abstract *Sleep Will Find You* exemplifies *Under A Spell*’s singular feeling of otherness. It feels like Barbieri is trying to evoke hypnagogic states, then translates the feelings of a dream, only to find that it starts to fade upon waking.

This haunting journey concludes with *Lucid*. After barely audible whispered exhortations from Barbieri’s writer-musician wife Suzanne to ‘wake up’ it emerges, blinking, from the shadows and concludes with a radiant mix of string synths and rippling electric piano. It’s captivating.

MIKE BARNES

3.2

Third Impression FRONTIERS

Keith Emerson collaborator Robert Berry reworks more of the master’s ideas.

In 2018 Robert Berry released *3.2*, an album featuring song fragments he and Keith Emerson had been working on for a reboot of the band 3, before the latter’s tragic death in 2016. Berry had developed these in a way he felt best represented the vision shared with Emerson.

Now, he’s attempted to some extent to repeat the process. As was the case with 2018’s *The Rules Have Changed*, he’s been forced to recreate those parts himself, as Emerson’s estate refused permission for his contributions to be used. Only *Never* is a true collaboration, being co-written by the duo.



What Berry tries to do is reflect what might have happened had he and Emerson been able to carry on a partnership that began with the excellent *To The Power Of 3* in 1988. And this is a decent album, with some fine moments. *Top Of The World* is a powerful,

striding opener. And *Black Of Night* combines Berry’s well honed vocals with his impressive imitation of the inimitable Emerson magic.

However, much of *Third Impression* gets bogged down in Berry’s efforts to interpret what his late partner would have wanted. A shame, and time for Berry to move on. **MD**

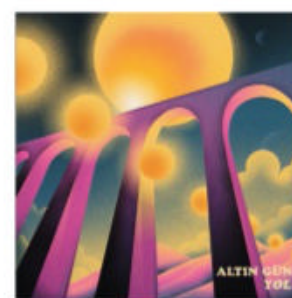
ALTIN GÜN

Yol GLITTERBEAT

Dutch-Anatolian psych-rockers go Euro-pop.

Having given traditional Turkish folk music a psychedelic pop makeover on their first two albums, Amsterdam’s Altin Gün take a deliciously surreal turn into the worlds of synthesised Euro-pop and soundtracks this time.

The six-piece credit having to create under lockdown; minds free to roam while recording overdubs separately, whether embracing 80s synths, blaxploitation and cheesy porn soundtracks, or reinterpreting Ali Ekber Cicek’s *Hey Nari* as cool bongo funk. Founder and bassist Jasper Velhulst likens *Esmerim Guzelim* to an 80s Turkish kindergarten music teacher



brandishing an 808 drum machine, while singer Erdinc Ecevit rises to the audacious retro makeovers, beguiling over Yuce Dag Basinda’s action movie synths, soaring against Arda Boykhan’s glistening Euro-house or invoking Lene Lovich on the jerkily

new wave *Bulunur Mu*.

Diehards pining for psychedelic guitar blasts will relish co-vocalist Merve Dasdemir belting out *Sevda Olmasaydi*, but it’s rollicking indulgences like *Macka Yollari*’s Shaft-gone-Euro-disco hump that elevate *Yol* into such an uplifting fantasy diversion for serious times. **KN**

BIRDPEN

All Function One JAR

Duo’s sixth album explores themes of isolation and disconnection.

BirdPen are multi-instrumentalist Mike Bird and singer/multi-instrumentalist Dave Pen, of electronic post-rockers Archive. Much of *All Function One* is lean and streamlined with inventive rhythmic shapes and strong vocal melodies. It’s vividly produced and a sonic glow dispels the shadows on *Life In Design* and *Flames*, which invite comparisons with early Radiohead, as well as, Elbow, Field Music and – unsurprisingly – Archive.

The disjunctive feeling between the uplifting sound and their introspective lyrical themes contributes to the poignant feel. The duo came up with the



idea of people retreating from the outside world before the pandemic struck and on *Seat 35*, the protagonist bids goodbye to a lover or their past life. Pen delivers an obsessive incantation of lonely living conditions and state of mind on *Changes*,

describing the sunlight only creeping into the room that ‘keeps you safe from everything outside’. But it’s difficult to completely escape the modern world and on *Modern Junk* he beachcombs through the cultural flotsam likely to ‘penetrate your brain’ before juddering unison passages disturb his train of thought. **MB**

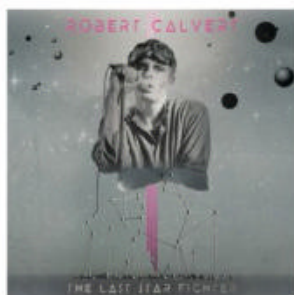
ROBERT CALVERT

The Last Starfighter CLEOPATRA

Remix project celebrating ex-Hawkwind frontman produces mixed results.

After leaving Hawkwind, Robert Calvert pursued an increasingly minimal electronic rock sound as a solo artist. While albums such as *Freq* and *Test-Tube Conceived* went unheralded at the time, they sound like visionary works now, anticipating a world of online paranoia and human redundancy against a stark setting of synths, drum machines and processed guitar.

The Last Starfighter sees a (mostly) new generation of electronic producers updating and reimagining Calvert's post-Hawkwind catalogue, though whether it's an act of homage or way of bringing his music to a new audience is



unclear. A Flock Of Seagulls' mix of *Over The Moon* marries the innocent joy of the original with vibrant synthpop, while Antoni Maiovvi's apocalypse disco take on *The Luminous Green Glow Of The Dials Of The Dashboard* boosts the urban anxiety of the

lyrics. Also noteworthy are the Depeche Mode-esque melodies of *Thanks To The Scientists* (Sixth June remix) and the dreamy, weaving guitars of The KVB's *Work Song*. But more often than not, the remixers struggle to complement or deepen Calvert's originals. This album is a nice idea, but what's really needed is a proper retrospective of his work. **JB**

COSMOGRAF

Rattrapante GRAVITY DREAM MUSIC

Timely considerations of our relationship with time itself.

The eighth offering from Robin Armstrong under the Cosmograf banner is centred around perceptions of time and the illusory properties of memory around these and related musings. Expansive opener *In 1985* combines historical events from that year with contemporaneous autobiographical recollections, mixing ambience and pulsing hard rock via sections with a heavy, Middle Eastern vibe.

Apart from drummer Kyle Fenton, Armstrong handles all the instruments, and he turns in some beautifully melodic guitar solos and distinctive vocals. The jaunty, organ-soaked title track disguises



darker undercurrents, as Armstrong touches on numerous late-20th century deaths in the pursuit of technological progress. The gentle lilt of *I Stick To You* similarly contrasts with a lyric inspired by the terrible curse of an immortal's

pain of knowing that they will outlast everyone and everything they love. It ends with *Time Will Flow's* rumination on the nature of time set against a hypnotic backing of sequenced synths and atmospheric guitar, capping a thoughtful and thought-provoking album that adds to Armstrong's already enviable body of work. **GMM**

CRACK THE SKY

Tribes CARRY ON MUSIC

Brilliant melodic prog from US veterans.

In 1975, *Rolling Stone* magazine declared Crack The Sky: "The best US prog band you've never heard." Their tremendous self-titled debut album, released that year, mixed 10cc with Blue Öyster Cult. Yet despite that, and a steady stream of decent releases in the years since, the West Virginians remain no more than a cult name.

Tribes is their 20th album, and probably the best they've made since *Animal Notes* in 1976. The connections to 10cc and BÖC are still prevalent: *Another Civil War* and *Dear Leader* possess a tone that echoes to the latter in the early-70s, while *Another*



Beautiful Day and *All My Innocence* offer a timbre that draws deeply from the 10cc wellspring.

However, Crack The Sky don't simply copy what others have done. *Alligator Man* has a quirky jazz rock momentum and *Boom Boom* is a fine showcase

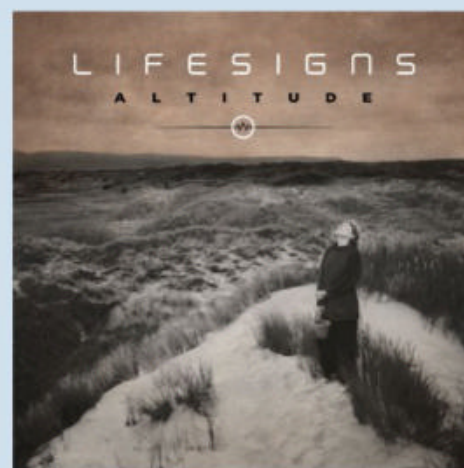
for their virtuosity. All the elements coalesce on the title track and *Quick*, where enticing melodies bring out the best in John Palumbo's narrative vocal style and the keyboard/guitar interplay is dexterous and thoughtful.

Prog hopes *Tribes* allows the band to flourish and finally get the attention they've always deserved. **MD**

LIFESIGNS

Altitude LIFESIGNSMUSIC.CO.UK

Seasoned prog sideman and friends hit new heights.



John Young may never have been a particularly prominent prog figure in his own right, but during his time playing with the likes of Asia, John Wetton, Jon Anderson, Greenslade et al, he seems to have absorbed some of their best qualities, which are once again on display on this album that combines the rich melodiousness of AOR and the emotional honesty of neo-prog with the intricate jazz-inflected instrumental decoration of vintage prog.



Emotional honesty meets instrumental decoration.



Lifesigns' 2017 album *Cardington* centred on a theme of adventure and hubris in aviation, and we're in the air again for the 15-minute opener here, the title track that takes a drone's-eye view of the land 'as far as the eye can see' with the bitter-sweet hook of a conclusion, 'I could be so much better.' There's plenty to get stuck into here, from a wistful piano-based opening through anxious drum patterns, foreboding backing vocals and freewheeling synth and bass gymnastics, urgent guitar surfing across the top before we return to the yearning central vocal hook, softening into elegant violin skytrails and then getting tangled up in tempo-chopping angst and gnarly jazz guitar. And we're still barely halfway through.

After the track fades out in a long coda of daydreaming violins, it's time for a pace change. That comes in the shape of *Gregarious*, whose ebullient opening piano riff instantly recalls Supertramp, before a gentle chorus that could be a distant cousin of *Comfortably Numb*. Just as instant in its appeal is *Ivory Tower*, which builds upon a beguiling xylophone-style motif with a sweet love-lorn ballad. The plot thickens, though, as it picks up a head of speed five minutes in as despondency is replaced by confusion and anger, punched through with dramatic riff volleys. 'I fall down... if I could be someone else,' Young muses.

Shoreline again explores more noodlesome prog waters, but Young skilfully frame another earworm of a chorus, as he begs listeners to 'save me', before the 10-minute *Fortitude* takes a more ruminative emotional journey, graced by a mesmerisingly melancholic keyboard solo, presumably played by Young, although ex-Strawb Dave Bainbridge also contributes both keys and guitar at various points on the record.

The most striking moment is still to come, though, as the final track (bar a late reprise of the opener) *Last One Home* unfolds into a supremely uplifting power ballad, built around the story of a sailor adrift in a storm who ultimately survives in the knowledge safety is near. Bainbridge's slow-burning guitar solo towards the end is another highlight among many on what is surely Lifesigns' strongest album yet.

JOHNNY SHARP

HEDVIG MOLLESTAD TRIO

Ding Dong. You're Dead. RUNE GRAMMOFON

Meeting of the Mollestad spirits.



Some artists begin their recording careers cautiously, slowly and subtly coaxing the listener into their sound world, gradually finding their way into their strengths and creative approaches. Others don't so much arrive on the scene as explode across it, apparently fully formed and taking absolutely no prisoners. It's long been clear to anyone with a pair of functioning ears which side of that line the Hedvig Mollestad Trio emphatically belong.

The fearlessness that drives them is front and centre.

From their fiery 2011 debut *Shoot!* and across the trio's subsequent six releases, Mollestad, bassist Ellen Brekken and drummer Ivar Loe Bjørnstad haven't been slow in coming forward. As each album has added another wave of surging momentum, they trash any generic barriers that happen to get in the way with an attitude that doesn't care if it's prog, metal, jazz or anything else you want to throw at them.

Last year saw a pause in the seemingly unstoppable progress of the band with the release of Mollestad's acclaimed debut solo album, *Ekhidna*, on which she added keyboards and brass in a sextet setting for her guitar, proving herself to be a nuanced arranger for a wider tonal range. Now back with her regular collaborators, she digs deeper into the instrument, unleashing waves of taut melodics along with her savvy use of power chords.

The fearlessness that underpins and drives the trio can be found front and centre on *Leo Flash' Return To The Underworld*. A bulldozing motif that evokes Lifetime-era John McLaughlin in a head-on collision with the metal debris of King Crimson's *Red*. It doesn't so much open the album as detonate it. Mollestad's nimble, elasticated lead guitar occupies the sonic high ground as Brekken and Bjørnstad's rhythm section constantly burrow below, adding and subtracting across the beat while never missing their mark.

Here, as elsewhere, the numerous benefits of their decade-plus partnership become abundantly clear as unexpected shifts in gear are achieved with a frequently jaw-dropping, preternatural ability. Be it empathy or telepathy or 'WTF did they just do?', the emotional impact in these relatively brief pieces is absolutely spine-tingling.

The beautiful ballad *Four Candles* closes the record. Like the calm after the storm, volume pedal swells confer a teary smear, not unlike a pedal steel guitar to Mollestad's sound. Swimming in reverb, as her colleagues conjure clouds of vaporous shapes, her notes bend and shiver, bright like the shimmering trail of a slo-mo meteor glimpsed through the dark of space. An album that's as bone-crunchingly powerful as it is graciously poetic, this is surely their best yet.

SID SMITH

ETERNAL RETURN

Once Only NEWDOG

Respected proggers combine to craft emotive debut.

Ensembles formed from various ambient prog base camps can veer towards either inspiration or indulgence. Eternal Return get it right, diving into allusive/elusive sounds as opposed to showing off their proficiency for the sake of it. The five-piece claim to be exploring the terrain of Talk Talk, David Sylvian and This Mortal Coil. While they can't match such transcendent levels, the best sections of their six-track debut find the sweet spot between artful and abstract, especially the nebulous suite moving from *A Medium-Sized Village* through to *The Bottom Of The Pond*. The almost subliminal feedback of



guitars and sudden break-out of percussion suggest *Laughing Stock* as a muse. Elsewhere there's a brush-stroke of the baroque pomp of *Shearwater*.

Collaborating within are Colin Edwin (Porcupine Tree), guitarist Robert Jurjendal (Toyah/Fripp) and

drummer Miguel Toro, linking up with the duo Dogon, whose singer Paul Godwin at first sounds too preciously assertive. However, as things settle in to take a trek into thoughtful ambivalence, so does he. By the time we emerge into farewell track *The Sky*, a sense of peace, tranquility and serenity has been found and, importantly, earned. **CR**

EVERGREY

Escape Of The Phoenix AFM

Swedish prog metallers step up a level.

After 11 albums, some may be forgiven for the notion that Evergrey have nothing new to offer on *Escape Of The Phoenix*. Thankfully, they'd be wrong.

The progressive metal inclinations that these Swedes have ploughed since 1998's debut *The Dark Discovery* are still prevalent. What the band have added here is depth to their creative vision. While they're no strangers to the art of balladry, *Stories* and *You From You* are better than anything they've attempted before. *Forever Outside* and *Dandelion Cipher* offer brawn plus intelligence, never veering too far into the metallic end of



the spectrum. Across all the tracks, Tom S Englund's vocals are confident and capable. He duets with James LaBrie on the synthwave-inspired *The Beholder*, more than holding his own with the Dream Theater man.

Elsewhere, *In Absence*

Of Sun gives keyboard player Rikard Zander a chance to shine on the album's epic presentation.

The title track is more ferocious, yet still has an inner grandeur. *Leaden Saints* is more obviously in the traditional Evergrey style, but avoids being run of the mill. It's a description that extends to *Escape Of The Phoenix* as a whole. **MD**

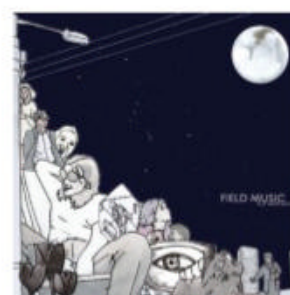
FIELD MUSIC

Flat White Moon MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

Superbly astute art poppers shine again.

From the opening track's *Tomorrow Never Knows* drum pattern to the winking Led Zep riffs of *In This City*, Field Music are clearly having a good time here. Which isn't to say their eighth studio album is any less intelligent, incisive and precise than any of

their others. *Flat White Moon* aims to tackle difficult emotions in an uplifting manner, and easily pulls it off. The Brewis brothers' adeptness at flitting between genres, sometimes mid-song, is a given. Here they do what they do with a jagged grace. Their talent would be irritating if it wasn't so electrifying. Recording began before lockdown and



then switched to their homes. The darkness of these times filters through, but Field Music's skill is to get your boots swinging with their buoyant, bright art pop. While the album is very much 21st century action, there are cheeky Cockney Rebel vocal fills,

XTC shapes and an unabashed love of *Penny Lane/Strawberry Fields*-era Beatles. Not to mention an out-of-nowhere delightful prog coda or two. *No Pressure* is both angry and funky, while *The Curtained Room* introduces Eric Stewart guitar tones to a falsetto echoing their onetime fan Prince. Field Music never let the listener down. **CR**

GHOSTS OF ATLANTIS

3.6.2.4 BLACK LION RECORDS

Dark but adventurous metallers hit the ground running.

Prog metal? Symphonic metal? Gothic metal? Whatever metal Ghosts Of Atlantis are, it's pretty heavy, and bloody good fun. The Suffolk sorcerers are on rampant form with this debut album, which thematically touches on ancient Greece and the lost city of Atlantis. Musically, their connection to ghoulish metallers Cradle Of Filth pulsates through the darkness, with *False Prophet* galloping like a runaway horse, snare drum cracking like an overzealous metronome.

The hook here for prog lovers is how the five-piece can eviscerate metal expectation; orchestral flourishes and



choral singing evoke a more ghastly Symphony X, and clean vocals amid the growly melee reins things in. Fans of Floyd or Yes won't find much joy in 3.6.2.4 but search beyond the devilish distortion and there's much for open-minded listeners to enjoy

- not least *The Lost Compass*, whose keys and clean guitar evolve into groovy orchestral riffola before dissipating into a lurching detour fit for a spot on a Between The Buried And Me record.

It's not for all, but with 3.6.2.4 Ghosts Of Atlantis appear to have the tools to make a splash - whatever subgenre they might be lumped into. **CC**

HOLY TOY

Close All Doors APOLLON

Third post-reformation album from Polish-Norwegian new wave oddballs.

In the early 1980s, Oslo-based Polish emigré and Holy Toy mastermind Andrej Nebb attempted to turn his fellow hipsters on to a brand of minimal, post-punk electropop closely related to that which was dominating the UK charts, albeit in a more anarchic, humour-laced form.

Nebb reactivated Holy Toy in 2013 alongside multi-instrumentalist Lars Pedersen, and this third long-player since their second coming is a typically idiosyncratic affair. While the industrial grind and groove of *Trapped* and the austere thrum of *Laboratorium* recall DAF and Nitzer Ebb, elsewhere things



are a whole lot stranger. The funereal goth hymn *Scarolezsmie Bose* appears to be accompanied by sampled pig grunts, and the squelching, warped psychedelic swirl of *Tibirib* is accompanied by a kid's organ. Then there's *Polka Fly* which is driven by

a breathless breakbeat. Meanwhile, *Mental Castration's* robot voice may almost sound self-parodying, but in common with several other tracks, a gnarly, lo-fi mechanised beat stirs up a gnarly groove redolent of early Joy Division irreverently covering Kraftwerk. It's Nordic noir in spirit, but with plenty of unexpected twists. **JS**

ILLUMINAE

Dark Horizons IMMRAMA RECORDS

Shimmering symphonies from a brand new collaboration.

Led by Karnataka multi-instrumentalist Ian Jones and Caamora vocalist Agnieszka Swita, Illuminae pack a lustrous and dramatic punch on their debut album. Opener *The Lighthouse* channels The Gentle Storm's one-off collection, 2015's *The Diary*, with its seaside sounds, operatic singing, and classical fervour. It's a dense and catchy gem that establishes the record's guiding blueprint of imperial romanticism.

Blood On Your Hands and *Heretics & Prophecy* maintain that regal intensity with lush vocal layers and tender acoustic guitarwork. It's not



all persistently forceful, though. *Lullaby's* bittersweet harmonies and strings usher in the heartfelt balladry of *Twice* and *Sign Of Infinity*. The grandiosity of it all occasionally spills into the overwrought, and a handful of tracks are

simply forgettable. Still, the album is a satisfying and impressive first foray, with a few special guests - including Craig Blundell, Troy Donockley, and Steve Hackett - giving it additional artistic prowess and insider credibility. Their involvement is one of many reasons for why *Dark Horizons* is such a thoroughly promising experience. **JMB**

MOGWAI

As The Love Continues ROCK ACTION

Scottish post-rock pioneers offer love to their listeners.



Possibly the greatest quiet/loud band to ever come out of Britain, it seems unthinkable that Mogwai are now celebrating their silver jubilee as recording artists. For a group who've moved so relatively little sonically, they remain a landmark on the world's music scene. If John Peel famously said that The Fall were "always different, always the same", similar applies to the power of 10 for Mogwai. The richness, the nuances, the stark beauty of their work coupled with their resolute anonymity make them like no other.



**The majesty of
their work remains
a thing to behold.**



Their 10th non-soundtrack album, *As The Love Continues*, was meant to be recorded in America with producer Dave Fridmann but the pandemic put paid to that. Instead, they recorded remotely with him in the States and then in Worcestershire. Perhaps some pastoral beauty has drifted into their mix; *Dry Fantasy*, with its keyboard refrain, nods toward the bucolic. The segues to their 'loud' passages are perhaps not as jarring as they once were, but yet still retain a startling splendour.

Mogwai once again bring what guitarist/keyboard player Barry Burns describes as "the repressed Calvinist approach to making music. We're just a bunch of boys playing music in a room. We never talk about meaning." It's the very fact that there's no meaning that the work is imbued with such significance; listeners project their own interpretations on the group's endlessly unfolding riffs and repetition.

As always, their fabulously random titles add to the mystique. Opener *To The Bin My Friend, Tonight We Vacate Earth* sets the tone in terms both of imagery and sound. *Fuck Off Money* does their soundscape thing perfectly, while *Ceiling Granny* is almost celtic in its sweep with its phased guitar. *Supposedly, We Were Nightmares* highlights how incredible a drummer Martin Bulloch is, complemented by the incessant bubble of an early-70s Who-like synth. *Here We, Here We, Here We Go Forever* offers some disco drum machines.

With Stuart Braithwaite and Burns singing in unison, the album's one vocal moment, *Ritchie Sacramento*, has a zip that recalls lost 90s Scotpop. For those who long for the aggression of masterpieces such as *Like Herod, Drive The Nail* is the closest to that early Mogwai blast; strummed guitars give way to a wall of noise, which then, of course, recedes. And then returns.

There are guest appearances by Nine Inch Nails collaborator Atticus Ross and saxophone maverick Colin Stetson, but they go entirely unnoticed, as whoever is making the sound is unmistakably Mogwai. The majesty of their work remains a thing to behold.

DARYL EASLEA

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KYLVER

The Plague Tapes KYLVER.BANDCAMP.COM

Doom-laden live tracks from British post-rockers.

Had 2020 gone according to plan, post-rock quartet Kylver would've completed their third studio album by now. With that plan scuppered by the pandemic, they've decided to release their first live collection, *The Plague Tapes*, instead.



and *The Frozen Sands*. But while these songs are compelling and expressive at first, almost all of them wear out their welcome before they're done because they don't provide enough variation or freshness to warrant their excessive playtimes. Only

the relatively short *The Dance Of The Mountain Ghost* and *Hy-Brasil* strike a balance between scope and length.

Diehard fans of apocalyptically sludgy instrumental post-rock may well get a kick out of what Kylver offer, but ultimately the band are stretching a few intriguing and moving ideas far beyond their limits. **JMB**

TIM LANE

As Sure As The Sun Rises In The East TIMLANEMUSIC.BANDCAMP.COM

Folk rock stories from the singer's beloved Norfolk.

Tim Lane plays in Norwich folkies the Punch House Band and prog outfit Stealing The Fire. He describes this mainly solo recording as inspired by the 'folk orchestra' that he assembled for a production of Peter Bellamy's folk opera, *The Transports* and here he's added the 'People's Republic Of Lakenham State String Quartet' to guitars, keyboards and drums.



Holkham Gap on the Norfolk coast? He taps into his home county's history with *Rebel Bones*, a song of Robert Kett's peasant's rebellion, and *Fish Out Of Water* is about the Sheringham Mermaid who, entranced by the singing of a local church congregation,

managed to haul herself onto land.

It's an entertaining and compelling collection, particularly *Pull Boys Pull*. Over jig-like syncopations, Lane highlights Henry Blogg and the crew of the Cromer lifeboat, and his dramatic narrative describing the true story of their rescue of two foundered ships one stormy night in 1917 is stirring stuff. **MB**

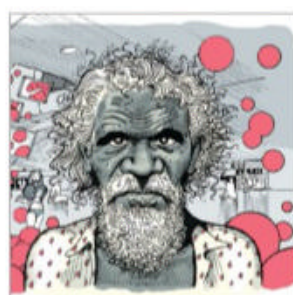
DEADBURGER FACTORY

La Chiamata SNOWDONIA DISCHI

Disruptive art rock from Italian musical activists.

Italian avant-rockers Deadburger Factory return with their first album since 2013's *La Fisica Delle Nuvole*. *La Chiamata* is a socio-politically charged concept album, centred around a shaman summoning an eruption in a shopping mall - a disruption of consumerism that jolts onlookers out of their self-absorption. It sees the band joined by a host of collaborators who recorded their parts together rather than remotely, a reflection of their intent to challenge the modern isolationist instinct.

Musically, *La Chiamata* can be melodic one moment, and then switch



gears entirely with scraping metallic noises, screeching saxophones, or even the transporter sound effect from *Star Trek*. Zappa and late-career Bowie are obvious touchstones in *Tamburo Sei Pazzo* and *Manifesto Cannibale*, while *Tryptich* sees the

band tackle an arrangement of jazz drummer Max Roach's 1960 civil rights composition, complete with screams of anguish and rage.

The lyrical content throughout might be inaccessible to non-Italian speakers, but the music isn't: it's a freewheeling and loud rejection of complacency and predictability. **DW**

JAZZ PROG

Sid Smith rounds up the best releases from prog's jazzier reaches.



Nik Bärtsch's *Entendre* (ECM) may be a solo piano release but it contains all the dazzling richness and elegant interlocking spirals that twist within his zen funk band, Ronin. Bärtsch's deft touch adds a heightened sensitivity to the disciplined rigour underpinning his work ensuring a reflective, human dimension isn't lost within the metronomic pulsations driving these pieces. Even stripped back to a single voice, the momentum of his polymetric compositions, whose trance-like repetitions and unfurling variations cleave the air with exacting precision, cast an enthralling spell.

Recorded at Norwich Cathedral in 2004 **Keith Tippett's**

The Monk Watches The Eagle (Discus) is a cantata for the BBC singers augmented by his wife, vocalist Julie and two saxophone quartets. It's also quite unlike anything else in his long career. His death in 2020 robbed us of his visionary talents but this is a persuasive reminder of his brilliance with stirring harmonies utilising voices and reeds, forging an aural setting that's

as uplifting as it is sombre.

Covering 27 complete radio shows across 14 CDs recorded between 1969 and 1990, **Barbara Thompson's** *Live At The BBC* (Repertoire) catches her quicksilver sax primarily with her jazz rock-flavoured band, Paraphernalia. Thompson's thoughtful, agile playing has stints with Soft Machine bassist Roy Babbington and, of course, her husband Jon Hiseman's whip-crack drumming. A sumptuous package.

Hiseman is also on **Group Sounds Four**

& **Five's** *Black & White Raga* (Jazz In Britain), pristine archive recordings from 1965 and 1966. Topped by Henry Lowther's scorching trumpet and future Soft Machine member Lyn Dobson's on point sax, these previously unreleased sessions burst with fiery interplay.

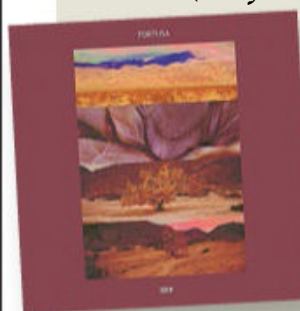
Danish guitarist **Jakob Bro's** *Uma Elmo* (ECM) possesses a gentle intensity. As dreamy arpeggios and lines radiate outward, they are joined by curling wisps of Arve Henriksen's keening trumpet and Jorge Rossy's impressionistic brushed cymbals and drums in tumbling themes as light as drifting snow. Serene but smouldering with a serious passion.

Glitchy percussion, twinkling chimes, subterranean bass tones, rasping sax and soothing synth constantly shimmer and swirl throughout **Tortusa's** *Bre* (Jazzland).

Tortusa (aka John Derek Bishop) carves sampled and processed sounds including contributions from Nordic post-jazz luminaries like guitarist Eivind Aarset into a seductive ambient heat haze of rarified beauty.

Cameron Graves is best known as Stanley Clarke's keyboardist. His new album *Seven* (Artistry Music) takes off at a turbo-charged pace with supple

acoustic piano and bass meshing with super-tight drumming and surging guitar. Though filled with intricate compositional detail, the velocity of each short track becomes a kind of exhilarating thrash jazz rock.



STRAWBS

Settlement ESOTERIC

Prog legends deliver wide-ranging musical masterclass.



After nearly 60 years in the saddle, the Strawbs could be forgiven at this stage of their career for following the lead of some of their peers and sitting back and taking life easy. But if that's their philosophy, then why on earth have they done *Settlement*? Because this follow-up to 2017's *The Ferryman's Curse* sees a band approaching their diamond anniversary challenging themselves, and in the process coming up with something special.

So many highlights, you'll want to listen to every song again.

At the heart of the matter is Dave Cousins, the man who has steered all things Strawbs since this trip started back in 1964. His voice these days is as becalmed and multilayered as ever, offering a folksy nuance, but always with a dark undertone. Lyrically, he reflects the unprecedented times we have been living in.

All this has been put into a musical ride that takes the listener on an elegant, yet deliberately bumpy journey. It begins with the title track, offering a nod to Link Wray in the way Cousins and Dave Lambert deliver a heavy guitar intro, before developing into a song with surprising elements of grunge. It's a surprisingly hardened beginning. But don't get too comfortable, because the appropriately titled *Strange Times* offers a more genteel treatise as Cousins croons in a somewhat subversive manner about current global concerns.

There are so many highlights that as every song finishes, you'll want to go back and listen to it again. For example, *Each Manner Of Man* is, without question, one of the most memorably melodic compositions the band have ever recorded. It's the sort of song that could have been a massive hit in the 70s, and should become a live favourite.

The Visit allows Cousins to indulge his banjo skills on a complex arrangement. And there's something mournful about *Quicksilver Days*. Cousins' voice has a sad, tearful quality as he reflects that: 'We lament for those whose blood has been spilt.' Against this, there's a downbeat musical backdrop reliant on Dave Bainbridge's keyboard skills.

We Are Everyone lifts the mood, as guest vocalist Cathryn Craig duets with Cousins on a track that talks, with positivity, about that which connects humanity being worth celebrating – a hymn of unity in such divisive times. The instrumental *Chorale* leads into closer *Champion Jack*, which swells from a low-key start to an orchestrally inspiring climax, in a fitting manner for a song celebrating the indomitable human spirit.

It's heartwarming and heartening that, seven decades into their career, the Strawbs have come up with an album that can stand proudly alongside any from their catalogue. Truly, age cannot wither them.

MALCOLM DOME

LIZZARD

Eroded PELAGIC

Grungy riffs and prog chops à la Française.

French power trio Lizzard continue to blend progressive metal and 90s alternative rock to produce potent results on their fourth album. The band's use of odd measures and creative syncopation suggest the influence of Tool, although lyrically they're less obtuse. Their sound is tight and punchy, singer and guitarist Mathieu Ricou often using his instrument percussively to set up a rhythm that allows bassist William Knox and drummer Katy Elwell to play counter rhythms.

When he's not riffing, Ricou explores the sonic possibilities of his guitar. For



his solo in *The Decline*, he unleashes waves of reverb, while the album is punctuated by three instrumental pieces that allow the frontman to paint soundscapes in sustain and melody. The title track is almost a ballad, as Ricou delivers an appeal to

a departed lover over a downbeat refrain but this is not an album drenched in gloom. There's a melancholic edge to *Blue Moon* but as soon as the trio gets heavy, they immediately crank up the energy levels. With the balance of heartfelt vulnerability and knotty riffs, Lizzard have crafted their most mature and accomplished work yet. **DW**

LÛN

Chamanes LUN-MUSIC.BANDCAMP.COM

French violin prodigy summons spirits of the earth and air.

Modern life really is rubbish if the current lurch back to nature is anything to go by. From Warduna's pre-Christian exhortations to Lunatic Soul's into-the-woods reveries, music's connection to its literal and metaphorical roots is stronger than ever.

The debut EP from French violinist Mayline Gautié - aka Lûn - sits perfectly within this wave of ancient-modernism. *Chamanes* translates as 'Shamans' - a pointer to where she's coming from. Its five tracks hover between worlds, conjuring spirits out of the mists as Gautié's violin dances around



hypnotic rhythms and wordless vocals.

Where her peers are rooted in Northern European traditions, Gautié travels further afield. The title track may conjure images of moonlit rituals in Scandinavian forests, but *Prāna* and *Lāsteio* gaze

further east towards the Balkans and Turkey, and the shores of North Africa.

It's several steps away from Gautié's time in orchestral proggers Adagio, let alone her stint in death metal band Idensity. And crucially, she's charting an entirely different course from that of her current contemporaries. Where it leads will be fascinating to see. **DEV**

THE MASTELOTTOS

A Romantic's Guide To King Crimson 7D MEDIA

Crimson sticksman goes looking for love songs in all the wrong places.

Current King Crimson drummer Pat Mastelotto and his wife Deborah attempt to make the case that romance and progressive rock aren't mutually antipathetic by rearranging 12 tracks from the prog icons' catalogue.

It's an interesting idea, but not necessarily a successful one. The mood throughout the album is more subdued than intimate, with Deborah Mastelotto delivering all the lyrics in a breathy, sing-speak whisper. This lack of variety and mood makes the music feel repetitive - even the twitchiness of *Elephant Talk* is given the same treatment.



The production and arrangements are dominated by wafting keyboards and Pat's steady, drum machine-like grooves. He gets busier in *Matte Kudasai*, decorating the sparse melody with free-flowing fills. On top of the beats, there are strings,

brass and woodwind, supplied by members of the Houston Symphony orchestra. The accordion on *Inner Garden* lends the track a French café vibe, while the trumpet and sax solos come from the Kenny G, Herb Alpert school of smooth. *A Romantic's Guide...* isn't an outright failure, but the flame of love flickers rather than roars. **DW**

SIMON MCKECHNIE

Retro BAD ELEPHANT MUSIC

Hugely ambitious and expertly realised collection from new BEM signing.

Easy descriptions and neat pigeonholes completely fail to capture the essence of multi-instrumentalist and songwriter Simon McKechnie's *Retro*. Opening track *The Origin Of Species* alone is split into eight parts over 20 minutes, moving dizzily through different musical sections and time signatures with abandon, and building an entire lyric utilising only text from Charles Darwin's historic treatise. There are lots of notes, but they're woven into tapestries of sound to be unpicked at over a considered pace of time rather than shredded out, prog metal style.



Elsewhere, the title track is built from bouncy electronics, snatches of parish church organ recitals 50s rock'n'roll guitar wrangling and slices of bubblegum pop, and *The Enchantress Of Numbers* is a multilayered paean to the life of mathematician

and mother of computer science Ada Lovelace (it also features a solo from fellow computing pioneer Charles Babbage's Difference Engine No 2).

McKechnie is a rare talent and this eclectic, yet entirely coherent, collection will delight fans of cross-genre explorations and quirky, inimitably British art rock. **GMM**

CLIVE MITTEN

Suite Cryptique: Recomposing Twelfth Night BUMNOTE

Virtual baton in hand, the former Twelfth Nighter revisits the past.

Clive Mitten has long dreamed of exploring the symphonic aspect of his former group Twelfth Night's output. During lockdown he sat down at a computer heaving with orchestral samples, and set to work on *Suite Cryptique*.

This two-hour, five-part instrumental opus sees Mitten reimagine, reorchestrate and rearrange music from the band's first three vinyl albums: *Live At The Target*, *Fact And Fiction* and *Live And Let Live*. But when he stresses this is not a covers album, he's not kidding. Some parts are recognisably retained, but Mitten also painstakingly re-versions some



passages as entirely new sequences. His 'post-minimal' style is inspired by everyone from Wagner to Reich, and these grandly cinematic pieces are rich with pizzicato strings, sweeping violins and burbling modern woodwinds. His clever

programming successfully disguises the fact that it's not the work of a real, 100-piece orchestra.

It remains to be seen whether ardent Twelfth Night fans will find his skew sacrilegious or fascinating. As a piece unto itself, though, *Suite Cryptique* is involved, involving and clearly a labour of love. **GRM**

OSIBISA

New Dawn MARQUEE

Veteran Afro-rock pioneers greet their sparkling next phase.

More than 50 years since Osibisa first enlivened UK clubs with their "criss-cross rhythms that explode with happiness", the pioneering Afro-rockers return with a beefy new line-up and their first new music since 2009's *Osee Yee*.

Any doubts expressed about the current band by guitarist Dell Richardson in *Prog 116* are dispelled as founding father Teddy Osei, original keyboardist Robert Bailey and longtime singer-bassist Gregg Kofi Brown (who wrote most of the 14 tracks) are joined by seven seasoned newcomers, including Osibisa's first female singers.



The vocals provide the freshest new flavours in the band's trademark soul/funk/jazz/pop melting pot. Among the sublimely soulful performances on here are Angie Amra Anderson dazzling on *Yen Kita Yen Sa's* gorgeous quiet storm and MOBO-

nominated Faye Jones bringing Billie Holiday lustre to *Dark Matter*, while Brown rails against corporate corruption (*Paper Dey Burn*) and police harassment (*No Fit 4 Street*).

The original Osibisa blasted fanfares, drum workouts and chants, but 2021's sleeker, more polished model is no less compelling. A new dawn indeed. **KN**



PROGRESSIVE FOLK

Paul Sexton traverses the UK for acoustic inclinations.

We begin on the edge of Dartmoor, in the village of South Brent, with stylish contemporary folk duo **Harbottle & Jonas**, who return with fifth album *The Beacon* (Brook View). Out on March 26, it's been previewed by the title track and the traditional *Black Is The Colour*. Like so much current music, it looks inward, but with great positivity, to home comforts, basic truths and devout hopes for the future.

Sharing lead vocals, David Harbottle and Freya Jonas are joined by violin and viola player Annie Baylis, who decorates an already verdant musical moorland. There's humour amid the beauty, too, notably in the character on *Whenever You See A Robin* who is "a cross between Clint Eastwood and Stig Of The Dump".

Then it's 600 miles north to the Scottish Highlands for **Broon's** self-released *Cosmic Ceilidh*, the instrumental accompaniment for a progressive folk hoedown with nods



to rock, Americana and jazz. Broon is multi-instrumentalist Steve Brown, he of the mandolin, guitars, bass, piano, accordion and drum loops. Written over six years in his home studio in Arisaig, its stylistic blend is what he drily calls "a game of three halves". Sometimes, as on *New Clear Days*, Brown mixes old-school

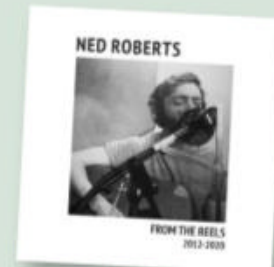
instrumentation with beats, adding rock guitar and a funk groove to such as *Seeds Beneath The Snow*. Others again, like *A Timeless Love*, are all pretty acoustics. With his command of loop sorcery and devotion to Rush, three tracks feature the ethereal drumming presence of Neil Peart. As Brown says, "file under world music, celtic fusion, prog croft", but most of all just enjoy, and genres be damned.

Iain Matthews extends his prodigious discography with the CD edition of *Fake Tan* (Talking Elephant). Released last year on vinyl, it sees him fortified from his association with crack Norwegian outfit the Salmon Smokers. The go-with-the-flow feel runs from the brooding sing-song opener *Same Old Man* to the banjo and pedal steel-driven *Keep On Sailing* at the other end. There's room for remakes of Dylan's *It Takes A Lot To Laugh, It Takes A Train To Cry* and, yes, Iain's chart triumph with Matthews Southern Comfort, Joni Mitchell's ever adaptable *Woodstock*, this time with almost a dub vibe.



Pete Guy now records under the name of one of his own tracks, **Feather House**, and excels on an EP led by the gorgeously delicate, string-laden *A Love To Heal*. Deserving approvals have already arrived from Tom Robinson and Travis frontman Fran Healy, and all four supporting songs mirror its promise.

Finally **Ned Roberts**, whose *Dream Sweetheart* album was a 2020 highlight, offers *From The Reels 2012-2020* (nedroberts.bandcamp.com), chiefly a selection of unreleased outtakes across eight years with producer Luther Russell. Ned's Dylan-esque troubadour spirit flourishes, with Joe Harvey-Whyte's lucent pedal steel adorning *Slower Than The Sea* and *The Drinker*.



JANE WEAVER

Flock FIRE RECORDS

Experimentalist goes pop but can't help bringing the sinister.



Somewhat channelling the spirits of Tom Tom Club, Goldfrapp and Norwegian electro star Annie, Jane Weaver's 12th album is her most pop and dancefloor-orientated yet. After a healthy, inquisitive career in which the Liverpool-born singer has forayed into indie and folktronica, as well as creating the genre-defying 2014 gem *The Silver Globe*, this is apparently the record she always wanted to make. Happily displaying her affection for funk and synthpop, it nevertheless co-opts witty world music tropes and elements of everything from drone to dub. Any originality lies in the fusion of disparate threads, but the overriding force is route one rhythm.



If it's a disco we're invited to, it's a cold, nervy, paranoid one.



Oddly, however, it's very toppey, with perfunctory bass. So if it's a disco at the end of the world we're invited to, it's a wilfully cold, nervy, paranoid one, as if we're in a near-future deserted shopping mall, shimmering with brightness and intimidatingly clean. At times the beat might be something Michael Rother would work some clipped guitar over, while other bubbling spells will have people lazily namechecking Giorgio Moroder when in fact they mean Cliff Martinez. And every time you begin to feel this could be Dua Lipa or Kylie, a brief warping of the sounds nudges everything closer to Tame Impala, and the influential shift in emphases they negotiated on 2015's *Currents*. It's possible to reshape a well-known Pet Shop Boys lyric and call this Spacemen 3 with a disco beat.

'Let's escape, you and me,' she sings on catchy closer *Solarised*, 'and return to a time that's more real'. And while the album wants to find a cheery innocence, the numbing, distancing effect of our locked-down world breaks in all over. This is no bad thing: the record's more interesting and less generic for its fretting crackle and hiss. *The Revolution Of Super Visions*, the highlight track, is a cheeky, squeaky, tribute to Parliament-Funkadelic, or a psalm to Prince, which for all its following those sacred maps owns its idiosyncratic phrasing and patterns. *Heartlow* plays out behind a veiling wash of mist in the manner of dreampop shoegazers Lush or Ride. Again, it's the unpredictable mix of all these usually miles apart elements that keeps things physical, not clinical. *Modern Reputation* whirrs and stings curiously; *Flock* itself is somehow both floaty and busy, culminating in what sounds like a barrage of flutes.

If this is Studio 54, it's been refurbished by the guys who did The Overlook Hotel in *The Shining*. Creepy, insistently a little bit off, and plenty of fun, it's a fascinating take on dancing while the world burns.

CHRIS ROBERTS

THE PROG COLLECTIVE

Worlds On Hold CLEOPATRA RECORDS

Spot the prog star with this collection of solid originals and cover curiosities.

Laterday Yes bassist and Prog Collective mainman Billy Sherwood has approached this latest multi-artist excursion with relish. Todd Rundgren, Steve Hillage, Derek Sherinian and Steve Hackett are just some of the musicians who crop up on *Worlds On Hold* - albeit on the seven cover versions, rather than the six original compositions featured here.

Anyone familiar with Sherwood's work will hear hints of his assorted other bands and projects. *Anything But Goodbye* features both Jon Davison and Patrick Moraz, and while *Brave New World* has Sonja Kristina handling some



of the lead vocals, the pitching and phrasing is remarkably Jon Anderson-esque in places.

Covering classics *Solsbury Hill*, *Nights In White Satin* and *A Whiter Shade Of Pale* may be of interest to some, but does raise the question of

whether Sherwood's time couldn't have been better spent on new material. More than anything, given that *Worlds On Hold*'s half-dozen original songs are arguably more Yes-like than the last Yes studio album and with nothing imminent from ARW, this might be as close as we're likely to get to new Yes music for some considerable time. **GMM**

PSYCHEDELIC PORN CRUMPETS

SHYGA! The Sunlight Mound MARATHON ARTISTS

Exhilarating fourth album from Perth psych mafia's junior members.

Psychedelic Porn Crumpets' mainman Jack McEwan was still a metal-loving schoolkid when he first heard fellow Perth natives Tame Impala. A decade or so on, he and his band have neatly plugged the psych-shaped gap left by Kevin Parker's departure for grown-up pop and Kanye West collaborations.

The Porn Crumpets have always been more energetically direct than many of their compadres, and their fourth album is a brilliant rush of noise and colour that sounds like it's ingested a shelf-full of LSD-spiked Haribo. McEwan originally wanted to make



a full-on metal record, and this imprint remains in the album's arena-sized drums and the flash guitar solo that lights up *Mundungus*. But no one is going to confuse *SHYGA! The Sunlight Mound* with Iron Maiden - the freak spirit freely flows through

Sawtooth Monkfish and *Mr Prism*.

In truth, there's little here that King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard, Pond or Tame Impala themselves couldn't do if they put their mind to it, but it's unlikely any of them would do it with such gleeful, who-gives-a-fuck abandon. Whatever they put in the Perth water supply, may it never run dry. **DEV**

THE STRANGER

Kaleidoscope OCTANE RECORDS/WILD THING

Australian prog metallers explore our shifting futures.

Following their well-received 2017 debut, *The Stranger*'s second potent and sometimes anguished album deals with subjects including social isolation and environmental concerns, as well as anxieties and aspirations for our future.

The Brisbane band wear their prog/power metal influences with pride, mixing in a hint of folk, more than a pinch of funk, some lovely vocal melodies and a swagger that belies their relatively short career thus far. *Eleventh Hour*, opens proceedings with evocative, cinematic synths that morph into an angry, tormented plea over climate change and destruction of



natural habitats, a subject returned to in *Creatures In The Canopy* with its somewhat more sorrowful approach. Elsewhere, *The Gemini* and *Siren* manage the clever trick of mixing 80s keyboard sounds with head-nodding metal grooves, with the latter

track departing further into the realms of substantial, heavy funk. The band also showcase depth and dimension via short acoustic guitar instrumental *Coming Home* and the measured swell and fall of the title track. The overall result is an excellent release that fans of melodic djent, heavy folk rock and funky metal should check out. **GMM**

NIK TURNER & YOUTH

Interstellar Energy YOUTH SOUNDS/CADIZ

Space is still the place for ex-Hawkwind sax traveller.

Long estranged from Dave Brock's Hawkwind brand, Nik Turner has remained closest to the freewheeling ethos of the group he helped form, travelling the globe and playing with anyone up for a cosmic jam.

In 2017, Turner took up snooker legend and prog champ Steve Davis' invitation to create a live improvisation at Glastonbury under the direction of Killing Joke bassist/polymath Youth. The pair went on to record 2018's *Pharaohs From Outer Space*, rekindle the Glasto space jam in 2019, and then reunite last year at Konk Studios to record *Interstellar Energy* with London's Space Falcons.



Originally released on Youth's label for 2020's RSD, it's possible to bask again in six dynamic, kosmische workouts that instantly enjoy liftoff on the 10-minute *Space*, Turner's sax laying motifs over its clanking undertow, countered by Chris Barnett's

keening violin. Crucially, each track boasts its distinctive mood; eastern drones glazing *Cracker*, Spanish-flavoured strings spacing *Tesla*, grimy Hawkwind guitar attacking *Sygnus*, psychedelic keyboards blanketing *Slider*, with only *Solar Probe* losing its momentum. Long may this maverick duo's spirit remain unfettered. **KN**

TUSMØRKE

Nordisk Krim KARISMA

Doomy Norwegians dig deeper into horrible histories.

Norwegian four-piece Tusmørke combine a fascination for gruesome medieval tales with a passion for early-70s folk rock and prog – something instantly evident from the fluttering Canterbury-style flute, noodling synth lines and gristly organ of opening track *Ride The Whimbrel*, before an inviting wah-wah motif reels the listener in beneath talk of flying away on the back of a large wading bird.

If that hints at witchcraft, the darkness descends further on subsequent tracks. Whispered, conspiratorial chatter about ancient burials punctuates *Mumia*, while *Dogs*



Flesh goes all out with horror movie-esque sonic necromancy, descending into discordant cacophony, giggling child ghost cackles and echoing wind chimes. The portentous spoken word passage of *Mysteries Of Sacrifice* colours in the picture further: 'Drugged

beyond all conscience and all sense... bludgeoned in the head, the throat is cut, ergot and rye rumbling in his gut...'

Now and then, it feels like the spicy narrative is hiding a lack of musical flavour (the 14-minute *Moss Goddess* descends into a doomy, dirgey plod), but elsewhere it's an enjoyably feisty yarn. Don't have nightmares! **JS**

WHEEL

Resident Human ODYSSEY MUSIC

Nineties-inspired prog metallers keep spinning.

When Wheel debuted in early 2019 with *Moving Backwards*, their website contained the quote, "While we wait for that next Tool album, we thought we'd just make what we'd want to hear!" They weren't joking: their vocals, crescendos and shifting time signatures all echoed prog-metal's big daddies with little shame or embarrassment.

Two years on, little has changed. *Resident Human* is packed with the same crawling prog metal as before, neatly dividing its songs between wonky four-minute anthems and much longer, more climatic epics. *Movement*



condenses angular riffing and snappy breakdowns into a bitesized lead single. Meanwhile, the 10-minute title track gradually escalates like the prior album's *Wheel* and *Lacking*. Singer James Lascelles remains as Maynard James Keenan-esque as before;

his roar over *Hyperion*'s polyrhythmic climax is reminiscent of that on Tool's *Schism*.

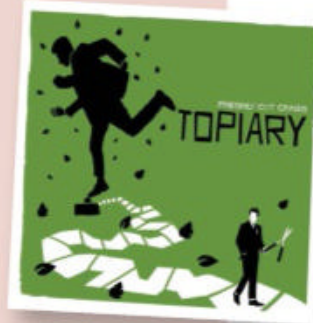
All this makes *Resident Human* feel like more of a twin to its predecessor than a proper successor. It won't win over the naysayers, but those who want more of what brought Wheel to the dance should be satiated. **MM**

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Grant Moon has a rummage down the back of the Prog sofa for the ones that nearly got away...



Freshly Cut Grass are a new band made up of recent graduates of the Royal Welsh College Of Music And Drama, and their highly promising debut's well worth a token. Bright, brassy and brimming with ideas, *Topiary* (self-released) is clipped from prog's jazzier (h)edges, its nods to Zappa, Herbie Hancock, Steely Dan and Snarky Puppy smuggled in via accessible, clever tunes. Their funky blend of mathy guitars, clever horns and sultry female vocals makes The Grass pretty unique in their, er, field.



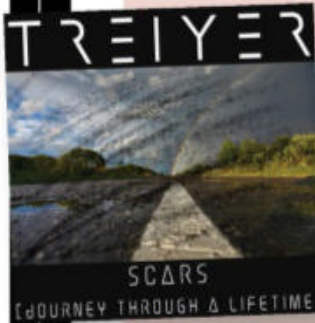
Speaking of horns, Samuel Sharp (formerly known as Lossy) returns with *Patterns Various* (Boot Cycle Audio), a collection of "cyclic pieces for saxophone and electronics" inspired by "patternistic phenomena". This is lovely, heady stuff. Sharp's sweet sax lines are treated with digital delays to supply rhythmic movement, making for minimalist, hypnotically beautiful music that's part Steve Reich, part Theo Travis.

Power Trip Career Aspirations and *Inevitable*

Union Of Contentious Factions are just two tracks on *Síndrome De Estocolmo* (lucaslee.bandcamp.com), Lucas Lee's deep dive into prog's Crimson netherworld. Discordant pianos, doomy electric guitars and a narrative about an evil state assuming control will give you shivers down the spine. Multi-instrumentalist Lee is well up to the task and guest drummer Marco Minnemann's on his usual unimpeachable form here.



In their time Argentina's Treiye have been invited to support Steve Hackett, Sons Of Apollo and Anathema, and their debut, *Scars (Journey Through A Lifetime)* (treiye.bandcamp.com), is a passionate, ambitious coming-of-age tale. Lead singer Paul Parisi's metal rasp is definitely 'an acquired taste', but guest guitar slots from Jakko Jakszyk, Steve Rothery and Hackett himself add class and credibility.



Lighter by comparison, *Let's Go There* (Turn Blue) is the affectionately rendered new album from Essex artist Stewart

Clark, who has a winning way of taking conventional song forms and giving them an oblique, proggy skew, be it a romantic acoustic piece (*When*), or some XTC-worthy pop (*I'm Scared Of Music*).

Rising Australian acoustic duo Opal Ocean take Rodrigo y Gabriela's genre-bending, nylon-strung talents and dial up the prog – their infectious frenetic LP *The*



Hadal Zone even features a bonus turn from Dream Theater's Jordan Rudess. And if DT's your thing then do check out *Sonic Birth* (Metalville), the grandiose, Queensrÿche-alÿche debut from The Progressive Souls Collective, an impressive line-up of session guns assembled by guitarist Florian Zepf.

For pomposity-free virtuosity dosed with off-the-wall humour, nothing beats Detroit's Danny Mulligan, aka Exodus

To Infinity (Vortex Studios). His brilliantly imaginative *Archetype Asylum* dishes up a mash of metal, musicals, bluegrass and jazz that'll leave you with a dumb smile on your face, and maybe even a mild concussion.



JON ANDERSON

Olias Of Sunhillow ESOTERIC

Yes icon's much-loved solo debut gets new sparkle.



In 1975, the five members of Yes Mk V – Chris Squire, Steve Howe, Alan White, Patrick Moraz and Jon Anderson – took a break from the day job to record solo material. The experiment, in the main, worked. The resulting albums displayed different aspects of the virtuosity of their mother group (or in White's case, inspired collaboration).

Olias is not just a collection of songs, but an entire universe.

However, it was Jon Anderson's work that caused the biggest stir. Recorded alone in his garage at home, his first solo release became the most sophisticated garage (one-man) band album of all time. *Olias Of Sunhillow* offered not just a collection of songs, but also an entire universe, complete, at times, with its own language.

Inspired by Roger Dean's design for the cover of Yes' 1971 album *Fragile*, the concept tells the tale of four tribes on the planet Sunhillow – Nagrunium, Asatranium, Oractaniom and Nordranious, fact fans – each representing a different aspect of musical consciousness. When a volcano erupts and threatens the planet, the magician Olias builds an ark (the Moorglade) with his cohorts (Ranyart and Qoqua) for the population to escape. This richness of detail coursed through every aspect of the project from the musical representation of the characters to David Fairbrother-Roe's artwork.

From a distance of 45 years, *Olias* sounds quite extraordinary, a missing piece in the Yes jigsaw. The fact Anderson played and sung every note on it himself, learning how to play instruments from scratch made it all the more remarkable. Its oriental motifs and cascading synths led people to believe it was actually Vangelis playing, a myth debunked, like many others in the splendid notes and interview with Anderson in this new edition. There's tribal drumming, a proto R2-D2 on *Dance Of Ranyart/Olias (To Build The Moon)*, generous helpings of mysticism, lots of harp, aural babbling brooks and Anderson's beautifully pure tones, often multilayered within an inch of their life.

A whole career could have been built from *Olias Of Sunhillow*, with stage shows, films and books around the concept – however time marched on, and, within months, Yes were back on tour and recording again. The album's celestial grace, such a positive boon in early 1976, was much less so in the years that immediately followed, and *Olias* fell somewhat off the radar. Adored by those who knew, it didn't retain the staying power of the era's other (largely) self-played masterpiece, *Tubular Bells*. Anderson still talks of making the album's follow up, *The Songs Of Zamran: Son of Olias*; but until then, this splendid remastered double edition of the original with its 5.1 will more than suffice.

DARYL EASLEA

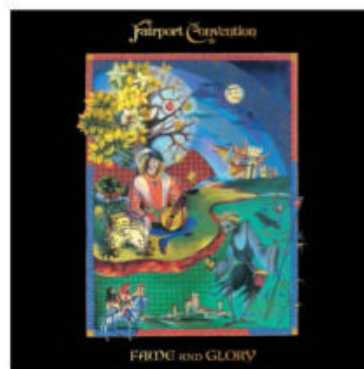
FAIRPORT CONVENTION

Fame And Glory CHERRY RED

Former fans-only collection is officially released with extras.

Fame And Glory gathers together music that Fairport Convention recorded for Alan Simon's rock operas *Excalibur*, *Gaia* and *Anne De Bretagne*. Originally released on their Matty Groves label in 2008, it's one of their best releases this century. Fairport enjoy playing material written by other musicians and, while their recent albums have been eclectic and charming affairs, they've erred towards a kind of nostalgia and gently joviality. But this music, written by Simon, is a more dramatic proposition, a calorie-packed smörgåsbord full of legends, dragons and mysticism. There's even intrigue on *Duchess Anne*, striding into battle with the exclamation, 'We will crush them to the ground.' And although these songs are taken out of their dramatic context, they hang together well as a collection.

Fairport are joined by some special guests: John Wetton sings on *Lugh* where he's joined by John Helliwell on saxophone and clarinet, and Martin Barre who weighs in with some big chords and fluid lead guitar. Jacqui



McShee also makes an appearance, on a sensuous live version of *Morgane* with Simon on flute and former Fairporter Dan Ar Braz on guitar, and she's accompanied by strings on *Sacrifice*.

Although the music on *Fame And Glory* is often denser, heavier

and rockier than one might expect from the band, it's deftly arranged and played with a briskness throughout. There are also some more subtle interludes, such as Rik Sanders' duet with Laurence Tixier on hurdy-gurdy on the fleeting *Danza Del Crepusculo*. But importantly it still feels like a Fairport album. Simon Nicol is in particularly good voice, and one of the most moving songs is *The Soldier* with Chris Leslie solo on acoustic guitar. They play a supercharged jig on *Castle Rock* with another alumnus, Dave Mattacks on drums, and *Pilgrims* is an introduction to "the sacred Isle of Avalon" complete with uilleann pipes. The album closes with one of the three extra tracks, *Goodbye My Friends*, which is imbued with the sweet sorrow of departure. **MB**

GLOBAL VILLAGE TRUCKING COMPANY

Smiling Revolution ESOTERIC

Idealistic 70s commune dwellers truck again.

Operating out of their Norfolk farm commune in the early 70s, the Global Village Trucking Company could have been the last genuine British underground band, flying counterculture idealism and relentless optimism against incoming musical trends, shunning the evil music biz and playing many benefits and free festivals. The press called them the UK's Grateful Dead, by the time their self-titled sole album emerged in 1975, the Globs, as followers called them, had disbanded.

Spread over two discs, *Smiling Revolution* presents their album as originally intended when the Globs recorded it at Rockfield Studios in November 1974 (for a label that was started by future Stiff supremo Dave Robinson but never got off the ground), along with tracks drawn from three Peel sessions and four songs contributed to 1973's *Greasy Truckers Live At Dingwalls Dance Hall* benefit set.

If the Globs' live shows were renowned for wild, improvised jamming that could go anywhere in the cosmos,



studio recordings such as *On The Judgement Day*, *Smiling Revolution* and Americana-presaging *Lasga's Farm*, all written by singer-guitarist Jon Owen, can't help but surprise with their vibrant arrangements, melodic flair and beautifully dynamic playing. They

effectively gave their happy hippie ethos a commercial mainstream sheen. It helps greatly that Owen's songs are handled with such telepathic sensitivity by keyboardist James Lascelles, lead guitarist Michael Medora, bassist John McKenzie and drummer Simon Stewart; they reach transcendental peaks when allowed to stretch out on awesomely bonkers locomotive fantasy ride *Skytrain* and glistening cerebral mantra of *Watch Out There's A Mind About*.

Like old folk field recordings, it sounds like a document from another era, before counterculture idealism buckled under corporate containment. It's a welcome burst of sunshine for dark times, even if it omits the timeless philosophy of *The Sun Can Always Catch You With Your Trousers Down*. **KN**

PROCESSION

Still/Fatherland EP/Living In Between EP PROCESSION1995.BANDCAMP.COM

Long-lost US college misfits re-emerge.

There are 'lost' albums and there's Procession's *Still*, which, it's fair to say, was never really found in the first place. Back in the mid-90s, when Bradley Sroka and some college friends formed a band in Maryland, they bravely vowed to ignore the prevailing trends of post-grunge and smart-ass college rock, took their cues from The Cure, Pink Floyd and Rush, and found themselves roundly ignored.

Twenty-five years later, though, he's offered up their sole LP and two EPs for re-appraisal via Bandcamp, and there are undeniably tantalising glimpses of what might have been. *Ginseng* has a seriously captivating symphonic prog sweep that endures despite the lo-fi production's glaring inability to do justice to the banks of celestial synth atmospherics engulfing the piece (it was remastered from an original cassette-only release, so there's only so much we can expect on that front). *Fermata* is similarly bewitching, as Petra Safarova's folky, untutored voice taps into mezzo-soprano territory as Sroka's keyboard



skyscraping recalls Popol Vuh's spiritually charged soundtrack work for Werner Herzog. At other times, their youthful guilelessness lets them down: Safarova's voice lacks the strength to bring *All The Best Things* to life, but there are appealing echoes of Elizabeth

Fraser in her ethereally inclined take on closing meditation *Silent*.

Fatherland EP (1996) takes a more guitar-led approach, with hints of Slint's post-rock blueprint now visible, but the songs are meandering, unfocused affairs suggesting a band losing sight of their strongest suits. Guitarist Wes Stitt doesn't seem like a natural choice to take over on vocals from the college-bound Safarova for the five tracks of 1997's *Living In Between*, but his wobbly indie kid tones are backed by some likeably melodic alt-pop. It's in the unorthodox time-signatures of *Post* that Procession intrigue, though, suggesting a proggy direction they might have expanded on had the crushing indifference of their peers not caused them to split soon afterwards. **JS**

BJØRN RIIS

Lullabies In A Car Crash/Forever Comes To An End KARISMA

Airbag guitarist's first two solo sets revisited.

When Airbag's frontman Asle Tostrup chose to take a break from the band to spend a year travelling, chief songwriter Bjørn Riis channelled his focus into a debut solo album, *Lullabies In A Car Crash*. Seven years on, it's reissued on a white vinyl double LP format along with its solo successor, 2017's *Forever Comes To An End*.

On its release, *Prog* summarised *Lullabies* as Riis "swerving into the slow lane", and there's no doubt it's a quieter, more introspective affair than Airbag's anthemically charged art rock. He's still wearing his Floyd influences on his sleeve, but it's perhaps a different era of that band's output that springs to mind. The 10-minute anthem to alienation, *Stay Calm*, could be on a Waters-penned sequel to *The Final Cut* as a tinny bedroom acoustic introduces our hero softly enquiring, 'Did your father give you hell, did you mother try to break you down?' That theme of alienation continues through a ruminative, atmospheric journey, with moments of claustrophobic angst



offering arresting pace-breaks, as with the prog metal riffs punctuating *The Chase Master*.

Forever Comes To An End sets its stall out more stridently, with the rising tension and pounding, melodramatic riffing that introduces the title track, but the focus turns out to be

external rather than introspective. By the time lyrics and vocals first feature, on cut-adrift third track *The Waves*, the picture of heartbreak gets gradually more explicit as the mood drifts from sadness (in the semi-ambient, string-laden desolation of *Absence*) to fight-or-flight (the urgent, chase-scene soundtrack vibes of *Getaway*) to *Winter's* bitter resignation ('*She stole my heart and she turned it into stone*').

Piano-led closer *Where Are You Now* keeps the emotional climate intense through some beautifully despairing guitar exorcisms until our hero forlornly begs his errant paramour to 'take my hand, make me whole'. And *Prog* is left thinking, if that paramour remains unmoved, they're probably not worth bothering with anyway. **JS**

BIG BIG TRAIN

The Underfall Yard ENGLISH ELECTRIC

BBT's pivotal 2009 masterpiece, remixed and remastered.



While promoting their acclaimed 2009 album *The Underfall Yard*, Big Big Train took a punt and gave away the monolithic, 23-minute title track free via their website. This counter-intuitive gambit paid off. Years later, with their fortunes flourishing, BBT polled their Facebook fans (affectionately dubbed 'Passengers'), and learned that this generous/shrewd gesture had led to many thousands of sales of the parent album. In turn, that LP was the gateway to the band's world for a large proportion of the receptive audience that followed them ever since. To this day that fan favourite still shifts units and remains their best-selling release to date.



The definitive edition of a modern masterpiece.



At that time, the band were 19 years, six albums and three singers in. This was their first outing with their new find, frontman, flautist and multi-instrumentalist David Longdon. From the a cappella choral lines of opener *Evening Star* and into the cascading rounds of *Master James Of St George*, it was clear his seasoned vocals gave fresh depth and soul to bassist/writer Greg Spawton's ever more refined compositions. With *Master James* and defining gut-puncher *Victorian Brickwork*, Spawton took the trauma of his father's recent death and couched it in textured, complex and listenable progressive rock. Drawing on grand heroics in the stirring *Winchester Diver* and the genius of Brunel in the title opus, Spawton was developing a unique way with historical English themes, setting the template for BBT's distinctive musical identity.

So many sonic trademarks were coming together for the band at this point. Former member Andy Poole did much of the under-the-bonnet stuff on the original; on this remixed remaster BBT's trusted engineer Rob Aubrey buffs to a new sheen a record that shone anyway. The work of (soon-to-be official) members Nick D'Virgilio and Dave Gregory gleams anew, as do the baleful, colliery band tones of Dave Desmond's brass ensemble.

The extras here are three new recordings by the 'classic' BBT line-up, including now-former members Gregory, violinist Rachel Hall and keyboardist Danny Manners. With a shiny new brass prelude and updated guitar solo from guest Francis Dunnery, *The Underfall Yard 2020* is a vibrant read that shows what a difference a decade, live experience and true chemistry can make. *Songs From The Shoreline* re-points *Victorian Brickwork* and reunites it with later EP track *Fat Billy Shouts Mine*, and the brand new *Brew And Burgh* is an elegantly simple, sentimental Spawton anthem about the fellowship found among the band, and their Passengers too. It's a sweet coda to this, the definitive edition of a modern masterpiece.

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SPIRIT

Son Of America ESOTERIC

Expanded compilation of unreleased material from Randy California and co.

Originally issued in 2005 as a double CD, *Son Of America* features unreleased demos, songs and instrumentals recorded by Randy California, either solo or with Spirit, between 1983 and 1996, just before his death the following year.

Given its origins, it's of surprisingly high quality: this is no rag bag of sub-standard recordings thrown out to cash in on the abiding interest in the guitarist and Spirit.

There are some real gems here. A cover of Dylan's *The Times They Are A-Changin'* is spellbinding, better than the version on Spirit's *Spirit Of '76* album. The first CD also includes the stylish instrumental *Space Jam*, which sounds typical of the psychedelic blues style on which California built his reputation.

The second disc mostly features alternative takes of tracks that had previously been included on the 2000 compilation *Cosmic Smile*. It's an eclectic collection: *One By One* wouldn't be out of place on a Daryl Hall & John Oates album, *Love From The Heart* is more in the Simon & Garfunkel vein,



Lover Man has an eccentric psychedelic pulse, and *The River* sounds magnificently like Traffic reimagined by Crosby Stills & Nash.

This new reissue of *Son Of America* adds a third CD, containing a live Spirit performance recorded for radio station KPFK-FM in Los

Angeles on April 4, 1993. Featuring Randy California alongside bassist Scott Monahan and drummer Ed Cassidy, it's completely undoctored, right down to the bonkers exchanges between the three. Here, the trio's presentation of songs like *Nature's Way*, 1984, *Fresh Garbage* and *Love From Here* is stunning. Naturally the music is predicated on California's unmistakable guitar blow-outs, but the others are crucial as well. There's also an outrageously confident cover of Hendrix's *Red House* that underlines Spirit's bluesy authenticity.

Anyone who already owns the original 2005 edition of *Son Of America*, will have to decide whether this is worth buying again for the live CD, but any true Spirit fan will want to hear this. **MD**

T2

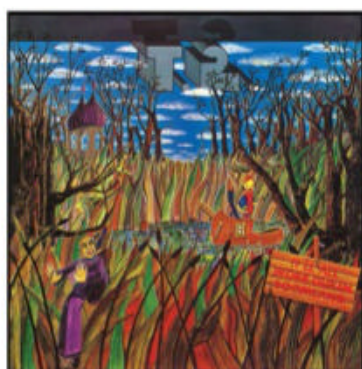
It'll All Work Out In Boomland ESOTERIC

Remastered, three-CD reissue of unsung early progressive classic.

There's a brief window at the end of the 60s and start of the 70s where 'progressive' referred to a much broader spectrum of music than what the world now thinks of as 'prog', a glorious melting pot of post-psychedelia, art rock and proto-metal that gave us Jethro Tull, Groundhogs and Wishbone Ash, Stray and countless more.

T2 are the great lost band of that era, a power trio who pushed the format of what rock could be, yet quickly dissolved and faded into music's back history. But they left some amazing recordings behind, compiled on this three-CD collection, which includes their one and only album, an unreleased second, and demos for a third.

Led by singing drummer/songwriter Pete Dunton, but powered by wunderkind guitarist Keith Cross, there's plentiful evidence of what an extraordinary band T2 were on the peculiarly titled *It'll All Work Out In Boomland* (matched by its bizarre, outsider cover art). Opener *In Circles* blasts off with a jabbing, pulse-



quickenning riff counterpointed by Dunton's wonderfully light voice, but it's Cross' ferocious technique that grabs the attention - at the time, he was hailed as the new Eric Clapton, but frankly he's miles better. The Floyd-ish melancholy of *JLT* brings a complete change of

tone, dancing piano and harpsichord building towards a majestic horn-driven motif. But it's the astonishing *No More White Horses* that epitomises the T2 sound. A growling, sinister chug explodes into a fretboard freak-out and more brass, before Dunton's beautifully sad vocal pulls it together - essentially The Stooges meet The Moody Blues. Oh, and the second side is a 21-minute track entitled *Morning* that ebbs, flows and surges, but never dawdles.

Incredibly, their unreleased second album may be even better, whether it's the acrobatic riffage of *CD*, the lithe jazz rock of *Fantasy* or the towering Mellotron epic *T2*. And even the demos made after Cross left are excellent. For lovers of the secret history of prog, this is an absolute must. **JB**

JAPAN

Quiet Life BMG

Thrilling three-disc reissue casts Japan as decade-defining pioneers.



When Japan were recording *Quiet Life* at Air Studios, Kate Bush, invited by producer John Punter, sat cross-legged on the floor while he played her the sorrowful, melodramatic six-minute track *Despair*. "Oh wow," she said as it faded. "It's so big, isn't it?" It was big, but it was also sparse, subdued. Influenced by Bowie's *Low*, as was most art rock of the era, *Despair* described a path Japan would soon stride along. Yet this profoundly melancholy album mainly did its serious young man brooding through throbbing rhythms and exploratory electronica.

Quiet Life heralded a new decade, romance replacing the riff.

It never felt chilly or scientific. The mix of self-taught, innovative musicians within the band made for a warm embrace of sounds, with David Sylvian's angst-relishing vocals conveying what the grooves suggested implicitly. Often mocked at the time, 40 years on *Quiet Life* and the two subsequent Japan albums - *Gentlemen Take Polaroids* and *Tin Drum* - are now recognised as major works, several heavens above many who were then considered peers on grounds of wardrobe.

Few had seen it coming. Pretty boy peacocks in swanky suits and coiffured hair, Japan had blazed through two new wave, sleaze-glam, guitar-based albums before this epiphany. Now they ventured into Moroder-esque white disco (they'd worked with him on *Life In Tokyo*, but were insistent Punter produced this album, having loved his Roxy Music work) while counterbalancing that with Sylvian-led sadder-than-thou laments. From the title track's pulse-beat, knowing refrain of 'Boys', and winking line 'now the times are changing', through the keening narcissism of *Fall In Love With Me* to the goth-under-a-strobe seduction of *Halloween*, the record rings with revelations. Here's a group realising how much more there was to them than they'd thought. The cover of *All Tomorrow's Parties* is mesmeric, *Alien* is far out with ideas, and grandiose finale *The Other Side Of Life* is a study of the beauty of ennui. Arguably best of all, however, is *In Vogue*, which makes you wonder if you're underwater, its long fade glowing with Richard Barbieri's subtle interjections, Rob Dean's circling guitar and Mick Karn's sublime slides. Nobody else ever got the mood this right.

Released in most territories in December 1979 but in the UK in January '80, *Quiet Life* heralded a new (art) decade, romance replacing the riff. This reissue adds a cool mixes/singles set (*European Son* would have suited the album), and a fan's tinny live cassette bootleg recorded at The Budokan in March '80 where the music can't be heard above the screams. This all-time great is where Japan learned to whisper.

CHRIS ROBERTS



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KATE BUSH: EVERY ALBUM, EVERY SONG

Bill Thomas SONICBOND PUBLISHING

Well-researched track-by-track trawl.

The output from the *On Track...* series continues at a prolific pace with classic prog acts getting plenty of attention. As labours of love often written by fans, the quality and styles of writing within of this series of books can be a little variable, but in tackling Kate Bush's back catalogue, Bill Thomas has put in some exhaustive research.

While there are no new interviews in this compact paperback tome, he has trawled 40-odd years' worth of music press, radio and TV archives for the reclusive singer's insights into the stories and processes behind each song. Everything is included here, from B-sides to live cuts to guest spots.



Remember *Don't Give Up* with Peter Gabriel? Of course. *Do Bears...* with Rowan Atkinson for Comic Relief? Possibly not.

While there's nothing particularly new here, Bush fans who don't have access to early-80s copies of *ZigZag* magazine will still find thoughts from the singer they haven't

previously come across. The appraisals of the songs aren't entirely uncritical - Thomas isn't afraid to acknowledge the frustration of some fans hearing guest vocalists such as Stephen Fry taking the spotlight on *50 Words For Snow*, for instance. But when summing up the enduring appeal of her best work, he does a sterling job. **JS**

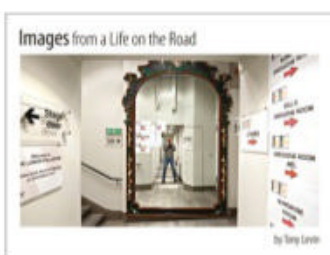
IMAGES FROM LIFE ON THE ROAD

Tony Levin TONYLEVIN.COM

Simple and beautiful images from a lifetime's touring.

Tony Levin is one of the most well-loved men in music. Over his five decades of playing, the bassist has been able to navigate many feuding factions and hot-headed visionaries with his disarming demeanour.

Levin has meticulously catalogued the shows he's played across his career, gaining the sort of access that other photographers could only dream of. This collection of images begins in the 70s and is divided into all aspects of touring: Travel, A Look Around, Backstage, and so on. In doing so, the disconnect between the bright lights and the humdrum is writ very large.



There's a great sense of humour and joy throughout. The opening pictures of Richard Macphail and Jerry Marotta on Peter Gabriel's 1977 UK tour see Macphail using an emergency telephone on

the hard shoulder of an urban stretch of motorway, while Marotta stands by the door of an old Triumph, looking on at the herd of cows blocking the road. These are offset by 200 or so intimate and breathtaking pictures of Robert Fripp, Gabriel, Sting et al onstage - a timely reminder of both the rapture of live performance and Levin's own place at the heart of things. **DE**

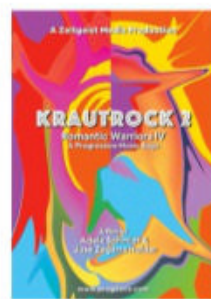
ROMANTIC WARRIORS IV: KRAUTROCK, PART 2

Various ZEITGEIST MEDIA

Revealing footage of 60s/70s southern German scene.

Filmmakers Adele Schmidt and José Zagarra Holder are tenacious in their ongoing quest to meticulously document progressive music's various tributaries. Every bit as enthralling and as exhaustive as their previous explorations of *Rock In Opposition* and the *Canterbury Scene*, this second instalment of a projected trilogy covering krautrock spends more than two hours on the bands that emerged in southern Germany including Xhol Caravan, Amon Düül II, Guru Guru, Kraan and many others.

Covering the galvanising role of political protest, LSD, and English and American pop's impact on the native



scene, this DVD is rammed with rare footage of groups in their hairy heyday, interlaced with contemporary commentary from several of those early movers and shakers.

With the energy and vitality that animated much of the music driving the narrative, there's little nostalgia here.

Instead, it feels like eavesdropping on survivors describing the aftermath of a cultural hurricane that swept them up and how, decades on, they have come to terms with that part of their lives. Away from the obvious big names, lesser-known outfits get their spotlight moment, ensuring this is a detailed and penetrating account. **SS**

FANFARE FOR THE UNCOMMON MAN

Various CHERRY RED

Official, all-star fanfare for Keith Emerson.



Tricky things, tribute concerts. At their best, they can be a poignant remembrance capturing the sense and creative spirit of the person in life. At their worst, a bloated, over-indulgence where the object of the event becomes a mere bystander, lost in the all-star crowd.



There's plenty of Emerson's showmanship here.



By and large, this 2016 show hosted by Marc Bonilla's band stays more or less the right side of the line. During the two-and-a-half-hour running time, an array of heavyweight veterans including Eddie Jobson, Brian Auger, Steve Lukather, Vinnie Colaiuta, Jorden Rudess, Steve Porcaro and others are all there to pay tribute.

Inevitably, perhaps, things are rocked up to the max with Bonilla's gritty high-powered attack abrading the various pieces they tackle. Occasionally, "Too much, man!" really is just too much. *Hoedown*, featuring Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter as one of three guitarists trading licks, plods along, and knockabout filler such as *Nutrocker* and *Are You Ready, Eddy* are somewhat superfluous while old favourites such as *Tarkus*, *Karn Evil 9*, *Lucky Man* and a reliably chugging *Fanfare For The Common Man*, here augmented with a substantial brass section, all receive a sleek AOR sheen performed with adrenalised enthusiasm, giving everyone their moment in the spotlight.

Part of what made Emerson tick was his showmanship and there's plenty of it here. While participants are perhaps only reflecting this aspect of Keith's psychological makeup, sometimes things can feel a touch ostentatious and gauche.

Elsewhere though, such moments are subtly offset, capturing Emerson's other personality trait: a composer of power and sophistication. His son, Aaron, performing his own heartfelt composition, *Ride*, reflects that lyrical sweetness of his father's work. An instrumental version of all parts of *The Endless Enigma* with Rachel Flowers' flawless interpretation of the fugue draws deserved applause, while CJ Vanston's romantic flourishes during an expansive solo in *Take A Pebble* add depth and warmth. Though hailing from different ends of ELP's output, what these performances have in common is that the inner music that spawned the notes really comes through.

Kae Matsumoto's sensitive rendition of *Prelude To A Hope* opens the concert and, in many ways, steals the show by stealth, providing ample testimony that, even in his final decade, Emerson's melodic capabilities remained absolute. This piece on its own, a quiet solo voice in among the jubilant onstage throng, is more than a potent reminder that his passing was such a tragedy and why he's much missed.

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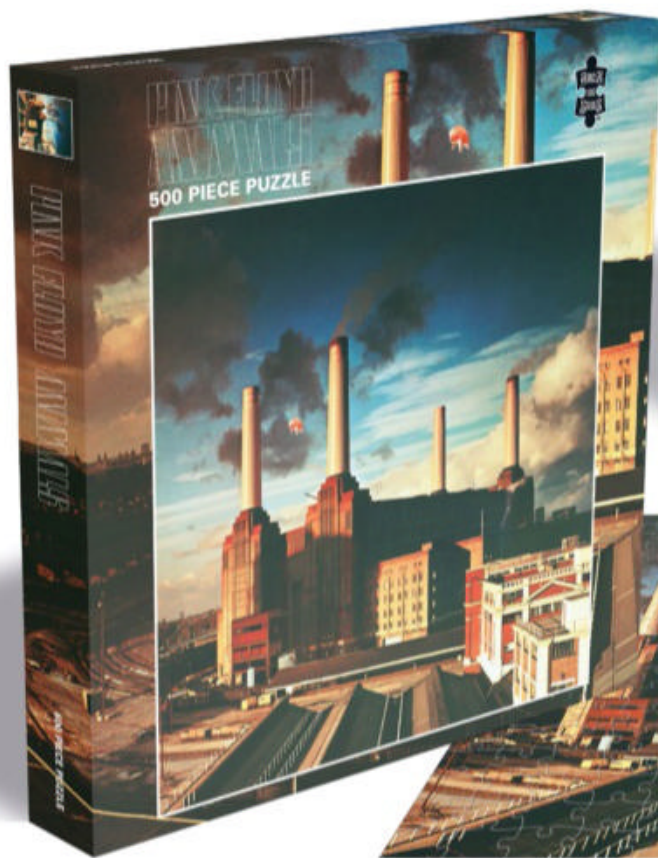
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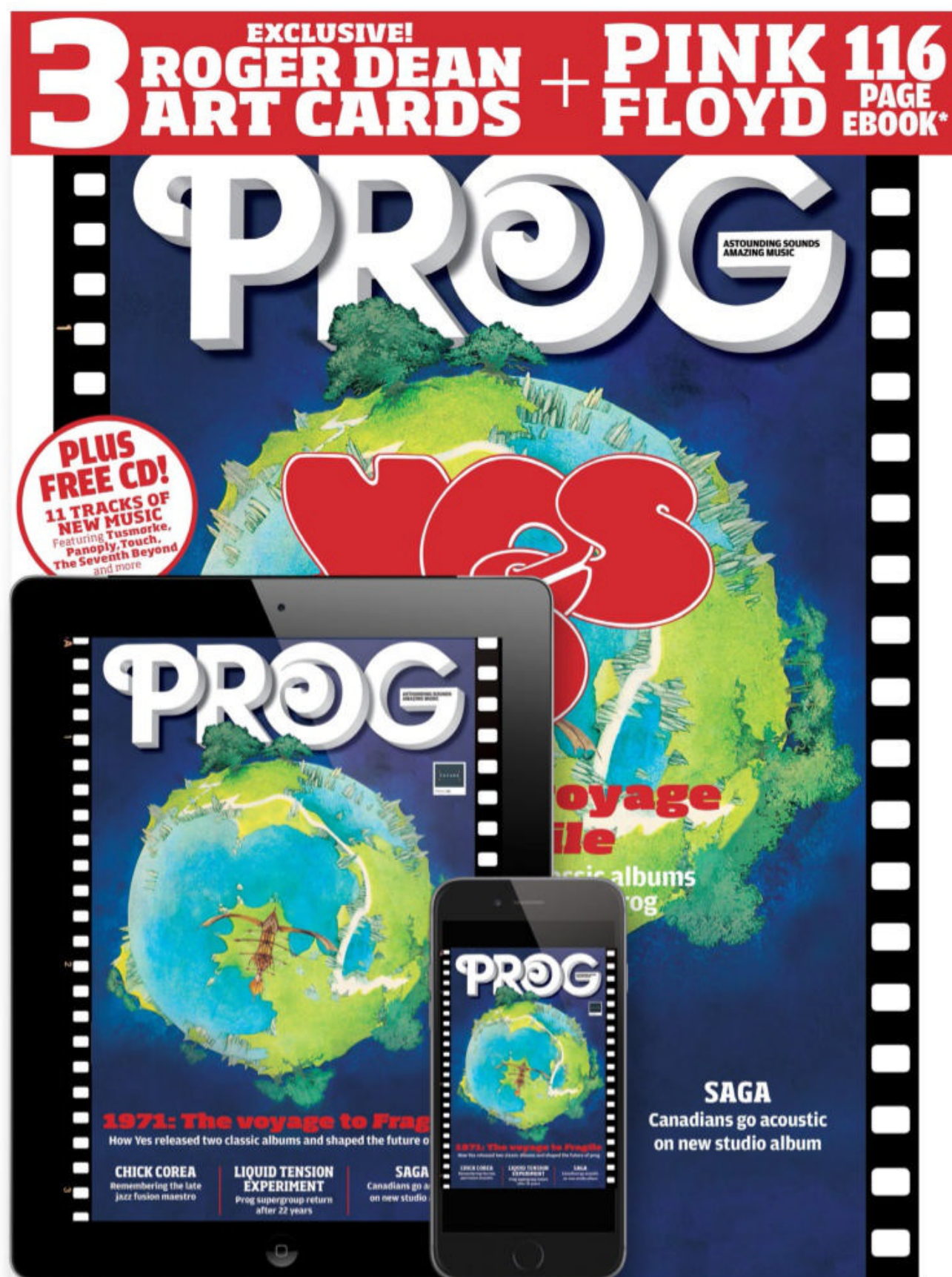
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Where's home?

Crowborough in Sussex. I've been here about two and half years.

Earliest prog memory?

Listening to my elder brother Steve playing records by Genesis, Yes and Be-Bop Deluxe in the room next to mine. I was about nine and remember thinking, "I don't know what that hippie shit is, but I like it!"

First prog album purchased?

Peter Gabriel III [Melt] in 1980, because I loved the single *Games Without Frontiers*. *No Self Control's* on there, *Intruder*, *Family Snapshot* – it's brilliant.



And the last?

The Claypool Lennon Delirium's *South Of Reality*. That and the first one, *Monolith Of Phobos* – I love it.

Sean Lennon, what a guitarist!

First prog gig?

My very first gig was Toyah, then King Crimson at Hammersmith Palais in 1982, on their Beat tour. Levin, Belew, Fripp, Bruford. It was the gig that made me buy a Chapman Stick!

And the latest?

The Claypool Lennon Delirium at the Commodore Ballroom in Vancouver, June 2019. I was touring with ELO, we had a night off and I dragged the lads there, and they were knocked out. The power and derring-do of it – it was mind-blowing.

The best prog gig you've ever seen?

So many – Pink Floyd, Genesis, Bowie, Cardiacs – but the gig that made me decide to go for it as a professional musician was It Bites at Hammersmith Odeon, December 23, 1989.

Newest prog discovery?

Everything Everything have got their own thing going, they're interesting. Their music's like

Tears For Fears meets 80s Crimson meets 10cc, with a bit of Roxy Music too. I love their first album, *Man Alive*.



Guilty musical pleasure?

My whole career's been a guilty pleasure! I do love Cliff Richard's



PRESS

Lee Pomeroy

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon**



MONITOR PICTURE LIBRARY/GETTY IMAGES

late-70s/early-80s era. We *Don't Talk Anymore*, *Wired For Sound*, *Carrie* – there's a lot of information in those songs over a short period of time.

Your specialist subject on Mastermind?

Either British prog of the 70s, horror films of the 70s and 80s, or Jack The Ripper!

Favourite prog venue?

I was an usher at Hammersmith Odeon when I was 15, and did possibly the best gig of my life there with Steve Hackett [on the

Genesis Revisited tour, 2013], playing my favourite music in my favourite venue.

Your prog hero?

For getting me into bass, Chris Squire. But for all-round prog wonderfulness, Peter Gabriel.

Outside of music what are you into?

Horror films and history, particularly London history. And I'm a huge comedy fan, from Spike Milligan to Bob Mortimer, who I literally love.

"Seeing King Crimson in 1982 made me buy a Chapman Stick!"

Ever had a prog date?

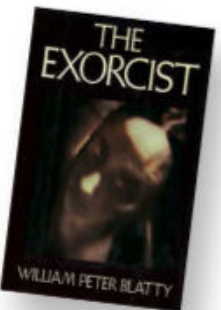
No such thing, mate [laughs]. My wife Jill is a big rock fan and she's quite partial to Genesis, Gentle Giant and Yes. If it rocks, she likes it.

Who do you call in the prog community for a good night out?

Dave Colquhoun, Rick [Wakeman]'s guitarist, John Mitchell, Adam Wakeman or any of the Headspace boys. They're a brilliant laugh and we get 'orribly drunk!

Recommend us a good read!

The Exorcist is my favourite film, and William Peter Blatty's novel is my favourite book. It still puts the shits up me!



The most important piece of prog music?

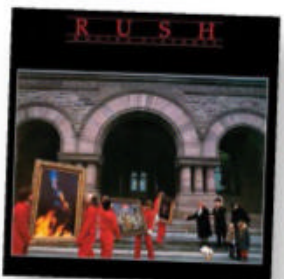
From the 60s, *Strawberry Fields Forever*; from the 70s *Heart Of The Sunrise* and from modern times it's *Blackstar* by David Bowie.

The prog muso you'd most like to work with?

Peter Gabriel. I've got a Chapman Stick, Peter!

A proggy album to get you in a good mood?

Moving Pictures by Rush. It's got Geddy, Taurus pedals, crunchy Rickenbacker bass, and Alex and Neil. It immediately makes me want to rip me shirt off and run up the road really fast...



Your favourite prog album cover?

Nursery Cryme. It's the first album cover I remember being intrigued by, and then opening it up and it's like a Victorian photo album. It's amazing.

And what are you up to at the moment?

I'm in my studio writing a lot of library music and trying to stay sane. Hopefully in the future there'll be another This Oceanic Feeling album. Other than that, there's nothing much happening at the moment is there? I'm open to offers and suggestions!

Lee Pomeroy is part of *The English Rock Ensemble* and can be heard on *Rick Wakeman's Red Planet* album, which is out now. For more, see www.rwcc.com.

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