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Contents

ISSUE 81 12.10.17

IF IT'S IN THERE IT'S ON HERE



Opeth p42

Just what is it that makes Opeth's Mikael Åkerfeldt tick?

Contents

REGULARS

BLOODY WELL WRITE pg 8

Missives, musings and tweets from Planet Prog.

THE INTRO pg10

Yes gear up for a brand new live album, RIP Virgil Howe, plus the latest news on Genesis, Trojan Horse, Peter Hammill, John Lodge, Von Hertzen Brothers and more...

RECORD COLLECTION pg 30

Stand-up comedian and star of TV's *Uncle, Nick Helm* shows us the proggy elements of his record collection...

Q&A pg 32

Radiohead drummer Philip Selway talks movie soundtracks and the day job...

THE OUTER LIMITS pg 72

Mike Scott and The Waterboys were always known for their 'big music' and moribund fisher folk. But just how prog were they?

THE PROG INTERVIEW pg 92

Christian Vander, founder of Magma, discusses a fascinating career and the mythology surrounding his band's zeuhl music.

THE MUSICAL BOX pg 98

We lead with Peter Hammill's *From The Trees*, plus reviews of Daniel Cavanagh, Eloy, PFM, VUUR, Primus, ELP, Bill Bruford, John Carpenter, Focus, Tangerine Dream, ELO and more...

TAKE A BOW pg 118

This month we've been off to see Yes in America, plus Dream Theater, Ayreon, Haken, William Drake, Justin Hayward, The Pineapple Thief, Mostly Autumn, Kindred Spirits, Deadly Circus Fire and more...

MY PROG pg 130

Amplifier founder and mainstay Sel Balamir allows us a glimpse into his own prog world.

FEATURES



Prog Awards _____ Pg 34

The winners. The stories. The gossip. It's prog's biggest night of the year!

Sons Of Apollo _____ Pg52

Mike Portnoy takes on Dream Theater with new prog metal supergroup.

The Contortionist _____ Pg 56

US sextet shift ever further into prog territory with new album.

VUUR _____ Pg 60

Anneke van Giersbergen returns to her darker proggy roots.

Brand X _____ Pg 64

The prog fusioners are back and raring to go after a 17-year hiatus.

White Moth Black

Butterfly _____ Pg 68

Dan Tompkins and Jordan Bethany take their atmospheric to the next level.

Motorspycho _____ Pg 76

Multifaceted Norwegians deliver the goods with new album *The Tower*.

Ne Obliviscaris _____ Pg 80

Aussie prog metallers discuss new album and crowdfunding.

Enslaved _____ Pg 84

Norwegian prog metallers shift ever further towards a prog Valhalla.

Lunatic Soul _____ Pg 90

Riverside mainman Mariusz Duda expands his experimental solo sound.

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So the sixth annual Progressive Music Awards has been and gone. And boy, what a night it was. A delightful gathering from the progressive world that really does rate as probably the most enjoyable night we've hosted so far. The vibe in the room was incredible, and hopefully some of that comes through in our coverage of the night, which begins on page 34.

This issue we feature an in depth interview with Opeth's Mikael Åkerfeldt, one of modern progressive music's standard-bearers. His band Opeth picked up the Best International Band gong at the Awards this year, and Dave Everley's profile of him (p 42) is one of the most revealing I've read, delving deep into what makes this fascinating and single-minded musician tick.

And of course, not only do we feature Opeth on the cover of this issue, but we have a fantastic live CD from the band that is unavailable anywhere else. Recorded when the band performed with a choir and orchestra in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, it offers a unique insight into how the band's music has evolved over the years. Quite the collectors' item.

Christian Vander of Magma, the subject of *The Prog Interview* on page 92, is an equally absorbing character with another incredibly unique story to tell. Quite fascinating to read where he got his first ever drum kit!

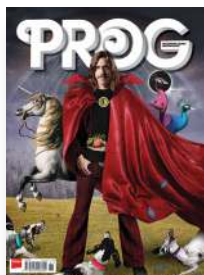
And of course, there's the usual round up of what's been happening on Planet Prog, from the return of Brand X to the continued progressive shift of bands like Enslaved and The Contortionist.

I've just had a glance at the cover artists who'll be gracing the cover of *Prog* between now and the end of the year. Suffice to say, I think you're going to enjoy them. Until next month, prog on...

Jerry Ewing - Editor



You can subscribe to Prog at www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/PROG. See page 116 for further details.



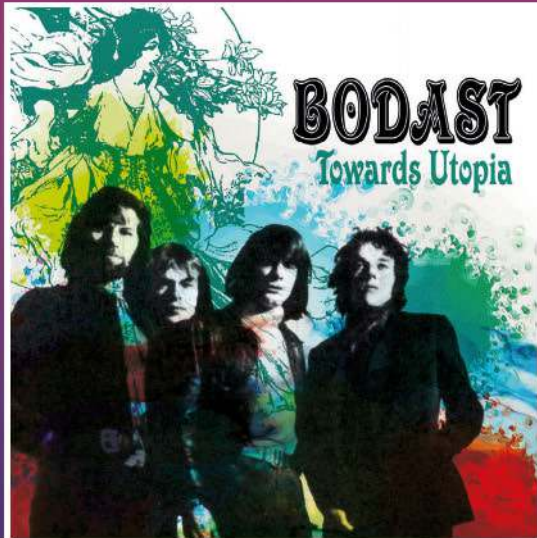
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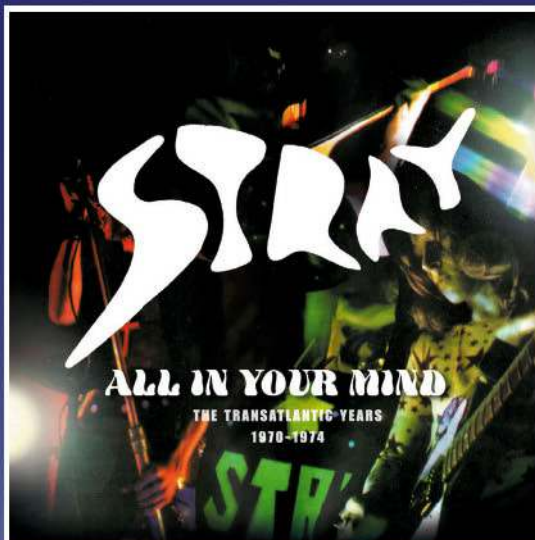
BODAST (featuring STEVE HOWE)



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- Newly re-mastered edition of the 1969 recordings by Bodast, the short-lived band formed in late 1968 featuring Steve Howe (Lead Guitar, Acoustic Guitar, Bass), Dave Curtis (Bass, Vocals), Bobby Clarke (Drums) & Clive Skinner (Vocals, Acoustic Guitar).

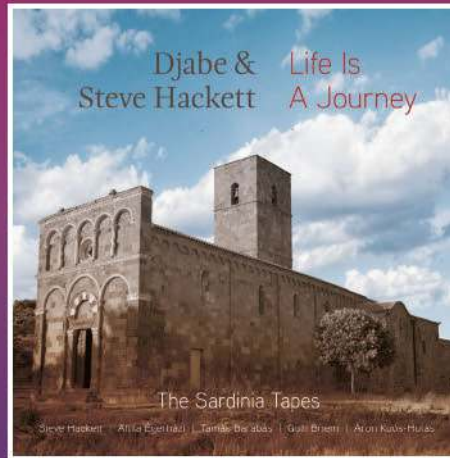
STRAY



'ALL IN YOUR MIND: THE TRANSATLANTIC YEARS 1970-1974'

- Esoteric Recordings label is proud to announce the release of a re-mastered 4CD clamshell boxed set anthologising all the recordings made by the legendary Stray for Transatlantic Records between 1970 & 1974.

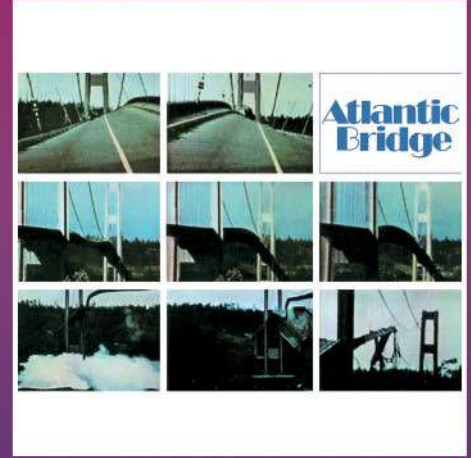
STEVE HACKETT & DJABE



'LIFE IS A JOURNEY'

- Unique new studio album of over 70 minutes of new music which washes away genre borders between progressive rock, jazz and world music. Released October 6th, recorded in the summer of 2016.

ATLANTIC BRIDGE



'ATLANTIC BRIDGE'

- The first ever UK CD release of a newly re-mastered edition of the 1970 self-titled jazz-rock album by Atlantic Bridge.

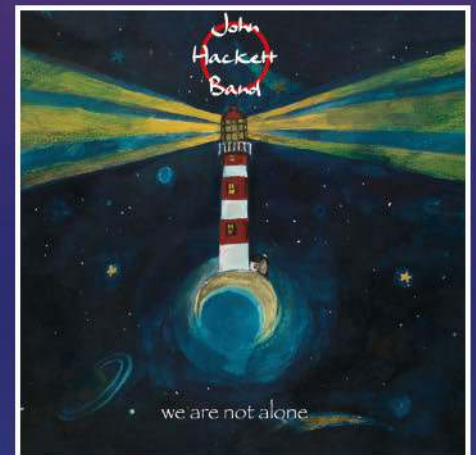
ACQUA FRAGILE



'A NEW CHANT'

- Esoteric Antenna is very pleased to announce the release of a brand new album by Italian Progressive Rock legends Acqua Fragile. Along with compatriots PFM (for whom Bernard Lanzetti's stunning vocal prowess graced several classic albums), Acqua Fragile were true progressive rock pioneers in the 1970s.

THE JOHN HACKETT BAND



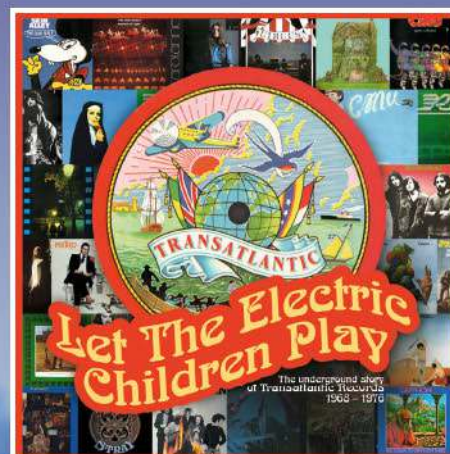
'WE ARE NOT ALONE' (2CD Deluxe Edition)

- Esoteric Antenna is delighted to announce the release of the wonderful new studio album by The John Hackett Band; "We Are Not Alone". Includes a bonus disc, "Another Live", recorded at the Classic Rock Society in 2016 featuring live performances of songs from John's previous albums "Checking Out of London" and "Another Life"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

'LET THE ELECTRIC CHILDREN PLAY: THE UNDERGROUND STORY OF TRANSATLANTIC RECORDS' (3CD Remastered Clamshell Box Set Edition)

- Esoteric Recordings are proud to announce the release of a new deluxe 3CD which tells the story of the so-called "underground" era of one of Britain's great independent record labels of the 1960s & 1970s, Transatlantic Records.
- Featuring over three and a half hours of newly re-mastered music over three CDs, this deluxe anthology also includes a lavishly illustrated booklet with new essay and artist biographies housed in a clamshell boxed set.



Bloody Well Write

Send your letters to us at: *Prog*, Future Publishing, 1-10 Praed Mews, London W2 1QY, or email prog@futurenet.com. 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*.

SEEING CRIMSON

It is rare not to read within the pages of 'The World's Greatest Magazine' somewhere someone extolling the virtues of some band's music by referring it in presumably hushed tones as being reminiscent of 'early King Crimson'. Whilst I take this as praiseworthy and it keeps me reading, I do so with gritted teeth at the lazy journalism. What is 'early Crimson'? The sturm and drang of *Schizoid* including 'the jazzy bit' or the pastoral *Moonchild* or the epic *Epitaph*? And that's just the first album. Or does it mean the leitmotifs of *Peace*, the brilliantly weird *Cat Food* or the lazy day *Cadence*? Or should I infer it's just the overall *Islands* mélange of styles that I am supposed to read into the reference? It is a universal fact that Crimson are brilliant and all of their work (oops, should I say oeuvre?) is worth repeated listening to (and sharing with those not yet in our sacred guild), but please, journos, can we be as precise as the musical interplay that all Crim alumni demonstrate album after album?

And by the way, all Prog Gods have been worthy winners but please, oh please, does Mr Robert not deserve deification some time very soon? The epitome of progress... although he'd probably shudder at reading that.

Paul Goodge

A LIFE IN PROG

I am a late 50s skeleton from Chicago who picked up the last four *Progs* and now subscribe. My American parents raised me in London, where I became obsessed with new music as a teenager in the mid-70s after watching the glam rock bands on *Top Of The Pops*. I actually do remember listening to Radio Caroline, although from London the reception was often poor, vanishing completely then re-emerging in a crackly state, but often playing entire album sides. John Peel, late at night, actually played more folk rock and prog before the punk emerged that he was so famous for promoting. There used to be an outdoor newsstand outside Gloucester Road tube station where I would spend my pocket money on the *NME*, *Melody Maker* and *Sounds*,



One reader asks: Just what is "early King Crimson"?

PRESS/DOUGLIVE/KING CRIMSON

which I would read religiously. *Melody Maker* was my favorite, because it seemed more "artistic" compared with the pop-oriented *NME*. *Sounds* also featured great stories on the prog, metal, and hard rock bands of the 1970s. But *Melody Maker* wrote about obscure jazz and folk, standing out as the more "musical" rag. Really excellent back then too was the French magazine *Rock & Folk* which I would read, being bilingual, when my family would visit our dilapidated cheap summer house in Antibes on the South of France, which also had a weekly radio show that played European prog, and where jazz rock bands of young adults often played for free at the local community center.

I think that *Prog* magazine brings me back to that time. It reminds me of a small record shop that nobody who lives in London today remembers (I've asked dozens of people!), nor is there mention of it on the internet, but it was called Parrot Records and I am guessing from looking now at a Google Maps image of the streets off Earl's Court Road, that it may have been on Hogarth Road. The staff changed my life by turning me on to endless prog from the UK and other European countries. I would rush home with my new LP in a bright blue plastic bag with a picture of a parrot on it. Many of my mates at the French Lycée were equally fanatic — we would swap records by Steely Dan, Mike Oldfield,

TWEET TALK

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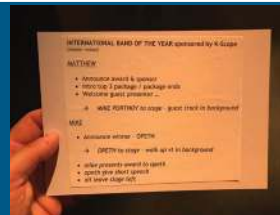
BRUCE SOORD

@bsoord
Just got pulled over by the police en route to our show in Dresden. Turned out to be a prog rock fan so let us go. The show goes on!



STEVE HILLAGE

@stevehillage
OMG - we WON!!! Heartfelt thanks to everyone that voted! <3



MIKE PORTNOY

@MikePortnoy
It was my honor to give this award to my brothers in @OfficialOpeth (funny, because the 2 runner-ups were NMB & DT! Hahaha) #progawards2017

LETTER

I have to say that I'm really pleased that your magazine has found me two prog albums which are long in length and do not contain one bum song in them. I've probably spent a combined time of seven weeks listening to them, and never get bored hearing them again. The two albums? Your demo CDs! P54: One For The Vine [from Prog



The Prog CD: our pick of the prog bunch.

76], and P57: Postcards [from Prog 79]. P57 actually seemed a bit 'racy' when I first heard it, but now I'm up to speed and the songs feed into each other seamlessly.

Will I take the plunge and buy any of the albums that the songs are taken from?

Which is, after all, the point of the demos. It certainly looks like it might be a way forward. Regardless, it's been a surprising pleasure.

Ian Rumens

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

Soft Machine, Focus, Supertramp and Roxy Music and record them on C90 cassettes, just as much thieves back then as downloaders are today. As a 16 and 17 year old, of course I got deeply into punk, although I preferred the more musical and experimental post-punk bands that emerged in the 10 years after it and which my ears, forged by earlier progressive music, drew me to. But only now am I discovering, thanks to Prog, the new progressive bands. I hope you continue to do that, and I hope that most of your readers are young people like I once was, discovering this great music to inspire and color one's grey world with. I hope your readers are not mostly old fogies like me.

Prog has rekindled my old love affair with reading about music cover to cover like I did with the old *Melody Makers* and *Sounds* (when they disappeared, I mourned their loss like that of old friends, which of course they had been). I have bought many of the works of the musicians you write about. I can't tell you how excited I get when the new issue arrives. You should continue to cover

prog, especially new bands, but don't leave out the more accomplished folk rock, jazz rock, metal, post-rock or post-punk either, whose aesthetics are often closely aligned.

Danny

KEEP SINGIN' THE BLUES

I think Justin Hayward's comment concerning The Moody Blues having little contact with each other outside of work can only refer to the present line-up.

John Lodge has been a friend of Ray Thomas since their teens, continuing to live a few miles apart and in fairly regular contact. Similarly Ray has rekindled his friendship with Mike Pinder since leaving the band and through these links the three were reunited on John's 2015 solo album [10,000 Light Years Ago]. It is this sort of recorded reunion that I would have preferred to see the band having (however unlikely) and agree with Justin's comments re the likely letdown of a live performance. However, the time has passed and a likely mix of band politics and health issues seems to have left the Moodies' recorded career at an end with the so-so 2003 Christmas album [December] rather than a possible final burst from the glorious classic five. At least the *Days Of Future Passed* anniversary arrived just in time to liven up a rather predictable stage show for what has always been a great live band. It might just have added another 12 months to their existence.

Whatever, there will never be another band quite like The Moody Blues and if someone had told the teenage me in the early 1970s that they would still be in existence in 2017, you could imagine the response. Thanks for the piece.

Anthony Vincent

Below: Justin Hayward in Prog80.



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INTRO

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

YES TO RELEASE LIVE TOPOGRAPHIC DRAMA ALBUM AHEAD OF TOUR

And Geoff Downes teams up with members of XTC, No-Man and Big Big Train on new Downes Braide Association album.



Yes are to release their first material without co-founder Chris Squire on November 24. *Topographic Drama – Live Across America* was recorded during last year's US tour and includes brand new artwork from Roger Dean.

"We wanted to get something out with this line-up," reveals keyboard player Geoff Downes. "Billy [Sherwood] took over from Chris nearly two years ago and we all felt it would be nice to have something that showed where the band is right now."

The album, available on double CD and triple vinyl, includes performances from *Drama* and sides one and four of *Tales From Topographic Oceans* alongside classics such as *Roundabout* and *Starship Trooper*. It opens with *Drama's Machine Messiah*.

"It's a very hard-hitting track and a very powerful way to open up a show," says Downes. "*Drama* was the first album I did with Yes back in 1980 and I still think it's very powerful. We had talked about [playing it in full] before Chris got sick because there was still four fifths of that line-up playing with Yes on stage. Sadly we lost Chris just as we were due to play the album so he never got the opportunity to play it. It's a real shame because I know that he was very proud of it."

Adds drummer Alan White, "*Tales...* and *Drama* are two favourite albums of mine. Being

involved creatively in writing this music, it took countless hours in the studio to reach our goals for both these classic albums. I've always really enjoyed playing this music live and sincerely hope it's equally appreciated by our fans worldwide."

Topographic Drama, which has been mixed by Billy Sherwood, comes out ahead of Yes' 50th anniversary celebrations and 10-date UK tour next March. The band will also host a special fan convention at the London Palladium and are currently discussing a new studio album.

"We've talked about it, but we've been pretty much flat-out on the road for the last year or two," says Downes. "We are hoping to get something out at some point next year as a 50th anniversary edition."

Visit www.yesworld.com for more.

Meanwhile, Downes has teamed up with Chris Braide (The Producers/This Oceanic Feeling) for DBA's *Skyscraper Souls*, which is out on November 17 on X2X Records via Cherry Red.

The album includes a host of special guests including Tim Bowness, Big Big Train's David Longdon, Andy Partridge from XTC and Marc Almond. Says Downes, it has a very English feel.

"When we first got together on this album, Chris had the vinyl of Caravan's *In The Land Of*



**"We had talked
about *Drama* live
before Chris
got sick."**

Main Image: Yes on stage during last year's Topographic Drama tour. Inset: Chris Braide and Geoff Downes, aka Downes Braide Association.



Grey And Pink and we listened to that. It's an area of music that our planets align on. It also has elements of Yes, Genesis, King Crimson — there are dark moments in there so it's not just bright, happy pop, there are some quite doom-laden sections in it. I think the strength of the performances from our guests is particularly special and we're very proud of the melodies."

The title track clocks in at around 20 minutes and Downes says it's their "epic". "It goes through all kinds of manifestations. We wanted to do

something that has these recurring motifs. We've always had a good response to our music and I think this one pushes the boundaries even further."

Downes is also continuing to work on ideas he developed with John Wetton, before the musician's death earlier this year. "I'd like to put something together as a tribute to him and get some of the great players he worked with over the years on there." **NRS**

STEPHANIE CABRAL

This month, Intro was compiled by

Olivier 'Zoltar' Badin
Chris Cope
Malcolm Dome
Daryl Easlea
Jerry Ewing
Jo Kendall
Hannah May Kilroy
Dom Lawson
Isère Lloyd Davis
Rhodri Marsden
Chris McGarel
Chris Roberts
Natasha Scharf
Sid Smith
Rick Wakeman
Phil Weller

JOHN LODGE UNVEILS LIVE BOX

Album of Moody Blues bassist's Birmingham show gets a release date.

Peace Of My Heart: live tracks Lodge's homecoming show are out in October.



Live recordings from John Lodge's first ever solo tour will be officially released on October 20 via the musician's own label, Keeping The Faith. *Live From Birmingham: The 10,000 Light Years Tour* features cover artwork from Roger Dean and will be available on CD/DVD and limited edition red vinyl. It's been financed through PledgeMusic.

"I really wanted to make something special because it was the first tour I'd ever done on my own," explains Lodge. "I was on Cruise To The Edge this year and Roger Dean was there. He did the artwork for my first album, *Natural Avenue*, so I asked if he would do something for this one. Because it was going to be on vinyl, I wanted a nice piece of artwork."

The double-CD/DVD set was recorded at last year's homecoming concert at Birmingham Town Hall and also features fly-on-the-wall footage charting the release of the album, *10,000 Light Years Ago*, as well as clips from the musician's intimate acoustic show at Hampton Court Palace.

"I was really pleased to get back to Birmingham because that's where I'm from," he tells *Prog*. "Birmingham Town Hall is an iconic venue; I saw people like Little Richard, Gene Vincent and Buddy Holly there back in the 50s and 60s. That was one of the big things about performing there - it completed the circle."

Lodge concludes his solo tour of the USA this autumn, and will return Stateside with The Moody Blues in the New Year.

For more, visit www.johnlodge.com. **NRS**



NEW BOOK FROM FORMER GENESIS TOUR MANAGER

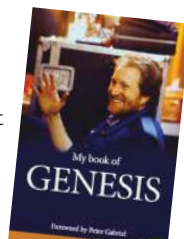
Richard Macphail teams up with Gabriel, Collins, Hackett, Banks and Rutherford on his "warts-and-all" memoirs.

The story of Genesis' early years comes under the spotlight in a new book due out on November 28. Richard Macphail's *My Book Of Genesis* explores the band's Charisma years with unseen photos.

"It's warts-and-all in the sense that I've been honest about what went on... there's lots of stuff I've talked about that hasn't really shown up anywhere else," Macphail reveals. "It's not a Genesis biography, but it's my story of their early years and my part in it. I've interviewed all the members of the band and Peter Gabriel has written a lovely foreword."

Macphail sang in Anon back in the 60s, and began working with Genesis in '69. He quit in 1973, but briefly returned for the *A Trick Of The Tail* tour. He was also Peter Gabriel's tour manager in the late 70s.

My Book Of Genesis will be available from Amazon, independent book retailers and from the website www.mybookofgenesis.com. **NRS**



VIRGIL HOWE REMEMBERED

InsideOut confirm that *Nexus* will be released in tribute to the musician.



Virgil and Steve Howe during the recording of *Nexus*.

► The gifted Howe family — and the world of music — suffered a terrible loss on September 11 when Steve's younger son Virgil died suddenly, aged just 41.

Virgil was the drummer for rock band Little Barrie, who he was due to tour with in September, but also played on and produced many other projects, not least his collaborations with his father and with Yes. A statement on Yes' Facebook page described the shock as "tragic, unexpected", announcing the cancellation of the remaining dates on the Yestival tour and thanking fans for their understanding and support, and for respecting the Howe family's privacy.

Little Barrie bandmate Barrie Cadogan said, "We are heartbroken that we have lost our dear friend and brother Virgil", while bassist Lewis Wharton added, "I am utterly devastated to lose my friend and a positive force in my life." Howe Jnr was described as "a beautiful and brilliant man" by DJ Eddy Temple-Morris, and by musician Steve Mason as a "colossal drummer [who] will be hugely missed." Others who knew him — some through his Soho Radio show — spoke of his friendliness, positivity and kindness.

Born in London in 1975, Steve Howe's second son (eldest Dylan recently played drums with Yes) featured on many Howe solo records. He played keyboards on *The Grand Scheme Of Things* (1993) and *Spectrum* (2005), and was in Steve Howe's Remedy band, who released *Elements* in 2003 and toured the UK. He also wrote and played on 2011's *Time*, and the recent release *Steve Howe: Anthology 2: Groups And Collaborations* has Virgil drumming on several previously unreleased tracks.

Significantly, he also contributed to the rich and complex history of Yes, producing the *Yes Remixes* album in 2003. Under the name of The Verge, he re-imagined 11 of Yes' best-known tracks into a techno-dance context.

More recently, he and his father teamed up for an album of fresh instrumentals, *Nexus*. Steve Howe told *Prog* 80, "I've done a wealth of different things but I haven't done anything like this before." He explained that it moved across genres, setting the father's guitars across the son's electronica, synths and pianos. "We didn't need anyone or anything else," he added proudly, insisting that "most of the credit" went to Virgil. **CR**

Nexus is out on November 17 via InsideOut.

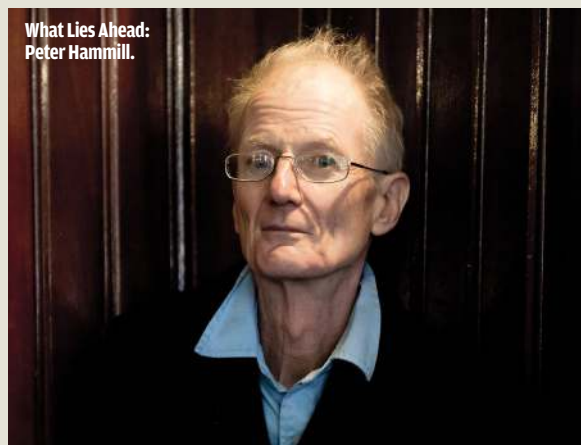
INTRO extras

GODLEY & CREME TO GET BOX SET

A 5CD box set of Godley & Creme's back catalogue is due out via Caroline International on November 17. *Body of Work 1978-1988* features the albums *L*, *Ismism*, *Birds of Prey*, and *Goodbye Blue Sky*, as well as a bonus disc of extended mixes and B-sides.

The package comes with a booklet and box designed by Kevin Godley, and also includes new interviews with the duo conducted by *Prog*'s Daryl Easlea. Godley & Creme split at the end of the 1980s but have since been involved in numerous multimedia projects.

What Lies Ahead: Peter Hammill.



WILL IRELAND

PETER HAMMILL'S LEAFY NEW SOLO

Van der Graaf co-founder explores life, love and hypocrisy on forthcoming release.

► *From The Trees*, Peter Hammill's 36th solo album, is released on Fie! on November 3. Six of its 10 songs were previewed at Hammill's three-night Café Oto residency in London this March.

"I'm very pleased with how it turned out," Hammill tells *Prog*. "I wanted to do that old-school thing of actually having completed the songs before I went into the recording process."

This marks a departure from the complex short story/screenplay aspect of his 2014 solo *...All That Might Have Been...* and the density of Van Der Graaf Generator's *Prog* Award-nominated *Do Not Disturb* from last year.

"A lot of people say they don't want to do the same thing from one album to the next. I think over the years, I've proved that in spades," Hammill says.

Although a long way from what many would call a conventional song structure, there is a tender beauty to the material here. The subject matter is richly Hammill — the passage of time, the hypocrisy of fame and office, a longing for lost love. To support its release, there will be a five-date Japanese tour in October, a visit to Italy for seven shows in November and a solo performance at the IB Expo 17 in Sweden. There's a possibility that some UK dates will be added next year. "For once in my life, I'm nominally touring to support a record. It's a triumph of marketing at this very late stage!" Hammill laughs.

For more, visit www.sofasound.com and turn to page 98 for full review of the album. **DE**

LEE ABRAHAM ANNOUNCES HIS VIBRANT NEW ALBUM

Former Galahad bassist teams up with Simon Godfrey, Dec Burke and Riversea's Marc Atkinson on latest.

► Lee Abraham releases *Colours* through F2 Music on November 27. And, he says, he's trying out a new sound.

"The title track from [my last album] *The Seasons Turn* was probably the longest track I'd ever done, but I wanted to try something different," says Abraham. "My second love is AOR; I grew up with bands like Toto and FM, so I decided to take a lighter approach to the songwriting and make the songs a little more concise, with catchy choruses. Having said that, there are still busy, tricky sections still in the music so I've tried to have a foot in both camps."

The album explores themes of love and relationships, and Abraham is joined on it by a host of guest vocalists, including Cosmograf's Robin Armstrong, who also created the colourful cover artwork.

For more, visit www.leeabraham.co.uk. **NRS**



"I am utterly devastated to lose my friend and a positive force in my life."



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VAN GIERBERGEN'S
VUUR

IN THIS MOMENT WE ARE FREE – CITIES

In Stores 20th October 2017

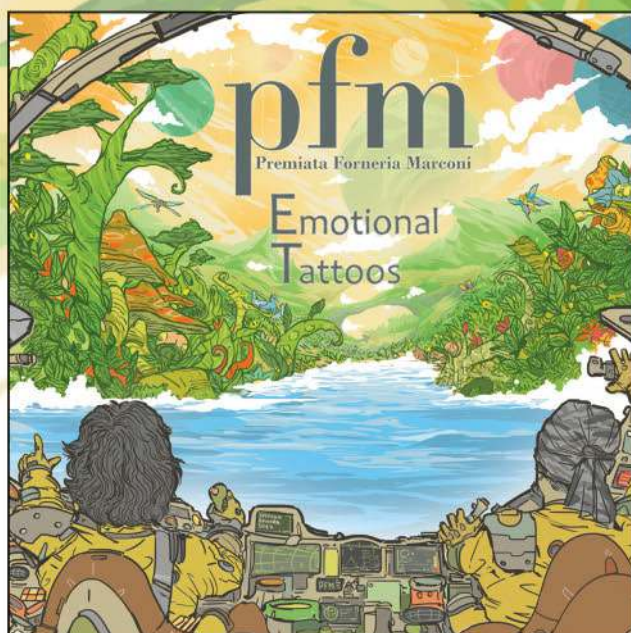
The new progressive metal band from **Anneke van Giersbergen** (ex-The Gathering, Devin Townsend Project, The Gentle Storm).

Produced by **Joost van den Broek** (ex-After Forever and producer of EPICA).
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Disciples Of The Sun:
Von Hertzen Brothers.

VHB SPREAD PEACE ON LATEST ALBUM

Finnish brothers team up with *Approach* drummer Sami Kuoppamäki on their most ambitious work to date.

► **Von Hertzen Brothers'** latest album, *War Is Over* – out via Mascot on November 3 – takes them back to their roots with a title track that's 12-and-a-half minutes long.

"We've had the song, *War Is Over*, in our drawer for a while," admits singer Mikko von Hertzen. "We knew it would be a huge amount of work. When we found out that [Finnish jazz drummer] Sami Kuoppamäki would be able to play with us again, we realised it was now or never. He's such a great drummer and the right person to play the song."

The 10-track was recorded in Finland and sees the band move away from 2015's rockier *New Day Rising* and towards a sound much closer to 2006's *Approach*.

"We wanted to make an American rock album and we achieved that, but I'm not sure it was really us," the singer admits. "We learned so much from our trip to Vancouver [where *New Day Rising* was recorded], but I think we get the best out of ourselves with the people we know and the language we use in our daily lives... We come from a background of Queen, Pink Floyd and Emerson Lake & Palmer – those bands are more important to us than American rock – so we've taken a few steps back to a proggy sound."

The fraternal group will showcase the album on tour this winter, where they'll be joined not only by Kuoppamäki, but also by live keyboardist Robert Engstrand (The Flower Kings/Turisas). For the full list of shows, visit www.vonhertzenbrothers.com. **NRS**

INTRO extras

65DAYS OFSTATIC: DECOMPOSED

65daysofstatic are performing an experimental new work called *Decomposition Theory* at Sheffield's AlgoMech Festival on November 9 and 10. The three live audio-visual performances are based around computer algorithms and live coding. The band's Paul Wolinski says, "We're trying to teach computers to make live music. Our role will be more as curators of the algorithms and we'll add programming and instruments over the top." The results may form the basis of new recorded material.



Table Manners:
Trojan Horse.

TROJAN HORSE SURF TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Salford four-piece team up with Kavus Torabi and Pete Trewavas on third album.

► **Trojan Horse** are moving in a new musical direction with *Fukushima Surfer Boys*. The 16-track – out on Bad Elephant on October 13 – has an eclectic range of influences, including Karlheinz Stockhausen, Flying Lotus and *The Wicker Man* soundtrack. The band even swap instruments on it.

"We had another change of drummer, so we decided to take things in a different direction," explains singer and multi-instrumentalist Nick Duke. "We looked at what we were doing previously and a lot of this album was saying, 'We could become more technical, but what do we get out of it?' It's about being progressive without ourselves."

Teaming up with long-term collaborator Danny The Red, they've also buried samples from the mysterious Russian shortwave station UVB-76 in the track of the same name. "It's fascinated me for absolutely years," says Duke. "It's a signal broadcast that churns out this repetitive pattern, but nobody knows why they're doing it or who is doing it. It's very weird and out-of-time so it sounds like we're playing in some weird time signature."

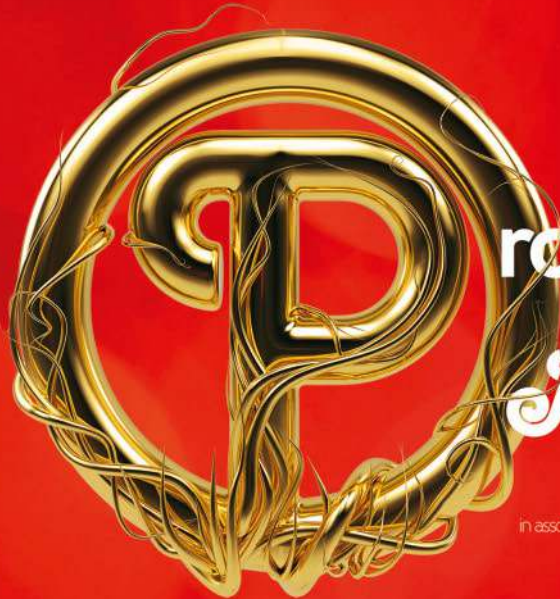
The album features guest appearances from Marillion's Pete Trewavas, Knifeworld's Kavus Torabi and Jimi Goodwin from alt-rockers Doves. A cassette edition will also be available through This City Is Ours on International Cassette Store Day.

Trojan Horse will head out on tour next year, but in the meantime they've contributed a previously unreleased track to *The Bees Knees*. It's a new compilation to raise money for Cleft's Dan Wild-Beesley, who was diagnosed with brain tumours.

For more, visit www.thisisthebeesknees.bandcamp.com. **NRS**



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FAD GADGETS

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



CROSS GUITAR

Guitars can be a bit cumbersome. This has spawned the invention of a practice instrument called the Cross Guitar, although the unintentionally hilarious promotional video exaggerates the problem a bit. It's essentially a strung plank with two fold-out arms, allowing you to practice on something that feels guitar-y but has much less bulk. It won't sound particularly good, but that's not the point; guitarists keen to refine their technique have already funded it five times over on Kickstarter.

<http://bit.ly/CrossGuitar>

WOW 17-9000

I became intrigued the other day by a wave of portable Bluetooth speakers that proudly boast their resistance to certain depths of water. I can understand watches being given such ratings, but if you want to listen to music, do you want to sit underwater? (I don't.) This beast, which boasts 50 hours of battery life and 360° sound, is rated IP67, which means you can keep it one metre underwater for 30 minutes. But it also floats. Which means that to test its resilience you'll need to sit on it in a swimming pool.

www.wowwatersports.com



SPECDRUMS

Frustrated drummers like myself who enjoy tapping on tables (and irritating anyone nearby) will relish

Specdrums, which are small rings that you slip onto your tapping fingers. Those rings connect with an app and transform those taps into sound; the clever bit, however, is that the sound produced depends on the colour you're tapping on. The rings come with a 12-colour keyboard, but you could just as easily assign sounds to a book cover, your jeans and a tabletop to produce an instant drum kit.

www.specdrums.com



RHYTHM IS EASY (RHYMING ISN'T)

Rick discovers a lyricist with a very unique talent...

“My wife writes lyrics. She’s so talented.” I looked up from my copy of *Prog* and smiled politely at the guy sitting opposite me on the train.

“That’s lovely,” I said. “Who’s she written for?”

“Nobody yet,” he replied. “She’s looking for musicians and composers to use her work. Would you like to see some of it?”

“Not really. I have people that I already work with and I write a lot of lyrics myself...” And with that, I continued reading my *Prog*.

“She’s very talented...” he added.

“Who has she sent her lyrics to?”

“Nobody yet...”

“Well, I suggest that would be a good start.”

“Who should she send them to?”

I put down my magazine and replied, “If she doesn’t send them to anyone, how can anybody make a judgement?”

“Good point. I’ll tell her that.”

He then started fumbling in his brief case and announced, “I just happen, by chance, to have a few with me. She’s written about 1,000 so far.”

I realised there was still another hour of my journey to go and there were no more stops so I couldn’t even get off and catch a later train. I was stuck with him and I feared the next hour would be a very long one.

“When did she start writing them?” I asked, humouring him.

“Last month.”

“She’s written 1,000 lyrics in four weeks?”

“She’s very prolific...” he smiled proudly and handed over a wad of papers.

I looked at the first one. It was called *I Love My Garden* and read through the first verse:

‘I really love my garden/ I’ve planted it with seeds/ But if I do not nurture it/ All I’ll get is weeds.’

“What do you think?” he asked hopefully.

I tried my best to be diplomatic.

“Words and lyrics are very personal; one man’s meat is another man’s poison. To be honest, these aren’t the sort of lyrics that would appeal to me, or anyone I know or work with.”

He looked crest-fallen, but was undeterred, “There are lots of different lyrics. There must be one you like?”

I skimmed through the pages. There wasn’t.

“Sorry, but tell her to keep trying. Get her to send them to singers and musicians she likes.”

“I’ll do that,” he said and added, “Can you give me some addresses?”

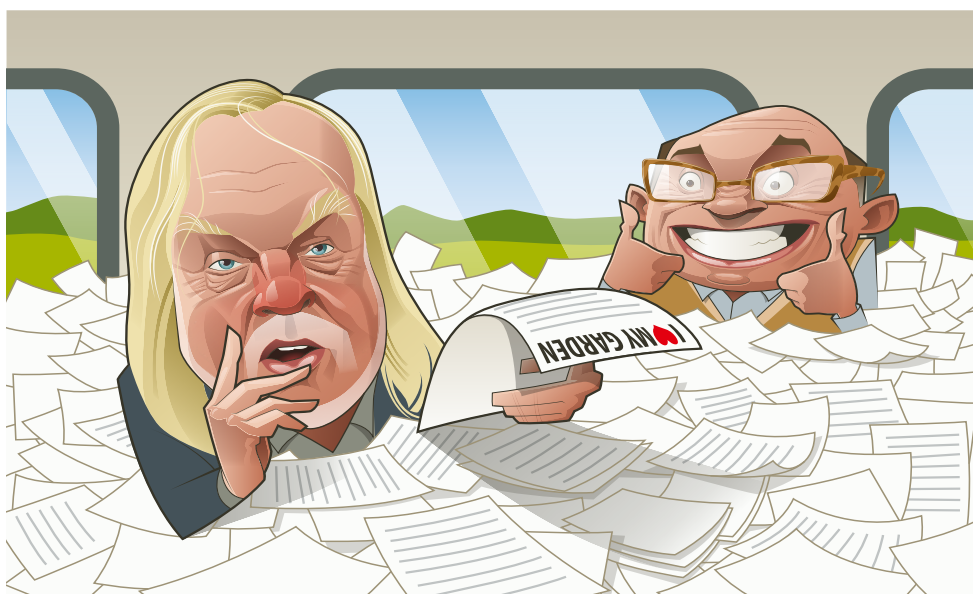
“No,” I said politely as our train pulled into Liverpool Street Station, “I don’t give out personal details of friends.”

“No wonder it’s so hard for undiscovered talent to break into the music business,” he muttered as he got off the train. “It’s a bloody closed shop.”

This genuinely happened to me a few years ago. I have kept my ears open for *I Love My Garden* on the radio, but nobody seems to have picked it up so I’ve decided to update the lyrics especially for this column.

‘I plant words in my garden/ Words for me to write/ They help to make the flowers grow/ Because they’re mostly shite.’

Now, who can I send it to?



Light Me Up: Zola Jesus, aka Nika Roza Danilova.



TOM SACCENTI

ZOLA JESUS

Dark, symphonic pop that haunts and mesmerises in equal measure.

“WHEN I WAS DEPRESSED and on tour, I used to listen to Buddhist chants, light a candle and be very silent before going on stage. Making music is so exposing and I’ve been trying to retain as much anonymity as I can,” reveals shy yet composed singer Nika Roza Danilova.

For over a decade, the woman performing under the name Zola Jesus has been developing a magnetic presence in the underground electronica scene. Blending piano, synthesisers and a strong vocal range, her albums have varied from industrial noise with *The Spoils* (2009) to dream pop with *Conatus* (2011).

“Originally I wanted to be an opera singer, but I fell out of love with that medium,” she says. “Zola Jesus was a way to establish a connection in music that wasn’t based on singing other people’s songs.”

Before recording her sixth work *Okovi* – her heaviest and darkest yet – she returned to her Wisconsin roots. Surrounded by two hundred acres of forest and solitude, Danilova recalls a sense of freedom. “I felt very liberated and I wasn’t thinking so much about the outside world. I could go weeks without seeing another person. This allowed me to really do what I wanted to do,” she explains.

The artistic result is a mature expression of brittle sadness and redemption, as the singer channels her personal painful experiences through each track.

“For this album, I used the music as a tool to heal and reconcile with the things going through my life. It’s hard to perform these songs and even talk about them because they are so deeply personal.”

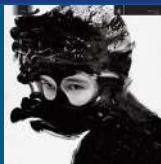
In the song *Exhumed*, the only release from the murky electronic distortion of the string quartet is the cathartic vocals that smash through the musical oppression. The track is accompanied by an artistic monochrome music video by long-time collaborator Jacqueline Castel, in which Zola Jesus appears as a haunting white figure climbing out of an open grave.

“In the past, I’ve tried to create things that are beyond my comfort zone, like pop, because I feel like that’s where true growth happens, but I’m much more attracted to darker music.”

Describing her Ukrainian and Slovenian family heritage, Eastern European folk music and black metal as influences for the album, Zola Jesus has firmly plunged into her darkest (dis)comfort zone.

“I use music to metabolise things that I understand better, whether it’s anxiety or sadness and confusion. I made pop music because I thought that if I dressed it up, it might seem more light-hearted and I would get away with it more. Who knows what I will do in the future!” **ILD**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Zola Jesus (vocals, synthesisers)

SOUNDS LIKE

Chelsea Wolfe, Diamanda Galás, Fever Ray and Throbbing Gristle

CURRENT RELEASE

Okovi is out now via Sacred Bones

WEBSITE

www.zolajesus.com



“Originally I wanted to be an opera singer.”

SUPPER'S READY! HOW TO DINE IN 7/4 TIME

YOUR PROG CHEF:
**ROBIN ARMSTRONG
(COSMOGRAF)**

On the menu: The Hay-Man's Bream



“I got into cooking about 10 years ago after being challenged by my wife to come up with something exciting to eat on a Saturday night. I'm a big fan of the new wave of British chefs and the way they take classic ingredients and give them a contemporary and progressive flavour. I guess it's very much like my approach to writing music...”

Ingredients (serves 2):

Sea Bream Fillets, 100g fresh peas, 100g French beans, 100g potatoes, 1 egg yolk, 200ml olive oil, 1 tsp cider vinegar, 1 tbsp wholegrain mustard, 100ml vegetable stock, 50ml double cream, 1 tbsp tarragon leaves, 25g butter, salt and pepper

Preparation:

“Peel the potato and dice into 1cm cubes then add to boiling water. Cook until tender, drizzle with a little olive oil, sprinkle with salt and roast for 20 minutes at 210°C (Gas Mark 7). Whisk the egg yolk, vinegar and mustard together in a bowl for one minute, then slowly add the olive oil to make a mayonnaise – don't add the oil too quickly, otherwise the mixture will split. Season with salt.

Gently heat the stock in a saucepan. Stir the cream into the mayonnaise then whisk in the stock a little at a time and set aside.

To cook the fish, oil a medium frying pan with olive oil, season the bream fillets and lay them skin side down. Fry while adding the butter cubes and baste to coat the flesh of the fish. I like to blacken the butter and crisp the skin and edges of the fish for extra crunch. Meanwhile, bring a pan of salted water to the boil. Peel the asparagus spears and blanch them with the peas and trimmed French beans for two to three minutes. To finish the sauce, add the tarragon, reheat and serve in warmed bowls with the potato cubes, peas and asparagus. Lay the fish on top.

Sea bream is my favourite fish and I call this recipe ‘The Hay-Man's Bream’ after my latest album, *The Hay-Man Dreams*. The sauce is very prog, and can be a challenge to get it perfect!” **JK**



JAN DICKSON/REXUS/SHUTTERSTOCK

MY PROG HERO

Inspiring the wider music world...



It's judgement day for Dream Theater as Herman Li hails them his prog heroes.



HERMAN LI

The DragonForce guitarist is *astounded* by Dream Theater's images and words.

“I was born in Hong Kong and the pop music there was just awful. I just wasn't into it. Then I heard guitar solos for the first time and I thought, ‘Wow, this is really cool!’ I came to London around '88 and it was around '91/'92 that I first heard progressive rock. It was the grunge era, but I never got into it so I had to go and find my own music. I used to live in Hammersmith and I remember borrowing tapes and CDs from the local library. I got a bunch of Rush albums and then I discovered Dream Theater and Symphony X. I got into them because they had a more modern approach.

Although Michael Romeo from Symphony X was one of the inspirations behind my guitar playing, Dream Theater are my true prog heroes. I got into them on *Images And Words* – I thought all the songs on that album were amazing – but *Scarred* from [1994's] *Awake* is my favourite track of theirs. That was from my ‘learning to play guitar’ time so it meant a lot to me. I practised along to that song. It's not extremely technical but the solo blows you away and it's got a great melody.

I've seen them play every tour since *Awake* – that was the first prog gig I ever saw – and I thought the *Astonishing* tour was the best I'd ever seen them. Wow. I don't know what people were complaining about online because I thought that album was amazing, and the whole show, the production... they nailed it.

They say you should never meet your heroes but I've met Dream Theater loads of times now. We've played festivals together, I got John Petrucci to sign my guitar and I even interviewed him once for a magazine, which was fun! I grew up being inspired by these guys and they're genuinely nice. Prog is the thinking person's music so maybe that's why the musicians are so friendly.

Through Dream Theater's fan club and online forums, I found out about a lot of other prog rock bands, like Shadow Gallery and Lemur Voice.

More recently I discovered Circus Maximus and I thought their album *Nine* had some really good songs.” **NRS**

Reaching Into Infinity is out now. For the full list of DragonForce tour dates, see www.dragonforce.com.



“I got John Petrucci to sign my guitar.”

PROG IN BRIEF

The Zappa Family Trust have announced that **Frank Zappa** (right) will be touring again... as a hologram! The shows are due to open in early 2018. Steve Vai, Adrian Belew and Arthur Barrow are expected to join the virtual star on stage.



Spock's Beard and **Neal Morse** release *Snow Live* via Radiant/Metal Blade on November 10. The 2DVD/2CD package features the first ever live performance of the band's 2002 album, recorded at last year's Morsefest. It's also out on vinyl and Blu-ray.



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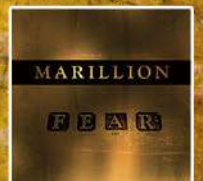
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CENTIPEDE

SEPTOBER ENERGY

(NEON, 1971)

Keith Tippett is best known to progressive music fans for his work on King Crimson's early 1970s albums, but when the pianist released the epic double album, *Septober Energy*, he was already hot property on the European jazz scene. Bristol-born Tippett had not only wowed critics and the public with his lightning-fast technique, but also with his qualities as a composer with two highly-rated albums recorded for Polydor and Vertigo. When he came up with the idea of writing a large-scale piece that would bring together more than 50 musicians from jazz, rock and classical music, RCA's progressive boutique label, Neon, jumped at the chance to sign him up.

During 1970, the massed ranks of Centipede played several high-profile gigs at home and abroad with RCA chartering a jetliner to ferry the musicians, gear and crew to Europe. Cited by a young Mike Oldfield (who saw them perform) as an influence in his thinking for *Tubular Bells*, Centipede boasted five vocalists, including Tippett's wife, Julie Driscoll, three drummers, and legions of brass and string players drawn from the very best contemporary music circles of the day. Featuring members of Nucleus, Soft Machine, King Crimson, Blossom Toes, and Patto, Tippett's magnum opus was informed by a utopian impulse that regardless of genre, music was a uniting force for good.

In June 1971, with Robert Fripp at the controls in Wessex Studios, players were ushered in groups to overdub their parts. The combination of a complex score coupled with its improvised passages added up to not only a high-pressure environment but an expensive one that allowed just three days in which to get everything done. Everything, that is, apart from Fripp's own guitar solo as they simply ran out of time. Beginning with ambiguous percussive sounds, ominous drones and ethereal vocal harmonies unfurl as though stretching in the morning sun, until the air is filled with skittering notes and fleeting encounters between brass and strings. Spread across four side-long movements, Tippett's tone poem breaks into strident themes that march firmly along to rock grooves which are springboards into jazzy excursions. The pianist's writing for such an extended ensemble focuses attention on the unconventional dynamics of the line-up but never loses sight of melodic and harmonic opportunities. Sing-a-long chants, gothic strings, turbulent arrangements and acerbic soloing makes for a formidable and sometimes challenging listen. The critical acclaim the album received upon its release didn't translate to sales and RCA dropped Tippett after his next, more introspective improv album, *Blueprint*. Nevertheless, *Septober Energy* remains a magnificent testament to Keith Tippett's ambitious and visionary enterprise.

SID SMITH



ALL AROUND THE WORLD

Our far-out trip to far-flung prog



Sixth Sense: Victim Of Illusion's Paolo Gurlino, Peter Hamer and Luca Imerito.

VICTIM OF ILLUSION

Musician and composer **Peter Hamer** on inspiration, hope and Italy's prog scene.

Pasta, pizza and... prog? Italy has a rosy relationship with experimental music, from Goblin and PFM to newer torch-bearers such as Kingcrow and Barock Project. Better add Victim Of Illusion to that list. The group, led by guitarist and composer Peter Hamer (aka Piero Giaccone), have channelled the likes of Porcupine Tree on their recently released third album, *Invisible Light*, and it's pretty potent stuff.

"Italy had a lot of famous prog rock bands, mainly in the 70s and the 80s," Hamer explains. "And then prog rock seemed to disappear in Italy. It's still alive, but it's just minor bands – not bands that are known in the world."

Victim Of Illusion – completed by vocalist Paolo Gurlino and Luca Imerito on bass – formed in Turin in 2010, releasing their debut *What Senses Blow Away* a year later. It's been a steady, organic growth for a group who prioritise honing their craft over live shows – but the stage looks set to beckon again in the coming months.

"At the moment we are mostly a studio band," Hamer explains. "We played at different contests a couple of years ago, after our second

album. Then we focused on writing, arranging and composing our third album. Now we are contacting some booking agencies for playing live."

And what about the latest record? *Invisible Light* is an engrossing cocktail of prog rock and metallic, spiky flourishes, with its main theme pointing towards finding "hope in the darkness of our days".

"We're surrounded by a lot of messages and fake things," Hamer says, "and [our] message is to be yourself in a sea of fake sentiments and emotions."

Grabbing further inspiration from the likes of Haken and Tool, but still exuding their own personality, there's a tangible international appeal to Victim Of Illusion. Meanwhile, the internet has allowed them cast their gaze further than Italy – and that reach is only set to expand.

"It's a big, big way for bands like us to be known not only in our own country but outside," Hamer says. "Our listeners are mainly concentrated in the US and the UK – more than Italy. That's the power of the internet." CC

For more, visit:
<http://bit.ly/VictimOf>



"Our message is to be yourself in a sea of fake sentiments and emotions."

PROG IN BRIEF

Mike Portnoy's new supergroup **Sons Of Apollo** (right) and **Pain Of Salvation** have been confirmed for next year's Be Prog! Festival. The Prog award-winning event will take place at Poble Espanyol in Barcelona on June 29-30.



Elbow have announced they'll be touring the UK next year. They play Glasgow on March 2, Birmingham (3), Manchester (4), Leeds (6) and London (7). The British band have recently released a new recording of *Kindling* from current album *Little Fictions*.

THE QUARTET OF WOAH!

Portuguese psychedelic progressive sounds to warp senses and blow minds.

LEADING THE CHARGE for a small but flourishing Portuguese prog scene, The Quartet Of Woah! make it plain from their name alone that they are aiming to achieve more than just entertaining a few folk. Instead, the music contained on the band's self-titled second album feels like a sustained campaign to blow minds, stir souls and, of course, make people shriek, 'Woah!'

"Back in the beginning, we started to get that 'Woah!' feeling from people while we were performing," states vocalist/guitarist Gonçalo Kotowicz. "Then it just stuck, like a war scream at the peaks of our shows. For us, it's pretty amazing what we find when we make music. When we formed the band we just wanted to spend time together, having fun doing something that was worthwhile, but it wouldn't have been a master plan if we weren't thinking of world domination too, of course! As long as we have fun and stick together, our mood is mostly high, not only because we demand it, but because our crowd does too. We want to keep amazing ourselves and finding new ways to do it."

Although the band's 2012 debut album *Ultrabomb* hinted at the kaleidoscopic brilliance to come, it was a record more firmly rooted in stoner rock than anything overtly progressive or challenging. On the new album – four songs, 55 minutes, not a second wasted – The Quartet Of Woah! have seemingly transformed into a mesmerising psychedelic prog rock band with a sound that encompasses everything from Floyd-esque melancholy and Hammond-driven retro-fuzz through to warped, unsettling dynamics and discord worthy of Van der Graaf Generator at their most menacing. Climaxing with the vibrant grooves and melodic thrust of the 13-minute *Days Of Wrath*, it's a supremely convincing evolutionary step.

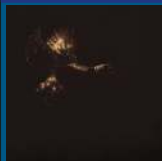
"I guess you could say that *Ultrabomb* fathered The Quartet of Woah!" Kotowicz explains. "We felt like we hadn't had time to properly introduce ourselves on the first album. And yes, I love *Days Of Wrath*. It really lifts you up after all the chaos and drama [of the previous three tracks]. It's the last song of the album and it sets you in the right mood for the next trip. I feel like it takes a lot of love to make songs sound like that, and if *that* should be our strength amid the state of the world in 2017, then I think we should go with it."

The art of using clever, soulful and bombastic music as a force for good is clearly an approach that most of us can get behind. Heavy enough to keep the post-metal and doom contingent happy but every bit as wildly adventurous as the prog diehards demand, The Quartet Of Woah! are audibly determined to live up to their name. There's a touch of theatricality and romantic grandeur lurking within their expansive hymns to the cranked amp, but there is also a strong underlying sense of collective euphoria and authentic, heartfelt joy at the simple process of making cool music with your friends, and seeing other people's faces light up in response.

As Kotowicz avows, we should never underestimate the power of music to transport us to higher planes and, of course, to make us splutter an excited, elated 'Woah!' every now and then.

"At one show, I was playing and this guy comes up and starts biting my fingers and screaming, 'I love you so much I've got to kill you!'" he laughs. "That always reminds me of how we look at the stage and think, 'Man, I love that thing so much... I want to tear it down!' I think that describes it well. The best shows we've done have had that feeling from top to bottom, from the first note to the last." **DL**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Gonçalo Kotowicz (vocals, guitars), **Rui Guerra** (vocals, keyboards), **Miguel Costa** (drums), **André Gonçalves** (bass, vocals)

SOUNDS LIKE

Fearless, exploratory heavy psych with a rich core of pure prog audacity

CURRENT RELEASE

The Quartet Of Woah! is out now via Raging Planet

WEBSITE

www.facebook.com/thequartetofwoah



"At one show, I was playing and this guy comes up and starts biting my fingers and screaming, 'I love you so much I've got to kill you!'"



Four's Company: The Quartet Of Woah!



A PAUSE FOR QUIET REFLECTION

Jerry Ewing ponders the emotion behind so much progressive music.

So there I was, sorting out a recent *Prog Magazine Radio* Show, and having filled up about two thirds of the show with music related to the issue on sale that month, we dip into prog's rich and varied past for a few classics. With Alan Parsons Project's *Eye In The Sky* about to get the deluxe 35th Anniversary treatment I happened across album closer *Old And Wise*, featuring a heart-rending vocal performance by the late Eric Woolfson and thought to myself, 'Now that'll be an ideal show closer. One to wobble the bottom lips...' And that got me thinking about how emotional progressive music can be.

I've heard just about every cliché there is to be thrown at progressive music over the years. And so have you probably. That it's boring, that it all sounds the same, that it's devoid of emotion, that it's just for blokes... Utter tosh!

I've long pointed out that none of the great prog originators sounded anything like each other, which dispels the first two. And if you've attended as many prog gigs as I have over the past 20 years, there's one factor that will strike you: an increasing and welcome presence of more women at gigs, and the manner in which they are drawn into the music.

It's not just the ladies, either. I recall one of Steven Wilson's 2015 gigs at the Royal Albert Hall, encoring with *The Raven...* Watching the giant screen and Jess Cope's stunning stop motion animation, I found myself put in the position of the lonely main character. And damn, if I didn't have something in my eye.

It's not just the new stuff either. Yes, Genesis and Pink Floyd have all supplied me with moments of intense drama and heightened emotion. And while Emerson, Lake & Palmer in the full throes of prodigious musical bravura might not tug at the heartstrings in the same manner, there's plenty of true soul in the likes of *Still...* *You Turn Me On*, *Lucky Man* and beyond. I expect everyone's got their own particular lip-trembling moments. Please do feel free to share.

So why do I write this? Well, you don't need me to tell you that as far as whipping boys in music go, progressive rock has taken more than its share of beatings. And I don't think it's fair. So I'm making my own little stand, as someone who's seen bands from Anathema to The Tangent and Lifesigns to Marillion conjure up emotions in their audience, that progressive rock's not just about musical flamboyance. It has real soul and emotion too.

I've been listening to the music we'll be playing on the *Prog Magazine Show* in question while writing this. You know what? Of course you know. As I type these words, Eric's crooning 'When they asked me if I knew you I'd smile and say you were a friend of mine...' And, dammit, if I haven't got something in my eye again!

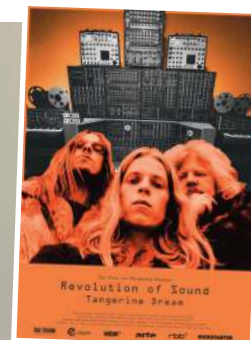
JERRY EWING

Got an opinion on the matter that you'd like to share? Please email us at: prog@futurenet.com.



HAVE A CIGAR

Saluting the scene's supporting crew



Movements Of A Visionary: Margarete Kreuzer worked closely with Edgar Froese.

REVOLUTION OF SOUND

Filmmaker **Margarete Kreuzer** on how David Bowie led her to the definitive Tangerine Dream documentary.

"I grew up in a small town in Germany and Tangerine Dream's music was a way of escaping my life," reveals Margarete Kreuzer.

Several decades on, their music has changed her life as she has written and directed one of the most important films about their founder, Edgar Froese.

It was back in 2003 when their paths first crossed. Kreuzer was interviewing David Bowie for Franco-German TV channel Arte, and she contacted Froese – one of the singer's old friends – for advice. Nine years later, when the director was thinking about subjects for her first feature-length music documentary, Froese came back into the frame.

"I had the idea of making a film about Edgar. He was very interesting and a pioneer of electronic music," the director recalls. "I met him in Vienna and we talked for hours about the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and maths – I made a film a long time ago about maths and culture. It was this that made him decide to work with me."

Froese gave Kreuzer unlimited access to the Super 8 footage he'd collected during his career and permission to use it as she pleased.

"Edgar was a very good filmmaker and there was more than 350 hours of material so it was very hard to figure out what I should do with it all," she says. "We had a lot of ideas though. We wanted to create new footage of brainwaves, we wanted to put a piano in the ocean... we had so many ideas that it was such a shock when he died so suddenly [in 2015]."

With help from his widow, Bianca Froese-Acquaye, and German media company Tag/Traum, she continued with the project and secured funding through Kickstarter. The result is not one, but two films: a television documentary called *Sound From Another World*, which came out last November, and the feature-length *Revolution Of Sound: Tangerine Dream*, narrated by Einstürzende Neubauten's Alexander Hacke. The film lists not only Tangerine Dream alumni, but also Jean-Michel Jarre and Risky Business director Paul Brickman among its interviewees.

Revolution Of Sound premiered at the Berlin Film Festival earlier this year and Kreuzer hopes to bring it to the UK. **NRS**

For more, visit www.facebook.com/tddoc.



"Edgar Froese had more than 350 hours of material."

PROG IN BRIEF

Glass Hammer (right) are celebrating their 25th anniversary with a collection of rarities. *Untold Tales* is out via Sound Resources on October 20 and includes material recorded with Yes singer Jon Davison.



The Prog Before Xmas returns this winter. **Abel Ganz**, Tiger Moth Tales, Long Earth and Comedy of Errors will perform at the Glasgow fundraiser on December 16. The event at The Drygate Brewery is to raise money for Maggie's cancer centres.

Antimatter are to release a 10th anniversary edition of *Leaving Eden* via Prophecy on November 17. The two-disc set contains a full album commentary and remixes of *Ghosts* and *The Immaculate Misconception* by main man Mick Moss.

Knifeworld bassist Charlie Cawood is releasing his debut solo album *The Divine Abstract* via Bad Elephant on November 3. It includes appearances from members of Knifeworld, North Sea Radio Orchestra, Haken and Mediaeval Baebes.

Opeth

Enslaved

UK & IRELAND - NOVEMBER 2017
 WED 15 - MANCHESTER - O₂ RITZ
 THU 16 - GLASGOW - BARROWLANDS
 FRI 17 - BELFAST - LIMELIGHT
 SAT 18 - **D SOLD OUT** ACADEMY
 SUN 19 - NOTTINGHAM - ROCK CITY
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 WED 22 - BIRMINGHAM - O₂ INSTITUTE

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US, THEM & YOU

What got us all
grooving this month...

Official Progressive Albums Chart

the prog top 30 albums

September 2017

Compiled by Official
Charts Company

- 1 **STEVEN WILSON** To The Bone (CAROLINE)
- 2 **MOGWAI** Every Country's Son (ROCK ACTION)
- 3 **RADIOHEAD** Radiohead (XL RECORDINGS)
- 4 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** Every Valley (PLAY IT AGAIN SAM)
- 5 **ROGER WATERS** Is This The Life We Really Want (COLUMBIA)
- 6 **THRESHOLD** Legends Of The Shires (NUCLEAR BLAST)
- 7 **EPICA** The Solace System (NUCLEAR BLAST)
- 8 **PAUL DRAPER** Spooky Action (KSCOPE)
- 9 **MIKE & THE MECHANICS** Let Me Fly (BMG)
- 10 **RICK WAKEMAN** Piano Portraits (UMC)
- 11 **MASTODON** Emperor Of Sand (REPRISE)
- 12 **LEPROUS** Malina (CENTURY MEDIA)
- 13 **JANE WEAVER** Modern Kosmology (FIRE)
- 14 **MIKE OLDFIELD** Return To Ommadawn (MERCURY)
- 15 **TIM BOWNESS** Songs From The Ghost Light (BURNING SHED)
- 16 **ANATHEMA** The Optimist (KSCOPE)
- 17 **KATE BUSH** Before The Dawn (FISH PEOPLE)
- 18 **PINK FLOYD** The Early Years - 1965-72 (RHINO)
- 19 **POND** The Weather (MARATHON ARTISTS)
- 20 **EPICA** Holographic Principle/The Solace System (NUCLEAR BLAST)
- 21 **TANGENT** The Slow Rust Of Forgotten Machinery (CENTURY MEDIA)
- 22 **WHITE MOTH BLACK BUTTERFLY** Atone (KSCOPE)
- 23 **HAWKWIND** Into The Woods (CHERRY RED)
- 24 **MARILLION** F E A R (EAR MUSIC)
- 25 **OPETH** Sorceress (NUCLEAR BLAST)
- 26 **FLAMING LIPS** Oczy Mlody (BELLA UNION)
- 27 **ELOY** The Vision, The Sword And The Pyre - Pt 1 (ARTIST STATION)
- 28 **VANGELIS** Rosetta (DECCA)
- 29 **BIG BIG TRAIN THE SECOND** Brightest Star (ENGLISH ELECTRIC)
- 30 **JETHRO TULL** The String Quartets (BMG)

Find out more at www.officialcharts.com

WIN!

BILL BRUFORD BRUFORD 1977-1980: SEEMS LIKE A LIFETIME AGO BOXED SET



Bruford 1977-1980: Seems Like A Lifetime Ago is a new eight-disc, limited Edition set of previously unreleased, remixed or remastered material from the Bruford band of the late 1970s. Produced by Bruford and presented in a 12" box with a 16-page colour booklet, four gatefold sleeves contain two discs each:

Disc 1 DVD: *Feels Good To Me*: 5.1 surround sound mix, original 1978 mix remastered.
Disc 2 CD: *Feels Good To Me*: 2017 Jakko Jakszyk remix from original master tapes.
Disc 3 DVD: *One Of A Kind*: 5.1 mix, original '79 mix remastered plus additional audio.
Disc 4 CD: *One Of A Kind*: 2017 Jakko Jakszyk remix from original master tapes.
Disc 5 CD: *Gradually Going Tornado*, remastered.
Disc 6 CD: *The Bruford Tapes*, remastered with bonus track.
Disc 7 CD: *Live At The Venue*, previously unreleased, 1980.
Disc 8 CD: *The 4th Album Rehearsal Sessions*, previously unreleased, 18 sketches of new material, recorded 1980.

It also includes a 16-page booklet with an essay by *Prog* writer Sid Smith, plus unseen archive visual material, complete band date sheet with contemporary critical reaction, band photos, a colour poster and a signed, numbered certificate of authentication. The package is available from Burning Shed and Pledge Music on October 28 via Winterfold Records. For your chance to win, answer the following:

What was the first King Crimson album that Bill Bruford played on?

- a) *Starless And Bible Black*
- b) *Islands*
- c) *Larks' Tongues In Aspic*

Email your answer to prog@futurenet.com with the subject header 'Bruford Comp'.

See www.burningshed.com and www.pledgemusic.com for more information.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This online comp will be open from October 12 to November 16. Postal entries can be sent to: Prog, Future Publishing, 1-10 Praed Mews, London W2 1QY. By entering online you agree to our competition rules and you confirm you are happy to receive details of future offers and promotions from Future Publishing and carefully selected third parties. The winner will be drawn 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



**VON HERTZEN
BROTHERS**
War Is Over
MASCOT

The Art Guy
Russell Fairbrother



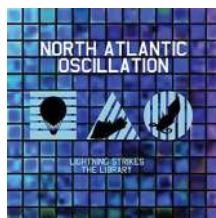
TROJAN HORSE
Fukushima Surfer Boys
BAD ELEPHANT MUSIC

The Lone Office Lady
Hannah May Kilroy



HIMMELLEGE ME
Myth Of Earth
KARISMA

The Musician
Daniel Tompkins



**NORTH ATLANTIC
OSCILLATION**
Lightning Strikes The Library
KSCOPE

The Writer
Bill Kopp



GRACIOUS
Gracious
VERTIGO

The Reader
Paul Bullough



**RIKARD SJÖBLOM'S
GUNGLY**
On Her Journey To The Sun
INSIDEOUT

CIRCU5

Contemplative prog rock theatre with a seriously dark concept.

OUR WORLD IN 2017 is a dark one, and as summer dies for another year, it darkens yet still. It's grey outside as Steve Tilling, the architect behind CIRCU5, talks to *Prog* – rain cascades down with a rhythmic pummelling. Such a gloomy setting mirrors, almost poetically, that of his new project's debut album and its twisted but evocative tale. The self-titled album tells the story of a child, raised as a psychopath by a secret government organisation hell-bent on curing its mental instabilities, while also harnessing the positive traits of psychotic genetics, such as fearlessness, domination and determination. The listener follows the story into the protagonist's adult life where the perturbing discovery is made, with disastrous consequences.

"I've always been fascinated by psychopaths," says Tilling. "They're the monsters that walk among us in that they don't really have that empathy that makes us human. But the character in the story isn't actually a psychopath – he's just been moulded to be who he is as an experiment."

"The album mirrors the ups and downs in my life while making it," Tilling confesses, before adding, "I've always been more attracted to anti-heroes, as opposed to something that's truly black or white. Life's more complicated than that: the character has his good parts too, and for a large part of his life, he didn't know the truth."

For all his force-fed psychotic traits and his domineering and brutal inbuilt violence, there's a victimised tenderness to the character. "He

becomes a blend of both sides of nature versus nurture," Tilling explains. "Like many psychopaths, he has the warrior gene, which is the gene that predisposes you to aggressive and violent behaviour, but there's also the idea that through nurturing, you can suppress those traits."

It's a thinking man's topic that underpins a thinking man's album, albeit one plentifully and carefully decorated with accessible hooks and melodies.

While echoing elements of *Stranger Things* in its conspiring sci-fi drama, musically Tilling hops between two conflicting worlds. From lofty alt-rock moments – *My Degenerate Mind* sounds like an early Foo Fighters offcut – to the left-of-centre tonalities and atmospheres of King Crimson (*The Chosen One – Resurrection*) and *In Absentia*-era Porcupine Tree, the depth of Tilling's musical wanderlust is his most progressive asset. The vast, expansive, five-part epic that closes the album proudly wears its array of influences on its theatrical sleeve. Tilling's influences travel widely and with them, so do you.

Ultimately, for Tilling, "It's about him finding his humanity after being shaped into something he's not. There are a lot of external and internal influences in life, but it's about overcoming negative influences and becoming a decent human being."

He talks with passion and detail, and after five years in the making, he has every nook and cranny fine-tuned on this album. "It's been a long road," he reflects, "but it's massively rewarding." **PW**

PROG FILE

CIRCU5

LINE-UP

Steve Tilling

SOUNDS LIKE

The deviant offspring of Foo Fighters and King Crimson – errant yet approachable

CURRENT RELEASE

CIRCU5 is out now via ST Productions

WEBSITE

www.circu5.com



"I've always been more attracted to anti-heroes as opposed to something that's truly black or white."

Psycho Thriller:
Steve Tilling.



Prog gets political with this London collective.

FROM 21ST CENTURY *Schizoid Man*'s tirade against the Vietnam War, through Pink Floyd and Marillion, right up to Steven Wilson's recent crossover hit, prog artists have long addressed sociopolitical issues, with lyrics going far beyond the stereotype of songs about hobbits and wizards. The grand scope of progressive music has proven to be fertile soil in which to plant lyrical seeds of doubt, despair and hope.

London-based band IT (pronounced 'it') released their fifth album *We're All In This Together* back in March, the latest in a trilogy which meets the modern malaise head on. Frontman and lyricist Nick Jackson faces down austerity and inequality on the album.

"I come from a political family," he explains. "My father's a political science professor. I grew up with politics around me so my style of writing is more socially conscious."

He laughs self-deprecatingly. "Trying to put the world to rights!"

The Canadian started IT as a solo psych-pop project in 1993, recording two cassette-only releases. After a period of touring multimedia performances with guest musicians, the first official band release came out in 2002, with Jackson's prog influences coming more to the fore. This release, *Over And Out*, flows as one song, a self-confessed "Floydian pastiche", replete with newsreel excerpts, voiceovers and gospel vocals.

2009's *Departure* saw the arrival of Andy Rowberry on guitar, and the newly forged writing partnership resulted in a more aggressive sound suited to its vitriolic attack on the Iraq War.

The spark for follow-up *We're All In This Together* was ignited by 2011's London Riots. "When that happened we were still doing interviews for *Departure*," explains Rowberry. "It was on the news while Nick was doing a Skype interview with some lady in New York. She was seeing it on the news. We were having a text conversation with each other. 'This was happening up the top of my road! It's on my doorstep.' Suddenly you think, 'Now we have something to focus on.'"

Jackson adds, "That was the catalyst and the symbol of the entire record. *Departure* was lyrically much more about global events whereas *We're All In This Together* is more England-focused, localised. It really brought it home for us."

The album pre-order included a lavish deluxe edition with bonus DVD. Visuals have always been an important concern for IT, even from those early live performances. The aesthetic of the deluxe package fed symbiotically into the music.

"It was a collaboration between myself and Melissa Connors, a photographer friend in Canada," says Jackson. "We flew her over and she and I went to Liverpool and got all those street scenes of abandoned houses. Melissa and I started working on images for the different songs even while I was still finishing verses, which is great because it helped me to get an overall visual and would help me focus."

"It's not just there to look pretty, to cover the fact that we're all ugly," jokes Rowberry. "It all ties together."

IT all ties together very well, Andy. **CM**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Nick Jackson (lead vocals, guitars), **Andy Rowberry** (backing vocals, guitars), **James Hawkins** (bass), **Will Chism** (drums), **Ryan McCaffrey** (keyboards, saxophone)

SOUNDS LIKE

Porcupine Tree with the vitriol of Roger Waters

CURRENT RELEASE

We're All In This Together is out now on Progressive Gears

WEBSITE

www.itband.tv



"The London riots were the catalyst and the symbol of the entire record."

The IT Crowd.

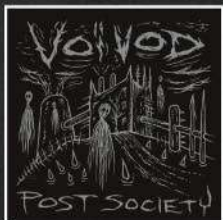


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MONDAY 16TH OCTOBER
CLIFFS PAVILION | SOUTHEND

WEDNESDAY 18TH OCTOBER
TRAMSHED | CARDIFF

SATURDAY 21ST OCTOBER
USHER HALL | EDINBURGH

SUNDAY 22ND OCTOBER
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THURSDAY 19TH OCTOBER
O₂ ABC | GLASGOW

MONDAY 23RD OCTOBER
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Himmellegeme, L-R: Hein Alexander Olson, Aleksander Vormestrand, Thord Nordli, Lauritz Isaksen, Erik Alfredsen.

HIMMELLEGE

Norwegian former metalheads reach for the stars.

“WHEN I MADE one of my co-workers – who’s actually married to a local priest – listen to our music, she said, “That’s what drug addicts must feel like when they take a trip!” I guess that’s a compliment, right?”

If listening to Sigur Rós immediately transports your thoughts to Iceland, Himmellegeme’s debut *Myth Of Earth* will remind anyone who’s visited the band’s home town of Bergen, Norway of its gloomy yet highly inspirational autumnal fading lights. In the Norwegian language, Himmellegeme means ‘orb’ or ‘celestial body’ – or, as lead guitarist Hein Alexander Olson clarifies, “The moon or something falling into space.”

It’s the perfect image for their lysergic and dreamlike style that doesn’t sit with the rest of the small but very active ‘new’ Bergen prog scene centred around the Karisma/Dark Essence imprint, and acts as Shaman Elephant, Seven Impale and Brimstone.

None of the five band members are actually from Bergen. “But we love it!” says their singer/guitarist Aleksander Vormestrand, before adding with a grin: “Even if it is true that it rains a lot here, so we spend a lot of time staring out of our windows, looking at the misty mountains. Some of that peculiar vibe must have crept into our music.”

Like Olson, Vormestrand is from the island of Karmøy in southern Norway – “Where the very first Viking king of the unified Norway lived!” – but he moved to Bergen in the late oos for his studies.

Himmellegeme’s musical roots lie not in prog, but in metal, even if they cite Pink Floyd and Porcupine Tree as some of the influences responsible for their first “serious” band Symbiose, with whom they released the album *Like All Shamans* three years ago.

“It was a mixture of both genres, a bit like Mastodon meets Opeth if you will,” says Olson. “But in 2015, with a metal scene that was oversaturated anyway, we began coming up with all those melodic and far more melancholic new songs that just didn’t suit our metal avatar, so we decided to start a new band on a side.

“It really took off when we initially auditioned our drummer Thord [Nordli] for Symbiose. But when he listened to the few demos we had already completed for Himmellegeme, he said he loved that material way more so we decided to focus more on the ‘soft’ parts of our material and start afresh.”

The album’s title refers to “this place you’ve heard of yet never seen, until now”; while the lyrics are a mix of both English and Norwegian. “I use my mother tongue whenever I feel like the song demands it and it’s okay if you don’t get what I’m saying because it’s all about going with the flow,” says Olson. “The best compliment we’ve heard so far from people who’ve just discovered us is that we made them close their eyes and drift off. That’s just fine with us.” **OZB**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Aleksander Vormestrand (guitar, vocals), Hein Alexander Olson (guitar), Lauritz Isaksen (keyboard), Erik Alfredsen (bass), Thord Nordli (drums)

SOUNDS LIKE

Pink Floyd-ish, crepuscular and laid-back dirges best listened to at night by a fjord

CURRENT RELEASE

Myth Of Earth is out now via Karisma

WEBSITE

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“The best compliment we’ve heard so far from people who’ve just discovered us is that we made them close their eyes and drift off.”

My Record Collection

NICK HELM

"I'm still learning about prog," says the rock-loving star of hit BBC show *Uncle*. So where does the actor-comedian-musician get his weirder chops from?

Words: Jo Kendall **Portrait:** Ben Meadows

"I grew up with vinyl; it was my mum and dad's record collection. My dad played guitar and is into folk, opera and classical music. There was lots of Latin American music, and soundtracks such as *Paint Your Wagon*. I found vinyl quite scary because you think you're gonna break it and it makes quite a violent noise if you play it wrong. But by four or five years old, me and my sister had learnt how to put on the Latin American music and we'd jump around the room to it.

Cat Stevens' *Catch Bull At Four* is my mum's — she signed it [points out the initials 'JH']. She must have had this at university or when she was travelling. Growing up in Finsbury Park in the 80s, we didn't sing hymns at school — it was Beatles songs and *Morning Has Broken*. Cat Stevens does folk but mixes so much more in with it — the track *Freezing Steel* is incredible. It's funky folk music, with a Hammond on it, bound up in this mysticism he has. This record fascinated me as there's a bit of ghosting on it, so you can hear the music before the track starts. It's imperfect, which I love. And playing vinyl is a physical experience, having to get up to turn it over from side A to B. It keeps you participating in it.

My dad used to play banjo and loves it. One half of this **Steve Martin** album, *The Steve Martin Brothers*, is comedy and the other half is banjo music. The banjo stuff is better than the comedy. While this music isn't progressive as such, Steve Martin's outlook is. He was the first comedian to do stadiums — that's why he wore white suits, to be seen — he did alternative comedy before anyone else, he's a playwright, a screenwriter, a comedian, a lead actor, an accomplished musician and a magician. He wasn't just giving these things a go — he mastered them before going on to the next thing. He's my comedy hero. As a kid I'd hunt out all his films in the video shop, to the point where, because I was young and stupid, I rented *The Naked Gun*, thinking Leslie Nielsen was him.

And then I got into Leslie Nielsen!

My mum used to love David Essex and my dad had a crush on Richard Burton, so we had a copy of **Jeff Wayne's *The War Of The Worlds*** at home, and this became a big favourite for me at university. Every magician needs this opening track for their act. It's so epic and exciting. It's up there with *The Phantom Of The Opera* — it gets you by the balls.

When I was eight, we moved house. I had a lot of friends in London but in St Albans I had quite

an isolated childhood where I spent a lot of time in the video shop, watching films and coming up with my own stories. My older sister was into Bon Jovi and Bryan Adams, and then she got the **Alice Cooper** single *Poison*. I found him very scary. Then *Wayne's World* showed me his sense of humour, and my mate had *Lost In America* on single, which we thought was hilarious. That was my introduction to him.

I had braces and my mum used to take me to Hemel Hempstead to have them tightened. My teeth would really hurt. We'd walk past this record shop afterwards and one week, to shut me up, she bought me Alice's *The Last Temptation*, which came with a free comic book. I totally fell in love with him. It's a concept album about a travelling ringmaster tempting a kid with false promises so he can steal his soul, and it has the character Steven in it from *Welcome To My Nightmare*, which I had yet to discover. I was just getting into horror films and this fitted perfectly. His lyrics are amazing, his ideas are fun and funny — his is a celebration of the dark side of life. The comic book is brilliant as well, written with Neil Gaiman.

Being a huge Alice Cooper fan, you'd get the works with packaging for albums such as *Billion Dollar Babies* or *School's Out*. **ELO's *Out Of The Blue*** is great as a physical thing — nice artwork, lyric sleeves. My generation grew up with ELO everywhere so they can be taken for granted, but every track here is a *Sgt Pepper* — complicated, exciting and beautiful.

I love a soundtrack album and **John Carpenter's *Lost Themes I and II*** stem back to my love of horror too. I listen to this when I'm writing, which is a lot. These are soundtracks to films that were never made so I come up with amazing imagery in my head to fit these when I write. I'm also a big fan of **Goblin**, especially for *Suspiria* and *Profondo Rosso*. These synthy themes aren't just there for atmosphere — they add a very musical groove and feel that complements the film and creates an identity.

And then you get the *Carrie* soundtrack [by Pino Donaggio]. I walked past this in the window of Flashback Records in Crouch End, went to the pub, then had to walk back to the shop to buy it — it was eating away at me. I'd not seen many Stephen King adaptations and last year I forced myself to watch more. When I watched this, my brain exploded — it's like watching a dream and the music is a huge part of that. It's iconic.

I found **Gowan's *Dirty Great World*** through a film soundtrack. This is what Lawrence Gowan did before joining Styx. This is quite a nice album but *Moonlight Desires* is the most amazing, romantic song, featuring Jon Anderson on backing vocal. I heard this for the first time in a film called *Wolf Cop*, during a romantic montage where Wolf Cop and this woman are locked in a cell and they have sex to this song. I saw the film once; I've listened to the song 100 times. I'll play this when I've had too much to drink and I'll dance around my kitchen.

Bat Out Of Hell gets all the love but **Meat Loaf's *Dead Ringer*** deserves attention. I never really fitted in during my teens. We'd go to Our Price in The Maltings and my mates would rip the piss out of me for buying Pulp. I found Meat Loaf through *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and *Wayne's World*. He's got an amazing voice, amazing range, huge personality. This album's great, really theatrical and operatic, and I love the imagery as well. He's a big guy, too, and I was a big guy... he's an inspiration as a performer.

I love *Season Of The Witch*, and I grew up with things like *Universal Soldier*, but I'm picking **Donovan's *Essence To Essence*** as a curveball. It's folky and mystical with some really funky stuff on there too. I really like it — it's a bit of comfort listening while I'm doing other things. It reminds me of my folks listening to John Denver, James Taylor, Cat Stevens and him. And imagine how great it was to find out he does backing for *Billion Dollar Babies*!

Everyone assumes I'm only into Slayer and Anthrax and heavy metal. Music is a bit like a remote control for me — when you find your remote control, you stop looking. I found Alice Cooper. But I'm still exploring, and want to discover as much stuff as possible."

Nick's food show Eat Your Heart Out is online at www.dave.uktv.co.uk and he's on tour now. See www.nick-helm.co.uk for details.


"Jeff Wayne's *The War Of The Worlds* is epic and exciting - it gets you by the balls."





PHILIP SELWAY

Not just the drummer for stadium proggers Radiohead, **Philip Selway** has also released a number of solo albums under his own name – and the latest is his very first soundtrack. *Prog* finds out more...

Words: Emma Johnston **Portrait:** Alex Lake

Dipping a toe into unknown waters is nothing new to the members of Radiohead, and their drummer Philip Selway's latest solo album marks another new milestone – his first soundtrack for a film. Directed by Polly Steele and starring Juliet Stevenson, *Let Me Go* is an adaptation of Helga Schneider's memoir. It tells the story of Helga's mother's decision to abandon her child in order to work as a guard in the Nazi concentration camps of 1940s Germany, and their eventual painful reintroduction to one another. Selway was brought on board by Steele and co-producer Lizzie Pickering, whom he knew from collaborating on a series of benefit concerts. As he explains, tackling the subject matter came with great responsibility...

Let Me Go is a soundtrack you can listen to as a standalone record, even if you haven't seen the film. Was that deliberate? That's what I wanted to do from the outset, and I think that defined part of the way we approached it. I had the Radiohead schedule coming up at particular points in the filming schedule, so it was a case of working with the screenplay and how I responded to that. And I'd seen the rushes as well, so I responded to the cinematography. But it was the ultimate thing in my mind that I wanted to release a soundtrack album that had to work as a record within its own right.

Do you think this release shows that you now have more confidence in yourself as a solo artist?

Definitely. I've grown in that respect. I wanted to write for dance and I wanted to write for film. And I got the opportunity to write for dance a couple of years ago with the Rambert dance company, and then this film project came along and it just felt like the right project, the right people to be working with. It felt like an incredibly powerful screenplay. I probably wouldn't have been in a position, in myself, if you went back about four or five years ago, where I'd have felt able to jump in and say, "Yes, I can do that."

"I wanted to release a soundtrack album that had to work as a record within its own right."

Do you have any favourite soundtracks?

The big soundtrack writers I've always really responded to are people like John Barry and Lalo Schiffrin, Leonard Bernstein, but none of them really inspired this one. It was a very different kind of texture to the film. Recently I loved what Geoff Barrow did for *Ex Machina*. You have to get the textures right, you have to get the emotional resonance of it right.

With the subject matter, was it a big responsibility to set the right tone?

Absolutely. It's based on Helga Schneider's real-life story, and this meeting between her and her mother actually happened, so you're very respectful of that. Somebody has shared that story, and then the wider story as well, the background of what happened in the 1940s, and in the concentration camps. One of the things that really drew me was the inter-generational story, and the complexity of how generational trauma plays out in all the different generations. If you're dealing with that in a real-life situation, you'd tread softly. That played into how I approached it.

Did you go on-set when they were filming?

I did! Just seeing that come to life, that was really exciting, and that played into the process of making the music. Knowing that Juliet Stevenson was going to play Helga informed how I wrote *Helga's Theme*. And it was great to meet everybody. It makes sure you're all coming from the same place. I got to be in the film as well! There's a scene in a nightclub in Vienna and I'm one of the audience members in silhouette. It's the scene where Lou Rhodes [singer-songwriter, solo and with Lamb] is performing her song. I think I make a good silhouette. That's the extent of my acting ability.

How did Lou Rhodes get involved?

There's a nightclub scene and we wanted this chanteuse figure performing. I approached Lou and asked her if she's be up for it. She came along incredibly generous-spirited and very open-minded to it. I love Lou's voice, and she's an amazing performer and a great songwriter. What she's done with Lamb and her own solo material, it has that emotional impact to it. If you're thinking of someone to cast as a chanteuse, you can't do better than Lou.

There seems to be a taste for World War II films at the moment, presumably because the world seems to be going mad again. Was that a consideration?

What I liked about the film was approaching it from a slightly different angle – from the angle of Traudi, the mother who abandoned Helga. She's a very strong presence. And you could see it would be a very timely film – what had become normalised to her in the context of Nazi Germany. You watch it and you have no sympathy for what she's saying, you're appalled by it, but you realise that was her normality, and seeing how a character can get to that point. Particularly at the moment – look at Charlottesville and the rise in hate crime, and intolerance seems to be gaining traction. It's very timely, because it makes you reflect on yourself and what you've got to guard against in yourself. But it's such a powerful message and lesson to put across.

Have you got plans for more solo records?

Yeah, I want to make another solo record. We're going to be taking a little bit of time off from Radiohead so I can start getting my plans together. With Radiohead it gets up and running and then it goes dormant for a while, it's how we work. We've all got different projects we want to get on with, having had a couple of years of touring. I've loved this tour. What makes sense of a band continuing is when you feel like you're always improving in some way, and I felt in terms of live shows, it stepped up another notch.

So what will happen with Radiohead after your break?

Ooh, we'll have to see! It's been the same for the past 30 years, so it's business as usual in that respect.

Let Me Go OST is out via Bella Union on October 27. For more information, see www.philipselway.com.





It's that time of the year again: when the great and good of the progressive music scene don their finery and come together to celebrate the music we all love, back in Shakespeare's lavish Underglobe. Here's how it all went down...

Our Banquo At The Banquet: Malcolm Dome
Images: Will Ireland

'Some are born great,
some achieve greatness,
and some have greatness
thrust upon them.'

Precious Metal: the coveted Prog Awards.



The Beatrix Players wow the audience.



Invited Guest: Marillion mainman Steve Hogarth.



Al Murray and Danny Baker get to the point.





L-R: designer Jarrod Gosling, Tim Bowness, Peter Hammill.



Prog bigwig Jerry Ewing gets the awards underway [while looking devilishly handsome - Ed].

Sir Lenny Henry. Let's just repeat that. Sir Lenny. Henry. At the Progressive Music Awards. And no, this wasn't just a gratuitous invitation sent to the great comedian in order to get cheap publicity. He's there with King Crimson's Jakko Jakszyk. And what's more, Sir Lenny embraces the occasion with real vigour.

He's very keen on the impressive Roger Dean exhibition put together for the night by Trading Boundaries, and even makes a point of telling John Miles, recipient of the Outstanding Musical Achievement award, how much he loved one of Miles' shows back in 1975! There's no doubt Sir Lenny is charmed by the convivial atmosphere. But then, that's what makes the Progressive Music Awards special.

"Everywhere I look in the room, it's full of friends or blasts from the past," says Mike Portnoy, a sentiment echoed by his Sons Of Apollo bandmate Derek Sherinian.

"This is my first time here," Sherinian says. "It's amazing. Just seeing so many legends, and they're all approachable. It's like a big family."

Prog editor Jerry Ewing emphasises the special atmosphere here in his introductory speech, reflecting on the remarkably positive vibe. He also reads out part of a lengthy letter from the absent Rick Wakeman. This is the first Progressive Music Awards that Wakeman has missed, as he's currently on tour with Yes featuring ARW, and he's clearly very disappointed not to be here. Mind you, most of his missive is apparently, erm, too inappropriate, as only Wakeman can be!

Prior to the awards themselves, the Beatrix Players perform two songs. One is their new

"Nobody ever says it, but Carl, *thank you!*"

Danny Baker

single *All That Thinking*, and they also play a highly stylised version of Nine Inch Nails' *Hurt*, which seduces everyone with its texture and grace. The band also pick up the opening award of the night, Limelight, which proves to be a very popular choice.

Everyone is then left stunned by host Matthew Wright's choice of attire as he takes to the stage. As Marillion's Steve Hogarth later remarks: "It looks like something I scraped off the roof this morning!"

This is Wright's fourth year as host, and he has never looked more in tune with the occasion. Short of donning a cape, he couldn't have looked more *elaborate* in his patterned velvet suit. "This suit screams prog!" Wright exclaims as he gets into the groove.

The aforementioned Jakszyk makes the first of two appearances onstage, picking up the Video Of The Year Award on behalf of King Crimson for *Heroes*. But he has a little surprise up his sleeve, or rather in his jacket: he pulls out a letter, which has a short message from none other than Robert Fripp: "King Crimson were created for the video age. And now the public has finally acknowledged this."

Well, it's better than just saying, "Thanks!"

The acclaimed festival Be Prog! My Friend wins the award for Event Of The Year, while Steve Hillage picks up the Reissue Of The



Opeth celebrate being Prog's International Band Of The Year.



Sonja Kristina gets into the crazy world of Arthur Brown.



The Big Big Train boys.



Broadcasting legend Danny Baker waxes lyrical about his love of ELP.



Lucky Man: Prog God Carl Palmer.

Year award for *Searching For The Spark*, and Anathema's Vinnie Cavanagh is delighted to be sitting next to Hillage tonight.

"I got to tell him I was one of his pothead pixies when I was 17 years old and working in a record shop. I'm not sure how pleased he was to hear that, but it was great for me to meet someone who meant so much when I was younger, and helped get me into this music."

Anathema themselves pick up the Album Of The Year award for *The Optimist*, and Danny Cavanagh later promises that they won't lose this one, as they did with a previous award.

Tim Bowness' *Lost In The Ghost Light* is honoured with the Album Cover Of The Year award, handed over by prog art legend Roger Dean. Bowness and designer Jarrod Gosling pick it up, although they do little to enhance their self-styled reputation as the Morecambe And Wise of prog! They probably need Rick Wakeman to write their scripts.

Portnoy presents the International Band Of The Year award to Opeth, and Mikael Åkerfeldt, like many of the recipients, hasn't prepared a speech. Instead, he grabs the chance to remark that the band still occasionally do a cover of Napalm Death's *You Suffer*, which is an extraordinary two seconds long!

Will Smith hands over the UK Band Of The Year award. The comedian and novelist is delighted that Marillion are the recipients, as he tells everyone, "As far as I'm concerned, they are the band of every year!" Well, he did once do an entire routine at the Edinburgh Festival based around them, so you can say he's something of a fan. Hogarth takes the opportunity to introduce each band member to the assembled throng, just to prove he's not yet drunk enough to have forgotten their names.

The peripatetic Jakszyk is back onstage to hand over the Outer Limits Award to Mark King, and relates how a call from the bassist 26 years ago saved him from bankruptcy! "This is only the second award I've ever won," says King. "The other one was for being the worst-dressed man of 1989!"

He glances knowingly over at Wright, who could be a contender in that category this year!

Steve Rothery is a massive fan of Steve Hackett, so it's appropriate he gets the chance to hand over the Chris Squire Virtuoso award to the latter, who seems genuinely surprised by the honour. And does Hackett let out a secret when he tells us that he and Rothery are talking about working together?

"I didn't write anything down because I wasn't expecting this," Hackett says later, "so what I said was all off the top of my head."

Voivod drummer Michel 'Away' Langevin, one of the nicest people you could ever wish to meet, is overcome to be in a room filled with such luminaries. "I've always loved Steve Hackett and Steve Hillage. But for me, the biggest thrill is knowing that I'm so close to Peter Hammill. He's such a big hero of mine. However, I don't want to meet him. I honestly wouldn't know what to say to him. How do you talk to a person who's been such a massive influence on you?"

Accepting the Visionary Award on behalf of the band, Away inevitably cites Van der Graaf Generator as being hugely



Mark King (centre), the worst-dressed man of 1989, picks up his Outer Limits going from Matthew Wright, the worst-dressed man of 2017.



"Everywhere I look in the room, it's full of friends or blasts from the past."

Mike Portnoy

important in Voivod's development, as well as pointing out that this is the first award they've ever been given.

Towards the end of the night, Away is introduced to Hammill, and the pair amiably chat about music and their love for being 'awkward buggers', as the latter once dubbed those like himself who get the Visionary accolade.

A new category, the Industry VIP Award, is given to Max Hole and presented by Andrew Daw, one of his protégés at Universal Records. In a near 50-year career, Hole has done much to develop and nurture progressive music, as promoter, manager and record company executive. It's incredible to think that the first gig he ever promoted was The Who at Canterbury University, supported by Genesis. The fee? A princely £1,000!

Sonja Kristina warms to her task of presenting the Lifetime Achievement award to Eddie Jobson. She relates how he was brought into Curved Air to replace Darryl Way and Francis Monkman when he was just 18. Jobson disagrees, though, saying he was only just 17 at the time. For someone that young to be asked to take over two such crucial roles is staggering.

The man himself relates how he bought the debut albums from ELP and Curved Air in 1970, and assiduously learnt the keyboard and violin parts. He also pays homage to his former UK bandmates Allan Holdsworth and John Wetton, both of whom passed away recently.

These two are also acknowledged at the start of the awards, when images of those talents we've lost in the last year pass across the screen. It's a sombre yet also warming reminder of these giants, and throughout the evening these people are also acknowledged by award recipients. Perhaps Mike Portnoy sums it up best when he says: "The music is timeless, but we are not."

And so to the last award of the night, the most prestigious one of the lot: the Prog God. This year it goes to Carl Palmer, and Danny Baker is given the job of presenting it. Widely recognised as a huge ELP fan, Baker's



Legendary prog artist Roger Dean announcing the Cover Of The Year winner.



Michel 'Away' Langevin:
Voivod's Visionary.



Comedian, novelist and massive
Marillion fan Will Smith.



Mike Portnoy, trying not to look
at Matthew Wright's suit...



A Stellar Line-up, L-R: Al Murray,
Lenny Henry, Jakko Jakszyk and
Danny Baker celebrating the
music they love.



Carl Palmer: a hugely
popular Prog God.

impassioned speech stirs everyone. He relates how, at the age of just 14, he went to see the trio at the London Pavilion in Piccadilly. The date is forever embedded in his memory: December 15, 1971. "I'd never heard anything like it before," he exclaims.

It remains the best gig Baker has ever seen, and it meant so much to him that he actually brought along vinyl copies of ELP's albums tonight, plus a tour programme. And to introduce Palmer onstage, he pulls out the press release that was sent out with the band's debut album, and he reads out the passage about the drummer!

We get a montage of footage spanning the iconic drummer's lengthy career. It includes The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown (Brown himself is present tonight, in an outfit that rivals that of Wright's), Atomic Rooster, ELP, Carl's Palmer's PM, Asia and Carl Palmer's ELP Legacy — a suitable reminder of how this man has spanned the whole prog era.

Palmer himself pays due homage to the important roles played by Keith Emerson and Greg Lake in his life. "We were never the greatest of friends," he admits, "but there was definitely a magic between us."

He also mentions the loss of John Wetton, who was part of the classic Asia line-up

alongside the drummer. And amusingly he relates how it's "Only taken me 50 years to become an overnight success!"

Palmer rightly highlights how ELP "Set the blueprint for this English art form" called prog, and it makes you realise that this man has been part of our lives for so long, it's hard to imagine what music would be like without him.

"I owe so much to Keith and Greg for where I am today. Without them, I would have been somewhere, just not here."

Baker interjects towards the end of Palmer's speech to make a very apposite point. "Nobody ever says it, but Carl, *thank you!*" as he grabs the drummer's hand in a sincere gesture that gets everyone applauding.

Palmer counters that with an equally heartfelt comment of his own: "On behalf of Keith, Greg and myself, thank you."

It's a fitting finale to what has been unquestionably the most memorable Prog Awards so far.

"You know, when you walk into this room and see so many faces — some familiar, others not, then you feel like you've come home," says Sonja Kristina afterwards. "It's a family gathering once a year, and I love it."

But the most oft-used phrase of the night is... "Where's the bar?" Several musicians

ask this vital question at various times in the night as they search for extra sustenance.

And who knows how many artistic plans have been hatched tonight? As Mikael Åkerfeldt says: "There are just so many amazing musicians here. I would love to do projects with even half of them."

To watch Sir Lenny Henry and also Al Murray wandering around with permanent smiles on their faces is a fine representation of what makes this a unique occasion. There are no egos, no attitudes. This is a community who come together from all parts of the globe and all areas of the prog world in a spirit of camaraderie.

"I cannot believe who's here," says Amy Birks, vocalist with the Beatrix Players. "To get the chance to perform in front of these legends is something I could never have imagined happening to us. And we'll never forget this night."

Perhaps Peter Hammill best sums up the feeling on the night. "Every year, coming here is a pleasure. It's déjà vu."

Here's to 2018, when we get to do déjà vu all over again. ☺

For all the coverage on the Progressive Music Awards, see www.progmagazine.com.



They came, they saw, they conquered. The general consensus of opinion is that the **Progressive Music Awards 2017** was one of the very best yet. Here, the winners share their thoughts on the night...

Words: Jerry Ewing **Images:** Kevin Nixon

"None of us are here on freehold. It's all leasehold..."

Limelight

Sponsored by



BEATRIX PLAYERS

"It's incredible - very exciting and amazing. It was slightly nerve-racking playing in front of that audience and you just have to forget about them for a few minutes and think about the music. But it was really great and we loved it."



Live Event

Sponsored by **TEAMROCK+**

BE PROG! MY FRIEND

Juan Antonio Muñoz: "The idea was always to blend the old prog bands with the new ones coming up, because we love the music."

Andy Farrow: "It's not about making money. It's all about building a brand and winning something like this helps get the message across. And we're seeing that message build because of the young bands that are coming through and the young people who come to the festival."



Album Cover Of The Year

Sponsored by **TRADING BOUNDARIES**

TIM BOWNESS LOST IN THE GHOST LIGHT

Tim Bowness: "It was a very detailed sleeve - we had many ideas and lots of notes. It was very important for me, in the digital age, to have a lot of detail on the artwork that conveyed the concept of the album."

Jarrod Gosling [artist]: "Right back to the 80s I'd always made up imaginary band names, so to be able to do it with the cover - and in the gatefold there are all these imaginary album sleeves from this band Moonshot - it was so much fun."



International Band Of The Year

Sponsored by  Kscope



OPETH

Mikael Åkerfeldt: "It feels like we have one year until the next band take over. But it's nice. I like it. I'm a big music fan and collect records, and I used to look for bands who looked like Black Sabbath on the gatefold Vertigo label. That's how I discovered Van der Graaf Generator and Gentle Giant. We've won lots of awards, but this is only the second time I've ever been there to actually collect the award, so it's great."

Video Of The Year

KING CRIMSON HEROES

Jakko Jakszyk: "We shot the video in Berlin, which added extra poignancy because that's where Robert recorded the original. It's a real honour to sing that song live. When David Bowie died, I did think it might be a nice idea to cover it. I emailed Robert and he was thinking the same thing. After two-and-a-half hours of enormous concentration with a Crimson set, it's the only part of the night when I feel like a rock star. It's lovely coming back to the Awards - I made a lot of good friends last year and it's good to see them again."



Outstanding Musical Achievement

JOHN MILES

John Miles: "I think I made a contribution but that was way back in the 70s. I suppose it has endured though. And the song *Music* has endured as well, and that was the biggest hit worldwide. I'm a man of few words and there are eight lines of lyrics in that song. I get to work with orchestras these days too, which is fantastic."



Reissue Of The Year

Sponsored by  ORANGE

STEVE HILLAGE SEARCHING FOR THE SPARK

Steve Hillage: "I'm blown away. When I saw the list of other nominees - people like Pink Floyd, my personal heroes Can, Yes, Rush - I was just honoured to be nominated. I think we've done a great box set, but to get the recognition for it is just fantastic. Artistically, the motivation was wanting to tell my own story, so we remembered everything really."



Album Of The Year

Sponsored by **CHERRY RED RECORDS**

ANATHEMA THE OPTIMIST

Daniel Cavanagh: "This is the one we wanted. It's prestigious, it means a lot."

Vincent Cavanagh: "It means the most. It's about the music and that's what we do. You put eight months of your life, your heart and soul into it..."

Lee Douglas: "It's also for an album with a new producer [Tony Doogan] who was really new to us, but I really enjoyed working with him."

Daniel Cavanagh: "It was difficult to make, it took a long time and we put everything we had into it and came out drained. But it worked."



Industry VIP

MAX HOLE

(presented by Andrew Daw)

Max Hole: "It's been a wonderful period in my life. I was very young in 1963 when The Beatles exploded and music was it for me. I managed Spirogyra and then Camel, Martin Carthy and Martin Chapman. I realised when I went to Kent University that as a singer-songwriter I wasn't very good, but I was enthusiastic and there were lots of great players there. All terribly exciting to me."



UK Band Of The Year

Sponsored by **THE PROG**
PROGRESSIVE MUSIC AWARDS 2017

MARILLION

Mark Kelly: "Very, very excited."

Steve Hogarth: "Very, very flattered. The album got an amazing reception, everything we could have dreamt of really. You never know, you make the best record that you can and then you cross your fingers and hope somebody gets it. And a lot of people seemed to get this one."

Ian Mosley: "We're really excited about playing the Royal Albert Hall on the back of this as well."

Outer Limits

MARK KING

Mark King: "I'm so chuffed. So pleased to get an award. Progressive is what music is all about to me. People might wonder why a guy from a jazz funk band in the 80s is here, but that was only one part. As a musician and composer you write all kinds of things. I've been lucky enough to work with all kinds of people over the years. I discovered Cream when I was eight and then at 15 had an epiphany seeing the Mahavishnu Orchestra. It all made perfect sense to me. And now I'm in Gizmodrome with Stewart [Copeland], Vittorio [Cosma] and Adrian [Belew]. Just amazing."





Chris Squire Virtuoso Award

Sponsored by **BMG**

STEVE HACKETT (presented by Steve Rothery)

Steve Hackett: "It's been a great evening. I was enjoying myself until they started handing out the awards, and then you tense up and think, 'What do I say if I won something?' But there's been a lot of love in the room and it's been a great evening. But it's not just this evening - it goes on. The genre that involves all genres is here to stay. It's the best art form, I think. It's important not to forget Chris Squire. I was a huge fan, and I remember talking to Phil Collins about Yes, and he was a huge fan at that time - big band music through electric instruments. And that was Yes."



Visionary

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VOIVOD

Michel 'Away' Langevin: "I'm really, really, really proud. As I mentioned on stage, we don't really get awards. We're still seen as very underground, although maybe influential. But to win this is mind-blowing. In the early days it was stuff like Van der Graaf, King Crimson, Rush... Progressive rock was huge in Quebec. Voivod became a prog rock band over the course of a few years, and we have bands like Mastodon and Meshuggah now telling us how we influenced them, which is great."



Lifetime Achievement

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EDDIE JOBSON (presented by Sonja Kristina)

Eddie Jobson: "I feel fantastic. And surprised. The albums that I did were mostly in the 70s and early 80s, so I didn't really expect, some 30 years later, to be honoured for them. It was lovely having Sonja Kristina present to me as well, because I was such a big fan of Curved Air and every boy at my school loved Sonja. I was just 17, had a record deal with Warners and was in the same studio that Keith Emerson had recorded with ELP in. And then Roxy Music, going to America... It all changed my life."

Prog God

CARL PALMER (presented by Danny Baker)

Danny Baker: "As the cliché goes, if anyone told the 14-year-old me I'd be doing this, I'd say that's a life well lived. It was a wonderful thing to do. I only used a third of the tributes and gags I had... But here is one of the great musicians of one of the great bands of the 20th and 21st century. Marvellous."

Carl Palmer: "I won the Virtuoso award several years ago, but never really thought about the main one. But it's a real great thing for me to have right now, having lost two such big players [ELP bandmates Keith Emerson and Greg Lake], as well as John Wetton. Three in one 11-month period. None of us are here on freehold - it's all leasehold. But to work with such great people and have made such great music... this is very touching. I'm still here and having this award is just great."

Prog's 21st Century Renaissance Man

Mikael Åkerfeldt has spent nearly 30 years steering the ship of **Opeth**, a group that have progressed far beyond their metal beginnings. The Swedes picked up the Prog Award for Best International Band last month and Åkerfeldt himself has collaborated with the likes of Steven Wilson and Steve Hackett. Could he be the new figurehead for modern prog rock?

Words: Dave Everley

Images: Kevin Nixon and Stuart Wood

Mikael Åkerfeldt can't remember precisely where he was when a disgruntled crowd member challenged him to a duel, but it was — inevitably — somewhere in America. Åkerfeldt's band Opeth were on a US club tour in support of their 2011 album *Heritage*, a record that jettisoned the last vestiges of their guttural extreme metal sound in favour of music that was pastoral, contemplative and unequivocally progressive.

The album had barely even hit the shelves, but Åkerfeldt decided that he was going to "force-feed" the new songs to the crowd, acoustic passages and all. Not surprisingly, this new Bob Dylan-in-reverse direction didn't go down too well with the knuckle-dragging element of their audience.

"We were hitting places where they were a bit loud in voicing in their opinions in the middle of the show," he says. "People started complaining and screaming and leaving during the show. And people started to challenge me to fights onstage. At this one show, this guy threw down his glove. He was challenging me to a duel."

Did you take him up on it?
"No," says Åkerfeldt with a laugh. "I had him thrown out."

Such are the pitfalls of being a modern prog icon, especially one as single-minded as Mikael Åkerfeldt. The 43-year-old Swede has steered Opeth from their beginnings as part of the Scandinavian death metal scene to their current position as 21st-century progressive rock standard-bearers.

It hasn't always been easy — there has been resistance from outside and inside the band. Ask Åkerfeldt today how he's managed it and he puts it down to his innate doggedness.

"I'm a stubborn person," he says. "Like playing *Heritage* songs before the album even came out, that was just tunnel vision: 'We're gonna do it this way, and you can fuck off if you don't like it.' Sometimes I'm too stubborn, maybe. But I can't change myself."

It's an approach that has served Opeth well, even if it has occasionally brought the band — and Åkerfeldt himself — close to the edge. Today, talking from his home in Sweden ahead of a short European tour to support last year's stellar *Sorceress* album, he's



Opeth at the Prog Awards
2017, L-R: Martin Axenrot,
Martin Mendez, Fredrik
Åkesson, Mikael Åkerfeldt,
Joakim Svalberg.



Some people got really, really upset with *Heritage*, but I didn't see it as a massive departure from before. If you couldn't see that coming, I wondered where you'd fucking been.



on garrulous form: friendly, open, honest and funny about his past, present and future.

Åkerfeldt, together with Steven Wilson, Devin Townsend, Ihsahn, Enslaved and more, is one of prog's New Kings — a group of musicians who, individually and collectively, have taken the foundations of the genre that were laid down 50 years ago and built on them, looking forward rather than backwards.

"I've put a lot into Opeth over the years," he says. "But then I've had no choice. This band is our life's work."



In some ways, Mikael Åkerfeldt makes an unlikely progressive rock hero, but in other ways it was the only possible path he would eventually take. As a teenager, he was a dyed-in-the-wool heavy metal fan, albeit one with an eye on the past: he loved Judas Priest and Deep Purple as much as the thrash and death metal that was in vogue at the time. "I always thought I was born in the wrong era," he says. "I never felt like I fitted in. I should have been around in the 70s."

While all his school friends focused on getting grown-up jobs — "They wanted to be civil engineers or some bullshit" — Åkerfeldt dreamed



of doing something else. “I didn’t want to be forced into a society where you have to be a certain way, where anything else you want to do is just a futile dream,” he says. “I just wanted to be a guitar player. That was gonna be my job.”

He dropped out of school early, at 17. His parents weren’t hugely supportive of his musical dreams. “They said things like, ‘You should get a proper job, get a proper education, and you can have your hobby on the side.’ They used that word a lot – ‘hobby’. It made me fucking furious. ‘What do you mean, ‘hobby’? It’s my life.’”

Sweden in the late 80s and early 90s was the ground zero of extreme metal, and Åkerfeldt found himself in the thick of things. Opeth weren’t his band – he had been recruited to play bass by original vocalist David Isberg, to the chagrin of the other members at the time. They all promptly left, leaving Isberg and Åkerfeldt to rebuild the group. Isberg himself bailed within a year, handing the reins to Åkerfeldt.

Early Opeth albums such as *Orchid* and *Morningrise* fell squarely in the extreme metal arena, though they possessed a musical ambition that most of their peers lacked: songs such as the 20-minute *Black Rose Immortal* and the dreamily bucolic *Credence* showed a progressive soul fighting to break out.

When you look back at those early albums, do you recognise the band that made them?

A little bit, yeah. I recognise the idea of the band, but I was limited as a guitar player and a songwriter. I’m very proud of those early records, but

I’ve put a lot into Opeth over the years. But then I’ve had no choice. This band is our life’s work.



2008’s *Watershed* (top) and 2011’s pivotal, pastoral *Heritage*.

there’s one thing I hear, which is a hunger, that makes me cringe. It’s kind of a juvenile hunger.

Isn’t that a mark of your ambition? That can’t be a bad thing!

It’s not a bad thing. It just makes me cringe. I had an ego. I figured we were the best band around. It was important in those days because it was the only fucking good thing I’d ever done in my life. Now I’ve been in the game for a long time, I guess I’m a bit more jaded [laughs]. I’m not less ambitious – it just shows in different ways.

Was Opeth a democracy or were you the leader from early on?

I always wanted a clean democracy – five people in the band, everybody as equals. I wanted it to be a tight unit of friends – that was more important to me than flexing my muscles, like, “I’m the fucking songwriter here.” Even though I did write most of the songs, there was a more democratic feeling, even if on paper it wasn’t really a democracy. [Laughs] It was a dictatorship like it is today.

You’re the only constant member throughout Opeth’s entire career. Why have you got through so many musicians?

It’s not a Ritchie Blackmore thing. In the early days, we didn’t make any money, we couldn’t live off the music, so a lot of people simply quit. Other people have been fired, but I haven’t fired anyone based on nothing – there’s always been a reason. I want to have a family-type situation, but it hasn’t always worked out like that. The people who are not in the band any more, they’re the ones who have the problems as far as I’m concerned.

Are you a difficult person to work with? A hard taskmaster?

I wouldn’t say I’m hard to work with. But I think I am a hard taskmaster. I don’t give up easily. I’m not the best musician in the band. All the other guys are fucking terrific – I’m not at

their level. I’m a pretty mediocre guitar player and singer, but I do write the songs, which is my strength. I have a clear idea of what Opeth is supposed to sound like, and we have something that’s ours. But musically, I would have fired myself a long time ago.



At the end of the 00s, Mikael Åkerfeldt had a crisis of confidence. Opeth’s most recent albums, the increasingly intricate *Ghost Reveries* (2005) and *Watershed* (2008), had been garlanded with praise and continued the band’s upwards trajectory. When Åkerfeldt started writing a follow-up to *Watershed*, he knew it wasn’t right.

“I wrote a continuation of the *Watershed* record, which was good but not great,” he says. “I was telling myself, ‘It’s good enough,’ which had always been forbidden. Things should never be ‘good enough.’”

It was bassist Martin Mendez who helped set Åkerfeldt right. Mendez told his bandmate what he’d written was “shit”. “That was helpful,” says Åkerfeldt dryly.

In reality it was. On the advice of his bandmate – and of producer/friend Steven Wilson – he scrapped the new songs and started again from scratch. The album that came out of this period of artistic turbulence would arguably be the most controversial, but also the most pivotal, of their career: *Heritage*.

Like *Blackwater Park* a decade earlier, *Heritage* remains a key staging post in Opeth’s career. They’d made bold artistic statements before – not least the amped-up/stripped-down yin-yang of *Deliverance* and *Damnation* (2002 and 2003 respectively) – but never anything so audacious.

Stripped of death growls, grinding riffs and anything else even remotely resembling extreme metal, *Heritage* was, perversely, more challenging than anything they’d released before. Åkerfeldt had been edging prog-wards ever since he was introduced to Camel years earlier by a colleague while working at a music shop in Stockholm, but this was an all-or-nothing embrace of the genre. It wasn’t quite a rebirth for Opeth so much as their prog coming-of-age ceremony.

Heritage was a big turning point, but it also sounded like an album you’d been itching to make for years. Is that the case?

Absolutely.

So what took you so long?

I guess I was comfortable because we were popular with whatever we were doing up till then. All those records had done well for us, it was comfortable, (P)



WILL IRELAND

MIKE PORTNOY ON MIKAEL ÅKERFELDT

I love Mikael dearly. He and I are kindred spirits. First of all, I love the music he makes. You won’t get a bigger Opeth fan than me. I love everything they’ve done, from the most brutal music to the most prog epics. You put it together and you get ‘bru-tiful music.’ As a fan, it moves me so much.

But as a friend and as a person, we’re both music enthusiasts and historians and record collectors. We get together and we can just talk music and rock’n’roll trivia and history together – I love and respect and admire him so much.

He is the one person that I have yet to work with. We’ve toured together, and I’ve taken Opeth out when I was in Dream Theater, and he and I constantly flirt with the idea of doing something together. We’ve been talking about it for 10 or 15 years now. We’re just waiting for the right moment, for the right vehicle.

It’s the one collaboration that’s still eluded me and I’m still patiently waiting for. I would do it tomorrow – Mike knows that. I think he’s a bit more hesitant. I’m obviously very good juggling 87 bands. I think he’s a little more, ‘Can I do this? Is the time right? What will it be?’ I keep trying to nudge him: ‘Mike, dude, whatever it is it’ll be great – let’s just fucking get in a room and play together.’” **DEV**

In A Field Of Their Own:
Åkerfeldt and his band.





The Damnation-era line-up, circa 2003.



TINA KORHONEN

STEVE HACKETT ON MIKAEL ÅKERFELDT

"I first became aware of Mikael through the stuff he did with Steven Wilson. It seemed quite radical, and I thought, 'Hmm, interesting voice.' I wasn't really aware of his death metal background at the time, but I picked that up latterly – I suspect that's only part of the picture with him.

Most of us concentrate all our efforts on something that can broadly be called a genre, whether that's progressive music or death metal. But I'm interested in the way things can develop and the way you can transcend the limitation of genres, and I think he is too.

I get the feeling that Mikael considers himself more of a guitarist than a singer. The rest of us, while we note that he plays excellent guitar, there's a uniqueness to his voice – a depth and a soul. It's a voice that can sing death metal, but also a voice that can sing ballads and do all this other stuff. He's a multifaceted character with tremendous capabilities.

Mikael helped out on my *Genesis Revisited* project, where he sang some of *Supper's Ready*. But I would love to collaborate with him again in the future because I think he's absolutely terrific. I haven't mentioned anything to him but I think something original would be good. He's a big fan of the classic period of Genesis, and I'm getting interested in the area he's working on. Once you start putting focus on each other's things, interesting things can come out of it." **DEV**

we could pay the bills. But we needed to try something different. And our bass player telling me the songs I'd written were shit helped.

A lot of people had a fairly adverse reaction to it, like the guy who challenged you to a duel in America. But surely they should have seen it coming, right?

That's what I thought! Some people got really, really upset with it, but I didn't see it as a massive departure from before. If you couldn't see that coming, I wondered where you'd fucking been.

Did the reaction hurt you?

Not really. I was in that tunnel vision mood: "We're gonna do it this way." I don't regret it. It made us improve as musicians.



Åkerfeldt's songwriting ability is almost matched by his gift for self-deprecation. But his humour –

and his mental wellbeing – has been sorely tested over the years. Ask him if there have been times when it hasn't been fun being in Opeth and his reply is instant.

"Oh fuck yeah," he says. "Millions of times. Being in Opeth has been shit at times. It's been shit for a lot of the time, in fact. We've had so many problems in this band. We've just never gone public with them."

The worst time came in the oos. The band's fourth album, 1999's *Still Life*, was a watershed moment. Easing back further on the brutality in favour of a complex, intricate approach, it served notice to the wider world that there was more to the Swedes than anyone could have guessed just a few years earlier. Two years later, the follow-up, *Blackwater Park*, suggested that their progressive/extreme metal hybrid was more than just an accident (*Blackwater Park* remains the definitive Opeth album in the eyes of many).

But the artistic and commercial success coincided with a period of turbulence for both the band and



Opeth in 1993, L-R: Peter Lindgren, Anders Nordin, Mikael Åkerfeldt, Stefan Guterklint.



Mikael Åkerfeldt: always at the forefront of the band.

Being in Opeth has been shit at times. It's been shit for a lot of the time, in fact. We've had so many problems in this band. We've just never gone public with them.



Åkerfeldt. Issues with then-drummer Martin Lopez created internal tensions that gradually built over a period of years. As the de facto leader, Åkerfeldt bore the brunt of it. He began suffering debilitating anxiety attacks.

"It was all mental problems caused by the situation in the band and the fact I took on too much work," he says. "There was a time when nobody in the band cared if we were gonna continue or not. I carried everything on my shoulders and the other guys didn't give a flying fuck about anything as far as I was concerned. They just expected me to deliver the goods, and then collect the cash."

Does it feel like you carry a heavy load leading Opeth?

Yeah, but there's pros and cons of being a band leader. People listen to what I have to say, people respect what I have to say. If I have an idea, they're open to trying it out. But there's a lot of stress too. If we do something bad, it's my fault.

What's been the lowest point of your time in the band?

There's been low points with all the ex-members, but in the early days when people left or got fired, it was like, "Okay, this didn't work out

because you're going this way and we're going that way." But later on there were other problems — all sorts of fights, abuse of many different kinds. I don't really want to talk about it cos we made a vow that we would never bring some of these things up. But it's been a constant thing.

How bad did things get for you?

At one point I thought I was going to die, it was so bad. I thought panic attacks and that sort of thing was a fucking crock of mumbo jumbo shit. I thought, "That's never gonna happen to me." But I got so ill that I was physically sick. I had to go to the doctor. I went to therapy and started reading up on panic attacks. I started to learn more about mental health, and that it could affect you physically too. Once I knew that, it was easier for me to strike back against those symptoms.

You got divorced a few years ago. That couldn't have helped?

No, it didn't. First we had the problems in the band, then I got divorced. It was quite a few years when I wasn't feeling that well. I had so many personal problems, it was bound to find its way into the music. More so the lyrics, actually. I had to re-evaluate my life. The *Heritage* album was when I started to do that.

How long did all these troubles last?

I'd say the start of everything band-related was 2002, and it ended in maybe 2014. That's a long time!

Would you say there are still problems in Opeth today?

Of course. There are problems in any band. But they pale in comparison to the shit that was happening around the millennium.



That's not to say there aren't positives that come with life in Opeth. The band have taken him to places he

wouldn't have otherwise gone to, and introduced him to people he wouldn't have otherwise met. Like soft jazz saxophone legend Kenny G.

"His kid is a big fan of death metal, and Kenny comes to the show with him," says Åkerfeldt. "I was talking to Kenny after the show, and he was going, 'How can you scream like that?'"

And then there's Jada Pinkett Smith, actress and wife of Will 'Fresh Prince Of Bel Air' Smith.

"She's a fan, and when we played in LA she came in the dressing room with her entourage. It was just me in there. Fredrik [Åkesson, guitarist] was in the shower — he didn't know she was there and he was farting very loudly. She didn't say much. She just stood there listening to these farts echoing around this tiled shower."

But Mikael Åkerfeldt's best celebrity story involves one of his home country's most famous people: Agnetha Fältskog. Åkerfeldt met the reclusive former ABBA singer as they finished recording *Heritage* in the same studio the Swedish pop icons recorded their original albums.

"The owners of the studio invited us to dinner at their place because they liked us so much," says Åkerfeldt. "And they go, 'Oh, we just invited a friend of ours.' And it was Agnetha. I'm like, 'Of course I recognise her!'"

Åkerfeldt admits that he was star-struck. "I started drinking heavily because I'm so shy. Once I was drunk, I was like, 'Okay, I'm sorry but I have to talk to you about ABBA.' And she was happy to answer all my questions about obscure songs."

At some point in the night, someone put on a jukebox. "I invited her to dance," he says. "I was dancing with the Dancing Queen. Sadly it wasn't to *Dancing Queen*."

You said you were shy that night. Are you generally shy?

I am in some ways. Especially when I'm being exposed to my idols. I've been to the Prog Awards or the Grammys and there'll be someone there: "It's fucking Ian Anderson!" or whoever. It's weird, cos I was never really like that when I was younger. I was just too shy.

Back in the day, Judas Priest were in Sweden for the *Ram It Down* record, and I spent night outside the Sheraton hotel like a fucking groupie, waiting to get my copy of *Rocka Rolla* signed. It made my life. But apart from that, I never really waited around. Now I'm one of those guys that people wait around for, I know what a hassle it can be.

Do you like the attention that comes with being a frontman?

Yeah, I think I do, probably more than I'd admit. I complain that I don't get much privacy, but it's a little bit



2001's *Blackwater Park*, the definitive Opeth album for many fans.



hypocritical. If it ended, I'd be like, "What the fuck happened! Please like me!" I probably have a little bit of an attention whore thing going on.

Opeth have never gone down the clichéd 'sex, drugs and rock'n'roll route', though.

Well, I like to think we have the rock'n'roll sometimes. There's been some sex along the way but it's mostly alone in your hotel room. I've never tried drugs myself, but there have been drugs. But we don't go around flaunting the bad side of things. We don't think it's cool if someone took a line of cocaine back in the day. I think that's fucking sad if you ask me. I do like to drink stupid amounts of wine though.

Mental breakdowns aside, what don't you like about being in a band?

I don't like touring. I like the playing, of course, but I hate travelling, I hate airports, not having privacy in a tour bus. It's just the same old fucking shit every day and it's boring. We played 270-odd shows for *Heritage*. That's too much. We're going to be around a hundred for *Sorceress*. That's still too much. But that's just me.

So what's the optimum number of tour dates for you?

Before I go on tour, it's zero shows. But once I'm out there, it's fine. I love the shows themselves, they're great. I love being in different countries, going record shopping. But it's just seeing this being planned in front of your eyes. Three weeks turns into five weeks which turns into three months.



JOE DEL TUFO

STEVEN WILSON ON MIKAEL ÅKERFELDT

"I first came across Opeth when I was being interviewed by a French journalist in the late 90s. He gave me a copy of *Still Life*, saying, 'You might like it.' It was spectacularly powerful but really nuanced. I realised there was a real artist at work.

Mikael and I have worked together many times over the years. We're both music nerds, but what we realised early on was that we

both have no concept of musical boundaries. We egg each other on to become more and more experimental in what we do.

When Mikael says he's a mediocre singer or guitarist, I understand what he's saying - I say the same thing. But he's a great musician - and that has got nothing to do with ability. Great musicians are people who are brilliant musical thinkers. Brian Eno is one - he can't play anything, but he thinks about music in a brilliant way. Roger Waters, arguably the worst musician in Pink Floyd, is another - he's responsible for most of their groundbreaking music. Mikael is in the same category.

I'd like see him make a record that really focuses on his songwriting, because he's a fantastic songwriter. I've just made a record where I've stripped away a lot of the more conceptual elements and focused on my songwriting. I'd like to see him do the same, because I think he is really underrated as a melodicist, a songwriter and arranger. I think that would be a challenge for him but one he'd absolutely rise to." **DEV**



I do get a little bit jealous of Steven Wilson sometimes. When he writes a great song, I'm like, 'Fuck you, you fucking asshole. I'm going to show you.'

Facing A Bright Future: Opeth are one of prog's most pioneering bands.

Have you ever thought of retiring from touring?

Yeah, I have, of course. But there's an organisation behind this. There are people who depend on us touring because it's the bread and butter. And I'd probably miss it if we didn't tour – I'd probably feel that something's not right. My ego needs that fix.



If *Heritage* alienated a chunk of their original fan base, it didn't mean the band were wholeheartedly embraced by the prog world either. To the more recalcitrant sections of the community, they were still a metal band, one who could slip back into the bad old ways at any point. It was an outlook that missed the point entirely, given that the very nature of progressive rock involves challenging yourself and moving forward at every step.

The two albums that Opeth have released since *Heritage*, 2014's *Pale Communion* and 2016's *Sorceress*, have gone a long way to banishing any lingering suspicions. Åkerfeldt even received the seal of approval from Steve Hackett when he was invited to appear on the guitarist's *Genesis Revisited II* album, singing sections of *Supper's Ready*.

Who do you judge yourself against – your peers today or older bands?

I don't really feel in competition with anyone. Not because I think that no one can compete with us, it's more a case of I don't want to compete with other people. I don't sit around going, "This is better than *Octopus* by Gentle Giant." I'm not thinking in those terms.

What about Steven Wilson? There's some competition there, right?

Ha! I do get a little bit jealous of Steven sometimes. When he writes a great song, I'm like, "Fuck you, you fucking asshole. I'm going to show you." But he's told me a couple of times, "I'm jealous of that song, I wish I'd written it." There's competition, but it's healthy and inspirational. It's loving competition.

There isn't a Progressive Rock Hall Of Fame, but if there was, would you put Opeth in there?

Shit yes. We'd be in there. But there'd be shitload of bands that would be inducted prior to us. I wouldn't want to go in first or second. Maybe around 215th, when there's no other good bands left.

Do you see Opeth as one of the great prog rock bands?

No, that's a different type of





KEVIN NIXON

ARJEN LUCASSEN ON MIKAEL ÅKERFELDT

"The first time I heard Mikael's stuff was on *Damnation*. I knew of Opeth, but I'm not a death metal guy - I'm a 60s/70s guy. But on *Damnation*, he was singing rather than growling. I heard his voice and I loved it.

I asked him to sing on Ayreon's *The Human Equation* simply because I love his voice so much. He's got a really melancholic feel. If a voice sings beautiful melodies, that's it for

me. It's like David Gilmour - he's not an amazing singer, he's just got a warm voice. Mikael is the same.

He's such a nice guy to be around. When he came to the studio, he was joking around all the time, playing on my old synthesiser. The guy is hilarious, and it's because he's real - there's nothing fake about the guy. He's not trying to be funny, he is funny.

We sat down one evening and we were playing music to each other - not just prog, but also stuff like 16 Horsepower and Wovenhand and Simon & Garfunkel and Whitesnake. I've got all these old vinyl LPs, these collectors albums. I said, 'Take anything you want.' He was like a kid in a candy shop. He went home with about 10 or 20 of these albums.

I'd love to work with him again. I ask him, but he's such a busy guy. I asked him for the Ayreon Universe shows I did recently. He knew I was doing theatrical things, and he said: 'Do I have to dance?' 'No, Mikael, no dancing.' Unfortunately, he couldn't do it. But we will work together again one day." **DEV**

I want to write music that doesn't sound like I wrote it. That's my dream.

thing. I love our music, of course I do. I have to, because I write it. But one of the great bands? It'd feel very uncomfortable saying that.

Is that just false modesty?

No, it's proper modesty. I'm Swedish. We're indoctrinated to be modest over here.



The unwanted hassle of touring aside, Mikael Åkerfeldt says he's happier than he has been in a long time. "I'm in a fantastic relationship, I've just moved into a new place, my children and me have a great relationship, my relationship with my ex-wife is good, my band is doing well, I have my health. So yeah, I'd say I'm fucking happy."

What's next for Åkerfeldt is still TBC. The possibilities, if not endless, are certainly wide-ranging: a new Opeth album, perhaps? A second album from Storm Corrosion, his project with Steven Wilson? A collaboration with a kindred spirit such as Devin Townsend or Mike Portnoy, both musicians he's been speculatively linked with in the past? Maybe even a solo album?

"I'd love to do all of the above," he says. "But in the real world, I'll probably have to muster up the energy to write an Opeth record. I did start writing some stuff the other day actually. Some ideas I was working on. They're kind of shit to be honest with you. They're probably not gonna last."



After turbulent times with Opeth, today it's all smiles for Mikael Åkerfeldt: "I'd say I'm fucking happy," he tells us.

Where will a new album take Opeth?

I hope it's going to be outrageous. I want to push myself. I want to write music that doesn't sound like I wrote it. That's my dream. [Laughs] But the stuff I've written so far just sounds like generic shit.

What is it that makes Opeth's music connect with people?

That's a difficult question. I don't sit around breaking down songs. I don't have illusions of grandeur that our records are going to break us on a huge scale around the world – it's not, "Guys, you better check the prices of Jaguars and Rolls Royce's cos you're going to be able to buy one in a couple of months."

It's hard to talk about our music without sounding like I'm being cocky. I guess its big, it's pretentious, but it's honest music. I don't have many ideas with the band other than to

Opeth's latest opus, the proggy *Sorceress*.



come up with good music – music that we like. I just want to keep it honest, and I want to love it when it's done.



That Swedish modesty strikes once again. Nearly 30 years after they first started in the dank corners of the Swedish heavy metal scene, Opeth have repositioned themselves in the vanguard of contemporary prog in a way that no one could have foreseen all that time ago. Åkerfeldt himself has become a figurehead for the scene, albeit a reluctant one. Progressive rock's future is safe in his hands. Assuming no one shoots him in a duel first, that is. 

Sorceress is out now via Moderbolaget/Nuclear Blast. Opeth are currently on tour. See www.opeth.com for more information.

YOUR EXCLUSIVE FREE OPETH CD!

World-exclusive live tracks from Opeth's orchestral extravaganza.

On September 19, 2015, Opeth marked their 25th anniversary with one of the most momentous gigs of their career. The Swedes teamed up with the Plovdiv Philharmonic Orchestra for a one-off show in front of 4,000 people at the Roman Amphitheatre in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

This issue of *Prog* comes with a world-exclusive CD recorded live at that landmark gig – the first time any of these songs have officially been released. The CD features five tracks – *Eternal Rains Will Come*, *Demon Of The Fall*, *The Devil's Orchard*, *The Grand Conjunction* and the title track of 2002's *Deliverance* album.

This concert for group and orchestra took place at a suitably historic venue – the amphitheatre was built in the first century AD, though its ruins were only rediscovered following a landslide in the 1970s.

The Plovdiv Philharmonic was conducted by Levon Manukyan, who has also collaborated with the likes of Paradise Lost and Anathema, though band and conductor had barely met before the gig took place – cue four hours of intensive pre-show rehearsals.

Opeth have embarked on a series of high-profile shows in special locations in recent years, from London's lavish Theatre Royal on Drury Lane to New York's prestigious Radio City Music Hall. "Those shows feel good because it allows us to stretch ourselves and show that we're more than just a bunch of long-haired musicians from Sweden," Åkerfeldt tells *Prog*.

The band originally intended to release the Plovdiv show as a commercial CD, but subsequently shelved their plans – meaning the disc you're holding in your hands is the only place you can hear these songs. **DEV**



Opeth live with a choir and orchestra at Plovdiv, Bulgaria, in 2015.



H COMING HOME

Prog's newest supergroup may include former members of Dream Theater, but don't go calling them a copycat act. With hard rock and AOR heroes on board too, **Sons Of Apollo** are an exciting prospect. **Mike Portnoy** and **Derek Sherinian** tell us more.

Words: Rich Wilson **Images:** Will Ireland

Sons Of Apollo have been a supergroup in waiting for a long time. Five years, to be precise, ever since former Dream Theater members Derek Sherinian and Mike Portnoy teamed up with bassist Billy Sheehan and guitarist Tony MacAlpine to form the short-lived instrumental live project PSMS. The musical understanding and chemistry between band members was palpable, and over the intervening years, Sherinian has been frequently hounding Portnoy to try to persuade him to convert the band into a fully fledged studio unit.

"PSMS was nothing more than a fun live thing and we didn't have any expectations beyond that," says Portnoy. "It was something for me and Derek to be playing together again and have some fun. We did a European tour and an Asian tour. The musical chemistry in that band was so strong and each individual musician was so strong that after that tour, Derek was egging me on to do something more full-time with it, but the timing was just not very good. It was also intentional for me to kind of avoid the progressive metal genre to do different things. Finally, earlier this year, after years of nudging me on, we finally got to a point where the time seemed right to pick up where we had left off and turn it into a full-time, vocal band."

"It has mainly been me bringing it up to Mike and saying, 'Let's do this for real and get a singer and form the ultimate prog metal band,'" adds Sherinian. "I understand that after being in Dream Theater for all those years, he wanted to diversify and work with different players. But I think that most of his fans really want to hear him playing prog metal, the genre that he helped invent. So that's what we're doing with Sons Of Apollo and it's the most natural style for me to play as well."

"When we announced we were going to do this, there was a bidding war from three major record labels for this band because they just knew that the secret sauce was Mike and I together playing this style. At the end of the day, people want to hear me and Mike going apeshit on our instruments."

There have been a couple of additions to enhance the appeal of the band. MacAlpine has been replaced by former Guns N' Roses guitarist Ron 'Bumblefoot' Thal, and singer Jeff Scott Soto (Yngwie Malmsteen, Journey) was selected to front the band. In typical Portnoy fashion, the album was written at speed, with the writing commencing in March and the album being delivered to the record label in July. That 



Fighting Talk: former Dream Theater men Sherinian and Portnoy are looking to reclaim the prog metal throne.



"DREAM THEATER HAVE SAT ON TOP OF THE PROGRESSIVE METAL THRONE FOR THE LAST 20 YEARS AND BEEN COMPLETELY UNCHALLENGED UNTIL NOW. BUT NOW IS THE ERA OF THE SONS."

Derek Sherinian



pace is something which is nothing new to those who have followed his career, but for any band to record an album as compelling as this debut in such a short period remains startling.

"I think that over the last 20 albums I've made, most have been made this way," says Portnoy. "I don't think the quality of anything I've done this way has suffered as a result of working quickly — it's just a matter of being very focused and creative. The only time in recent history when I spent a ridiculous amount of time making records was with Dream Theater and, to be honest, there was a lot of money wasted on those records."

"We're hungry and you can fucking hear it on this record," says Sherinian. "The creative process in this band is really healthy. We immediately felt that Ron was a long-lost brother and we just dug right in like three little kids with paint and an open canvas."

"The beautiful thing about Sons Of Apollo is that Mike and I are the producers, so we basically get to do whatever the fuck we want. There's nobody telling us what to do and we don't have to send in daily demos to some A&R suit who doesn't know shit. We basically just let ourselves go for 10 days and tried to write the sickest and best music that we possibly could."

"The difference between what we've done in the past and what we're doing now is that we've placed great emphasis on songs. We've got memorable choruses but also have adventurous musical journeys within them that are unrestrained. We play the way we always have played, but there's a lot more emphasis on quality control, with the lyrics, the melody lines and song structure. It's like the first Van Halen album but with chops."

"We also really took time to go through each vocal phrase to make sure there was no cheese anywhere, no gargoyles or Dungeons &

Dragons shit, and no rectum-puckering high notes. Everything is very smooth and ballsy."

Sherinian makes a vital point. There are countless prog metal acts who are merely imitators, prepared to regurgitate the genre's clichéd, hundred-notes-a-second technical excess at the expense of adept songwriting, soul and choruses. It's a blessing then that Sons Of Apollo have taken a far more embracing approach, brimming with virtuosity but adding that key accessibility.

Songwriting aside, it's Jeff Scott Soto's vocals and the introduction of Ron 'Bumblefoot' Thal into the group that have certainly aided the band in creating something more original than just another prog metal act.

"I think Bumblefoot is going to be the big surprise for a lot of people," exclaims Portnoy. "He's the

Sons Of Apollo, L-R: Billy Sheehan, Mike Portnoy, Jeff Scott Soto, Derek Sherinian, Ron 'Bumblefoot' Thal.

real star of the show here and people who only know him from Guns N' Roses, where he wasn't really able to do his thing, are going to be shocked at what he can do. He was incredible to write with and took what myself and Derek were doing in a very different direction. Bumblefoot is a guitar hero and I always wanted to work with him in a band and give him the platform to truly shine. I think this album will absolutely do that.

"Jeff is also an amazing frontman. He knows how to work the crowd and front the band, which I knew would be a great asset. The greatest asset of his voice is that it has a real accessibility. He's got a great background in the AOR kind of stuff, and from when he was fronting Journey for a little while."

"Derek and I have this crazy prog background. Billy and Bumblefoot are doing crazy guitar unisons, so Jeff is really the anchor and the glue to make the whole thing very listenable."

Those hooks Portnoy refers to are prevalent throughout the album, but in *Coming Home* and *Alive*, Sons Of Apollo have created a pair of tracks that could, given the right opportunity, provide them with crossover single success. In these days of dwindling radio importance, it's difficult to fathom quite how that leap could be made, but the potential is clear.

"*Alive* to me is a home run on every level," agrees Portnoy. "In a perfect world, that would be as big as a Foo Fighters or Red Hot Chili Peppers song. It's something you could picture being played in a stadium. That was the first song that Jeff demoed up and sent to myself and Derek, and I was just floored. That was the moment that proved he was the right man for this



band. We've shot a video for *Alive* as we hope for that to be the single when we hit the road next year. This band has the commercial potential to really stand up in today's market. I think there's enough there for the existing fan base but there's also a lot there to make a lot of new fans."

There's an inevitability, though, that with two former Dream Theater members forming a progressive metal band, comparisons between the two acts will naturally follow.

Perhaps surprisingly, Portnoy remains relaxed about the Dream Theater-related questions that will unquestionably pepper every interview over the next 18 months. Indeed, he reveals that he's been able to "build up a very nice personal relationship with both John Petrucci and Jordan Rudess over the last couple of years", adding that he's "comfortable in my own skin and feel I have definitely moved on".

Yet Portnoy suggests that one of Sherinian's motivations in reforming the band was to invite comparisons between the two acts.

"If I'm being honest, a lot of Derek's incentive to form this band was to, in his words, 'Reclaim my rightful throne to the genre that I helped create,'" he laughs. "But once we got together and started making the music itself, it really went to so many different places that go way beyond the Dream Theater

"THE ALBUM ENDED UP BECOMING VERY DIVERSE AND SOMETHING THAT TRANSCENDS THE PROGRESSIVE METAL TAG."

Mike Portnoy

world. It has the progressive metal moments on *Gods Of The Sun*, *Labyrinth* and *Opus Maximus*, and those three epics are definitely progressive metal material in the Dream Theater vein. But then you hear songs like *Signs Of The Time* or *Coming Home* and they have a hard rock, Van Halen, Deep Purple kind of influence.

The album ended up becoming very diverse and something that transcends the progressive metal tag."

Sherinian is more forthright in his assessment of Sons Of Apollo's prospects and perhaps, given the manner of his replacement in Dream Theater in 1999, there's a suspicion



Psychotic Symphony: an album full of hooks and virtuoso chops.

Derek Sherinian (left) and Mike Portnoy, shot exclusively for Prog.

that he's been waiting for a moment to perform in a band that can invoke musical revenge on his old bandmates.

"It really is an original sound and it's not fair to compare us with Dream Theater," he says. "Dream Theater really isn't the Dream Theater it was. With Sons Of Apollo, people are going to hear the influence that Mike Portnoy brings into a band and you're going to see the spirit that's maybe not in Dream Theater now.

"I read a lot of the message boards and it seems that a lot of Dream Theater fans weren't happy with that last release. I haven't heard it, but the consensus seems to be that it was very Walt Disney and didn't have any balls to it. So we want to invite those fans to come over to Sons Of Apollo because I'll tell you, man for man, pound for pound, there's not a band with the virtuosity, the balls and the presentation that we have.

"I'm not saying that in an arrogant way. I'm saying that because it's a fact. I think Sons Of Apollo is the best thing that will ever happen to Dream Theater and if it gives them a new spark of inspiration to start making great records again, then it's only beneficial for the fans."

Such statements could merely be seen as PR bluster to provoke interest in the project, but he makes a forceful argument. This band is ludicrously talented and with the commercial attributes possessed by some of their songs, they have the potential to achieve a mainstream success not seen in the genre for a long time. It's a fact not lost on Sherinian, as he closes with an upbeat soliloquy that you suspect is only partially tongue-in-cheek.

"I'm going to make a bold statement," he proclaims. "Dream Theater have sat on top of the throne for the last 20 years and have been completely unchallenged until now. But now is the era of the Sons. There's only so much room at the top of prog metal, so they need to start clearing their shit out now because we intend to have our thrones put in there by October 20th..."

Psychotic Symphony is out on October 20 via InsideOut. See www.sonsofapollo.com for details.





EARTH TO

Since emerging with their extreme metal debut *Exoplanet* in 2010, The Contortionist have never stood still. Losing two founding members after 2012's *Intrinsic*, the addition of Jordan Eberhardt on bass, Eric Guenther on keyboards and the prodigious vocal talent of Mike Lessard ultimately proved reinvigorating for the group. Their next album, 2014's *Language*, saw the band stepping back from extreme metal and moving towards the mainstream of progressive metal, while also making overtures to progressive rock, atmospheric alternative rock and even post-rock.

Their new LP *Clairvoyant* is very much a progression on the direction first charted by the band on *Language*. As guitarist Robby Baca says, "We did it with the same producer and pretty much the same group of dudes, so in a way it's kind of a continuation of *Language*. It was more of a focused effort, I suppose. We

made an effort to not get too 'out there' with wild, crazy song arrangements and I think it fits with the discography as a whole. It's definitely the most concise, to-the-point, focused record we've ever done."

Eschewing many of the trappings of progressive metal for a tighter, more melodic sound, there's nevertheless a thematic heaviness and a dramatic tension as powerful as any of the drop-tuned chugs found on their previous material.

"When we do something melodic, whether it's a more melancholy melody or an uplifting melody, when you get a part that really hits home, to me it feels way better than any heavy part could ever feel," says Lessard. "I've never got the sensation from writing a metal song that I get from writing a part that resonates harmonically, so that's usually why my vote goes towards the more rock-oriented songs."

However, he stresses that this wasn't a deliberate decision at the writing stage:

"It wasn't conscious in the sense that we sat down and went, 'No metal.' We sat down when we started writing and really, no metal came out. There was a track or two that were heavier, and obviously the title track on the album is a bit heavier, but y'know, it just wasn't what made the pick."

The dark atmosphere of the album hints at a consistent theme, and Lessard is candid about it being an arc.

"I think with every album we try to take that approach [of having a concept] lyrically, and the overall vocal vibe is coming from the angle that it's the opposite of *Language* in the sense that if *Language* is life, *Clairvoyant* is death. It's the opposite of that. That's why *Language*'s artwork is colourful – it's this uplifting piece of artwork, whereas the new album, it's just black and white. There's no colour to be found, it's all been sucked out."

Lyrics like 'You were so sick, you were skin and bones/so you fed yourself excuses just to



Back with genre-straddling album *Clairvoyant*, **The Contortionist** share their creative vision with *Prog*, and tell us how they're twisting their metal sound in whole new ways.

Words: Alex Lynham **Images:** Gobinder Jhitta

keep it going' and 'If the relapse happens today/ then let tomorrow be recovery' strongly hint at cycles of addiction, regression and death, though Lessard is relatively coy about the exact meanings of the songs and what inspired them.

"There's definitely a linear story," he allows. "Now, for me to give that away, I feel that it takes away from the listener a little bit. I don't release lyrics with our albums and stuff of that nature because I'm a strong believer in letting the listener create their own story and not putting their imagination in a box, or spelling it out for them. I like active listening. For me, my favourite albums have always been where I don't know what the song is about, and I don't

"When we were writing, no metal came out – the heavier songs just didn't make the pick."

Mike Lessard

have the lyrics, so I have to do research with one of my friends or whoever, or speculate with other people, and it creates conversation. So I try to keep it open-ended."

On the instrumental side, while they've stepped further from their technical and progressive roots, there's still a level of subtle complexity to the individual parts, rhythms and timings, and compositionally, there are plenty of Easter eggs for the careful listener, as Baca explains.

"There are musical themes. I don't believe any of the actual music, instrument-wise, got carried over from *Language*, as far as I can remember, but there are definitely moments that happen in different ways across different songs on the record. It's kinda subtle for some of them, but there's a couple that are kind of obvious. "Y'know, bands like Dream Theater did this back in the day,

and when I was younger, I picked up on that stuff. I thought it was so cool that they would take this chunk of music and rearrange it, put it in a different song, and it would be in a different key or a different time signature or something when you heard it again later. I always wanted to do something like that and I think this is the first time we've ever done it, so I'm stoked about that."

This ability to shape-shift while injecting new depth into their music is also partly down to how *Clairvoyant* was conceived. Normally, Lessard says, the writing process takes a very different form.

"I think in terms of focus on past albums it has been in some ways just to do with the deadlines, to get the album done in time," the singer reveals.

With the new album, the band gave themselves more breathing room. "We made sure we had a year," Lessard says. "We did a little bit of touring in the middle just to

break up the monotony of it all, but with this album we had a chance to focus on it so you don't get any through-composed songs, you don't get the thing where we're like, 'Well, you know, this is what we have, this is what we have to do, and we've got to make the best of it.' With this album we were able to be like, 'Well, we have all these songs – which ones do we think are the best? Which feel the strongest?'"

To break the back of the writing, the band decamped to Maine in the north-east of the US for a month-long writing summit with Evan Sammons, Lessard's bandmate from side project Last Chance To Reason.

"We spent about a month in Maine sort of around where Mike grew up, writing a good chunk of the record," Baca recalls. "It was pretty isolated so it was easy to just get lost in the songwriting and not get distracted."

At this point the songs came together quickly, thanks to the time that had already been spent on generating ideas individually. The band are spread across the United States, so having done some prep work before going into the studio was necessary.

"We used to live in the same place," explains Lessard. "Now Robby lives towards the middle of the US [Indiana] and I live in the south-east [North Carolina]."



Other members are just as spread out – Guenther lives in Atlanta, and Eberhardt in Denver.

Describing how the initial ideas for the songs came together, Lessard says: "We had spent the summer before [Maine] with everybody on their own, writing their own stuff and sifting through

their own ideas, so that when we got to Maine, there was a little bit of a launch point."

Despite all the pre-production time given to *Clairvoyant*, it was also the case that less was set in stone than ever before once tracking commenced. Recording with longtime friend Jamie King in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, the band felt free to experiment.

"Jamie is very easy to work with – he's like the seventh member of the band when we're in there, and he's got a guiding hand on all the instruments, so it's a really smooth process," Baca reveals.

Lessard describes the origins of the single *Reimagined* as being an example of this rules-free approach. "Some of the songs started from parts. *Reimagined* was a song I started during the *Language* process, so that had been sitting around forever before it settled on what it was.

"Some of the songs got done in the studio, so some of them didn't even happen when they were supposed to be written in

the writing process – they kind of formed in the studio after we'd had all that time to be in that mindset. When we were supposed to shut that mindset off, it stuck around and I think some of the strongest songs came from when everybody was in the studio working on stuff."

Baca adds: "That's something we've never done before. Previous records, we've gone in with every single note and beat completely set in stone and we've recorded it that way. This way it was a lot more fluid and to me, that was a much more enjoyable experience."

As for what motivates them to continue, and what they love about music, the two are in accord, as they have been throughout the conversation.

"For me, it's the process of having an idea and making it something that other people can actually experience," says Lessard. "And then the process of not even having an idea and having something just start to come to life without you even thinking about it, so really the creation process is the most fascinating thing about music – the initial idea becoming a tangible thing."

Baca agrees, before adding: "The creation of music is sort of... a thing where you're almost like a kid again, you're just playing with music, and if you can get to that state, there's nothing like it." ☺

Clairvoyant is out now via eOne Music. See www.facebook.com/thecontortionist for details.

The Contortionist:
making metal with
a thrilling prog twist.



"The creation of music is sort of where you're almost like a kid again, you're just playing with music, and if you can get to that state, there's nothing like it."

Robby Baca

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"I'm an 80s kid so I grew up with a different sound [to my bandmates]. In prog music, I listened to Yes and Pink Floyd. With the new guys in the band, 10 years makes a big difference."

Anneke van Giersbergen, shot exclusively for Prog, September 2017.

The Ungentle Storm

Embracing her inner headbanger, **Anneke van Giersbergen** plunges into the turbulent, swirling waters of progressive metal with **VUUR**. The Dutch star tells *Prog* about her heavy new direction, finding players who can kick her songs in the butt, and the joy of performing music for children.

Words: David West **Portraits:** Tina Korhonen

It's been a decade since Anneke van Giersbergen left The Gathering, the band that first brought her fame, to strike out on her own. In those 10 years, she's lent her creative energies to a host of projects, from collaborating with Devin Townsend, Danny Cavanagh and Arjen Anthony Lucassen to releasing solo albums and recording and touring with The Gentle Storm. Now she's set to unleash her heaviest music to date with her new band VUUR — which means 'fire' — on *In This Moment We Are Free — Cities*. Where does she find the time?

"I love singing so everything people ask me to do, most of it I say yes to," says van

Giersbergen. "My husband Rob, who is also my manager, has to stop me a lot of times: 'You really physically don't have time to do this.' Having said that, I did everything in the last 10 years and I feel like I need to focus more on a few specific things. Maybe you can say it's the same as being married for all this time, then you break up and you do it with everybody and then it's out of your system and you're relaxed again. Then you can... I wouldn't say settle down, but I would say focus on a few things that I love the most."

VUUR share plenty of personnel with The Gentle Storm, the band founded by van Giersbergen and Lucassen. Joost van den Broek

has switched from playing keys to producing and co-writing, while drummer Ed Warby, guitarist Ferry Duijsens and bassist Johan van Stratum all contributed to The Gentle Storm before joining VUUR.

"Arjen and I put a band together just so we could tour with The Gentle Storm and I realised halfway through, 'Holy shit, this is such a good band,'" says van Giersbergen. "The players are really good and they're such nice guys. I thought, 'If I'm going to do this, I'm going to do this now, with them,' so I asked them, 'Will you join me in a new band?'"

Despite the familiar faces behind the scenes and in front of the camera, plus new kid on the block Jord Otto as lead guitarist, the two groups sound completely different. Where The Gentle Storm had strong folk and classical influences, VUUR have their feet firmly planted in progressive metal, with a dash or three of djent in the pummelling attack of Otto and Duijsens' twin-guitar onslaught.

"It's a funny thing," says van Giersbergen. "We wrote on a six-string with a drop tuning. Neither Joost nor me can play a seven-string but we always worked in a key that was good for a seven-string because we had guitar players who play seven-strings and our bassist has an extra string so it's going to be extra low, low, low. We had distinctive ideas about how fresh but heavy it should sound."

A second factor in selecting the line-up was van Giersbergen's desire to have younger players in the group — roughly a decade separates VUUR's frontwoman from her guitarists. "I'm an 80s kid so I grew up with a different sound," she says. "In prog



VUUR, L-R: Ferry Duijsens, Johan van Stratum, Anneke van Giersbergen, Ed Warby, Jord Otto.

PRESS/SET/VIEW

music, I listened to Yes and Pink Floyd and it's all warm-sounding, and with the new guys in the band, 10 years makes a big difference.

"I thought it was important to surround yourself with people just a little bit younger so the gap isn't too big – you understand each other but you keep being fed fresh ideas. Plus I wanted a different sound. I wanted to be heavy and dark but maybe catchy or epic. I didn't want any restrictions."

As much as the young gunslingers bring their fire to VUUR, it's not a one-way dialogue between the musicians and their bandleader, as borne out by van Giersbergen's exchanges with guitarist Otto.

"He's a fantastic solo player – he's very skilled and he can play really fast," says van Giersbergen. "I ask him all these questions because I love playing guitar but I'm obviously not that good in that way, and then he's asking me questions. Because I do a lot of solo shows, I play a lot of acoustic guitar and I could teach him a thing or two on the acoustic – simple things, melody things. I was actually proud that I could teach him about playing guitar."

"They're so unbelievably good at what they're doing, it's like, this is the song I wrote, this is the whole structure and everything is good, now we play it and they kick it in the butt and make it so much better."

Then there's Ed Warby behind the kit, one of Holland's top metal drummers, whom van Giersbergen calls "a living legend" from his impressive body of work with Gorefest, Ayreon and Hail Of Bullets.

"Sometimes you go into a city and you immediately feel a vibe or it triggers something. Its culture, its climate and its people, everything can make you feel a certain way in a certain place in the world."

"When you're writing, you think you know Ed's drumming," says the singer, "and in your head, you think, 'Okay, Ed can do this here and he can do something like this there and then it'll take this part to the next part when he does this.' Then he comes up with something 10 times as cool as you ever could imagine."

The sheer heaviness of VUUR brings its own challenges for van Giersbergen, as their music demands all of her power as a singer.

"I realised when we were done with the album, everything is full-on, vocal-wise," she says. "There are a few passages that are quiet, but most of the stuff is really belting it out, whereas The Gentle Storm had a lot of soft songs and soft passages. I was thinking if we do headline tours, I don't know if I can do that for one-and-a-half hours for 30 days straight. We'll see. Maybe we'll do an acoustic bit in the middle. But it's a good energy."

The 11 tracks on *In This Moment We Are Free* – *Cities* share a common theme, as each song is about a different city. "Sometimes you go into a city and you immediately feel a vibe or it triggers something," says van Giersbergen. "Its culture, its climate and its

people, everything can make you feel a certain way in a certain place in the world. Because we skip around so much, you could be in Moscow one day and then Istanbul the next and they'll be totally different worlds. That makes you have these different feelings and triggers in a short period of time. That's why I write a lot – I'm inspired a lot."

In some cases, van Giersbergen imagines a location as a character for one of her songs. "A city like Istanbul, I really see a big guy hanging over the city with a big sword, my warrior," she says, "but I did also sometimes write about something that happened in a city. For instance, for London I wrote about the Great Fire, but I always write poetically, so in this case I write about the fire speaking to the inhabitants and the inhabitants speaking to the fire. It's never 'Hey, this happened' – it's a poetic story. Sometimes it's hard to talk about it because it's moods and feelings and so on, but every city has a totally different angle."

Van Giersbergen's career has covered a huge range of musical styles far beyond the opportunities afforded to most musicians in the arenas of rock, metal and prog. She's sung

for the Dutch king and the Dalai Lama, while in May she's going to perform with Residentie Orkest The Hague (The Hague Philharmonic Orchestra) for their Symphonic Junction concerts. Then there are her solo shows, and the Dutch-language album and live music show she wrote based on Frank Tashlin's children's book *The Bear That Wasn't*.

"It was fantastic," she says. "Playing for kids is completely different to playing for adults, but we had grandmothers, we had dogs in the audience, and also the occasional metalhead, people with Pink Floyd T-shirts who came to see us play because they were just interested. That makes metal and prog people so very open-minded. They check out everything. Because they like me as an artist, they'll go, 'Okay, I'll go to a children's play,' and they buy the album for their niece. It's nice."

"I can do everything I put my heart into. It's an honour to be able to do that. I'm unbelievably blessed that things come my way." 🙏

In This Moment We Are Free – Cities is out on October 20 via InsideOut. See www.vuur.band for more information.



Stories From The City:
van Giersbergen
returns with a very
heavy new album.



Photo taken by Paul Adam

*"What kind of guitar do you choose when you're asked to join King Crimson?
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Brand X live at Crystal Palace, September 1977, L-R: Morris Pert, Percy Jones, John Goodsall, Phil Collins, Robin Lumley.



You Can't Keep A Good Brand Down

After 17 years, **Brand X** have reunited. The jazz fusion pioneers are back on the road and have just released a new double live album – their first release in 20 years. **Percy Jones** looks back, and forward...

Words: Sid Smith

“We were working under strained circumstances – it wasn’t very easy,” says Brand X’s Percy Jones, recalling a meeting in 1979 after a lawyer in the group’s management company said the band should make more commercial music.

Jones sighs heavily as he remembers the moment. “I was thinking, ‘Oh,

shit. It’s come to this. I’ve got a lawyer telling me what to do musically.’ My feeling was we’d just alienate the people already buying our records and probably not gain a different audience anyway. I put my foot down and said I wasn’t doing it.”

The compromise was to have two different line-ups record tracks in order to cater for both directions. Jones teamed up with ex-Quatermass



Brand X in 2017, L-R: Chris Clark, Scott Weinberger, Percy Jones, Kenny Grohowski, John Goodsall.

keyboard player Peter Robinson and drummer Mike Clarke, while Brand X co-founder and keyboardist Robin Lumley, Phil Collins and bassist John Giblin provided the other half, with guitarist John Goodsall diplomatically maintaining a foot in both camps.

"We recorded in shifts with the other band working in the day and we'd go in and record all night. That was the only way we could get it done," says Jones ruefully.

The result of these dual sessions was 1980's *Do They Hurt?* and 1982's *Is There Anything About?*, the latter released after Brand X had disbanded. Jones' hunch proved correct, with the group failing to pick up any new fans with the more song-oriented approach.

"I went out and bought a copy of that last one because nobody sent me a copy. I listened to it once and I gave it to the kids next door. I think they ended up playing frisbee with it."

"Nothing stays the same. So that's why I had an uneasy feeling, at least initially, just not knowing how it would all connect."

Percy Jones

While Brand X appeared to have been tossed onto the scrapheap, they became one of those bands whose life was artificially extended as vinyl gave way to CD in the mid-80s onwards and their back catalogue was recycled via 'Compact Price' campaigns and the 'Introduction To...' reissue programme. Sometimes such anthologies appeared with sexually provocative cover art that probably said more about the

graphic designer's fantasies than it did about the music. But whatever the predilections of those putting the albums out, the fact that they were released at all confirmed that there was an ongoing interest in the group.

In the 90s, there were a few tentative reunions, but nothing that lasted beyond a couple of albums. Jones recalls talk of another attempt to put a Brand X together a few years ago that would have included keyboard player David Sancious and, later, Patrick Moraz. Both attempts stumbled and fell without a single note being played when the management underwriting the venture failed to put enough dates together to make any of it work. Today, with new management in place, Jones says that things are different.

"They understood the music to a pretty good degree, and the logistics of the business, and it takes those two things really to pull off a tour," he



But Wait... There's More! / Live 2017, Brand X's new album.

Sticking His Neck Out: guitarist John Goodsall.



Don't Fret: bassist Percy Jones is on fiery form on the new album.

COURTESY OF AVRAHAM BANK

“The world of fusion or jazz rock had a tendency at that time to take itself extremely seriously, but Brand X were completely the opposite.”

Stephen W Tayler

He needn't have worried. *But Wait... There's More!*, their first release in 20 years, finds Goodsall, Jones and former drummer Kenwood Dennard, alongside keyboardist Chris Clark and percussionist Scott Weinberger, playing for a wildly enthusiastic crowd. Stephen W Tayler's detailed mix is some of the hottest instrumental music you'll hear this year.

Percy Jones, who has lived in the USA for 38 years, studied engineering rather than music at university and constructed one of the most instantly recognisable fretless bass sounds this side of Jaco Pastorius. His lithe runs, peppered with dazzling harmonics and a funky muscularity, may well have prompted comparisons to Weather Report's star player, but the style was all his own.

Having cut his teeth as a gigging bassist with late-60s multimedia troupe The Liverpool Scene, by the time Brand X began recording their debut album in 1975, Jones was working on London building sites.

“I was living in Beckenham and Robin Lumley lived in the area. We got together for a jam in somebody's kitchen. I was playing a lot but not really gigging. We also used to do some jam sessions up in Clapham every Wednesday night: me, Lumley, Goodsall and some other guys.”

Jones recalls that it was this loose collection of players who were somehow fixed up with an audition for Island Records, which nobody took seriously at all.

The Big Three (from top): fan-favourite albums *Unorthodox Behaviour*, *Moroccan Roll* and *Masques*.



COURTESY OF AVRAHAM BANK

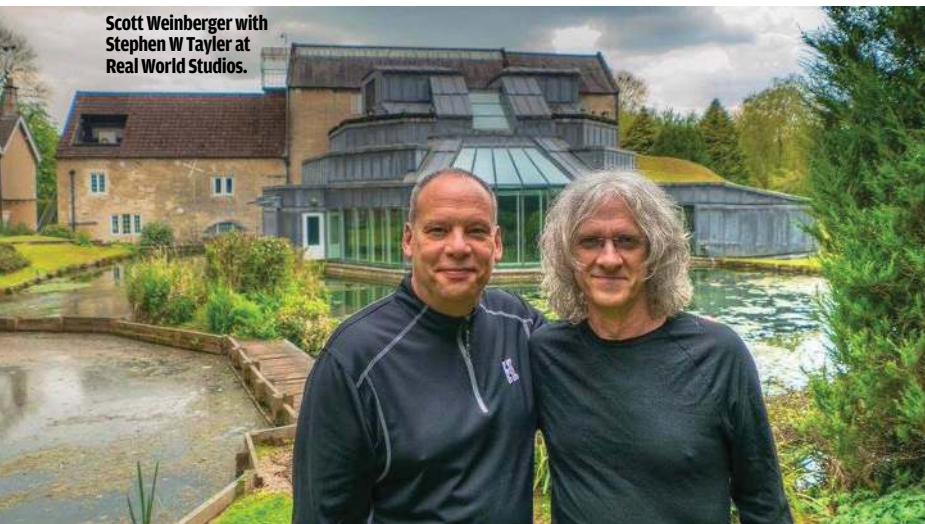
explains. “Geographically we were all spread out. I’m in New York, John is in Minnesota, Kenwood Dennard [drums] was in New Hampshire. So it takes some financial help to just get everybody in one place and then more finances to rehearse. We couldn’t have done it without that kind of backing.”

That their early discography was featured so heavily on the new live double album, *But Wait... There's More!* was no accident. An online poll highlighted the affection and esteem with which *Unorthodox Behaviour* (1976), *Moroccan Roll* (1977) and *Masques* (1978) are still held.

When Jones saw the results, he admits to being filled with a degree of trepidation when the band began rehearsals in the summer of 2016.

“I didn’t know how people would react to those compositions in this day and age, or whether it was going to work. The other reason, and I think I can speak for me and John for this: we’re not playing the same as we did back then. Our styles have changed, our way of thinking has changed, you know? Nothing stays the same. So that’s why I had an uneasy feeling, at least initially – just not knowing how it would all connect, basically.”

Scott Weinberger with Stephen W Tayler at Real World Studios.



BRAND X PRESS

“We played for these two A&R guys at Island and we were just making stuff up, improvising, and they signed us! Amazing. We didn’t expect that.”

As unexpected as this was, Jones says they were even more surprised when, after the label rejected the first album they recorded with vocals, Island boss Chris Blackwell gave the go-ahead for another record, but this time an entirely instrumental album.

“That first album had been kind of like an Average White Band-sounding thing. But because we were all listening to jazz rock, that’s what we wanted to do. Our original drummer wasn’t suitable for the material. We had Bill Bruford, who came in briefly, but he turned it down because he was already playing with someone else and he didn’t want to spread himself too thin. So that’s when Phil Collins arrived.”

There’s little doubt that the association with Collins’ ascending star in Genesis took the group to an audience well beyond jazz rock aficionados. Similarly, when Island unaccountably declined to release *Unorthodox Behaviour*, it was Collins’ connections to Tony Stratton-Smith’s Charisma label that ensured its release.

The Fender Precision fretless bass heard on their debut, the instrument on which Jones built a reputation, was purchased second-hand using almost all of the money he’d received from a publishing advance. Robin Lumley upgraded his keyboard setup and, Jones wryly notes, John Goodsall stumped up all of his advance on a fur coat.

If Jones’ agile bass has been a vital component in their signature sound then so too has John Goodsall’s lucid guitar. Fur coat or not, he was capable of bolstering quick-shifting rhythmic accents with an almost blasé panache, with a knack for bending rock licks into dextrous, quicksilver shapes.

It’s a partnership that has not only endured but is, perhaps, the benchmark of authenticity for any venture bearing the Brand X name.

“He’s got a unique style and way of playing and he’s got a unique style of writing,” says Jones. “His writing is really interesting and people tell me that my bass and his guitar work well together. That’s what keeps us working together. We’ve played together on and off now pushing on 40 years.”

The union has lasted longer than many marriages, though as Jones candidly admits, it hasn’t been without its ups and downs.

“If there’s something he’s doing that bothers me, I’ll talk to him about it. That happened not too long ago. I got in his face a little bit after a gig in Pennsylvania and told him what I thought. He didn’t like it and he mentioned a tune that I’d screwed up [laughs] and we had a bit of back and forth. I was thinking, ‘Oh shit, this is not going well,’ but then the next morning at breakfast we were fine. And I suppose that’s the way we deal with it – if something’s bothering us, we thrash it out, try to resolve it and move on. You can’t let little things blow up.”

The release of *But Wait... There’s More!* not only reunites Jones and Goodsall but also brings back producer Stephen W Tayler. Tayler, who worked with the band on *Moroccan Roll*, says that although the line-up may have changed, the original spirit lives on.

“The world of fusion or jazz rock had a tendency at that time to take itself extremely seriously, but Brand X were completely the opposite. Their music is powerful, intricate and impressive, but there’s always a humorous subtext that makes me smile and frequently break into fits of giggles – and 40 years on they still make me laugh.”

Laughs aside, the passage of time can be hard on musicians whose stock in trade is dexterity, especially when navigating Brand X’s high-octane hybrid of devilishly complex themes and on-point improvisation. Older and wiser, Jones accepts that he has to work hard to maintain the levels of virtuosity fans expect.

HIDDEN TREASURE

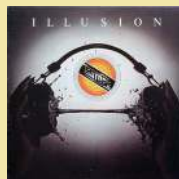
The best jazz prog you’ve never heard.

The 1970s was a golden age for British jazz rock, with trailblazing groups such as Soft Machine and Nucleus leading the way. Groups like Brand X and Bruford enjoyed high profiles, but here are six of the best bands that have been overlooked or underrated.



Back Door (Back Door, 1972)

Propelled by Colin Hodgkinson’s ferocious bass and Tony Hicks’ powerhouse drumming, Ron Aspery’s rasping sax skips across a volatile concoction of bluesy bebop rock with lightning-fast licks. Their debut still sounds astonishing. They supported ELP in 1973/’74.



Isotope (Illusion, 1974)

One of the few British guitarists capable of matching John McLaughlin’s speed and passion, Gary Boyle’s joyous playing is all over a set of surging tunes stoked by ex-Soft Machine man Hugh Hopper’s trademark fuzz bass. An astonishing and formidable fusion outfit.



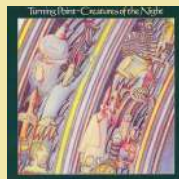
Zebra (Panic, 1975)

Formed by members of IF and Osibisa, the Jeff Beck-admired band fuse riotous Afro-centric brass riffs with supple Fender Rhodes-heavy tunes. Occasional soulful vocals, short guitar jabs and catchy rock riffs underpinned by future Gillan bassist John McCoy add up to a dramatic and exciting soundworld.



John Stevens’ Away (Somewhere In Between, 1976)

A pioneer of the UK’s mid-60s free jazz scene, drummer John Stevens’ rock-orientated band boasted both electric and acoustic bass. Steve Hillage was a fan and had them as the support act for his *L* tour.



Turning Point (Creatures Of The Night, 1977)

Flowing with clean, airy melodies written by bassist Jeff Clyne or keyboardist Brian Miller, Pepi Lemer’s wordless vocals and David Tidball’s soaring soprano sax inhabit an early Return To Forever atmosphere.



Barbara Thompson (Paraphernalia, 1978)

Thompson’s lyrical sax and flute do all the melodic heavy lifting in a band featuring ex-Softs bassist Roy Babbington. Contrasting visceral solos throughout her intricate compositions, Thompson flies closer to jazz than rock but still lands plenty of killer punches. **SS**

“It’s tougher than it was back in the day,” he admits. “When we were doing gigs back then we would typically do a 45-minute set and now we’re doing about two hours. So playing that old stuff and playing longer sets is hard work. I just try to stay in shape. At some point it’ll all fall apart, and when it does, I’ll have to hang up the bass. But I’m not there yet, thank goodness!” **P**

But Wait... There’s More! is out now and is self-released. For more information, see www.facebook.com/OfficialBrandX.

White Moth Black Butterfly
vocalists Daniel Tompkins
and Jordan Bethany.

How Tesseract's **Daniel Tompkins** braved
sadistic midges, toxic fumes and self-sacrifice
to find *atonement* at the end of the rainbow
with **White Moth Black Butterfly**.

Words: Natasha Scharf

Taking Flight

"On the first Tesseract album, you could hear I had a lot of issues I wanted to get off my chest, but now it's very hard to write anything other than happy music."



"The midges in Scotland are fierce — they destroyed us!" Daniel Tompkins laughs as he reveals one of the menaces of the beautiful British countryside, where

he was being filmed for his experimental project *White Moth Black Butterfly*.

"Our director had 130 bites on his body!" he adds, his voice lifting in amazement.

It's a warm and dry afternoon when the Tesseract vocalist lets *Prog* in on the secrets behind the rain-soaked sets in the mock medieval village of Duncarron, near the lush Loch Lomond. Not only did the videos for *Tempest* and *Evelyn* result in him working with the team at Dark Fable Media — they've previously filmed the likes of Devin Townsend and Ihsahn — but they also mark a new multimedia era for the project. And fans are already referring to the diptych as a cross between *Game Of Thrones* and *The OA*.

"Me and Jordan [Bethany, co-vocalist] did a performance inside the longhouse," he says. "There were three braziers burning within this confined space so we were getting choked for at least three or four hours — it was quite hardcore. We had to break every few minutes to dry our eyes because we were crying from the smoke. We were filming on the land, in the forest, by the rivers — doing anything we could to get the right shots. My and Jordan's feet were sodden after an hour and we were there for two days, but we got some amazing footage. The last shot we did was this epic fight scene. There was a break in the rain and a big rainbow came out. It was unbelievable."

The two-part storyline follows Tompkins and Bethany through their quest to save the soul of a fictional village, which results in their on-screen deaths. The prog-friendly productions are far bigger and more ambitious than anything the pair have done before, so to suggest the singer is excited would be a massive understatement.

The battle scenes and interpretative dance rituals they filmed are a far cry from his *other* band's very modern videos, but then again, the free-spirited *White Moth Black Butterfly* are very different from Tesseract.

Tompkins has enjoyed an eclectic career so far. Before becoming a full-time singer and vocal coach, he was a police officer, and it was during this period that he first started dabbling in the solo project that became WMBB. Back in 2009, it was little more than a light-hearted creative outlet, albeit one that would allow him to experiment musically and learn how to use music production software.

WMBB also filled the creative void between him leaving post-hardcore band *First Signs Of Frost* and first joining djent newcomers Tesseract. But the project soon evolved into a collaborative effort when he began writing with Indian musician Keshav Dhar. (Tompkins was also in Dhar's own band *Skyharbor* for several years.)

The result was WMBB's self-released *One Thousand Wings* in 2013. It was an album that fused trip-hop, experimental electronica and shoegaze, and won the pair a new fan base. They played three intimate shows that





"I want people to plug in, listen from the start and go off on a journey right the way through."



autumn, and released the single *Rising Sun* via Bandcamp the following spring. But after Tompkins rejoined Tesseract in 2015, the project seemed to flutter away.

Four years on from their acclaimed debut, WMBB are back with the cinematic *Atone*. This second album finds Tompkins and Dhar reconnecting with guest vocalist Bethany, and teaming up with Devin Townsend Project/Casualties Of Cool producer Randy Slaugh. Across 11 tracks, the studio-based quartet explore themes of faith, hope, forgiveness and loss, although the vocalist avoids divulging the exact meanings of specific songs.

"I wouldn't say the themes are a reflection of how I was feeling," says Tompkins from his home studio in Nottinghamshire. "I wasn't in a sad or dark place — I'm feeling very happy actually — but the music I create has an element of sadness to it. Music is a powerful tool — I've always liked material that has an underpinning of hope and takes you on a journey, and when I listen to *Atone* now, there's a feeling of nostalgia throughout it.

"With technology and politics, how people interact with each other is quite apathetic, and I think back to how things were when we had very little and perhaps cared a bit more about each other. I think that's one of the reasons I wanted to do a historic music video, so I could dip into that a bit more. But there are also a lot of love songs on the album too...

"I haven't got anything negative to sing about now, but I used to. In my younger days, I was a very bitter person. I think on the first Tesseract album [*One*], you could hear I had a lot of issues I wanted to get off my chest, but now it's very hard to write anything other than happy music."

Recorded across India, the USA and the UK, *Atone* moves WMBB's sound away from their synthetic-sounding debut and into a much grander space. Inspired by the likes of Sigur Rós, Tool, North Atlantic Oscillation and Enigma, it takes the listener on a journey, ebbing and flowing through folkish elements and trip-hop nuances. It's thoughtful with

a melancholic edge, enhanced by the addition of elegant harps, cellos, a French horn and even a pipa, a type of Chinese lute. There are additional guest vocals from classical singer and fellow voice coach Amanda Munton, and dramatic samples that send the project soaring to even more dynamic heights.

"One of the songs, *II: Penitence*, has a very folky, soft vocal," Tompkins reveals. "But at the end of the string part there's a soundscape from World War II, with the sounds of people marching and weapons being fired. It's a very evocative song and there's a lot of that about the album. There are very low, brooding moments that blossom into colourful vocal-led songs.

"I know it sounds cheesy but it's like a dreamscape. I want people to plug in, listen from the start and go off on a journey right the way through, rather than just have an album of songs. I think we've achieved that and I think we've found our sound in *Atone*. It's not an album you'll get bored listening to. It's experimental but it's also very accessible in areas — the balance was hard to find but I think we've got it."

Although he cites Enigma's New Age-influenced *MCMXC aD* as a major inspiration, Tompkins' and Dhar's musical vision feels far more organic and contemporary. Add Randy Slaugh's instrumental arrangements and the results are seriously impressive.

The project's new deal with Kscope, the same label that Tesseract are on, has given them further excuses to think big. Outside their work in the progressive world, both Slaugh and Dhar score films, and that's a direction Tompkins would like to see WMBB move in. He confirms that the two promotional extravaganzas released so far are just a glimpse of his hopes and dreams.

"I'd like to have an album that's accompanied by a film in the future," he says. "The

music really does lend itself to that type of thing. Because White Moth is a studio project, one of its strengths is the visuals, and I think it's an exciting prospect to have an album accompanied by visuals. I've always had a big plan for us and in the next five years I would like to have released another couple of albums and played in the live arena with a proper production. We'll see where this takes us."

Now *Atone* is finally out, Tompkins has turned his attention back towards Tesseract. The progressive metal five-piece are currently working on the follow-up to 2015's *Polaris*, which is tipped for release early next year. With the singer also involved in the synth-pop studio project Zeta — their self-titled debut was released in June — there's a risk he could be spreading himself a little thin. However, he says, that's something he's making sure doesn't happen.

"Before I rejoined Tesseract and on the second Skyharbor album [2014's *Guiding Lights*], I felt like I had diluted myself a little bit so I began to rein things back," he admits. "When I initially left Tesseract [in 2011], I felt like I had a very uncertain future. I took a big leap of faith in leaving the police force and doing music full-time so I lent my voice to as many projects as possible to keep a presence. "In the last eight years, I think I've released 14 albums with various different bands... but now I have one progressive metal project, one experimental and another outlet for pop. I would never do more than that and, to be honest, I feel like I'm a bit stretched anyway."

If *Atone* is anything to go by, perhaps a little stretching is a good conductor of Tompkins' creativity. But will it be another four years before White Moth Black Butterfly take flight again? And can they really achieve Tompkins' big dreams? Only time can tell. ☺

Atone is out now via Kscope. See www.facebook.com/whitemothblackbutterfly.



CLASSIC PROG RELEASES FROM GONZO

RICK WAKEMAN *Crimes Of Passion*

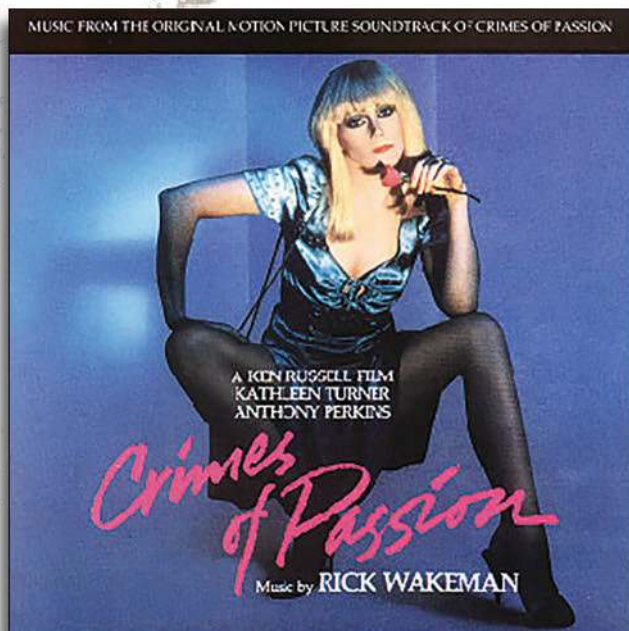
RICK WAKEMAN This record is the soundtrack from Ken Russell 1984 movie 'Crimes of Passion'. The film explores themes of human relationships and mental illness through a mix of sex and suspense!

ATOMIC ROOSTER A compilation album by Atomic Rooster put together by Vincent Crane's widow Jean shortly after his death in 1989

ARTHUR BROWN With his most famous music played live to a rabidly appreciative audience, you, too can hear what the fuss is all about

THIRD EAR BAND Recorded at Tuxedo Club, Piacenza (Italy), on January 14th, 1989

RICK WAKEMAN In an up-close and uproarious stand-up performance filmed live in front of a studio audience



THIRD EAR BAND Released in 1993 and highlights include 'Dance With Dolphins', the very English folk-sounding ten-minute 'Water Into Wine' and the tribal 'Psychedelic Trance Dance'

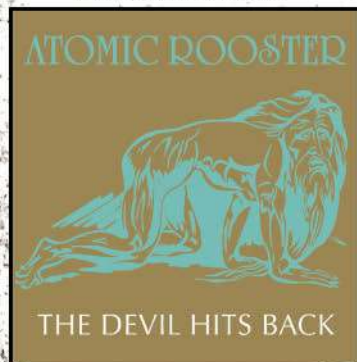
NICO A concert recorded by Nico for "Pandora's Music Box '85" at De Doelen Concertgebouw in Rotterdam, The Netherlands on October 9, 1985

TONY ASHTON & JON LORD

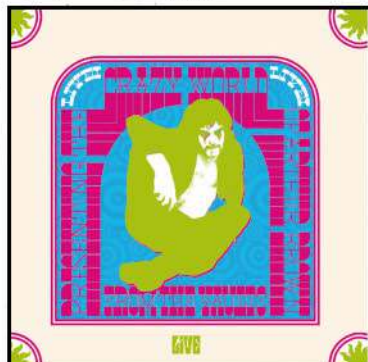
Jon Lord wanted to move away from his signature sound with Deep Purple; and with Tony Ashton, produced a brave, but oddly enthralling album

MARTIN SPRINGETT Gloriously melodic and original album; The Gardening Club, and we are very pleased to bring it back into the public eye for the first time in many decades

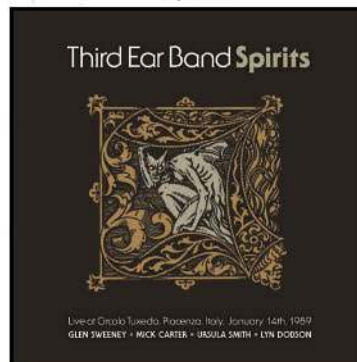
ATOMIC ROOSTER *The Devil Hits Back*



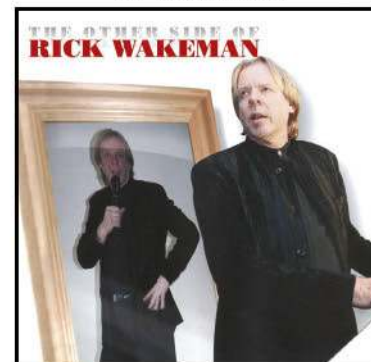
ARTHUR BROWN *Live*



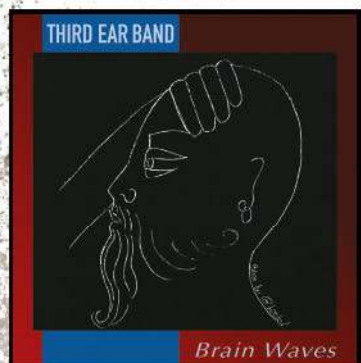
THIRD EAR BAND *Spirits*



RICK WAKEMAN *The Other Side Of*



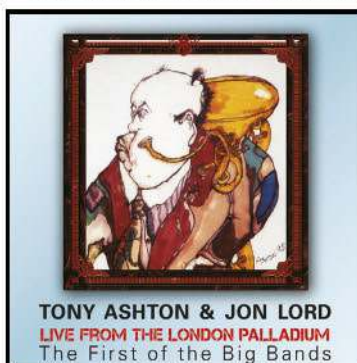
THIRD EAR BAND *Brain Waves*



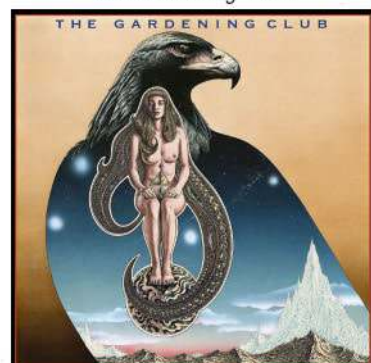
NICO *Behind The Iron Curtain*



TONY ASHTON & JON LORD *Live From The London Palladium*



Martin Springett *The Gardening Club*



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Mike Scott/ The Waterboys

Whether he was leading **The Waterboys** or going solo, this Scottish musician has always been unafraid to hold back in a music industry that “rewards repetition”, and he’s just dropped a new double album. He grew up listening to the stuff, so now we have to ask: **how prog is Mike Scott?**

Words: Paul Rees **Portraits:** Paul MacManus

On this particular midsummer’s afternoon, Mike Scott, founder and sole permanent member of The Waterboys, is sat in a tucked-away café in his adopted home town of Dublin, recalling the specifics of his adolescent prog fixation.

“Around 1971, ’72, I was a big Pink Floyd fan,” he says, the lilt of his native Edinburgh still very much apparent in his voice. “My favourite Floyd album was *Meddle*. I was also a huge King Crimson fan and, I have to say, a teenage devotee of Blue Öyster Cult, and especially of their *Spectres* album.”

Not that Scott has ever made music that sounded remotely like the Floyd or King Crimson, much less the venerable American hard rockers. However, during 30-plus years both at the helm of The Waterboys and as a solo artist, he has followed his own path just as doggedly as, say, Roger Waters or Robert Fripp.

Now 58, Scott grew up in Edinburgh wanting to be a “heroic” footballer, before discovering Dylan, The Beatles and the Stones, and being moved to pick up a guitar. He passed through the typical litany of short-lived school bands and after an ill-starred year at the city’s university studying English Literature and Philosophy, he put together one that stuck: Another Pretty Face in 1978. They managed to get a record deal with Virgin, and Scott moved to London.

Another Pretty Face got as far as being on the cover of music weekly *Sounds*. Scott, though, restless even then, broke the band up and assembled The Waterboys to better realise his

“I want other songwriters to do great work because it’s a bigger inspiration for me to be better and trump them.”



The Waterboys’ new double album, *Out Of All This Blue*.

more vaulting aspirations. They became part of a kind of movement for the first five years of their existence, with Scott as one of its totemic figureheads. This was alongside fellow 80s trailblazers U2, Simple Minds and Big Country, under the banner of ‘The Big Music’, so called after the signature single from The Waterboys’ second album, 1984’s *A Pagan Place*.



Pretty Things: Mike Scott (far right) with Another Pretty Face.

The next year’s *This Is the Sea* was their watershed. Wide-eyed and rousing, it gave them a breakthrough hit, *The Whole Of The Moon*, which climbed into the UK Top 30 but stalled when Scott refused to lip-sync to get on *Top Of The Pops*. In any case, by then he was already looking ahead to a new dawn for the band.

Soon enough, he had jettisoned that line-up of The Waterboys and surrounded himself with another, decamping with this new group of musicians to a country house on the west coast of Ireland. There, Scott aimed to conjure music of a more pastoral, soulful bent, realised on the *Fisherman’s Blues* album of 1988. Now regarded as his masterpiece, at the time it baffled and shed a significant portion of his band’s audience.

“I grew up in the 60s and every time The Beatles or Dylan made an album, the frontier changed, because they moved it,” Scott says today. “In the 70s, it was Bowie and Roxy Music that went on changing their musical costume. I loved that. For me, that’s what one should do with music, and it’s a natural state. At the same time, I know it’s cost me a lot of fans. The music business also isn’t geared up for rapid change, but to reward repetition.”

Even so, and ever since, Scott has roved and roamed, his career increasingly coming to appear as an exercise in first and foremost satisfying his own inquisitiveness. He made another ‘raggle-taggle’ record with that incarnation of The Waterboys, *Room To Roam*, and after that a more conventional-sounding but near-concept set inspired by



Mike Scott in 2017: an undisputed prog fan, but is he a prog artist?



his nocturnal adventuring, *Dream Harder*, in 1993. For that one, he recruited a cast of top-class session musicians, but finding himself unable to gather a line-up to tour, ditched The Waterboys name and went off under his own instead.

In this venture, he set a course that was altogether opposite to the slickly produced *Dream Harder*, making a hushed, intimate record, *Bring 'Em All In*, at the Findhorn Foundation, an out-of-the-way communal retreat in the Scottish north-east.

"The right way to go solo is to do what George Michael did, which is go to America and make a record produced by the great Jerry Wexler," says Scott. "George's *Careless Whisper* had an amazing sax hook and all the best session musicians in the world, whereas I made a one-man acoustic record at a spiritual retreat in Scotland. It wasn't so much about my wanting to escape, but I had got bored musically and always have been a bit of a seeker.

"In total it was a very tricky time for me, but to quote the song, I found what I was looking for at Findhorn and lived there for a couple of years. The experiences I had were wonderful, educational, and still serve me now on a daily basis. I learned to cut myself a bit of slack and to trust to instinct."

Neither *Bring 'Em All In* or its more fleshed-out follow-up, *Still Burning*, managed to find more than a devoted cult following, and so, in 2000, Scott resurrected The Waterboys. His first steps back into the fold were faltering. He touted their comeback album, *A Rock In The Weary Land*, as a bold, new form, 'Sonic Rock', but really it sounded as if he had been listening to too much Radiohead. The record slipped by, unloved.

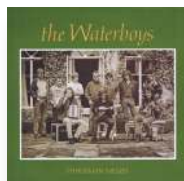
Subsequently, Scott recovered his bearings, without diluting his questing spirit. Over the last 14 years he has toured The Waterboys consistently and put out a clutch of admirable records, each one different to the other. Principal among these have been 2003's mostly acoustic *Universal Hall* and, in 2011, *An Appointment With Mr Yeats*, on which Scott set a collection of poems by Ireland's literary giant WB Yeats to music.

Given the scope of Scott's vision, the latest Waterboys album, this year's *Out Of All This Blue*, is perhaps the most inevitable, since it's a sprawling double.

It's a record that sounds as if it might have been beamed in from another, grander era. It was recorded mostly



Above: an outtake of the *Fisherman's Blues* album cover shoot, taken outside Spiddal House in Galway, 1987. Below: The Waterboys' classic 1988 album *Fisherman's Blues*.



solo by Scott in his home studio, with long-time sideman Steve Wickham, Texan guitarist Zach Ernst and ace Muscle Shoals bassist David Hood among those to overdub their parts afterwards. *Out Of All This Blue* echoes most of all the boundless mood of the great white soul records of the early 70s made by Van Morrison and Joe Cocker in cahoots with Leon Russell — albeit that Scott also colours his palette with a battery of loops and samples, inspired by a shopping list of hip-hop

"In fact, we're going to be touring this autumn with an expanded band of two drummers and girl singers. From 1967 to 1972, that's a halcyon period of music for me, and one that I adore dipping into. You had all these great players like Jim Keltner and Nicky Hopkins shaping records by so many different artists.

"At the same time, I've used hip-hop production values all over this record. I admire how someone like Kendrick Lamar will throw anything into his records and break up the rhythm to make a statement. They're like audio movies in that sense, and I wanted to do something like that. Fortunately, our drummer, Ralph Salmins, put me on to a website called producerloops.com that houses all these incredible collections of loops. I was like a kid in a toy shop."

The majority of the album's 34 songs are also reflective of Scott's new-found domestic bliss. Last year, he married Japanese manga artist Megumi Igarashi, and he gives over the final quarter of *Out Of All This Blue* to rhapsodic love songs to his wife.

"Two thirds of the record is love songs," he qualifies. "I've never written so many before, but then I've had such a romantic five or six years. Several were written during the courtship of my wife and some are drawn from other relationships that I've had.

"I did split it up conceptually and conceive of the whole as four sides of old vinyl. There's something so evocative about the way vinyl breaks up an album and that you have these natural resting places.



The Big Music: The Waterboys live on *The Tube* in 1986.



1985's *This Is The Sea*, which included the smash hit *The Whole Of The Moon*.

records recommended to him by Ernst. This is most notable on one of the standout tracks, *New York I Love You*, which uses Lou Reed's *Sweet Jane* riff as a jumping-off point into a heady collage of appropriated and found sounds.

"I love that Joe Cocker and Leon Russell *Mad Dogs & Englishmen* sound, and the movie is required viewing on The Waterboys tour bus," Scott says.



Scott beside a portrait of WB Yeats in 2009. Below: 2011's *An Appointment With Mr Yeats* album.



MARC O'SULLIVAN/REX SHUTTERSTOCK



Mike Scott: always aiming for that 'wow' factor in his songs.



PAUL MACMANUS

“The right way to go solo is to do what George Michael did, to go to America and make a record produced by Jerry Wexler, whereas I made a one-man acoustic album at a spiritual retreat in Scotland.”

“In the last few years I’ve also become a parent [he has a daughter with singer-actress Camille O’Sullivan and an eight-month-old son with Igarashi], and that’s diverting in the most wonderful way. It’s actually helped my music. My little girl is four and I’m constantly making up songs for her, which means my creative engine is running all the time. All of the songs on this new record were written in the last couple of years and in an atmosphere of constant song-making.”

Yet for all of this apparent contentment, Scott, one of our most undervalued craftsmen, still burns to be heard, and for his due recognition. While he doesn’t claim to have scaled the heights of a Dylan or a Leonard Cohen, he would back himself against any songwriter from his generation and the next. To his mind, with *Out Of All This Blue*, he’s laying down a gauntlet to his contemporaries. Or, as he expresses it, “Let them beat this.”

“I’ve always wanted to be the best,” he says. “It’s a healthy competitiveness, not toxic. I actually want other songwriters to do great work because it’s a bigger inspiration for me to be better and trump them.”

“One of my favourite stories is about the great country singer Hank Williams. When he used to perform at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, between sets he would sit on the stairs to the stage door. As the other artists came up, Hank would peer at them from underneath his Stetson and say, ‘You can’t write ’em like old Hank, can ya?’ I like that. I’ll be sat there when U2, or Noel Gallagher, or Muse walk by, saying, ‘You can’t write ’em like old Mike, can ya?’”

Out Of All This Blue is out now via BMG. See www.mikescottwaterboys.com for more information.



YOUR SHOUT!

It’s always been very ‘Big Music’, often with literary pretensions. Which does beg the question... how prog is Mike Scott?

“I love The Waterboys, but I wouldn’t classify them even remotely as a prog band. I would label them as pop/rock, with elements of traditional Irish folk.”

William Wallberg

“They’ve had their ‘prog’ moments, notably *A Pagan Place* and *This Is The Sea*. It seems to me that after that Mr Scott hasn’t really innovated in any real sense. As much as I like the folky vibe of *Fisherman’s Blues*, I’d struggle to describe it, or anything that followed, as progressive.”

David Elliott

“Started out Bunnymen meets Van Morrison. So odd, but not prog. They then went more Steve Earle goes Celtic. Much less odd, but still not prog.”

Prog Watcher

“Their music’s enjoyable enough, but they can’t be said to have broken any new ground. So for me, not prog.”

Leigh Langhorn

“They combine the folk roots of The Incredible String Band with the soul of the Moving Hearts, mix in a splash of psychedelia, the lyricism of Dylan and, after 30 plus years, release a triple album. The one group wifey and I agree on.”

Gary Morley

“Where rock and roll tips its hat to American blues, I’ve thought that progressive rock has dipped into the well of British/Celtic folk music at its root, thematically and lyrically. The Waterboys have pushed that folk tradition forward, progressively...”

Kent Brehm

“About as prog as mild cheddar cheese.”

James Shardlow

“In prog terms they’d probably have a lot in common with the Canterbury scene and also Fairport Convention.”

Leslie Moyes

“Not prog, but a folk-influenced rock band/artist that explore the parameters of that particular field. Great band/artist nevertheless...”

Thomas Olsson

“Actually my introduction to The Waterboys was a guy in a record store who told me, ‘So you like progressive rock, well have a listen to this one - it’s like Jethro Tull for the 80s.’ Then he handed me *A Pagan Place*. Bought it, brought it home, put it on, and loved it...”

Jacob Holm-Lupo

“I wouldn’t really call The Waterboys progressive in any aspect... They’re just good folk rock!”

Ciaran Whyte

“More part of ‘the big music’ fraternity before they went all raggle taggle, but a very good band. Their sound changed when Karl Wallinger left to form World Party, who were possibly more proggy than the Waterboys...”

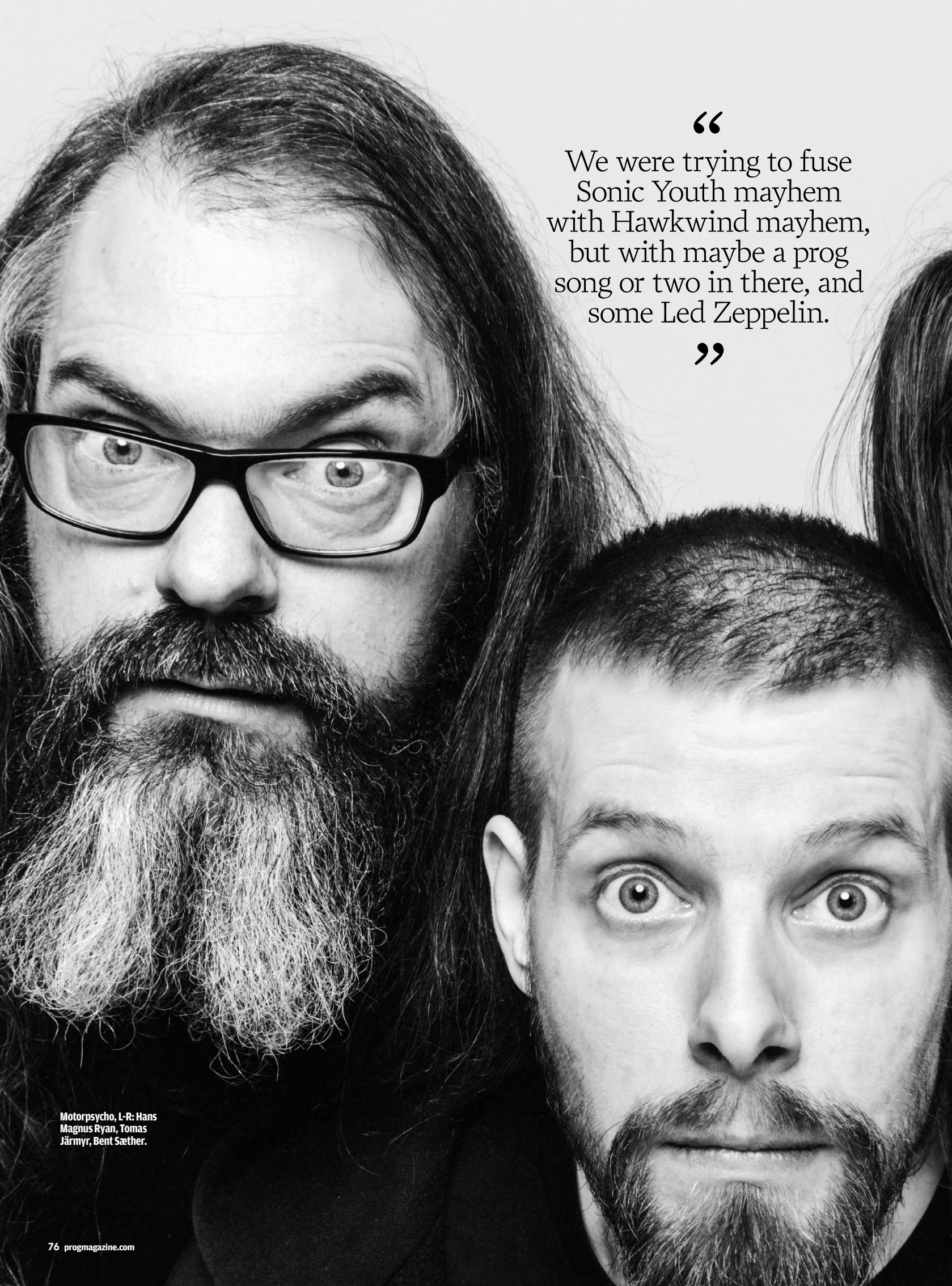
Neil Boughey

“Nah, not for me. Good band, folk and Celtic influences certainly, but not much prog going on.”

Mark Hudson

“Why would you even ask that? Was it a drunken conversation down the pub?”

Julie Jearam

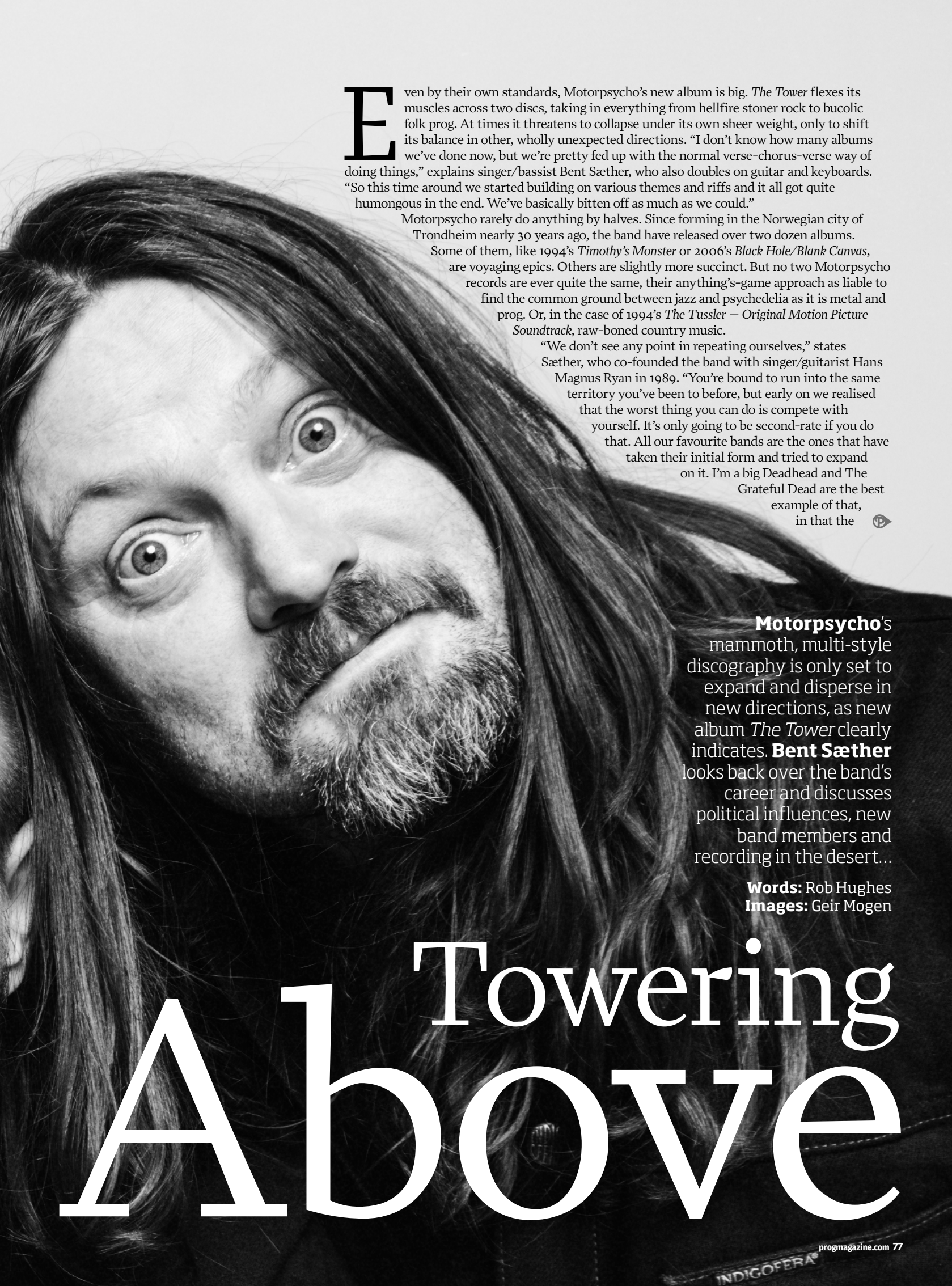


“

We were trying to fuse
Sonic Youth mayhem
with Hawkwind mayhem,
but with maybe a prog
song or two in there, and
some Led Zeppelin.

”

Motorpsycho, L-R: Hans
Magnus Ryan, Tomas
Järmyr, Bent Sæther.



Even by their own standards, Motorpsycho's new album is big. *The Tower* flexes its muscles across two discs, taking in everything from hellfire stoner rock to bucolic folk prog. At times it threatens to collapse under its own sheer weight, only to shift its balance in other, wholly unexpected directions. "I don't know how many albums we've done now, but we're pretty fed up with the normal verse-chorus-verse way of doing things," explains singer/bassist Bent Sæther, who also doubles on guitar and keyboards. "So this time around we started building on various themes and riffs and it all got quite humongous in the end. We've basically bitten off as much as we could."

Motorpsycho rarely do anything by halves. Since forming in the Norwegian city of Trondheim nearly 30 years ago, the band have released over two dozen albums.

Some of them, like 1994's *Timothy's Monster* or 2006's *Black Hole/Blank Canvas*, are voyaging epics. Others are slightly more succinct. But no two Motorpsycho records are ever quite the same, their anything's-game approach as liable to find the common ground between jazz and psychedelia as it is metal and prog. Or, in the case of 1994's *The Tussler – Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*, raw-boned country music.

"We don't see any point in repeating ourselves," states Sæther, who co-founded the band with singer/guitarist Hans Magnus Ryan in 1989. "You're bound to run into the same territory you've been to before, but early on we realised that the worst thing you can do is compete with yourself. It's only going to be second-rate if you do that. All our favourite bands are the ones that have taken their initial form and tried to expand on it. I'm a big Deadhead and The Grateful Dead are the best example of that, in that the 

Motorpsycho's mammoth, multi-style discography is only set to expand and disperse in new directions, as new album *The Tower* clearly indicates. **Bent Sæther** looks back over the band's career and discusses political influences, new band members and recording in the desert...

Words: Rob Hughes
Images: Geir Mogen

A1 Towering Above

songs are just excuses. It's like there's a key and a tempo, then here we go. That kind of looseness is really inspiring. We try to write songs that force you to be totally focused on the here and now."

Despite all this creative wanderlust, Motorpsycho do operate under a set of guidelines, however movable. Sæther puts this down to their beginnings in the Trondheim squat scene, where a bunch of hardcore noise bands formed just as grunge was taking hold.

"We were trying to fuse Sonic Youth mayhem with Hawkwind mayhem," he recalls, "but with maybe a prog song or two in there, and some Led Zeppelin. If you look at everything roughly, that's more or less what we've been doing ever since, though maybe wider and further out."

I think. That's what the lyrics are addressing. Do whatever you need to do, but c'mon, be decent. Be human."

The louder moments on *The Tower* were recorded with Raphael at White Buffalo studios in Los Angeles, but Sæther and Ryan felt they needed a change of scenery to capture the less punishing, more pastoral tones that dominate disc two. They duly headed east to a recording space in Joshua Tree, nestled a couple of hours away in the Mojave Desert.

"Downtown LA doesn't really lend itself to acoustic guitars and hippie vibes, so we decided to add the other venue too," Sæther says. "Motorpsycho could've concentrated on the other stuff and made a proper heavy rock album, but we needed the acoustics in there to add a different texture and make it more hippified. We wanted it to represent the whole

Conservatory, he's best known for his tenure with Italian avant-noise trio Zu.

Järmyr proved a more than capable replacement for Kapstad. In fact, suggests Sæther, the drummer has brought a unique dynamic to Motorpsycho: "He has a different style than Kenneth, he's not all over the place all the time. It's a clearer approach, a little more disciplined. It made the songs and riffs come more into focus. The drums on the record are perfect for what we were after."

The Tower is just the latest in a series of landmarks in Motorpsycho's recording career. The first of these came in 1993, in the form of the mammoth *Demon Box*. The album coincided with the arrival of fourth member Helge Sten (aka Deathprod), who brought his avant-garde influences to bear on the band's hardcore psych rock.



Motor Heads: the band are back with a towering new statement of intent.



The arrival of *The Tower* coincides with both a new chapter in Motorpsycho's life and our troubled new political climate. Sæther and Ryan recorded the album in California earlier this year with executive producer Dave Raphael. The music, especially on disc one, is often dense and foreboding — *Bartok Of The Universe*, *A Song For Everyone*, the title track — while the lyrics speak of dark deeds and strange times.

As Sæther points out, the album's themes were shaped by the seismic shift in American politics as Donald Trump took office.

"Musically, we started way before current events and all that stuff," he says. "It was all instrumental until I began writing the lyrics around the time of the US election. That was the direct result of a lot of paranoia — it was the thing most forward in my mind at that point. Nothing else felt as important."

"When it came time to record with Dave Raphael, who's American, it kind of put it all into perspective. It's all about decency,

band and what we're about, so we needed that kind of concept too."

Aside from the hitherto largely unexplored political agenda, the other fresh aspect of *The Tower* is the inclusion of Motorpsycho's new drummer. In May 2016, just after a European tour promoting their previous effort, *Here Be Monsters*, Kenneth Kapstad quit the band. Kapstad had been in place for nearly 10 years and was an integral part of the Motorpsycho set-up.

Sæther and Ryan pressed on with a live score to accompany a Norwegian theatre piece, *Begynnelser*, which translates as 'beginnings', before finally bringing in Swedish drummer Tomas Järmyr at Christmas. A graduate of the Trondheim Jazz

The upshot was a renewed sense of daring and ambition, Motorpsycho crafting an experimental masterpiece. Among

Deathprod's listed credits on *Demon Box* are "various machines making lotsa noise".

The album earned them a Norwegian Grammy nomination and fostered Motorpsycho's reputation as one of Scandinavia's most essential bands.

"It was the last record that we were contracted for," Sæther explains, referring to Oslo label Voices Of Wonder. "We thought that this was the

last call, so we decided to just put it all in there, everything that we'd ever wanted to try out. And somehow it worked. It has a lot of identity — it's our 'fun' album. You can still



feel the aggressiveness and lack of respect and sheer energy of the thing when you listen to *Demon Box* today. It was the album that opened the floodgates, because that was our first success as well."

Motorpsycho lived up to their billing throughout the 90s. True to the spirit in which they were founded – they were named after Russ Meyer's cult biker flick from 1965, "because we wanted to do something like 'motor', meaning energy, and 'psycho', meaning psychedelia", explains Sæther – the band roared through the decade without touching the brakes. *Timothy's Monster*, *Blissard*, *Angels And Demons At Play* and *Trust Us* all hurtled on in the wake of *Demon Box*.

Yet there was also a playful element to Motorpsycho that took them way off the beaten track. As if to wrong-foot anyone who

with the droning guitars and blasted textures of their previous work (*The Tussler...* aside) and instead presented a postmodern take on American psych pop. Cue echoes of Barrett-era Floyd and The Beach Boys, alongside brass, strings and bursts of jazz.

The effect may have been startling for fans, but Motorpsycho were intent on clearing the ground for another fresh start. "*Trust Us* [1998] was the max of the kind of heavy, churning stuff we'd been doing," says Sæther. "All of a sudden we felt like writing songs instead, working on the vocals and arrangements. And that made for a different kind of songwriting. It was the start of a new era for us."

Various members of the band looked to forge different ways of composing, resulting in a couple of albums that incorporated electronica and improvised jams. In the

listened back to it in its entirety, but realised "there wasn't really any way to make it smaller without taking away stuff that was necessary to make it whole". He's also acutely aware that Motorpsycho's fiercely loyal fan base, who have stuck with them through every career turn, have certain expectations.

"We have a very different relationship to our fans than most bands," he says. "When you think you're being commercial and writing songs in that vein, our core audience doesn't really like that. They like it when we're doing new stuff and trying to push our boundaries. For us, commercial is being difficult. So I guess, in that context, an album like *The Tower* is really commercial for us. It's kind of ass-backwards, as they say in the States. As a songwriter, I think the most important thing to remember is not to censor

“
We don't see any point in repeating ourselves – all our favourite bands are the ones that have taken their initial form and tried to expand on it.
”

thought they might be able to bundle them into a tidy category, along came the band's homage to classic longhair country, *The Tussler...*. Credited to Motorpsycho & Friends, the album was a radical departure from anything they'd attempted before.

"I think it was a mixture of two things," Sæther says of its genesis. "First of all, our drummer [Håkon Gebhardt] bought a banjo on tour and played it all the time. We discovered country music and fell in love with stuff like The Flying Burrito Brothers and Gram Parsons. Also, because *Demon Box* had been the heaviest, darkest, cartoon-y metal-type thing, we wanted at all costs to avoid repeating that. So we threw a spanner in the works and made it all the more confusing for everybody by making *The Tussler...*. It really worked. We got away with it, which opened us up to being anything we wanted to be."

Another key moment in the band's trajectory came about at the turn of the millennium. *Let Them Eat Cake* dispensed

meantime, the Americana boom brought another country rock affair in 2004 with *Motorpsycho Presents The International Tussler Society*. It wasn't until 2006's *Black Hole/Blank Canvas* that Ryan and Sæther returned to the pummelling rockisms of their earliest days.

That album found them newly enervated, attacking the songs with real gusto. It's also as good a place as any to flag up their prog credentials. Dip into Motorpsycho's back catalogue at random and chances are you'll discern the journeying spirit of the bands who took rock into the outer dimensions in the late 60s and early 70s.

"Prog has always been a definite influence," affirms Sæther. "King Crimson, Van der Graaf Generator and Magma are the big three for me. And I hope it shows. But there are bucketloads of others as well, chiefly a 35-year love affair with Black Sabbath."

This same pioneering ethos feeds directly into *The Tower*. Sæther admits he thought the album might be too unwieldy when he first

yourself. And if it doesn't work in a certain context, just put it away for a different day."

Despite their prolific work rate and extensive back catalogue, Motorpsycho show no signs of puttering out yet. Rather, Sæther insists that their best days remain ahead of them.

"We've made a few good records," he says modestly, "but we still have to make that brilliant one, that classic one. There are so many songs and structures that we haven't even written yet. And when you improvise as much as we do, it never gets stale."

"There's no showbiz bullshit with Motorpsycho – it's all about the music and trying to find that spot where some kind of transcendence happens. We have a high percentage of 'what the fuck just happened?' moments in the studio and on stage. I don't think we'll ever tire of that. There's nothing in life I'd rather do. So why stop now?" P

The Tower is out now via Stickman Records.
See www.motorpsycho.no for more information.

They've had strong financial support from their loyal fanbase, their music was included in a teaching curriculum at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, and now Aussies **Ne Obliviscaris** are set to make big waves beyond their native land.

Words: Rod Whitfield



Painters **Of The** *Tempest*

Ne Obliviscaris, L-R:
Benjamin Baret, Tim
Charles, Dan Presland,
Xenoyr, Matt Klavins.

“We have
fans who love
classical music,
fans who love
death metal, and
obviously prog.”

- Xenoyr

In their homeland, Aussie band Ne Obliviscaris are a household name. But in recent times they have been gaining attention around the world, thanks to a combination of their avant-garde approach to creating heavy, progressive music, an inexhaustible determination to find success, and the innovative manner in which they fund their activities.

For those uninitiated, Ne Obliviscaris' music is extreme, melodic, epic and progressive as hell — all at once. From Melbourne's famed Corner Hotel, the band's two frontmen Xenoyr (extreme vocals) and Tim Charles (clean vocals and violin) describe their sound to *Prog* for those unfamiliar.

“I think we cross a lot of boundaries in terms of influences and things like that,” Xenoyr muses. “We have a very wide audience that listen to our music. We have fans who love classical music, because the violins are involved, and how we implement that into the music; fans who love death metal; and obviously prog. I think it's because we use a lot of variation, and I think our fans overall are very open-minded.”

Charles takes it further, feeling that their highly progressive sound and approach are also products of the very different personalities and attitudes that each member brings to the table. “We just be ourselves, and that's a bit different,” he says. “We're very unique individuals creating music that we think is unique. It's passionate and intense.”

“All of us have extremely diverse influences,” Xenoyr adds, “and I think that comes through in our music.”

The band received a stunning accolade in 2013 when their song *And Plague Flowers The Kaleidoscope* from debut album *Portal Of I* was included in a teaching curriculum at Sydney Conservatorium of Music, with the song being analysed for its composition and musicianship. It was presented to the composition students by Professor Matthew Hindson, the Chair of Composition at the Conservatorium and a renowned classical composer, as: ‘An exemplar in structure, mixing timbres, meters, modes, how to approach virtuosity, sound and noise, extended performance and techniques.’

A greater compliment to a musician can scarcely be imagined, and both Xenoyr and Charles are honoured by the distinction. “That was something that just came out of the blue for us,” Charles recalls. “We were up doing a show in Sydney, and one of the professors from the Conservatorium came to the show. We found out he was actually a big fan of the band, and he wanted to use *And Plague Flowers The Kaleidoscope* as part of an assignment for his composition subject at the Sydney Con, which meant so much to us.

“It was one of those things where we had our music essentially being studied and analysed in regards to the use of arrangements and structure and compositional techniques, vocal extended techniques and all this sort of stuff. It was just really nice to have that validation from an institution like that.”





Famous Five: already big *Down Under*, the band are looking to break out worldwide.

As intimated previously, the band have had quite a storied journey across the length and breadth of their almost 15-year history. They have overcome severe sickness and injury within the band, a seemingly perpetual revolving door of line-up changes – they’re currently looking for a new bass player – frustrating visa issues for their French guitarist Benjamin Baret (which held up the band’s progress for several years), and other disconcerting personal controversies. With the imminent release of their third full-length album *Urn*, Charles is confident the band have left all of that hardship behind.

“We had the first nine years, which was endless struggle for no reward, to create the first album,” he laughs. “Then there’s from when *Portal Of I* came out in 2012, where things have actually gone really well for us. Now here we are, five years later, about to release our third record.”

“A lot of international people don’t realise, because they only hear [second album] *Citadel* or whatever, they think we’re only relatively new,” Xenoyr adds, “but we’ve been around for 14 years. We’ve had so many hiccups along the way, we could have broken up at any time.”

According to Xenoyr, a true crystallising moment for the future of the band came when they decided to dip their collective toe into the crowdfunding pool in 2014 to test those waters. When it was a huge success and showed them that their existing fans really did care enough to put their money where their mouths were, they knew they had to continue.

“I think that really did put into perspective who and what our fans were,” he states confidently. “It showed us that the fans really were behind us, and just how many loyal fans

we had, and what that made it possible for us to do. We write music for ourselves but we’re not necessarily wasting time in terms of touring and getting exposure across the world. So it was really encouraging.”

The success of that initial crowdfunding campaign also inspired them to take that approach to funding their band to the next level. In early 2016 they announced that they would be undertaking a Patreon campaign, whereby the band’s fans would fund their activities in a more ongoing fashion, in the form of a monthly subscription. In return, subscribers receive all manner of exclusive content and access to the band and their music that non-subscribers don’t get.

This announcement caused its share of controversy and trolling of the band online, but, a year and a half down the track, it has proved to be a tremendous success.

Charles has some advice for any other band considering heading down this road. “I think the most important thing about the newer elements of the music industry is to understand how these different ways of interacting with your fanbase work for different bands at different times in their career. So the thing *Ne Obliviscaris* has is a strong history of support from our fans in a financial sense, and we were convinced it would work for us. But it’s not something that would work for every band. So for some bands I would say it’s not for you, but a crowdfunding campaign might be.”

Testing the waters in this manner is the crux of it all. “For us, the success of that initial crowdfunding campaign, that being an even greater success than we’d hoped for, meant we felt we had a track record of asking our fans for

help, and them coming forward and pitching in and giving back to us in return for what we’ve done for them with music and shows and so on. We felt that track record meant we could move forward with the Patreon.

“It was a case of saying, ‘Instead of going back to the well and saying we need your help again, let’s start to develop an ongoing assisted relationship.’”

While the band are signed to the prestigious French label Season Of Mist, home to the likes of Cynic, Atheist, Septicflesh and many more, they are essentially entirely self-funded, and the Patreon campaign and their steadfastly DIY aesthetic helps them carry on making the music they want to make in the manner in which they want to make it. This can be clearly heard on new opus *Urn*.

“The new album is just us being ourselves again,” Charles says. “The first two albums were just us creating the music that we want to create, ignoring what anyone on the outside thinks. We were really happy with the response to *Portal Of I*, and we thought it was the best record we could create at the time.

“Then when we did *Citadel*, the most important thing for us was to make sure that we loved it, and we were like, ‘If we love it, it’ll do fine.’ It was a bit different, but we loved it, and it did even better. So with this new record it was just trying to maintain that philosophy, even though we’re a significantly bigger band this time and there’s a lot more people on the outside asking what it’s going to sound like. It was just a matter of blocking out the outside world and writing music for ourselves.” 🎧

Urn is out on October 27 via Season Of Mist. See www.facebook.com/NeObliviscarisBand for more.

“We’ve been around for 14 years. We’ve had so many hiccups along the way, we could have broken up at any time.”

- Xenoyr

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Enslaved: looking on the bright side of life on new album *E*.



Theory of Evolution



"When you are as young as we were, it's not easy to try to incorporate Pink Floyd into your music. It takes a while to discover the best way to take the music forward."

They've already travelled a long way from their metal origins, and now **Enslaved** are changing their sound once again with their none-more-prog 14th studio album *E*. Guitarist **Ivar Bjørnson** reveals all about the band's past progression, their mapped-out future, and the magical relationship between man and horse.

Words: Malcolm Dome

Make a note of the year 2043, because that's when Enslaved are planning to end it all. "We're looking at being in this band for another 26 years," explains the group's guitarist and co-founder Ivar Bjørnson. "It does sound daft when you put it like that, but we all just believe that's when Enslaved will come to a natural conclusion. What that means in terms of albums, I'm not sure. When we get to within five or 10 years of that point, we'll probably go mental and release a 12-LP box set!"

The Norwegian band, who formed in 1991 — which means by the time they finish, they will have made it beyond their 50th anniversary — have just begun a new thematic cycle with the album *E*. It takes them into territory that's philosophically very different from what has been at the core of their previous few albums.

Ever since *Vertebrae* in 2008, Enslaved have explored the individuality of the human condition on a series of records that have been challenging and linked through a fascination with the darker side of life. Now, however, the band are reaching towards a very different concept. Instead of looking at people as being isolated, with all the subsequent problems that arise from this, they're examining how people interact with one another.

"Yes, it is a more positive spin," muses Bjørnson. "And at a time when so many other bands are going towards the dark side, it may seem odd for us to be moving the other way. But things like that never bother us. It's almost typical of us to go against the trend!"

Enslaved are not a band with a far-reaching vision of where they should be going musically and lyrically. The fact that their last album *In Times* (2015) was to be the final instalment of their previous thematic cycle wasn't actually planned out in advance.

"When we did that album, none of us were sure if it might be the end of that era for us," admits Bjørnson. "It only became obvious when we went out and toured. Then we understood that we had come to the end of that path."

In their normal fashion, it didn't become clear to them where to go next until they had written the first song for *E*.



Enslaved, L-R: Håkon Vinje, Arve Isdal, Grutle Kjellson, Cato Bekkevold, Ivar Bjørnson.

“That was *Sacred Horse*. This is about the magical relationship between man and the horse, and how this was used during the Bronze Age, with the carving of horse images. There’s an interdependence which goes back that far. Once we had the song in place, then it became clear that we were being led down this route to a fresh ideology, and that’s when we began to write in a way that dealt with the duality of relationships. It’s the way we’ve always worked. The overall theme – I wouldn’t call it a concept – for an album can come at any time in the process. But once it’s in place, things flow very naturally.”

When Enslaved first got together, they were firmly in the extreme metal category. However, as Bjørnson insists, even back then they had ambitions that lay a lot more in the progressive sphere.

“When Grutle Kjellson [vocals/bass] and I started this band, we were both heavily influenced by prog,” he says. “We loved the likes of Yes, Genesis, King Crimson, Pink Floyd and Rush, and Grutle was also a massive fan of Led Zeppelin. These were the major inspirations for what we wanted to do. King Crimson were especially important to metal fans like us, mainly I think because of *21st Century Schizoid Man*.

“However, you have to understand that we were both very young back then: I was just 13, while Grutle was 17. In the early days of Enslaved, we were simply not good enough or experienced enough as musicians to be able to emulate those bands. So in order to get started, we had to look at a different area, and that’s why we gravitated towards death metal.

“When you are as young as we were, it’s not easy to try to incorporate Pink Floyd into your music. It takes a while to discover the best way to take the music forward. But we soon discovered how to do this. We realised that if we stayed in the death metal style then not only was it very restrictive, but it also left us in real danger of becoming a parody of ourselves.

“But black metal offered so much more scope. The great thing about that genre is that you can do anything you want within it. You listen to a lot of the bands who were around the scene in the early 1990s, especially in Norway, and what you hear is music that is hard to put into one category. There are classical influences, folk inspirations and a much more progressive-leaning aptitude. That suited what we wanted to do.”

This ambition was not only fuelled by the band’s own aspirations, but also through the encouragement of one of the most notorious of all black metal icons. Euronymous became infamous in the early 1990s when he was seen as one of those who was inciting the spate of arson attacks on churches in Norway. A founder member of Mayhem, he was murdered in 1994 by Varg Vikernes. But Bjørnson recalls another side to the man whose real name was Øystein Aarseth.

“We used to regularly go into his record shop, Helvete, in Oslo. The main reason we used to do this was to find out what the latest underground metal releases were. But he encouraged us to widen our musical horizons. He would always say to us, ‘Don’t bother with

that shit.' And he'd give us albums from artists like Tangerine Dream and Brian Eno, plus more obscure Scandinavian prog bands. He would tell us to go home and listen to these records as they were far more interesting than the latest extreme metal releases.

"People don't realise how much Euronymous was keen on the progressive and experimental side of music, but he was a major factor in getting us to stretch ourselves as musicians. The albums he gave us made a big difference to the way we developed as a band."

By the mid-90s, Bjørnson and Kjellson were beginning to take a lot more musical risks. The former believes they were following a similar path to other like-minded Scandinavian bands.

"If you look at that era, then Opeth, Ulver and Ihsahn were beginning to move away from the more simplistic metal style, taking a more challenging path. We did this as well. What we all had in common was a desire to be different. I suppose in broad terms we all came from that black metal background. But as I said earlier, this was an area of music that was so diverse in itself, musicians were free to explore in their own way. There was a direct connection to becoming progressive, and all of us grabbed

difference to their philosophy. Keyboard player Håkon Vinje was brought in at the start of this year to join Bjørnson, Kjellson, guitarist Arve Isdal and drummer Cato Bekkevold.

"Our previous keyboard player, Herbrand Larsen, had been with us since 2003. On our last tour, he explained that he was fed up with the nomadic life you lead with a band who spend as much time as us on the road. But being a gentleman, Herbrand said he'd stay with us until the end of the tour."

Once that was over, time was against Enslaved. "We had three months to find a keyboard player, rehearse with them and record the album because the studio time was booked. We could have postponed everything, but didn't want to do that. We could also have started the search for a replacement earlier, but that would have been like moving your new girlfriend into your house before your divorce had come through. It would have been rude.

"Our last show on the tour was in Bergen, and we had a good young Norwegian prog band called Seven Impale supporting us. And their keyboard player was incredible. He went mental onstage, and even played the organ with his elbows. He seemed like exactly the

"When we started this band, we were both heavily influenced by prog. We loved the likes of Yes, Genesis, King Crimson, Pink Floyd and Rush. These were the major inspirations for what we wanted to do."

the opportunity. It's not that we all did this at the same time, but we were all developing our individual styles."

The turning point for the band came with 2001's *Monumentum* album. This was when it became obvious that they were a different beast to the one that had first exploded into view with 1994's *Vikingligr Veldi*.

"I believe the shift towards something more progressive had occurred in 1997 with *Eld*. But it was with *Monumentum* that we moved away from using blastbeats, and you can hear the progressive influence coming through. By this time, we had absorbed lots of inspiration from a wide range of artists and felt ready to do something more dramatic.

"In some ways, though, maybe we made too much of a jump with that album. There were fans, maybe quite a lot, who didn't appreciate what we were doing. And we did lose them for a time. But once they had got used to what we were trying to do, they came back. In the long run, I feel our fans accepted where we were heading musically, and now they are prepared to go on this journey with us.

"In truth, I don't think we have really made revolutionary changes to our sound. What we have done is more evolutionary. With each album we've recorded since 2001, there have been gradual alterations. There's been no reason to go for a big jump. We're happy with the way everything has gone."

However, there has been one change in the band's line-up that has made a massive

right person for us. It was Håkon. After the gig, we asked him if he'd prepared to help us out in the studio on the new album. Then we found out that he could also sing, so we became even more interested.

"As luck would have it, Håkon was looking for a new band because Seven Impale's singer was planning to take time off to go to an opera school. So we grabbed him. You know what sums him up? When he was eight years old, apparently he said he wanted to be like Jon Lord – that clinched it for us!"

The arrival of Vinje has had a major effect on the band's approach. "In the past, we worked everything out on guitar. But Håkon has now expanded it. For me, he's like a Rick Wakeman or Klaus Schulze, in that he's given our keyboards a voice of their own. He came up with some great musical suggestions during the recording sessions."

All of which makes *E* an album that almost satisfies Bjørnson. "I always feel we can do better when I hear the final results. But there has to be a point when the album is ready, otherwise we'd still be working on *Monumentum*. I can't say that *E* has turned out exactly as envisioned, but it's as close as we could hope to get right now. Maybe in 26 years, when we reach the point where we call an end to Enslaved, we'll be even closer to realising our dream sound." 

E is out on October 13 via Nuclear Blast. See www.enslaved.no for more information.

ENSLAVED'S PROGGIEST MOMENTS SO FAR...

CONVOYS TO NOTHINGNESS From *Monumentum* (2001)

The beginnings of prog stirrings are here. There's a real sense of ominous introspection as the song builds to a climactic overload, yet it then moves into more eerily somnambulant scenery. This shows a genuine desire to experiment.



THE CROSSING From *Below The Lights* (2003)

A complex maze of torturous metallic passion coupled to a more dense and atmospheric appreciation that owes much to Van der



Graaf Generator. This is an agitating composition that never settles and is always challenging the listener to remain involved.

ROOTS OF THE MOUNTAIN From *RITIR* (2012)

This is where the band displayed an authority so reminiscent of Opeth. There are sparks of the old Enslaved gruffness, but this is butted up against a colourful ambience that's evocative yet also claustrophobic. There's little doubt the band are revelling in their self-imposed artistic freedom.



SACRED HORSE From *E* (2017)

Folk essence meets psychedelia on a track that gives vent to Enslaved's desire to push the envelope like never before. This is a stunning cognisance of the way in which nature should be allowed to develop without interference. It's the soundtrack to a symbiotic relationship between human and animal.

HIINDSIGHT From *E* (2017)

This comes across as if the band have let their imaginations take over and spontaneously created a tapestry of sound. But underlying this is a distinct discipline. Enslaved display a penchant for what jamming on ideas can achieve, but always within a framework, albeit a flexible one. It's the joy of artistry mapped out within the necessity of focus. **MD**



BRAVE NEW WORLDS

Riverside frontman **Mariusz Duda**'s latest solo departure as **Lunatic Soul** sees the Polish musician continue his quest to make music that isn't in any one genre, fuelled by 80s sounds, personal tragedy and a desire to break down barriers.

Words: Rachel Mann



f prog is to be more than a series of nostalgic glances back at its 70s glory days, it needs artists talented enough to excite and challenge new audiences. No one doubts the defining power of the heroes of yesteryear, but — as the recent chart success of Steven Wilson underlines — prog claims its future by extending the riches of the past.

Mariusz Duda, songwriter and bassist for Polish masters Riverside, is arguably one of those musicians who breaks down walls between genres and finds new riches. Like The Mars Volta or Opeth, he has that tricky knack of seamlessly blending alt-rock, progressive metal and classic prog.

Yet it's Duda's solo project Lunatic Soul that provides the Warsaw-based artist with the chemistry to transform his musical DNA. It's a dismal night in the Polish capital when we catch up with him, but he lights up as he says, "When I created Lunatic Soul I wanted to create something different to Riverside. To create a really original musical world."

Yet Lunatic Soul's genesis in 2008 wasn't the result of frustration with Riverside. Rather, Duda says, "I wanted to make Lunatic Soul something that's not strictly any genre."

He admits that perhaps the first four albums didn't always achieve his aim. With their focus on what he calls oriental sounds, he says, "I sounded like dead-condensed-influence guy, with 80 per cent oriental and folkish sounds and shades of electronic."

Certainly there are moments on those albums when Duda's Peter Gabriel and Floydian influences bleed through. Tragedy, however, changes things. On February 21, 2016, Riverside founder and



"Usually I find inspiration in books, films and artists' weird minds, whereas this album is inspired by an unexpected turn of events in my life."



guitarist Piotr Grudziński died suddenly from a cardiac arrest. For the first time, Riverside's future was decisively and understandably placed in doubt. No one would have dissed the band if they'd decided to stop.

Duda and co responded boldly in 2017 with the *Towards The Blue Horizon* tour, with Maciej Meller on guitar. It felt like a risk for the band, but, as Duda says, "We decided to prove that we can still carry on and continue our career. It was really nice. People accepted us."

Grudziński's death shook the foundations for Riverside, but also had a huge impact on the fifth Lunatic Soul album. Self-deprecatingly, Duda suggests that Lunatic Soul 1-4 sounded too much like music from *The Last Of The Mohicans* or some historical movie. In the aftermath of tragedy, Lunatic Soul Volume 5, simply called *Fractured*, was always going to be a different beast.

Fractured's genesis also involved another heartbreaking event. Grudziński's untimely death was followed three months later with the death of Duda's father. "It wasn't like he was sick for a year — he just died suddenly in an accident," says Duda, with controlled emotion.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, these challenges brought new dimensions to Lunatic Soul. "Usually I find inspiration in books, films and artists' weird minds," Duda says, "whereas this album is mostly inspired by an unexpected turn of events in my life. Mostly it was like therapy for me. The last album [2014's *Walking On A Flashlight Beam*] was therapy about



Mariusz Duda: back with a soul-searching new album.

loneliness. This album was therapy from personal tragedy.”

In this age of spill-your-guts self-revelation, Duda is impressively discrete about the impact of the past year’s emotional trauma. Rather he wants the music to do the talking. “Fortunately,” he says, “I had the chance to be in the studio. I wanted to reflect on everything, but also make something that helps me to move on.”

The most extraordinary shift is indicated by Duda’s choice of sound palette and the conscious effort to fill *Fractured* with crafted songs. If ...*Flashlight Beam* touched on electronic elements, it still tended – in Duda’s marvellous words – to be “music to dance around the fire to”.

Fractured is a startling departure into the sound textures of Depeche Mode, Talk Talk and electronic-industrial. For fans of Riverside, this may come as a shock. However, as Duda says, “I grew up on that kind of music.”

If the dark, industrial sounds of a Gary Numan-shaped youth are displayed on *Fractured*, it’s the result of Duda’s bold musical decisions. Peter Gabriel famously instructed Phil Collins to play without cymbals on *Peter Gabriel III*, and there are similar strategies with Lunatic Soul. The debut album featured no guitars. The key decision this time, Duda says, was to avoid sounds he’d used before. This involved digging into tones as likely to be found on an 80s PPG Wave synth as state-of-the-art keys.

If the musical shifts in Lunatic Soul are beguiling and challenging, Duda recognises he’s in new and risky ground. “I think I crossed some barriers this time. These are brave moves for me.”

King Of Crimson: “I decided to do something less in dark colours but more in red,” Duda says.

“I think I crossed some barriers this time. These are brave moves for me.”

Perhaps his deepest fear is of moving away from his instinctive style, which he describes as “very aesthetically pleasing. Not too distorted.”

Certainly Duda’s direction channels the kind of bold steps that have seen Steven Wilson experiment with pop and Anathema’s recent use of dance effects. However, he’s not just interested in innovation for innovation’s sake. One revelation, in particular, is very touching. When talking about *Fractured*’s most obviously prog track, *A Thousand Shards of Heaven*, Duda says, “I composed that on Piotr’s guitar. I bought his guitar because I wanted to have some sort of souvenir from him. When I started to play, all these sounds came up.”

Thousand Shards... is a 12-minute epic, but Duda’s revelation takes it into completely new dimensions.

It’ll be fascinating to see what impact Lunatic Soul’s electronic richness will have on Riverside’s more traditional sound. Will the next album be as much Depeche Mode as Porcupine Tree? Duda says, “I don’t know yet. But whatever we come up with, it will be something very different from *Love, Fear And The Time Machine*.”

What’s clear is that while there are some wounds that never fully heal – such as the loss of loved ones – people like Mariusz Duda sometimes discover powerful and moving things in the dark. For him, music is the thing. As he says, “When it comes to music the dividing lines don’t matter.”

In the face of personal nightmares, Duda doesn’t lose sight of hope: “I decided,” he says, “to do something less in dark colours but more in red.”

Fractured is out now via Kscope. For more information, see www.lunaticsoul.com.



THE PROG INTERVIEW

CHRISTIAN VANDER

The *Prog* Interview is just that: every month, we're going to get inside the minds of some of the biggest names in music. This issue, it's **Christian Vander** from **Magma**, with input and translations from his fellow bandmate and wife Stella Vander. Over the course of this lengthy and wide-ranging interview, *Prog* and the Vanders discuss the origins of Magma, Vander's method of composition, the Kobaian constructed language, and how Magma fit into the overall musical landscape.

Words: Bill Kopp

There is almost no useful frame of reference to describe the music of Magma. Founded in 1969 by French pianist/drummer Christian Vander, Magma have never conformed to conventional ideas about genre, or much else for that matter.

A constantly rotating line-up of musicians have passed through Magma's ranks, and the band have released more than a dozen studio albums, at least as many live albums, plus numerous compilations, DVDs and boxed sets. Vander's side projects – a jazz trio and quartet, plus an

80s-era spin-off project called Offering – are relevant within the Magma universe as well.

Magma have never existed anywhere near the musical mainstream. However, the group's works have received enthusiastic praise from open-minded critics – *Rolling Stone* place 1973's *Mëkanik Dëstruktiv Kömmandöh* at No.24 on its list of the greatest albums in progressive rock. And some prominent tastemakers count

themselves among Magma's coterie of hardcore fans: a new documentary film, *To Life, Death And Beyond: The Music Of Magma* features passionate commentary from Trey Gunn, Jello Biafra and Metallica's Robert Trujillo, among others.

Magma all but define underground music: early on, Vander was inspired to create nearly all of Magma's lyrics in

Kobaian, a language of his own construction. And the group's uncompromising style – often characterised by martial-sounding music with angelic, operatic vocals – demands much from the listener.

As unlikely as it might seem, today Magma are as busy as ever, with a high-profile documentary, recent career-spanning boxed sets and reissues, and even a string of concert dates in the US.

Christian Vander speaks very little English. His wife Stella, Magma's vocalist since 1973, provided the translation during our recent conversation, occasionally fielding some of *Prog*'s questions herself.



Magma's classic 1973 album *Mëkanik Dëstruktiv Kömmandöh*.

“

Chet Baker was a good friend of my mother, so he was the one who would teach me how to do the 4/4. He gave me my first drum kit when I was 14 or 15 years old.

”

What was your musical training and background before Magma?

I started to work with a drum teacher only on the *tambour*, the classical snare drum. But I was also always going to jam in the jazz clubs, and I didn't work with this teacher for very long anyway, because I thought it wasn't the right thing for me to do. And even before that, when I was a kid, my mother was a very good friend of Elvin Jones. Elvin was hanging out at my mother's place and he showed me a few tricks. Not on a real drum, but whatever he could find to serve as a drum at home, like a toy.

Also, Chet Baker was a good friend of my mother, so he was the one who would teach me how to do the 4/4. He gave me my first drum kit when I was 14 or 15 years old. He had said to me, “You come tonight with a taxi at the door of Le Chat Qui Pêche”

Stella Vander (seated, right) and Christian Vander (seated, second from right) with Magma, circa 1974.



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

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Christian Vander: an icon
in the worlds of prog, jazz,
fusion, metal and more.

— it was a jazz club in Paris where he was playing — “and I will wait here with a drum kit for you.” So, I came and took the drum kit. And many years after, I discovered that Chet stole the drum kit from his own drummer and gave it to me. In fact, people from the police came and said, “You are holding a stolen drum kit. You have to give it back!”

How did the concept of Magma originally come about?

I was listening to a lot of John Coltrane. He didn't want to play

as [early Magma bassist] Laurent Thibault said, Kobaïa is a planet... Kobaïa is like Earth, but without — how do you say — the stupid, the dumb people. Instead it had people with something in mind, and who wanted to work for a better place. They wanted to make *this* place a better place, but they had to do it on another planet. Because it looks like it's impossible to do that on Earth. We could verify this, you know?

So, it's not science fiction. You see what I mean? It's not about another planet with other people

already living there. It's just about escaping from here, and there are many different ways to escape. But this is one of the ways, trying to create another planet somewhere. It doesn't have to be in space.

What do you seek to communicate in the Kobaïan lyrics of Magma's music?

The main purpose of the lyrics is to allow the music to be as expressive as possible. I'm always giving the example of John Coltrane, who was playing

Stella Vander live on stage.



KEVIN NIXON

other people's music: he decided that he had to do his own thing. In 1967, I decided I had to leave France, so I went to Italy and played with funky bands, playing funky music, rhythm and blues.

In 1969 I suddenly felt very strongly that I had to go back to France and do *something*: that was probably the beginning of Magma in my head. I didn't know what it was at that moment, but I felt something very strong telling me, “You are to go, and you have to do your own thing. You have to do your music.”

So I left Italy within a few hours, went back to France and started to look for people who could be interested. And that's when Magma started.

For many years, much of Magma's music centred around the Kobaïan story. Is that tale now complete?

The story of these people leaving Earth for a better place, another planet, is *not* finished. Because

“There are a lot of young musicians from bands like Opeth, Baroness, Melvins and many others that are really into Magma. Stella Vander

an instrument: any people who are playing an instrument are expressing something that people can understand, even if there are no words. So, the lyrics are the closest possible to the music to make it sound right, because I never wanted to write in French, except for a few words in French, and a few in English. Because the idea is to have a novel of sounds that expresses the most from the music, and that's why I invented the language: because I couldn't do it with any existing language.

The sound of the vocal is very important in Magma's music. It has to not distract from the expression felt by the people listening to it.

In general, do your musical works arise from composition or improvisation?

The process starts this way. Almost every day I'm on my piano, playing and singing. Things come like this and that and differently from one day to



Medallion Man: Vander at his home in 1973, wearing his Magma pendant.



the other, and music is probably working somewhere in my mind. It's like a singer speaking before he thinks, because suddenly the next day something comes and it's much more organised and different than it was the previous day. And it looks like the beginning of something; that's the way a real composition starts.

But before that, for a few days, or a few weeks, or maybe a few months, it's improvisation around many different things. Suddenly the shapes arise, but as I said, it's more the singing that does the trick, even before the mind.

Do you think of live performance as an extension of what you create in the studio, or is studio work an attempt to capture the essence of live performance?

Well, this could be both because usually Magma always play on stage before recording. Almost all Magma albums were recorded a long time after we tried it onstage in many different ways with many different changes. But then after we record it, because in the studio...

Stella: You know, Christian is very tiring for people, because he has an idea every five minutes. So even though it's complete and we're going in the studio because it's complete and we're going to record it the way it is, it's not true! Because he's going to change something else at the end.

And then after we've recorded it and we play it again on stage, we can change things that we did onstage for months, or maybe even years, depending on what we changed in the studio to do the recording, you see. So it's endless.

How has the music of composer Carl Orff influenced you?

When I started to compose *Mékanik Dëstruktiv Kömmandöh*, I had never listened to Carl Orff. Magma's pianist of that time, Faton Cahen, told me, "That sounds a lot like a composer called Carl Orff," and he had me listen to Orff. And when I listened to that, I said, "Oh, this is the ideal orchestra for Magma; this kind of orchestra would be really nice to have." But because I never listened to him before that, his music didn't have a real influence on those compositions.

Magma don't sound like anyone else. But people do apply the 'prog' label to your music.



You know, I barely listened to all those bands from the same era. I was listening to jazz all the time, especially John Coltrane. Sometimes, someone would say, "You should listen to this or that." But I always learned more from jazz music than from any other kind of music, especially more than — what's it called? — prog rock. And I think Magma is *not* a prog rock group at all!

Do you feel a kinship with the jazz artists who were working in the late 60s and 70s?

Yes. I was listening to jazz musicians from that time. For example, Tony Williams. His drumming was very inspiring. Also, for example, Weather Report. In fact, I was working on a composition at that time, and I listened to that album [1974's *Mysterious Traveller*] from Weather Report with the song *Nubian Sundance*. It was very much like what I was working on at that time, and so I stopped to work on that composition,

because I thought that it was well done by the people from Weather Report.

So could Magma's music be considered jazz fusion?

I don't agree with the label jazz rock fusion, because we don't want to have any labels put on Magma's music. When I meet people and they say, "Well, what do you do?" I say, "I'm in a band called Magma," and blah blah. "And what kind of music?" I use only one word: *unclassifiable*. That's why we made the word *zeuhl* for that: to avoid any other label.

Other artists have made music in the zeuhl style. Are you pleased this has happened?

Well of course we're pleased because it became a new genre: you have jazz, you have pop, and then you have zeuhl. It's a very good thing to be able to say, "Okay, I'm doing my own kind of music and I'm not the only one to do it."

Magma had a logo a long time before doing so was a common thing for bands. How important to you is the concept of branding?

We released a DVD earlier this year. We put the logo on the cover, but we didn't put the name Magma on the cover. We think now we can only use the logo and people know what it's about. And when they don't know, they ask, "Oh, what is this logo?" And they look into it.

And we think it's very important to stick to a kind of logo when you're happy with it. Even outside of music, brands like Coca Cola, for example, or Volkswagen, they never change the first logo they created.

Who developed the logo?

I made a drawing of the kind of necklace I wanted to have around my neck, and from that I worked with Laurent Thibault's sister, who was a graphic designer. It changed from the original design. We worked together and we came

to that logo, and then that was kept. It was hung to a chain and became the logo we're wearing and all the fans are wearing.

Stella: You know, in the beginning, it was a whole necklace all around the neck. I don't know if Christian still has the original drawing. Yeah, he wore that necklace that was going all around the neck, but he wanted to have it like a pendant instead. Laurent's sister worked to be able to hang it from a chain, to make a pendant from it.

The pendant was pretty big...

Yeah. The first one that all the Magma musicians were wearing was large, but nowadays it's more a small logo that all the fans want to have. There are big logos on the T-shirt. In the early days, the logo pendants were made out of copper and they were very heavy — almost half a kilo — and, getting older, it's beginning to be a problem to hold that around your neck all the time!

How has your approach to making music changed in the close to 50 years since Magma began?

It's still the same approach, but we always want to bring something new. We don't want to use what we already did to make something else from that. I'm always trying to do something different, from scratch.

In 1970, did you ever think Magma would continue into the 21st century?

Yeah, it's written on the album cover. *Magma: To Life, Death And Beyond*.

The musicians in Magma have changed almost constantly since the beginning. Do you view that as a challenge or as an opportunity?

In fact, it's been both. Because sometimes we thought that someone would be here forever and we were very disappointed when they decided to leave, whatever the reasons. And sometimes it was really challenging to find someone that could fit as well, but sometimes we could find someone who was even... not *better*, that's not the word... was bringing something more and different on the top of all that was already done. So, sometimes a challenge, sometimes an



Red Hot: Magma man Christian Vander shot in Paris, June 1981.



The latest line-up of the ever-evolving band, with Christian Vander (centre).

opportunity, and sometimes both at the same time.

As the 50th anniversary of Magma approaches, what does the future hold for the band?

Stella: The future is to go on as long as we can. As Christian said, "To life, death and beyond." So, for the 50th anniversary, we will probably think about something. We already have an option on a very special venue in Paris, which is called le Philharmonie de Paris. Brand new. We have an option for a concert here, and we don't know what we're going to do yet, but we will probably come out with something. And there will probably be other events and maybe other places worldwide where we're going to try to do something very important.

The 50th anniversary is getting closer. We celebrated the 10th, and the 20th and the 25th. You start by decades, and then you do it every five years because you don't know how long you're going to be there!

I remember when we celebrated the 30th anniversary, we had a concert with many musicians that were a part of the band at some time, and one of them said, "I'm here for the 30th anniversary, but who knows? I'm going to be here also for the 50th anniversary!" At that time, 50 was a long time after, and now it happens to be in two years.

You returned to the States in August for Psycho Las Vegas... a metal festival?

Stella: Yes! We're very trendy on the metal scene. We did several very big metal festivals like Roadburn in Holland and Hellfest Open Air in France, and we were invited to play at Psycho Las

I don't agree with the label jazz rock fusion, because we don't want to have any labels put on Magma's music.

Vegas, which is a very big metal festival. Yeah, this is amazing: Magma in Las Vegas! I would never have thought about that, but we are very happy.

Christian: We didn't know what kind of audience was listening

to metal music. In fact, we had a false idea — they're really open to many other kinds of music and it looks like they're really into Magma now. In fact, we barely play jazz festivals any more.

Stella: There are a lot of young musicians from bands like Opeth, Baroness, Melvins and many others that are really into Magma. Sometimes we see official photos from a band that we don't even know and the guys are wearing Magma T-shirts! Metal is a new audience for us, and it's great.

When Magma's history is written, how would you like the band to be remembered?

Almost every week we have a call from a music teacher saying, "I want to put on a project with my pupils. I would like them to play this piece of music or that piece of music. May we do it?"

Recently, we had a call from Les Percussions de Strasbourg: it's a very famous classical ensemble from the east of France, and they

want to put on some Magma music. So, this would be the best way to be remembered, if it's performed the way it should be. Because one time I had the chance to listen to a tape of

music from Béla Bartók conducted by Béla Bartók. And it's very different than what you hear now, the way it's conducted now. But we have a lot of reference of recordings, and people can refer to that. We have a good chance that it can be performed the right way, and that would be even better than words because,

as I said, music comes first.

This would be the nicest way to be part of the music of these two centuries: to have people who aren't even born now go on to play Magma's music. ☺

Magma are currently on tour. To Life, Death And Beyond: The Music Of Magma is out now on Citrus Pie. The reissued Wurdah Itah album is available now on Seventh. See www.magmamusic.org for tour dates and more information.



To Life, Death And Beyond: the new documentary looking at Magma's music.

New spins...

PETER HAMMILL

On his subtly hued and autumnal new album, Peter Hammill turns over a new leaf, coming to terms with ageing as only the Van der Graaf Generator man can.

Words: Sid Smith **Illustration:** Stuart Briers

Peter Hammill's 35th album under his own name is a finely crafted masterpiece that grapples fearlessly with the varied psychological aspects of old age. Forget the demon alcohol or drugs, advancing time is prog's worst enemy as more of its veteran heroes, young guns when they started making waves half a century ago, are falling with increasing frequency.

Peter Hammill, who co-formed Van der Graaf Generator at Manchester University 50 years ago, is one of the few to square up to their mortality on record. He even started 40 years ago, with the projected later life of 1976 track *Autumn*, but he inevitably upped the intensity after 2003's near-fatal heart attack at 55. That narrow escape was reflected in his astonishing next album, *Singularity*.

This vulnerability has underpinned subsequent albums with varying degrees of transparency, joined by increased focus on vanishing family, friends, places and contemporaries. Always intensely driven, Hammill has described an ongoing thread "that I make an effort to document some of the passages of life through which most of us go as I experience and observe them".

This ethos is used to devastating effect on his follow-up to 2014's cinematic noir epic *...All That Might Have Been...*. True to long-standing form, its multi-tiered firewalls of vocals and swirling electronic backdrops are followed by "10 songs, all of them on the short end of things and generally conventional – or as conventional as I get – in form".

Long-time devotees will know this means more concise statements that make their point in under five minutes. Subtly hued and autumnal, these 10 songs are starkly simple, befitting an album named after an eternal symbol of ageing with natural beauty and dignity. As Hammill puts it, "The characters who pace their fretful way through these songs are, in general, facing up to or edging their way

From The Trees

FIE!

PETER HAMMILL



Starkly simple, befitting an album named after an eternal symbol of ageing with natural beauty and dignity.

towards twilight... None of these songs are of soft comfort, but in the third act of life it's time to look with a clear eye at where one has (or, indeed, has not) been, at where one's going."

Unusually, when he started work on the album last year Hammill, performed these songs live on piano or guitar ("old school") before recording. Each follows its chosen mood, maybe suggesting a chorus or hook but invariably with a seat-clenching turn or heart-in-mouth lyrical twist. His overdubbed chorales are less frenetic and more warmly carpeted – even if that devil still likes to whisper on his shoulder. Synthesisers are used as tonal crayons rather than flamethrower paint brushes. This

makes the gorgeous strings that rise on closing track *The Descent*, about coming down from life's peak, doubly effective when they fade into infinity as the album's final sound.

During his first three decades or so, Hammill often sang of the pain, anger or melancholy caused by lost love. *From The Trees* sees him reflecting on those changes that seem to set in after passing 60, questioning his lost youth and asking why all that energy wasn't sometimes put to better use.

Girl To The North Country reaches back to folk scene beginnings ('She was once your lucky star, you went and let her down so hard'), while *My Unintended* is 'the letter I never sent', capturing these uncomfortable moments when traumatic episodes or bad decisions of decades ago suddenly jerk into sharp focus, to be re-examined as if they can still be put right.

Being Hammill, as he sings on *Charm Alone*, 'My private thoughts, I keep them all well hidden,' which means projecting painful situations through characters, such as the performer losing his muse and audience on *Milked*, finding 'Fame and fortune are falsehoods that'll leave you for dead' on *Reputation* (against a rolling Brecht-Weill piano jaunt) or, even worse, finding no one listening (*On Deaf Ears*).

The compelling uncertainty of *What Lies Ahead* concludes, 'Let's leave the truth unsaid about all those lies ahead.' Paradoxically, Hammill pours the bleak lyrics of *Torpor* ('I find it hard to breathe, I can't maintain the pace, feels like I'm slowing irreversibly and there's no knowing where this leads') over the album's most exquisite vocal melody.

This isn't to say that this richly compelling album can only be appreciated by sexagenarians, even if it is gratifying to encounter something so much deeper than the usual ageist gags. With Hammill, an album's always going to touch emotions that are universal at any age and, on any level, *From The Trees* demands to be held among his evocative best. It might just take a little time.



DANIEL CAVANAGH

Monochrome KSCOPE

A cathartic outpouring of music for the soul.



Given the trials and tribulations endured by Cavanagh, explored at length when the magazine interviewed Anathema upon the release of their latest album *The Optimist* (Prog 77), there's a remarkable consistency to the music on *Monochrome*, his first album of self-penned solo

Monochrome will tug on every sinewed heartstring you have.

material. This may not come as a surprise to any Anathema fan, given the band's remarkably strong run of quality albums, but anyone with an understanding of the consequences of depression will know what a rollercoaster of emotions the sufferer can endure.

Centred more around Cavanagh's emotively delightful piano playing than his guitar work, this is a deep and emotional album. When he sings 'And I can't be where you are today...' at the beginning of opening track *The Exorcist*, one doesn't know if he's referring to a lost love or some far away catharsis. Or both. Then there's his imploringly heartfelt vocal of 'Do you believe in where I stand, Because you save me from myself...'. It's soul-stirring stuff.

Longtime friend Anneke van Giersbergen puts in the most soulful of turns on *This Music*, *Soho* and *Oceans Of Time*, meaning that these songs are closest in sound to what you'd hear from Anathema. But that's hardly surprising given that along with brother Vincent and John Douglas, Daniel is one of the band's main songwriters. But *Monochrome* isn't a carbon copy of his day job.

In places, this is far more of an old school progressive rock record than Anathema's 21st century progressive sound, albeit one imbued with delicately beautiful harmonies and catchy melodies. Five tracks push well over the six-minute mark, the most epic being the Poe-flavoured *The Silent Flight Of The Raven Winged Hours*, which, at over nine minutes, sees Cavanagh diving headfirst into the kind of musical exploration Steven Wilson is so feted for. Album closer *Some Dreams Come True* does that thing that Anathema excel at: lending a listen that sucks you emotionally inside the music and yet also offers you a sense of hope and uplifting respite.

It's not all demanding stuff, however. The delightfully folksy *Dawn*, with Anna Phoebe supplying some fine violin playing, is as jaunty and upbeat as one can imagine. But given the artist's own predicament over recent years, this was always going to be an intense ride. It is to Cavanagh's credit that instead of wallowing in the mire, he's created something utterly beautiful from something that can be so destructive.

Monochrome will tug on every sinewed heartstring you have. But it'll ultimately leave you smiling. Quite lovely.

JERRY EWING

ACQUA FRAGILE

A New Chant ESOTERIC ANTENNA

Veteran Italian trio end 42-year hiatus.

Acqua Fragile formed part of a fertile Italian prog scene in the early 70s, with singer Bernardo Lanzetti often labelled the Italian Peter Gabriel. The band originally split soon after the frontman left in 1975 to join the scene's leading lights, Premiata Forneria Marconi, but four decades on they're finally reunited. Lanzetti rejoins drummer Piero Canavera and bassist Franz Dondi for a third album, and they do a tidy job of recapturing the old magic here. Lanzetti's formidable pipes have matured but he still has a commanding semi-operatic charisma to his voice on the car chase soundtrack rush of *All Rise*



and the windswept acoustic balladry of the title track. His theatrical exhortations on *The Drowning* also have echoes of Peter Hammill's VdGG pomp, but elsewhere a judicious choice of guest players enhance the sound too. Alex Giallombardo's jazz patterns on guitar make

beguiling cameos, as do Alessandro Sgobbio's synth solos. King Crimson wordsmith Pete Sinfield and Steve Hackett lyricist Nick Claburn contribute some strong lines, but Lanzetti's own bon mots are part of the charm - *Wear Your Car Proudly*'s slightly jarring use of English, for instance, only adds to the febrile, edgy mood of the piece. **JS**

ANCIENT VVISDOM

33 MAGIC BULLET

Occult hopefuls fail to conjure magic.

It's not every band that can capitalise on the initial flush of excitement that surrounds a great debut album. Lots of people were pinning their hopes on Ancient VVisdom being the next big 21st-century occult rock band to follow in footsteps of The Devil's Blood and, more significantly, Ghost. Sadly, since that undeniably intriguing first salvo, the Americans haven't done anything to disavow a creeping feeling that the emperor has his meat and two veg on display. There are several enjoyable moments on 33, not least the insistent, brooding title track, but it's a jarring paucity of ideas that undermines



the overall effect. Vocalist Nathan Opposition's po-faced, monotone delivery adds little to what are some clumsily prosaic lyrics, and the musical backdrop rarely strays from a restrained, mid-paced plod. In truth, it all sounds about as malevolent

as a night spent carol singing in an orphanage and is only partly redeemed by the airy warmth of the production. Quite why Ancient VVisdom's formula seemed so fresh and exciting in 2011 and yet so stale and charmless now is a mystery, but any semblance of dark magic has evaporated completely here. Maybe the Devil switched to Spotify. **DL**

AND SO I WATCH YOU FROM AFAR

The Endless Shimmering SARGENT HOUSE

Happy-go-lucky Northern Irish rockers keep up form.

Life just feels that bit better when And So I Watch You From Afar are in it. Over the years the Belfast instrumentalists have become masters of juggling adroit technicality, serious groove and potent party vibes, with their music both magnificently math yet merrily major-key. *The Endless Shimmering* is album number five - keeping up their release-every-two-years hot streak - and it feels like a coming of age for the quartet, with each of the nine songs contributing something vital, just like all great records. Take *Terrors Of Pleasure*, which sees its riffs and guitar leads slither and



wriggle, while thundering closer *Chrysalism* is a rousing rally through jagged motifs that still, somehow, manage to hook. And So I Watch You From Afar's true allure is when they grab the listener by the throat and launch them on a journey, which isn't

easily done when there are no vocals to guide the way. The magnum opus here is the seven-and-a-half-minute white-knuckled *Dying Giants*, which conjoins a crushing post-rock aura with a sense of impending doom before dissolving into a heart-tugging, string-laden outro fit for the grandest of grand epics. Keep 'em coming, lads, keep 'em coming. **CC**

BROCKMANN // BARGMANN

Licht BUREAU B

Berlin duo sculpt a modern Krautrock classic.

Somewhat recalling Fripp and Eno's spontaneous mid-70s live ejaculations, guitarist Franz Bargmann and keyboardist Timm Brockmann (founder members of Berlin trio Camera) decided to mate their guitars, pianos and analogue synths with no preproduction and see what happened. The liaison paid off as Bargmann (currently with Michael Rother's live band) strikes up guitar reveries that evoke Frippatronics and Cluster, yet also veer into the deeply textured reveries pioneered by New York's iconoclastic Loren Connors, all set against Brockmann's spectral dream colours.



While *Softarps* and *Prisma* are immensely soothing, the 10-minute *Schatten* whips up a searing behemoth of a space jam reminiscent of early Amon Duul II, bolstered by Automat drummer Achim Farber's canyon-demolishing bombardment. The motorik groove underpins the sleek cruise of *Horizont*, and Eurodisco even exposes itself on the cheeky *Muezzin*, but it's when the pair dispense with beats in favour of their hauntingly celestial out-of-body excursions that the real magic sparks. Watch out for trick closer *Hyper* which, after falling silent for 15 minutes, crashes back in for a final lap with all guns blazing. **KN**

BROOKLYN RAGA MASSIVE

Terry Riley In C NORTHERN SPY

The minimalist masterpiece tackled by Indian classical musicians.

Terry Riley's 1964 composition *In C* comes with a set of simple instructions. The musicians play a series of 53 repeated melodic cells, largely independently of the other players, while referring to a rhythmic pulse of a single note of 'C' played in quavers on piano or tuned percussion. And if you start lagging too far behind the others, you can miss out a cell. It's conceptually neat and can be played on any combination of instruments. But even Riley admits that he has never heard anything like this version, which sees his love of Indian classical music - which initially inspired



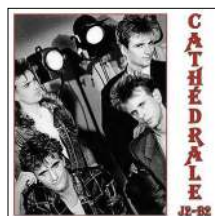
the piece - returned with interest. It begins with a raga introduction or alap, then a tabla takes on the pulse and the first cell finds the musicians chanting the theme and playing it on sitars, winds and strings, both in unison and on the offbeat. Riley himself suggested they open up the composition slightly to allow soloing based on the themes, and over the course of an hour it unfolds as a kind of vast musical ritual. There are some breathtaking moments, such as when the strings suddenly sweep in en masse with a new theme, and a thrilling, virtuosic all-percussion section. **MB**

CATHÉDRALE

J2=B2 ANGEL AIR

Save a prayer for the missing link between Renaissance and Lifesigns.

With their extravagantly blow-dried, highlighted bouffant hairdos, it isn't very hard to guess that Cathédrale were a band from the 1980s. The music - airy, lightweight, super-polite pop rock with musician-friendly airs and graces - serves only to confirm this theory. What's rather more shocking to note is the presence of two prog staples in the group's midst - step forwards ex-Renaissance bass player Jon Camp and current Lifesigns keyboard maestro John Young, both looking suitably moody on the front cover. Previously unreleased until now, these 12 songs date back to varying stages of the band's short

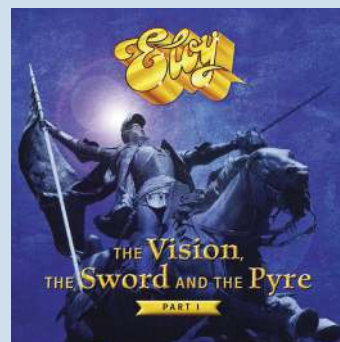


existence, some conceived as a four-piece and fronted by Camp, others recorded after the realisation that a full-time lead singer and a lot more keyboards were going to be necessary. Save for the audio quality which is what you'd expect from a cassette discovered under somebody's bed, the results are largely inoffensive. *One By One*, *Calling Out For You* and the jumbled white boy funk of *Element Of Surprise* all tip their hats at Mr Mister, Cutting Crew and Silent Running, though lack the guile and quality to echo those same bands at their finest. More frustrating still: genuine prog is woefully thin on the ground. **DML**

ELOY

The Vision, The Sword & The Pyre ARTIST STATION

German prog veterans revive their career arc.



Close to fifty years since founding, Eloy are now 72-year-old guitarist, producer and vocalist Frank Bornemann, plus a supporting cast. The German almost-legends were crackerjacks of symphonic rock and space rock in the 70s, big in their homeland, but never becoming card-carrying Krautrockers as they had more in common with British prog such as Camel, Floyd and Yes.

At its weakest, it's just solid. At its best, it rumbles and soars.

After a convoluted path through the decades, having attempted to go commercial before retreating, Eloy return with their first album in eight years. And despite being a no-holds-barred, historically researched concept album, it's subtitled "Part 1", so Bornemann is evidently born again.

The name 'Eloy' was taken from HG Wells' *The Time Machine*, and this time Bornemann transports us to the medieval world of Jeanne D'Arc. *The Vision, The Sword & The Pyre* was originally conceived as a spectacular stage musical, but fear not, there's no excess of sung dialogue and exposition. The historical figures do express themselves vocally, and there are spoken passages, but these are neatly woven into the overall texture and atmosphere. In fact, it's remarkable how many disparate elements are crammed in, while the whole thing retains its feel as a forceful, sincere and entertaining rock album.

Guests include Canadian singer Alice Merton as Joan (or Jeanne) and German vocalist Jessy Martens. There are choirs and children. Again, though, the switching voices don't lurch the record into rock opera or sub-*The War Of The Worlds* territory. All the paint stays within the corners of the canvas.

The author has done his homework, studying the sainted Joan's sufferings and becoming something of an authority on the subject. Indeed, heaps of info is included, and we're led through her tale by a trusted comrade-in-arms, Jean de Metz. All this impressive academia, however, mustn't distract us from the merits of Eloy's actual music. At its weakest, it's just solid. At its best, it rumbles and soars.

The Age Of The 100 Years War builds into some crunchy lock-grooves and there's clever jump-cutting between heavy rock and a more 80s-style AOR. *The Call*, where grinding riffs and swirly keyboards mix is where things truly take off. The compelling 10-minute *Chinon* subverts its detailed arrangements and gets us joining in with those begging Joan to share her revelations. *Orléans* flirts with electronica while *Les Tourelles* revels in guitar lines that echo classic goth.

The longer you stay in your seat, the more interesting this ride becomes. We all know things don't end well for Joan, but Eloy seem to have landed in their own Indian summer.

CHRIS ROBERTS

GODSTICKS

Faced With Rage KSCOPE

Welsh quartet get creative with their anger.



Far be it from us at *Prog* magazine to judge a record by its sleeve, but on the face of it, this Cardiff prog metal mob's fourth album promises to be a distinctly cross affair. I mean, there's that title for starters, then you scan the list of blunt, not hugely cheery-sounding songtitles: *Avenge... Unforgivable... Angry Concern... We Are Leaving*. Not before time, by the sound of it. But it won't take more than a cursory listen to reveal that there's a way wider spectrum of emotions at work here, and a broader palette of musical colours than their prog metal tag would suggest.



A winning blend of aggression and emotional depth.



On Godsticks' last long-player, 2015's *Emergence*, they seemed in the mood to emphasise their heavier credentials, and you wondered if they'd rather hit hard than box clever. Now signed to Kscope, though, they've found a winning blend of channelled aggression and emotional depth, combining lyrical intelligence and instrumental fireworks.

Maybe leader Darran Charles' stint as part of The Pineapple Thief's touring band has helped broaden their sound, because this certainly seems to be their most fully rounded album to date. In fact, when you pay proper attention to some of these 10 songs, the usual prog and hard rock influences often don't apply.

Hard To Face has an alluringly despondent descending chord progression that sounds distinctly gothic in flavour, like Dead Can Dance struggling to rein in their frustration. There are also echoes of symphonic metal on *Avenge* as Charles sings mournfully of being 'face down, lying on your gravestone', a line you can fully imagine Tarja Turunen belting out. Then *Open Your Eyes* is built around a heavy riff groove, as if they've been listening to early-90s funk metal.

Meanwhile, for a band built on the visceral gut-punch of hard rock, Godsticks have a surprisingly strong grasp of the power of a good tune. *Revere* and *We Are Leaving* in particular are sublime examples of Charles' talent for beautifully elegiac melodies, while *Fame And Silence* has distinct notes of emo angst shot through it.

But they still like to challenge themselves technically – Charles is one hell of a guitar player, and he can spray shredded notes and staccato riffs across any stylistic template. He's not let down by his bandmates either, who manage to turn *Everdrive*'s impossibly obtuse time signature into a hypnotic Chili Peppers-style rumble.

Whether all those reference points are conscious is doubtful, but that's no bad thing – it's more likely the sign of a band reaching maturity, and building a sound that exceeds the sum of its parts.

JOHNNY SHARP

CIRCUIT DES YEUX

Reaching For Indigo DRAG CITY

Compelling art prog from Chicago-based aesthete.

One of last year's more curious albums was the self-titled debut from Jackie Lynn, who essayed a song cycle about a Tennessee country singer who flees to Chicago, gets embroiled in a cocaine racket and disappears from view. It turned out to be the work of writer-producer Haley Fohr, better known under her other alias of Circuit Des Yeux. Unlike the Jackie Lynn project, Fohr's four previous albums as CDY have dispensed with narrative almost completely, instead offering impressionistic fragments and an emotional tone that wavers between ecstasy and despair. *Reaching For Indigo*



is no less mysterious, its only thematic concession being some accompanying blurb about "a moment that fell down in the life of Haley Fohr on January 22, 2016". Co-produced with regular collaborator Cooper Crain (Cave/Bitchin Bajas), it's an intense listen that sets

Fohr's baritone against ruffled synths, acoustic guitar and piano. The quasi-operatic *Philo* unfolds in grandiose style, the experimental drones of *A Story Of This World Part II* reach back to early 70s Can, while both *Brainshift* and *Falling Blonde* find a midpoint between the torchy minimalism of Anohni and the arthouse musings of Nico. **RH**

FOCUS

The Focus Family Album IN AND OUT OF FOCUS

Looking for a concept work? Look elsewhere.

Everybody's favourite flute-inclined Dutch prog maestros' latest album is something of a baffling hotchpotch. Over the course of two discs we're offered rarities and alternatives from 2012's *Focus X*, alongside rough sketches for the forthcoming *Focus XI*. There are solo efforts from each constituent member too: founder/flautist Thijs Van Leer; veteran drummer of 47 years Pierre van der Linden; guitarist Menno Gootjes; and rookie bassist Udo Pannekeet. Plus there are in-band collaborations: *Spiritual Swung* (van der Linden, Gootjes and recently departed bassist Bobby



Jacob's improv jazzy side project) and *Mosh Blues*. This is probably middling-to-fair news for Focus fans who must have everything, but with *XI* limbering up on the touchline, what's the point? Even with its Roger Dean cover, *...Family Album*'s content is both

bulky and insubstantial. Unsurprisingly, van der Linden's *Riverdance* is an unaccompanied drum solo, but so is *Spiritual Swung*, unaccountably credited to Focus, which is a bit of a swizz when you consider that only six of the 20 tracks are so credited. Even as a Focus 10½, this inexplicable, unfocused potpourri fetches up somewhat short. **IF**

BEN FROST

The Centre Cannot Hold MUTE

The *Solaris/Fortitude* soundtrack composer's fifth, recorded with Steve Albini.

The video for *Threshold Of Faith* – disorientatingly shot, and treated to appear as vivid blue and eerie white – features images of a man's pale, soaked upper torso being wired up to some kind of medical apparatus, deep blue water currents rushing past ghostly fish, and billowing black and blue clouds. It almost perfectly reflects Frost's music. The Iceland-based Australian's main instrument is the guitar, but whatever the main sound source on this track, it's electronically processed to within an inch of its life and rotates on an eccentric cycle along with crunchy clouds of digital noise and



sub-bass notes going off like depth charges. A luminous keyboard melody rises up out of the darkness towards the close. All the music here, though powerful and at times rather forbidding, has a sense of distance. The carefully picked guitar notes and deep pulses of

Meg Ryan Eyez seem shrouded in a sonic gauze, while on *Ionía*, massive bass notes punch out from the background through a sea of abstract, churning sound. *Healthcare* is a procession of huge, shuddering guitar chords, but like many of these pieces, it ultimately finds its resolution, in this case with a lovely, translucent keyboard melody. **MB**

GILROY MERE

The Green Line CLAY PIPE MUSIC

A musical journey into the glory days of public transport.

Gilroy Mere is the latest nom de plume of prolific folktronic musician Oliver Cherer, created to front an album that celebrates the 1930s-spawned Green Line buses that once took passengers from the smog of central London to the leafy country towns of the Home Counties. We seem to be awash with artists seeking to channel some prelapsarian vision of Britain's past, and sometimes this type of alternative nostalgia can feel like a retreat from the future. But in the hands of a skilled craftsman such as Cherer, it can be deeply affecting. Many of *The*



Green Line's songs are miniature rural fantasias, instrumental vignettes of quiet wonder, such as the slightly uncanny Bert Jansch meets Kate Bush pastorate of *Cuckoo Waltz*, or the beautiful reverie of *A Lychgate*. But there's the rumbling motion of the buses here too. The fluttering melody and drum machine heartbeat of *Dunroamin'* is bucolic motorik steeped in English melancholia, Cherer mournfully chanting a litany of suburban house names, while the neon synth arpeggios and dramatic piano chords of the title track signal the end of the journey. **JB**

GODSPEED YOU! BLACK EMPEROR

Luciferian Towers CONSTELLATION

Montreal's instrumental post-rock heroes return in style.

It says much about their tenacious determination to remain private that Godspeed... are no more knowable now than when they first started in 1994. Canada's greatest enigmas stopped giving interviews years ago, allowing the flow of their music to act as their sole mouthpiece, save for some inscrutable liner notes and curt press releases. This sixth album (and their third since reuniting in 2010) finds the nine-piece in scintillating form, creating semi-symphonic atmospheres that build inexorably and hover in the air, suspended by strings and shivery guitar drones. This is most explicit on *Undoing*



A Luciferian Towers, which imagines a metropolis where skyscrapers have been stripped to their bones, leaving only braids of bare wires and hollowed windows. A mountain-folk feel permeates the first section of *Bosses Hang*, before looping into a keyboard motif and soaring higher. Meanwhile, another three-hander, *Anthem For No State*, presents a future nightmare in which Canada is an environmental wasteland, its resources long since removed. It's an extraordinary work that begins with an understated guitar figure and ends in an orchestral assault of distorted notes and crashing cymbals that scramble the senses. **RH**

HAWKLORDS

Six SHELLSHOCK

Hawkwind satellite matches mothership.

What with Hawkwind enjoying a career renaissance, Dave Brock lashed to their helm like an indomitable, string-playing, Old Man Of The Sea Of Tranquility, it's increasingly hard not to regard today's Hawklords as simply surplus to requirements. That said, with Harvey Bainbridge herein and Nik Turner perpetually occupying a naughty step elsewhere, who are the one true Hawks? Existential crises aside, are the 'Lords ultimately worthy of a noble name bequeathed to them, via Bainbridge, from an original 1978 line-up that included Calvert, King and Brock



himself? Album opener *Ghost In The Machine* is irresistibly reminiscent of *Spirit Of The Age*, which is both a relief and a disappointment. Obviously you want a familiarly Hawkish hook, but it never bodes well, especially this early in a relationship

with an album, to be whispering another's name to a song, even as it's taking you to climax. With swirling keyboards, mesmeric crescendos and cosmic repetition, *Mind Crime* is immense, *New Space* soars before *Whisper's Downfall* throttles back, prefacing closer *Los Cavatina's* trippy squall. Two Hawks? Better than one. **IF**

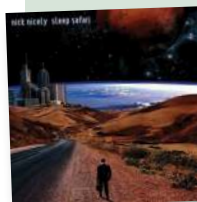


PSYCHEDELIC PROG

Take a trip with **Rob Hughes** as he seeks out the latest mind-expanding music.

These isles have few betters when it comes to pumping out musical eccentrics. And those eccentrics don't get much finer than Nick Saloman, more commonly known by the name **The Bevis Frond**. After a trio of reissues in August — *The Auntie Winnie Album*, *Bevis Through The Looking Glass* and *Triptych* — he's now given *Son Of Walter* (Fire Records) a decent spruce-up.

First released in 1996, the album marked a return to his earliest MO, dispensing with the band altogether and allowing Saloman to indulge his vision and create a one-man opus from his Walthamstow bedroom. A true thing of wonder it is too, Saloman's guileless voice and wiggly guitar out front, backed by multitracked harmonies and everything from organ to theremin. *Barking Or False Point Blues* is heavy psychedelia, offset by aching meditations like *Forgiven* and *Requiem*. Best of all is the epic 12-minute drone *Garden Aeroplane Trap*.



The similarly offbeat **Nick Nicely** returns with *Sleep Safari* (Tapete), which is billed as "a homage to unconsciousness, lyrically exploring sleep's mysteries through a surrealist eye". True to that description, the album immerses the veteran songwriter in a trippy netherworld

dominated by electronica.

It's an infinitely rich, dense affair, with Nicely playing with experimental sounds and phased effects, without ever losing sight of his natural gift for melody. *Gliding* is skanky dub with a prog twist, *Dance Away* sways into focus through mounds of synthetic fuzz and *Rainmaker* is all strobing ambience. *Solar Wind*, meanwhile, sounds like 4AD's idea of an acid rave.

Equally likely to bend your head is *Blessed Poisons* (People In The Sky), the third outing from Italian duo Andrea Bellentani and Simon Maccari. Trading as **The Diaphanoids**, they bring hard-edged industrial noise to the psychedelic realm, creating ambient pieces that throb with an aggressive pulse. Voices float in the ether, sustained rhythms underpin great swirls of noise (particularly on the impressive *Too Many Stars And Not Enough Night*) and there's even a dash of Wire to be found in the propulsive swirl of *My Friends Can Fly*.



On a more conventional trip are **L.A. Witch**, whose self-titled debut album on the Suicide Squeeze label

marries throbby reverb guitars to garage riffs and drowsy vocals. The whole thing feels like a vivid fever dream, from the louche psych of *Brian* to the muggy *Baby In Blue Jeans*. Led by vocalist Sade Sanchez, the all-girl trio tap into the seedy traditions of Californian noir while also recalling such 80s miscreants as The Dream Syndicate and Green On Red.

For those who like their psychedelia to be just a little brighter, **Antibalas** are an ideal pick-me-up. Their first release in five years, *Where The Gods Are In Peace* (Daptone) finds Brooklyn's favourite Afrobeat combo in majestic form. Singer Duke Amayo leads the charge as they rush through a euphoric mix of highlife, cosmic funk and free-roaming jazz, complete with the fattest trumpets this side of Donald Byrd.





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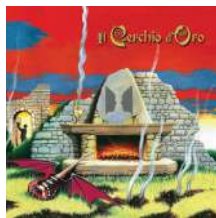
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IL CERCHIO D'ORO

Il Fuoco Sotto La Cenere BLACK WIDOW

This fire nearly sputters out.

Italian proggers Il Cerchio d'Oro have a proclivity for concept albums – see 2013's *Dedalo E Icaro* (Daedalus And Icarus) and 2008's *Il Viaggio Di Colombo* (The Voyage Of Columbus) – but if their new album *Il Fuoco Sotto La Cenere* (The Fire Under The Ashes) has a theme, it's lost in translation. There's a tendency for the band to wear their influences on their sleeves. The title track moves between Pink Floyd classic prog and a riff-led midsection that brings Budgie to mind, before launching into an early Deep Purple, psychedelic passage. Vocalist Piuccio Pradal doesn't have



a big voice and can sound strained when pushing at his limits in *I Due Poli*, which has a spacey vibe with plenty of theremin. The weakest track is the album's closer, *Fuoco Sulla Collina*, where Pradal's limitations as a singer are all too apparent and Massimo Spica's tuneless lead guitar work quickly becomes grating. *Thomas* is much more fun with its bouncy organ melody, vintage synth sounds and unhurried pace. *Per Sempre Qui* sees the band drawing deeply from the well of Floyd again, but if you take your prog with a shot of psychedelia and forgive Pradal's voice, you may dig this. **DW**

KANSAS

Leftoverture Live & Beyond INSIDEOUT

Keep calm and carry on, wayward son.

Kansas already have multiple concert albums to their name, but this latest release offers plenty to distinguish it from the pack. It's the first live release featuring new vocalist Ronnie Platt, who joined in 2014, and over a marathon two-disc set, the group play 1976's *Leftoverture*, the album that made them stars, from start to finish. Song selections favour their classic 70s releases, going back as far as *Journey From Mariabronn* from their debut, although they tackle three cuts from 2016's *The Prelude Implicit*, which fit comfortably among the hits. *Rhythm In The Spirit* features scorching guitar



licks from Richard Williams and Zak Rizvi, while *The Voyage Of Eight Eighteen* is an ambitious epic, with violinist David Ragsdale taking the spotlight. Disc two, *Leftoverture*, kicks off with the immortal *Carry On Wayward Son*, as anthemic now as it was four decades ago, with Platt matching Steve Walsh's range. *What's On My Mind* has a swaggering hard rock strut, and *Magnum Opus* lives up to its title, all pomp and glory, minus the meandering intro of the version from *Two For The Show*. The band sound superb and the playing is tight, punchy and energised. A worthy addition to their legacy. **DW**

KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD & MILD HIGH CLUB

Sketches Of Brunswick East HEAVENLY

Prolific Aussie septet go weirdo-jazz.

A prodigious output is one thing, but keeping it all interesting is another. King Gizzard have now issued 11 albums since debuting in 2012, with *Sketches Of Brunswick East* being the third in a projected run of five this year alone. What appears to keep the band hungry is their willingness to try anything, and a determination to defy expectations. Thus the heavy psych vibes of 2014's *I'm In Your Mind Fuzz* were followed by the acoustic prog folk of *Paper Mâché Dream Balloon*. Similarly, this summer's end-of-days stoner epic *Murder Of The Universe*, a concept piece

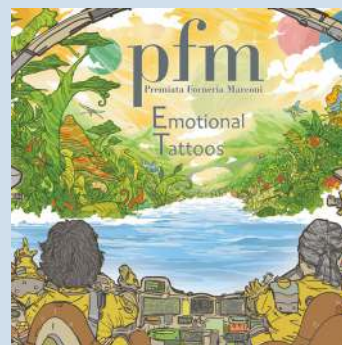


in three distinct parts, has now been succeeded by a relatively brusque, Miles Davis-referencing collaboration with smooth Los Angeles avant-jazz types Mild High Club. Save for some Fifth Dimension-style harmonies, it's mostly instrumental, a loose song suite of sinewy bass and woodwinds. It feels like an extended interlude rather than a fully fledged work, though the proggy pastorella of *The Spider And Me* and *Sketches Of Brunswick East II* manage to find a contrast in the whirling trippiness of *The Book* and the Chemical Brothers-ish *A Journey To S(Hell)*. **RH**

PFM

Emotional Tattoos INSIDEOUT

Songs for the stadiums from ELP's old muckers.



Joining the roster of Manticore recording artists at the behest of Greg Lake in 1973, there's no doubt that an association with what was then one of the biggest prog rock acts in the Western world helped PFM reach a wider audience. To be fair to Milan's finest, though, their success wasn't entirely down to rock star largesse. They had the talent to justify the attention heaped upon them on the international scene after the dazzling brilliance of *Photos Of Ghosts* and other subsequent releases.



With an AOR-style, it sounds like a band locked firmly in their comfort zone.



Decades later, after periods of inactivity, various reformations and changing line-ups, original member Franz Di Cioccio, the band's drummer and vocalist, remains a constant presence, and it's his leathery voice, filtered through a light gauze of phasing, that dominates these new songs.

With the two-CD edition presenting an instrumentally identical mix but with vocals in either English or Italian, there are points when the stately progress of languid synth-rich themes or jaunty, folk-flecked melodies evoke something of the group's 70s heyday. The rousing instrumental *Freedom Square* could easily give *Celebration* a run for its money when it comes to depositing earworms in your head. *I'm Just A Sound* partially inhabits the fusion-friendly hairpin bends PFM used to place in proximity to their more romantic and anthemic inclinations, while *A Day We Share* circulates an insistent rhythmic motif, set upon by various contrapuntal devices and, incongruously perhaps, a happy, poppy chorus.

While undoubtedly a meticulously groomed, high-end production, everything appears varnished in a slick, aural sheen. The unfortunate side effect of this is that a lot of the material begins to sound homogenised, lacking any rough edges or contrasting textures. The sense of things being overly smooth is further compounded by many of the compositions themselves tending to favour a familiar, streamlined, AOR-style construction.

While accepting that any band, regardless of vintage or heritage, have the right to move on from their past in order to shift gears or adopt a mode that better suits their current disposition and personnel, a lot of *Emotional Tattoos* sounds like a group locked firmly in their comfort zone. That's fine, of course – one person's collection of symphonic rockers can easily be another's overly bland soft rock concoction.

None of this means that *Emotional Tattoos* is a bad album – in fact, it's very good in places. However, it's difficult to feel that it represents PFM at their most distinctive or freshest.

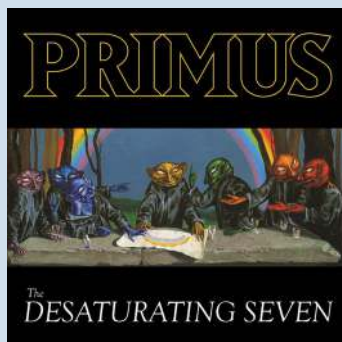
SID SMITH



PRIMUS

The Desaturating Seven ATO

Beware prog goblins! Claypool's crew excel on another children's story.



Not content with blowing minds to twinkling, nostalgic smitherens with 2014's *Primus & The Chocolate Factory*, Les Claypool and his resolutely wonky trio have based their ninth full-length album on author Ul De Rico's gently bizarre 1978 children's book *The Rainbow Goblins*. You may find yourself rushing to find a plot synopsis, but while the source material is a perfect fit for Claypool's perverse conceptual world, it's the music on *The Desaturating Seven* that provides the greatest revelations.



Flows like a movie, albeit a really fucking weird one.



Within their first set of new material since 2011's *Green Naugahyde*, Primus have subtly reinvented their own sound, skilfully drawing from past glories while boldly stretching out in a way that showcases the chemistry between Claypool, guitarist Larry Lalonde and drummer Tim 'Herb' Alexander. Second track *The Seven* is a case in point. With its nods to *Discipline*-era King Crimson and its woozy, darkly psychedelic unfolding, it's a more pointedly and joyously prog version of what Primus have been doing for three decades.

The Trek is similarly rich in ideas and immaculately loose-limbed in delivery, with every subtle change in rhythmic emphasis and each spine-tingling atmospheric detour making perfect sense, all blended seamlessly and blessed with vibrant analogue tones.

It's not hard to imagine the eye-melting stage show that will, perhaps inevitably, accompany future performances of this album. Primus have always been highly focused when it comes to their visual identity: *The Desaturating Seven* flows like a movie, albeit a really fucking weird one. Even a shorter, more succinct chapter like the rattling, punchy *The Scheme* has that narrative thrust and depth of imagination driving it forwards.

Most startling of all is *The Dream*, one of the most thrillingly deranged things this band have ever committed to tape. It starts with two minutes of ululating glitch wrongness before Claypool's voice arrives, disembodied and watery, underpinned by Alexander's robust thumps and Lalonde's delay-drenched squeaks and scratches. It's truly psychedelic – something Primus have been great at doing for years, even though they're rarely acknowledged for it – and it generates a thick, choking sense of unease that's only partly punctured by the skittering, gnarly rush of the song's climax.

Most intricate of the lot is *The Storm*, eight minutes of grotesque but oddly euphoric ebb and flow that comes across as a distant, demented cousin of *Southbound Pachyderm* (from 1995's *Tales From The Punchbowl*) but with added rainbows, goblins and flowers. As with everything else here, the main lesson to be learned is that there's still only one Primus.

DOM LAWSON

JOHN MAUS

Screen Memories DOMINO

First album in six years from Minnesota's singing theoretician.

Maus has spent most of his working life juggling songwriting with academia, studying Renaissance music at the California Institute of the Arts and earning a master's degree in philosophy from Switzerland. Since his last album, 2011's *We Must Become The Pitiless Censors Of Ourselves*, he's completed a political science doctorate at the University of Hawaii. All of this might suggest an artist big on heavy conceptualism, but less interested in carrying a decent tune. The reality is quite different. His earlier experimental music has morphed into something more cohesive and hook-friendly, occupying



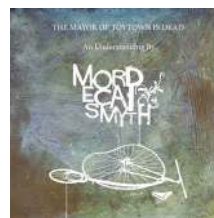
a space where stately synth-pop and obscure progtronica get on down. Keyboards and modular synths dominate on this fourth solo record, their droning patterns overlaid by Maus' sulky voice. If you've ever wondered what Sisters Of Mercy might sound like if they teamed up with Vangelis, see *Teenage Witch*. Post-New Romantic surliness cuts through the industrial throb of *Touchdown*, while echoes of sometime collaborator Ariel Pink ring through the broody hallways of *Walls Of Silence*. There's straight-faced humour too – 'Your pets are gonna die' on *Pets* – and a whole lot more besides. His best album yet. **RH**

MORDECAI SMYTH

The Mayor Of Toytown Is Dead MEGA DODO

A collection of curious, psych-soaked pop – from Reading.

You can't fault Mordecai Smyth's attention to detail. The first full-length follow-up to 2011's *Sticky Tape And Rust* is brimming with instrumental settings that constitute a kind of aural shorthand for late-60s breezy pop and the darker tones of the early 70s. If some of these tunes appear familiar in places, that's because his writing is 'informed by the music of yesteryear'. Thus twangy guitars, breathy flute, sweet harmonies, sinuous clarinet, sprightly beats and folds of luscious Mellotron are craftily marshalled into an agreeably trippy set consisting of nine songs. The clever trick here is that they manage



this heart-on-the-sleeve homage while avoiding any obvious rip-offs. Just in case the connection to a more whimsical era wasn't entirely obvious, a swaying, singalong cover of Caravan's *Golf Girl* dispels any doubts. Its inclusion, though pleasant enough,

seems unnecessary given the strength of the material, such as *Heading Back West*, which could've been found down the back of Ray Davies' old sofa, or the impending uncertainties lurking beneath *Far From The Crowd*'s sunny exteriors. Guest spot soloing from Strawbs' Dave Lambert bookends a lovingly assembled collection blessed with a special atmosphere. **SS**

MY SOLILOQUY

Engines Of Gravity RARE ARTIST

Threshold departure gives guitarist new focus.

Damian Wilson wasn't the only one to leave prog metallers Threshold earlier this year, you know. Guitarist Pete Morten quit the band after 10 years and two albums, with a tad less soap opera drama, to focus on his own project, *My Soliloquy*. It's been on the go since 2002 (as *Soliloquy*), but new record *Engines Of Gravity* is only their second to date. Good things come to those who wait, it seems, as the album is an impressive take on prog metal, with soaring singing hovering over stellar songwriting. It's obvious this is Morten's baby, with the musician recording vocals, guitars, bass and keyboard alongside



drummer Damon Roots. At times it's personal stuff, with *Darkness Is Gathering* an introspective trip into the psyche. For fans of Devin Townsend, Haken and, erm, Threshold, the record isn't groundbreaking, but it certainly isn't forgettable either, with opener *In Bed*

With The Enemy boasting a chorus as infectious as that cold your granny just sneezed onto you, while *A Modern Lexicon* chugs with stomping palm-muted guitar and demonic leads akin to Arcade Messiah. If this is what he conjures up post-Threshold, then going 'solo' might just be one of the best things Morten has ever done. **CC**

NORDIC GIANTS

Amplify Human Vibration KSCOPE

Masked proggers' powerful second, soundtracking a titular documentary.

Nordic Giants have long been a captivating live band, but have never completely channelled their visceral stage performances onto a representative studio recording. With *Amplify Human Vibration*, a study of "human spirit", they have perhaps finally succeeded. Powerfully moody, there's also gentle, uplifting triumph in tracks like *First Light Of Dawn*. Interestingly, the song also somewhat recalls the first album by Public Service Broadcasting, a sonic reference to be found many times on this record. While *Dystopia* has a hint of mid-career Maybeshewill, *Spirit* has a sound more uniquely Nordic Giants'



own, with searing lead parts contrasted against warm, cinematic washes of backing chords and a brilliantly percussive climax. At this point, the use of somewhat prim vocal samples to add gravity to tracks has become somewhat out of favour in the post-rock scene, and

that's the only point on which the Giants stumble. Some heavy-handed sample use might detract from what would otherwise be potent instrumentals needing a little more mystery woven into their fabric, but post-rock is a meditative form, and the human voice drags the listener out of their reverie all too often during the running length of this release. **AL**

ODDFELLOW'S CASINO

Oh, Sealand AT THE HELM/MICROCULTURES

Pastoral psychedelists returns with tales of a nation rent asunder.

Oddfellow's Casino is the brainchild of singer-songwriter David Bramwell, who, in his own words, has been "quietly releasing" albums over the past 15 years. *Oh, Sealand* is his seventh, an accomplished contemplation on England's turbulent condition, an island nation simultaneously buffeted by the waves and drowning in our own history. With contributions from authors Alan Moore and John Higgs (who commissioned the track *The Ghost Of Watling Street*), Bramwell's musical palette is somewhere between the 80s post-punk psychedelia of The Teardrop Explodes and Echo & The Bunnymen,



and the more melancholic side of the Canterbury Sound bands, colourful but undercut by a creeping unease. With its jabbing bass and little clarion calls of synth, *Land Of The Cuckoo* makes the source of this disquiet plain: 'The storms of England are shaking our

bones' and we've all been kicked out of our cosy nests. *Down In The Water* is more urgent still, its insistent sonic maximalism trying to wake the sleeping, submerged population. Elsewhere, mystic Albion is invoked on *Children Of The Rocks* and *Penda's Fen*, the latter inspired by the 70s BBC play of the same name, its guitars coiling like roots underground. **JB**

SAICOBAB

Sab Se Purani Bab THRILL JOCKEY

Japanese ragas shrieked toward the avant-garde.

When it comes to talking a good game, SAICOBAB - the latest project from ex-Boredoms/OOIOO vocalist YoshimiO - can weave gold from straw faster than you can say Rumpelstiltskin. *Sab Se Purani Bab*, we're told, reflects the deep connections between traditional Indian and Japanese music and spiritual practices. There's a surfeit of chin-stroking stuff on numerology, equations, silver ratios and mathematical concepts, a casual promise to masterfully blend classical ragas with animated vocal melodies, but in comparison to the highfalutin fine intentions of their



complex manifesto, the reality of the situation fetches up short. Granted, Yoshida Daikiti is quite the sitar player, but in the context of this quartet (completed by Akita Goldman on double bass, Motoyuki Hamamoto on percussion and the

clanging vocals of YoshimiO), recorded live and edited to in post-production, SAICOBAB sound stultified by their need to perpetually challenge. There's none of the taut, hypnotic, crescendo-bound power so characteristic of classical Indian ragas, nor the mellifluous shared intuition of improvisational jazz, just nagging uneasy listening. **IF**

SONS OF APOLLO

Psychotic Symphony INSIDEOUT

Ye gods! The latest Portnoy juggernaut rolls into town!



Thunder roars. Lightning crashes. Sitarers ring. A harp cascades. There's wild soloing, strings borrowed from Led Zeppelin's *Kashmir*, and a riff that sounds like the kind of music that might accompany Zeus on a late-night trip to the all-night garage. We're just two minutes in, and the debut album from Sons Of Apollo is proving to be unflinchingly epic.



The kind of music that might accompany Zeus on a trip to the all-night garage.



Put together by drummer Mike Portnoy, bassist Billy Sheehan, guitarist Ron 'Bumblefoot' Thal, former Journey frontman Jeff Scott Soto and Portnoy's old Dream Theater cohort Derek Sherinian, Sons Of Apollo are men whose rock family tree has steadily grown into a fully fledged forest. And as they leap nimbly from supergroup to supergroup, it's tempting to wonder if this is a blueprint for rock's future: find musicians of repute who work quickly, rattle out an album, then embark on a one-off, coffer-swelling tour (we're promised that SOP will spend 2018 "touring all over the world") before moving on to the next project. And, a few quibbles aside, why not?

Psychotic Symphony is very much the sum of its parts. The musicians are as good as you'd expect, especially Portnoy, who almost seems to drag the rest of the band along with him, and Thal, whose playing veers from ugly metallic crunch to stunningly fluid solo.

Labyrinth starts with urgent, staccato strings, is joined by a subtle, stuttering riff that sounds like a sped-up version of AC/DC's *For Those About To Rock*, proceeds with a frantic section similar to the *Hyperspace* movement of Rush's *Natural Science*, and climaxes with the kind of keyboard swells that Tony Banks had perfected by the time mid-period Genesis rolled around. *Signs Of The Time* begins with a riff plucked straight from the Gojira playbook before noodling its way towards jazz rock nirvana. *Divine Addiction* could be *Perfect Strangers*-era Deep Purple, while the middle section of *Coming Home* is like the mid-point of The Who's *Won't Get Fooled Again* rewritten for anyone unfamiliar with the original.

Everything sounds like a celebration of rock music, a tribute to rock music and, often, an affectionate, metallic approximation of rock music originally made by other people. These hat-tips are usually quite sly, and by the time you've noticed, the band have moved on to something entirely different, and it really doesn't matter.

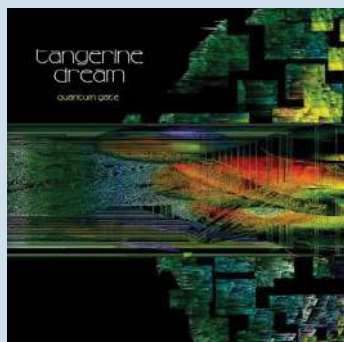
Psychotic Symphony is fierce, loud, bewildering, brilliantly performed and monstrously entertaining.

FRASER LEWRY

TANGERINE DREAM

Quantum Gate KSCOPE

Froese may be gone, but his Dream lives on.



Now here's something you may not have expected – a new Tangerine Dream album without the physical presence of founder Edgar Froese. Yet despite his death two years ago, the man's vision is clear. The band's leader and founder was determined that Tangerine Dream should continue without him – that way Froese would ensure that what he'd planned for the future would happen.

This isn't just about delivering what their late leader would have wanted...

This is a fresh phase in the iconic ensemble's ongoing career, one that Froese himself wanted to embrace the esoteric subject of quantum physics. And although he's obviously physically absent here, nonetheless the music has his imprint, because Froese left behind extensive sketches as to how the album should be approached.

Thorsten Quaeschning, Ulrich Schnauss and Hoshiko Yamane – the musicians who are now guiding the band's creativity – have taken on the challenge of bringing Froese's artistic aspirations to reality. And they've done it with zest, desire and no little brilliance. But this isn't just about the three delivering what their late leader would have wanted – they've also added in their own touches to give contemporary meaning to what is a tough subject to make palatable in a musical sense.

Sensing Elements opens up by giving the listener a taste of the band's aspirations. It veers from ambient to claustrophobic, as the protagonists show they aren't prepared to merely tread well-worn Tangerine Dream pathways, but are committed to making the electronic scope sound experimental, all while never losing sight of the fact that they intend to encourage you to willingly go with them on this journey into the unknown.

At times the presentation is terrifying in its alienation, as on *Granular Blankets*, while at others there's an undercurrent of calm, most notably on *Non-Locality Destination*. *Proton Bonfire* has the whiff of turmoil masquerading as controlled musicality, a duality that's evident throughout the album.

The notion of presenting quantum physics in this form should be one of confusion. After all, it's a subject that's still puzzling the finest scientific brains. In this respect, *Quantum Gate* can be said to be the soundtrack to our wide-eyed ignorance while standing on the precipice of scientific knowledge.

This is a bridging album for Tangerine Dream, allowing them to make the transition from Froese's dominant influence into uncharted waters. His presence is still obvious here, and the next album will be vital. However, *Quantum Gate* is an impressive celebration of both past and future.

MALCOLM DOME

PHILIP SELWAY

Let Me Go - Official Soundtrack BELLA UNION

First film score from Radiohead's dark horse.

With two fine solo albums, *Familial* and *Weatherhouse*, Philip Selway has already proved that he's a viable musical force away from the Radiohead drum stool, but this is his most impressive project yet. The soundtrack to Polly Steele's memoir, it rises to the story's serious themes (family, loss and Auschwitz) with a refined, gentle touch, managing to stir the emotions while never sacrificing intimacy for the sake of pomp. Of course it's foolish and reductive to box Selway as 'the drummer' anyway, his musical contributions to Radiohead having been



so much more diverse. Here he brings in gorgeous strings (arranged by Laura Moody), electronics, glockenspiels and vibraphones. Lou Rhodes (Lamb) sings *Walk* with understated presence, while Selway sings two tracks with skilfully repressed urgency.

His motifs find pockets of warmth within the sombre subject and while there are appropriately chilly, haunted diversions, there's a kinship with the comforting melancholy of David Sylvian or John Martyn, or the softly invigorating atmospheres of Talk Talk. *Let Me Go* fills the room with a delicate grace. Jonny Greenwood, watch your back! **CR**

TROJAN HORSE

Fukushima Surfer Boys BAD ELEPHANT

Salford prog mavericks bring electronica to the party on third album.

Trojan Horse are happy to namecheck the giants of prog in their bio, but the fact they cite Flying Lotus, Thundercat and Karlheinz Stockhausen as influences on their new album says everything about their attitude to the dogmas of genre. *Fukushima Surfer Boys* sees the band heading in a more electronic direction. It's a modern take on prog that's never less than engaging, and is often thrillingly inventive. *The Ebb c/w Solotron* is a case in point, its processed beats and grumbling sub-bass melded to arpeggiated guitars and synths, evoking a chilly atmosphere of urban dread. In contrast, *How*



You Gonna Get By? and *I Wanna See My Daddy* are tightly arranged prog pop songs, the former like a turbocharged Supertramp, the latter recalling a slow-burning Mansun. *The Modern Apothecary* mixes angular skronk and music hall absurdism, while *Sickle*

Cell Orphan starts as an acoustic ballad before an angry riff and woozy keytar gatecrash the sadness. Oh, and there's the lush electro rock of the title track, and then the disjointed monologue backed with dramatic orch-tronica of *The Shapes...* Sometimes overwhelming, but never under-ambitious, Trojan Horse reinvent prog, again. **JB**

VUUR

In This Moment We Are Free - Cities INSIDEOUT

Promising debut from Anneke van Giersbergen and friends.

Vuur is the new project from cult prog artist Anneke van Giersbergen, well-known for being the frontwoman of The Gathering and latterly for collaborating with Devin Townsend. Across a suite of tracks thematically dedicated to different world cities, the band – not only Giersbergen herself, but luminaries like Esa Holopainen, Daniel Cardoso and Mark Holcomb, of Amorphis, Anathema and Periphery respectively – deliver a punchy and upbeat take on modern progressive metal, channelling the spirit of various cities. Highlights are the rolling arpeggios of *The Martyr*



and *The Saint - Beirut* and the melodramatic strokes of *Your Glorious Light Will Shine - Helsinki*. Unfortunately, for all the talent here, ultimately the record drags. Several album tracks are overlong and similar, and despite the vocal hooks and deft

musicianship, there's a lack of 'wow' moments. The LP is at its best when it veers closest to the kind of cinematic metal that the Devin Townsend Project ply their trade in: *The Fire - San Francisco* and *Freedom - Rio*. Overall, this is a promising start, but one that hopefully will see the band developing in a unique direction on future releases. **AL**

JANE WEAVER

The Architect FIRE

Hello Jane, gotta Neu motorik?

The gradual diminution of the EP as a credible format is a depressing phenomenon. Where once there was *Five By Five* and *Ready Steady Who*, there's now an album track of genuine downloadable merit, bulked out by an exclusive 'meh' remix and a couple of bits of half-cocked fluff. Obviously Jane Weaver can't be held entirely responsible for the culture's ongoing plummet into the mire, but *The Architect* – an undeniable slice of driving krautpop genius – is enjoyed to far better advantage set amid the excellence of her ninth *Modern Kosmology* album than cast adrift here



with a trio of marketing afterthoughts. Harsh? Perhaps, but by comparison to its titular lead track, *The Architect* EP's forgettable supporting features (Andy Votel's remix adds five minutes to its duration, but little else; there's acoustic humathon *Code*; *Element* has further experimentation with added biscuit tin drum machine) are unlikely to enter the repertoire of the nation's few remaining whistling milkmen. However, *The Architect* itself is a deliciously space-whispered, dancefloor-friendly recalibration of Primal Scream's *Kill All Hippies* and, stripped of additional baggage, well worth a cheeky stream. **IF**

WHITE MANNA

Bleeding Eyes AGITATED/CARDINAL FUZZ

Business as usual for Northern California heads. Thankfully.

White Manna seem to live by that old maxim of not fixing anything that ain't broke. The same imperatives that drove their self-titled debut of 2012 – rampaging space rock, locked riffs, overdriven guitars – have now sustained the quintet over five albums. Yet this doesn't mean they're stuck for ideas. Rather, their adherence to the intangible mysteries of fuzz-heavy psychedelia feels like a statement of faith, the band exploring a rich niche of music with an ambitious fervour that borders on the devotional. *Bleeding Eyes*, their sixth outing, is the kind of howling mindfuck that aligns



them to Carlton Melton and The Black Angels. Regular engineer Phil Manley is at hand, helping leader David Johnson shape these compositions into vast, open-ended grooves. The devilish riff of *Vimanas* is joined by a vocal that sounds beamed in from some distant Californian mountaintop. The title of *Speed Dagger* is a pretty good indicator of the pleasures within, as heads-down Stooges meet Spacemen 3. *Trampoline* takes 60s garage rock and bends it through a psychedelic lens, while *Freak* speeds along on a motorik rhythm. Breathless and intense, it's everything we've come to expect. **RH**

WOBBLER

From Silence To Somewhere DARK ESSENCE/KARISMA

White Willower Lars Fredrik Frøislie's fantastic love letter to classic prog.

Wobblers are part of vintage keyboards collector and bandleader Lars Fredrik Frøislie's vast body of work centred around his love for prog, with each of his musical adventures specifically mapped out. If White Willow have always been about pushing their boundaries into the mainstream, in *Lingua Mortua* try to mix it with black metal, while *Tuskmørke* take us into the rabbit hole for a Lewis Carroll acid trip. The oldest of the bunch, Wobblers, may wrongly appear as the most conservative as they solely focus on the golden era of the genre, but *From Silence To Somewhere* finds



Frøislie finally reaching the zenith he's been seeking for over two decades. Not as openly symphonic and grand as its predecessor, 2011's *Rites At Dawn*, there's something almost reclusive yet never constrained about *From Silence To Somewhere*, as if they had retreated to an isolated cabin to create it. Yet their sound is crisp and as warm as a comfy winter evening spent in front of a fireplace. And even if the Jon Anderson falsetto and the Rickenbacker attack emphasise the Yes lineage, the largely folk element in how those three epics (plus one short instrumental) are smartly arranged is all theirs. **OB**



AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Grant Moon has a rummage down the back of the Prog sofa for the ones that nearly got away...

Released on Sel Balamir's boutique label Rockosmos, **Thumpermonkey's** new EP *Electricity* was inspired by an etching in an obscure 1889 book about a Victorian



MP who attempts to restore Babylon's glory with this newfangled alternating current thingy. *Garmonbozia*, *Tzizimime*, the stunning *This Is Not A Fire* and *Woodscrivened* are muscular and dynamic, poetic and punky, and very proggy. You're left wondering why the band aren't carried shoulder high everywhere they go.

Multi-instrumentalist

Steve Tilling has made a compelling debut in *Circu5* (ST Productions), the first release by his project of the same name. It's a tight, dark and intelligent album revolving around the concept of a child being raised as a psychopath by a shadowy government organisation. Tilling's vocals evoke Trent Reznor in parts, but *Circu5* should chime well with fans of *Lonely Robot*, *Cosmograf* and even Roger Waters and Tull. Turns from the likes of XTC/Big Big Train's Dave Gregory add to the pedigree.



Takaakira 'Taka' Goto is the guitarist for Japanese experimentalists Mono, and his latest project,

Behind The Shadow Drops, sees him bathe in the more ambient/trip-hop side of his musical personality. *Harmonic* (Temporary Residence) was recorded in close collaboration with Tortoise's John McEntire, and the results are moody, glacially thoughtful and beautifully textured. Titles such as *The End Of Daydreams* and *Trace Of Snow Waltz*

add to the melancholy, Eno-esque vibe. **The Franky Valentyn Project's** self-released *All Is A Dream* is the Australian polymath's joyful, Halloween-scary 2015 album, now reissued. There's a camp, Trans-Siberian Orchestra feel here, with Monique LeChat's operatic vocal contributions notably adding some heft to a fun if slight slice of conceptual bombast.

In any other issue this would've been my curveball title, but there are two real curate's eggs in the nest this month. Legendary photographer **William Eggleston**, 77, is now releasing his first album. *Musik* (Secretly Canadian) is a set of improvisations recorded throughout the 80s on his Korg OW/1 FD Pro synthesiser. Eggleston's a fan of Bach and his noodlings are often baroque in flavour, punctuated by church organ blasts and warping, sub-Vangelis drones. He's clearly musical, but this is ultimately the work of a dilettante, and to get the most from it you'd have to be pre-invested in the man and his colourful history in his true artistic field.

From Bach to Vivaldi, who's feted on **Willie Gibson's** *Seasons Change* (Gare du Nord). This is the Red Priest's renowned contribution to hold

music, *The Four Seasons*, arranged for and painstakingly programmed into a Eurorack Modular Synth. It's frivolous and daft MIDI fun, but Gibson's nerdy focus is admirable, there's a Walter/Wendy Carlos spirit here, and the presto from *Summer* was never quite this unsettling. It's as if John Carpenter re-soundtracked *A Clockwork Orange*.



EMERSON, LAKE & PALMER

Fanfare: 1970-1997 BMG

Welcome back my friends to the box that never ends.



The arrival of this monumentally weighty prog rock monolith has caused some puzzlement due to the fact that the bulk of its contents have only just been reissued earlier this year, and come close on the heels of a similar campaign by the previous label to hold ELP's catalogue. So is there enough here to tempt the hardcore fan with money to burn?

Previously unreleased live material provides the draw here.

The previously unreleased live material provides the draw here, firstly in the shape of the triple 180gm vinyl *Live In Italy*, which finds the band on ridiculously good form prior to *Brain Salad Surgery*'s release. The velocity at which they tackle everything occasionally gets the better of their not inconsiderable technique, subtlety being the main casualty. Nevertheless, *Karn Evil 9* has a phenomenal momentum that roars with an animalistic swagger.

At the end of *Still You Turn Me On*'s plaintive chorus, as the final lyric drifts away, Lake suddenly snarls, "You big noisy fucker!" presumably directed at a talkative punter yakking through the soulful ballad. Taken from multitracks, it's a wonderful, up-close example of audio vérité and a genuinely exciting account of the band's ostentatious grandiosity.

The first of five previously unreleased live CDs, *Live At Pocono 1972* is similarly fuelled by a rattling speed, providing an outstanding listen. Even into the AOR-orientated 90s, represented by the other in-concert discs, that furious showmanship remains evident. With their newer material sometimes lacking the creative invention so casually dispensed in their early career, it's almost like two different bands ploughing through the setlist. Nevertheless, the tape sources, from soundboards or multitrack, are terrific, packing a sometimes grainy but invigorating punch.

Other exclusives include two 45 singles and four good-quality reproductions of tour programmes, which provide a Proustian rush. The hardback book, though thin on new details or perspectives, at least provides a useful listening guide to the previously available studio and live releases.

Presented in their original running order only, these CDs come in replica LP card sleeves, though BSS's lacks the die-cut cover, leaving one Blu-ray disc housing the Wilson/Jakszyk remixes. With remastering dating from previously released editions, there's nothing here you don't already own.

Is it worth it? Handsome as it is, only diehard completists need buy. Even then, they'll almost certainly complain, perhaps with justification, that the relative lack of ambition, meagre rarities and overlooked opportunities from within the studio archives, when compared to sets released by ELP's contemporaries, leaves them feeling a little short-changed.

SID SMITH

JOHN CARPENTER

Anthology: Movie Themes 1974-1998 SACRED BONES

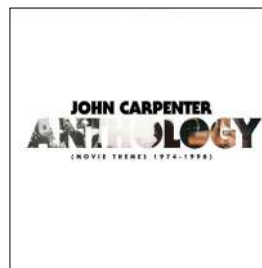
Legendary director-composer reanimates his oldies.

When it comes to the world of movies, we're all correctly wary of remakes. Too often a Hollywood cash-grab means our cherished memories are replaced by a blaring, point-missing cover version.

Arch fright-fest director John Carpenter will be as aware of this pattern as anybody. Which makes it particularly strange, or bold, that he's recorded new versions of his own classic movie themes, from the unforgettable *Assault On Precinct 13* and *Halloween* to the less iconic *Vampires* and *In The Mouth Of Madness*.

Clearly he enjoyed working with his son Cody and godson Daniel Davies (son of former Kink Dave) on the recent *Lost Themes* albums, and has further tours as a musician imminent. Yet these are not lost themes - they're mostly well known and beloved.

Do these reworkings increase or diminish the eerie charms of the originals? For the most part, the project just entails a scrub-up. From his debut *Dark Star* to the quivering,



implied spookiness of *The Fog*, the timbre and tension that you remember are still there. He also interprets Ennio Morricone's atypical theme for *The Thing* and Jack Nitzsche's more romantic *Starman*. Perhaps, though, everything sounds a little too clean.

Sure, his innovative, minimalist synth work was always pristine, allowing its repetitions to unnervingly you and get you glancing anxiously over your shoulder. And maybe it's a trick of the mind that has your reviewer thinking the originals felt grainier, somehow more... scratched. However, something about these versions feels just a little bit too clinical and computerised, as if the technology is the master of the human rather than the other way around.

Let's not be too picky, though. With this collection we can relax in a way that Carpenter's films never allowed you to, and the evocative enigma survives.

As a man who was ahead of his peers in embracing electronic sounds, he has the right to modernise and update as he sees - or hears - fit. **CR**

DANTALIAN'S CHARIOT

Chariot Rising: Remastered Edition ESOTERIC

Zoot's psychedelic suit of many colours.

Dantalian's Chariot were a textbook example of British R&B veterans who, after suddenly finding themselves old hat when caught in 1967's psychedelic revolution, traded their mohair suits for kaftans, wrote LSD anthems and performed against eye-blasting liquid light shows.

In their previous life they had been Zoot Money's Big Roll Band, formed in 1961, releasing records and remaining a hot ticket on the club circuit. With psychedelia sweeping the UK by mid-1967, the band reinvented themselves, Zoot already well-acquainted with London's hip scene (his house was the unknown Hendrix's first stop after landing at the airport in London in 1966).

They took their new name from a 17th-century demonology compendium and acquired a spectacular San Francisco light show for their debut performance at 1967's National Jazz and Blues Festival debut (wearing white to highlight its effect). During their short life, they released one single, *Madman Running Through The Fields*, inspired



by their collective LSD experiences. They recorded enough music for an album but were dropped by their record company and split soon after. This left their unreleased album reimagined nearly 30 years later by Tenth Planet and now reissued by Cherry Red.

Leading off with that fabulous single, it reveals a band gamely stabbing at '67 psych's rotating pig-on-a-spit, straddling psychedelic awakening in *Sun Came Bursting Through My Cloud*, workaday whimsy on *Four Fireman*, sitar ragas (*Soma* parts one and two), exotic travelogues (*This Island*), fuzzy freakbeat on *World War Three* and a counterculture call-to-arms with *High Flying Bird*, referencing San Francisco.

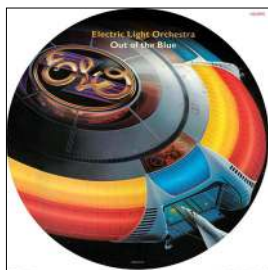
After his Chariot ran aground, Zoot joined Eric Burdon's Animals while guitarist Andy Summers struck gold playing with The Police. Zoot's sterling work as an overlooked R&B pioneer is soon to be honoured with a box set but this brief psychedelic dabble shows how adeptly he coped with changing times and remains a period classic. **KN**

ELO

Out Of The Blue LEGACY

A bit of Blue for the dads...

Given its iconic sleeve artwork courtesy of album cover designer John Kosh and Japanese artist Shusei Nagaoka, it's somewhat surprising that ELO's 1977 breakthrough album has never appeared on a picture disc before. Up until now, blue vinyl has been the best that collectors have been able to get their hands on.



only features on three songs. All three were gone for 1979's *Discovery* (although oddly appear in all the music videos). But one can see Lynne tampering with his prized baby for optimum success here.

Turn To Stone, Sweet Talkin' Woman, It's Over, Mr Blue Sky and Wild

West Hero were the massive worldwide hits, and remain instantly recognisable to this very day. But side three's sumptuous *Concerto For A Rainy Day* is likely to hold a place in the hearts of those who picked up on the band's earlier progressive inclinations.

From here, Lynne would dabble with disco rock (*Discovery*), dance with Olivia Newton John on the ill-fated *Xanadu*, return to prog concepts with 1981's *Time* and then slowly lose interest over the more pop-fuelled *Secret Messages* and *Balance Of Power*. Here though, the band are at the very peak of their often beguiling powers.

Alas there's no replica space station to be built with this release, but then you can't have everything. The music still more than makes up for it. **JE**

GÖKÇEN KAYNATAN

Gökçen Kaynatán FINDERS KEEPERS

Retrospective celebration of the founding father of Turkish electronic music.

Gökçen Kaynatán is a perfect example of an artist who has had a profound effect on the musical development of his homeland yet who remains practically unheard of in the wider world.

Born in Istanbul in 1939, Kaynatán first came to prominence as a teenage rock'n'roller, including a stint playing alongside Turkey's very own rock guitar god Erkin Koray. But it was his fascination with new technology and incorporating electronic sounds into music that really fired his imagination.

In 1972, he got his hands on an EMS Synthi AKS and never looked back, going on to pioneer a potent blend of Anatolian kosmische. Yet despite a reputation for innovative live performances, his long-standing distrust of the record industry meant he produced just two singles highlighting his unique sound, both of which are included here.

However, from the mid-70s, his music could regularly be heard on Turkey's first television channel, TRT 1, where he used his battery of electronic instruments



to produce a constant stream of theme tunes, jingles and incidental music, and that's where much of the material on this excellent collection comes from.

Do anın Ötesi brilliantly encapsulates Kaynatán's aesthetic, lonely synth notes drifting against some

bitingly grungy guitar while a primitive drum machine is pushed to its limits (watch the fantastic footage of him playing this on YouTube).

The scratchy aquatic funk of *Evren* has the same maverick spirit of Can (serendipitously, Kaynatán studied in Germany in the early 70s), while the industrial library music of *Cennet Dünyamız* sounds like Bo Diddley played by a particularly louche robot.

Essentially a one-man Radiophonic Workshop creating his own sonic universe, Kaynatán's music reflects a time when technology offered a happy - if slightly off-kilter - vision of the future. His work was a key modernising influence in Turkey's popular culture and its self-definition as a forward-looking secular society. **JB**

BRUFORD

Bruford 1977-1980:

Seems Like A Lifetime Ago WINTERFOLD



This rather impressively lavish box set collects the recorded output from Bill Bruford's eponymous band that enjoyed an all-too-brief existence from 1977 to 1980. The collection contains their three studio records and one live album, alongside the previously unreleased *Live At The Venue* from 1980, and a collection of rehearsal snippets from the sessions for the planned but never realised fourth studio album. All that's missing is their 1979 *Rock Goes To College* performance.



The live albums are the highlights as the music really breathes.



The original incarnation featured guitarist Allan Holdsworth, bassist Jeff Berlin and keyboardist Dave Stewart. When Holdsworth departed the fold, his spot was filled by his protégé John Clark, who, bizarrely enough, subsequently became Cliff Richard's guitarist.

The first two albums, *Feels Good To Me* and *One Of A Kind*, have been remixed from the master tapes and are presented here in three formats: the original mixes, a 2017 remix by Jakko Jakszyk, and in surround sound 5.1.

The new remixes really open up the music, bringing Berlin's bass out of the background and providing clarity to even the densest sections. Musically, Bruford played a blend of progressive rock and fusion, not dissimilar to Weather Report or Billy Cobham's work with George Duke, only with a little more muscle. Their 1978 debut *Feels Good To Me* features occasional vocals from Annette Peacock but is predominantly instrumental.

Bruford himself never hogs the spotlight, resisting any urge to smother the songs in reckless runs around the drum kit. If anything, it's Holdsworth and Berlin who repeatedly threaten to steal the show. Holdsworth's lead work impresses throughout, from the dark and dirty lines of *Hell's Bells* to his lightning-fast soloing in *Seems Like A Lifetime Ago, Part Two*. As for Berlin, his lithe playing in *Travels With Myself - And Someone Else* recalls Jaco Pastorius, and he powers his way through the appropriately heavy-hitting *Joe Frazier*. *Gradually Going Tornado* moves into Zappa territory with its twisted funk and absurd lyrics.

The live recordings, *The Bruford Tapes* and *Live At The Venue*, are the highlights here as the music really breathes once set loose from the studio. The bandleader launches *Sample And Hold*, from *Live At The Venue*, with a bristling drum solo, and the live versions of *Joe Frazier* and *Five G* handily outpace their studio forebears - Berlin's bass playing on the former is superb. "Not too bad," comments Bruford, a master of understatement.

The set also comes with a booklet of interviews and articles, plus photos and a poster. A collector's dream.

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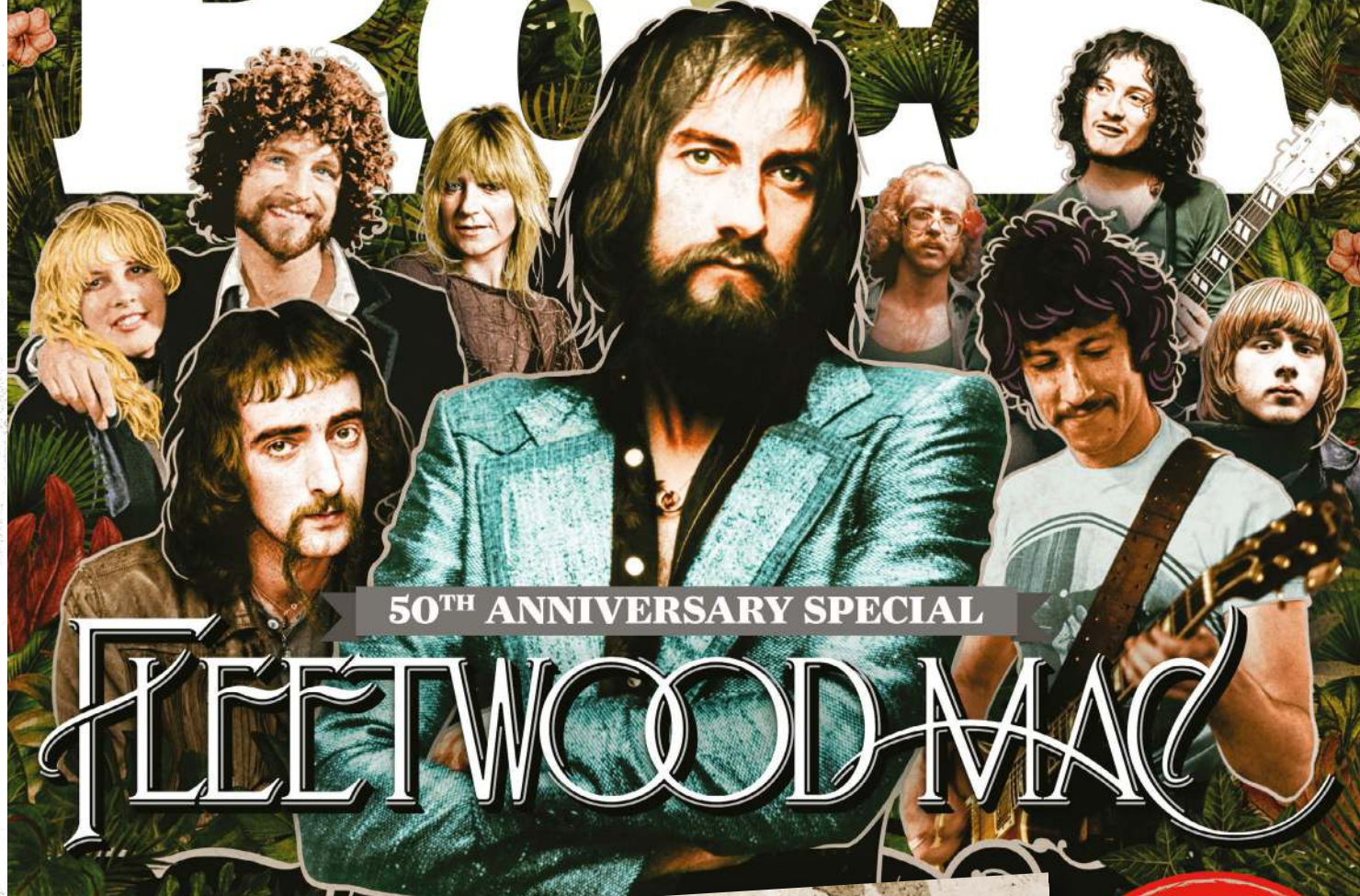
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SONJA KRISTINA

Anthology CHERRY RED

From *Hair* to eternity: a double CD overview for Curved Air's frontwoman.

While Sonja Kristina is best known for her time in Curved Air – not least as one of a handful of pioneering female artists in the 1970s progressive rock scene – her solo career has yielded some exceptional music. It's the product of a colourful life, which found her singing as a 13-year-old in local folk clubs of Essex, then in musicals, including a teenage turn in *Hair*. Concurrently, she spent time as a hippie boho hanging out with The Pink Fairies and The Deviants and later, as Curved Air underwent a break-up and renaissance, a spell as a bunny girl croupier at the Playboy Club. She enjoyed both punk and the neo-psychedelic Club Dog scene of the 1990s, when she was at the vanguard of the acid folk revival.

The story starts in the present with a nod to the beginning and a 2017 reading of *Frank Mills* from *Hair*. The other contemporary recording is a poignant cover, with acoustic guitar, accordion and harpsichord, of Greg Lake's *C'est La Vie* prompted by an



appearance at a recent tribute concert. There's also a melancholic acoustic recasting of Motörhead's *I Don't Believe A Word* and a lavishly arranged version of Carl Orff's *O Fortuna* with Air compadre Darryl Way.

But Kristina's original full band material

really stands out. It's eclectic in its arrangements, but carries a strong melodic signature and an incisive style of lyric writing. *Baby Song* begins as a mother's paean to her offspring before acknowledging their inevitable disillusionment with life, then veering of into an exultant instrumental dance with hints of African highlife.

A lot of the material has a folkish tinge with Paul Sax's outstanding violin playing featuring on a number of selections, and merging with the gleaming synths and multiple vocal harmonies on the sinuous *Angel*. Kristina drolly embraces the dark side on the fiddle-fuelled hellish hoedown of *Devil May Care*, then dispenses some pithy advice to the song's wayward protagonist on *Anna*. **MB**

ANTHONY PHILLIPS

Invisible Men ESOTERIC

Eighties reissue finds Phillips plays pop.

Sometimes artists change direction because that's where the muse leads them and sometimes because circumstances demand it. Phillips is refreshingly candid about the circumstances leading up the recording of his eighth album released in 1983. The two-disc set, featuring the original album and extra demos and outtakes, captures him at something of a crossroads in his personal life. As Jonathan Dann's excellent and detailed liner notes make clear, Phillips urgently needed to reach out to a wider audience; in other words, make some money.

Collaborating with Richard Scott in 1982, quixotic encounters with the Roland 808 drum machine spawned several chart-orientated tunes in short order. The sonic landscape here is quintessentially 80s pop: stiletto-thin synths, bright guitars, bursts of synthetic handclaps, brash sax and hook-pandering titles like *Golden Bodies* and *Love In A Hot Air Balloon*.

Though *Going For Broke*'s formulaic approach, full of synthy-bombast,



rolling timpani and those self-motivational lyrics that urge individuals to throw caution to the wind when there's nothing to lose, in the dying moments, where it jumps out of its sequencer-driven groove it provides a startling glimpse,

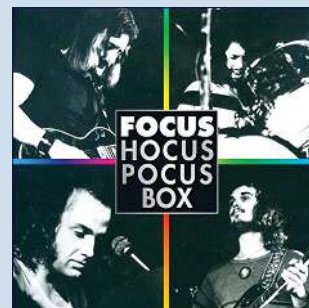
complete with a blistering guitar solo, of what a post-Gabriel Genesis might have sounded like had Ant returned to the fold. Throughout, the album is upholstered with luscious chords pressed into the service of toe-tappers rather than Phillips' more usual pastoral ruminations.

It might be a far cry from the acoustic alchemy and intimate warmth of Phillips' classics such as *The Geese And The Ghost*, but that was the object of the exercise and as such it's an entertaining diversion. Phillips' own assessment was that *Invisible Men* was a misstep but while many of the songs eschew the more thoughtful, intimate side of Phillips' catalogue, many contain a degree of craft that's not only admirable but surprisingly catchy. **SS**

FOCUS

Hocus Pocus Box RED BULLET

Vodelicious: a comprehensive retrospective of the Dutch masters.



The deployment of *Hocus Pocus* in recent film *Baby Driver* reminded everyone how exhilarating Focus' unlikely 1973 hit was and is: yodelling, flute riffs and all. Their follow-up that year, *Sylvia*, is arguably even more effective, with Jan Akkerman's guitar driving like a grown-up, though fans of the art of the yodel are still catered to, albeit briefly. Even in that curious period of the early 70s where anything went, Focus seemed an oddity, an anomaly, a law unto themselves. As years have passed, the Dutch band have found a niche as jazz-influenced progressive rock stalwarts. Despite a hiatus and break-up or two, they're still very much active: indeed, a new album emerges this month.

Focus Con Proby will split the trousers of your mind.

Here, however, is their career anthology: a 13-CD box set gathering all their essential albums, right up to 2012's so-so *Focus X* and throwing in an extra *Best Of* (which zooms in on shorter, more instant tracks). It'd be a diehard devotee who'd claim the group have improved over time, but there's no disputing the originality and sumptuous musicianship of their 70s heyday. The Amsterdam instrumentalists – they soon realised vocals weren't their strong suit, bar the odd yodel – hit on a confident, consummate style which matched the epic and the downright groovy. Their golden age produced soundscapes of light, shade and colour. Thijs Van Leer's keyboards and flute and Akkerman's versatile guitar just require solid rhythms – which they get – and away they go, attempting everything from lengthy symphonic suites to power-grabbing jams.

In *And Out Of Focus*, the 1970 debut, reveals in stand-out *Anonymus* that they aspire to beauty as much as ballast. *Moving Waves* (a UK Number 20) gave them their crossover, with *Hocus Pocus* contrasted with 23-minute prog endeavour *Eruption*, based on the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice. *Eruption* is hot lava, but after the fun, accessible *Focus 3*, they hit their home run on '74's *Hamburger Concerto*. This time the 20-minute "side two" opus is inspired by less lofty themes – the cooking of said burger – but musically it's just great gushes of joy. Like contemporaries Nektar, they use their non-British experiences to twist the tropes of the genre off the familiar path, yet know when to come roaring back with a big crescendo. From *Mother Focus* onwards they're half-heartedly trying funk, losing Akkerman, not quite in the zone. There are fleeting upswings though, and the bizarre collaboration with PJ Proby, 1978's *Focus Con Proby*, is like a crazy lost Scott Walker album and will split the trousers of your mind. In their moments of maximum clarity, Focus were fantastic.

CHRIS ROBERTS

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Badger © Roger Dean, 1973

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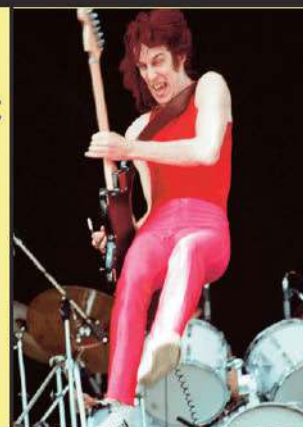
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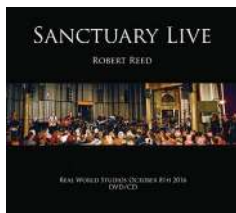
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Sanctuary Live TIGERMOUTH PRODUCTIONS

Astounding sounds. Not such amazing visuals.

Last October Robert Reed took his parallel universe Mike Oldfield act to Real World Studios and performed it in front of a live audience. As is the way of these things, it's now available on DVD, but it's not much of a show. The studio is lit as it might be for the recording of an album, and don't expect pyro or lasers or dancing girls on podiums. Most notably, as the musicians slowly bring the themes into focus as *Sanctuary* gently unfolds, movement by movement, you realise what an extraordinary achievement it was for Reed to create the original album single-handed. Ultimately, *Sanctuary Live*



is a much more satisfying album to listen to than it is to watch. This might be a perfect souvenir for those present, but most people will probably find they return to the audio CD of the same performance that accompanies the release than give the film more than a single, cursory viewing. Then there's the bonus "documentary", entailing little more than 25 minutes of shaky camerawork showing people standing about doing very little or talking about chips. This is extraordinary music, but it's music to wallow in, and watching it presented this way on the small screen is a barrier to doing so. **FL**

SHIRLEY COLLINS

The Ballad Of Shirley Collins FIRE FILMS

Folk music's national treasure examined through a lens.

"There are some great female voices around now – but I'm not one of them and I wish I was," says Shirley Collins early on in this documentary of her life. It's not self pity speaking. Feted in the 50s, 60s and 70s on the British folk revival circuit, Collins and her portative organ-playing sister Dolly were spellbinding stars of the scene. But then Collins suffered an emotional trauma that muted her talent for nearly 38 years. This film looks back on Collins' extraordinary life, from the demure schoolteacher who, in 1959, fell for archivist Alan Lomax and journeyed with him to the US to collect an important body of folk song field recordings, to



artistic acclaim, lost love and lost confidence and, eventually, aged 80, a rebirth with this year's *Lodestar* album. Black and white reconstructions are a cute way to embellish her backstory, but there's plenty of wit, warmth and wisdom in the now as Collins joins the bonfire parade in the streets of current home Lewes, or swaps tales with the decorated tribes celebrating the yearly pagan knees-up, Jack-In-The-Green, in her birthplace Hastings. Hats off to long-time friend, Current 93's David Tibet – chatting with Collins at a kitchen table, shared treasures strewn – who constantly urged her to sing again. The results, recorded in her living room, are a triumph in the face of torment. **JK**

100 MIGLIORI DISCHI DEL PROGRESSIVE ITALIANO (THE 100 BEST ITALIAN PROGRESSIVE RECORDS)

Mox Cristadoro TSUNAMI EDIZIONI

This native language mini-encyclopaedia about Italian prog, specifically from 1970 to 1977, is a precious support guide for anyone who knows a smattering of Italian, whether they are new to the genre or well-seasoned progsters. Mox Cristadoro shows us many familiar names (Area, Banco Del Mutuo Soccorso, Goblin, New Trolls, PFM), but also many more obscure bands, with very peculiar stories to tell. Hundreds of books have been written about the Italian progressive scene, but only a few are able to captivate the reader in such a hypnotic way as this book does. Did you know that a very young Ritchie Blackmore

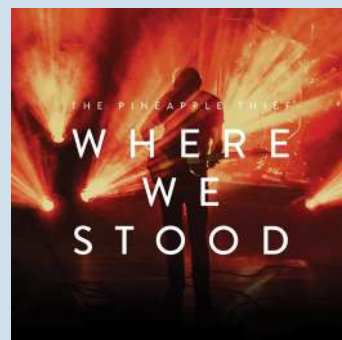


used to play in the Anglo-Italian band The Trip? And that his Deep Purple bandmate Ian Paice played drums for the Piccolo Teatro in Milan back in 1967? It's very interesting food for thought when reflecting on how the involuntary isolation of many Italian small towns (particularly in Central and Southern Italy) – where it was nearly impossible to find records coming from abroad – helped some bands to create a new musical identity, influenced by classical musical rather than Van der Graaf Generator, Yes or Emerson, Lake & Palmer. It would be nice to see all of these stories translated into English... **GM**

THE PINEAPPLE THIEF

Where We Stood KSCOPE

West Country proggers' London show caught on camera.



It's like *Foxtrot* never happened. One of the first things that strikes you as the stark, simple spotlights come up on The Pineapple Thief's show at London's Islington Town Hall is the lack of traditional visual frills. But if you're going to eschew the staple stagecraft props of the performing arts, from big haircuts to dancers to Slipperman costumes to neon backdrops and accompanying films, you might as well go completely the opposite way. And as it turns out, The Pineapple Thief's stage uniform of black jeans and black T-shirts, offset by a modest array of lights, lends them a sleek, stylish look, even if their own mothers would probably struggle to pick them out in a police line-up.



Gavin Harrison's kit looks 20 feet wide and 35 pieces deep.



The closest they get to a visual trademark are bass player Jon Sykes' huge headphones – actually ear defenders, as we learn from the interviews that intersperse the live footage on this 95-minute film – which explain everything from the band name to the bass man's hearing issues.

But of course, as Bruce Soord and his bandmates would doubtless be at pains to tell you, individual backstories, like showbiz visuals, are a secondary consideration, because The Pineapple Thief are All About The Music. And on that front, a set peppered with selections from most of their 11 albums to date, is never short on thrills.

The slow-building opening strains of *Tear You Up* ease us gently into the set, but once Darran Charles' jagged shards of prog-metal guitar pierce the soundscape it's clear that there'll be no shortage of weight to back up the floatier parts of their sound. The more abrasive highlights include some exemplary noise mangling from the Godsticks man on a powerful reading of *The One You Left To Die*, and the similarly emotive and heavy *Alone At Sea*.

Guest drummer Gavin Harrison's punchy percussion might be less prominent in the sound mix, but more rhythmically tuned ears will appreciate the intricate patterns underpinning *Reaching Out* and *Tear You Up* here. Either way, the regular camera shots from overhead make up for his low sonic profile, making the King Crimson/Porcupine Tree maestro's kit look around 20 feet wide and 35 pieces deep.

For a live recording, the sound quality is also pretty much faultless too, even if sometimes the sparse environment and the lack of focus on the crowd make it feel a little like a TV live set with a studio audience. But all that is simply in keeping with what TPT are about – top-drawer no-frills progressive rock, nothing more, nothing less.

JOHNNY SHARP

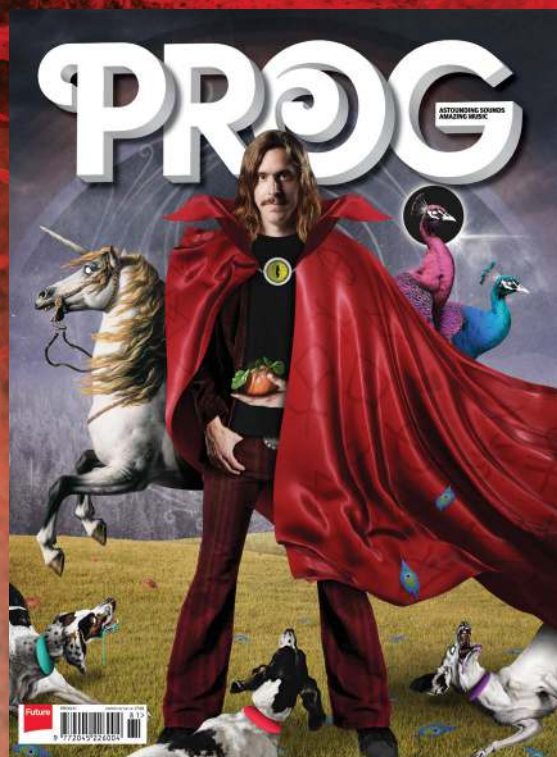
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Take a bow

YESTIVAL

VENUE MICROSOFT THEATER, LOS ANGELES
DATE 29/08/2017

A seated venue with air conditioning is a welcome treat after a long, hot summer's day. This is Yestival, and we're all here to see Steve Howe et al revisit the early, incredibly prolific period in the band's history by chronologically playing one track from each studio album from 1969's *Yes* through to 1980's *Drama*.

Before that, however, are two more staunch heavyweights of that era: Carl Palmer, helping to pay homage to his lost bandmates' history, and Todd Rundgren, who is ostensibly promoting his 27th studio album *White Night*, but in reality offers much, much more than that.

Carl Palmer's ELP Legacy are up first. Resplendent in a pink floral shirt, Palmer takes his seat behind his drum kit. Flanked by Paul Bielutowicz on guitar and Simon Fitzpatrick on bass, the trio play a power half hour of ELP's classic compositions in front of a psychedelic display on the screens behind them.

As soon as they start with *Hoedown* and *Karn Evil 9*, bottoms rise from seats to dance along.

They're joined onstage by a special guest for *Lucky Man*, as **Todd Rundgren**, wearing a technicolour blazer, steps up and stomps around to sing on ELP's first US hit. Palmer takes a moment to descend from behind his kit before *Fanfare For The Common Man* to thank the audience and tease future tours. He takes another few moments during that final song to fit in a drum solo, of course, but that just ensures he keeps the ELP legacy intact.

Rundgren returns after a 30-minute break for his own set in much more restrained attire. His band walk out before him, setting the tone in black suits and sunglasses, but it's the only thing about this set that's monochrome.

Starting with the rousing, synth-laden *Come*, Rundgren demands the crowd follow him and the strobe spotlight that steps as he steps, and they duly obey. Then the 80s Europop vibes of *Truth* flow through the air with strobe lights and power, making the venue feel like a Russian nightclub, with us commoners taking the place of the mob in the VIP section.

Rundgren is a captivating presence as he dances along with the backing singers, feeling, directing and pushing the music forward. He even has a costume change mid-set, sporting a bronze paisley vest for the second half. The quality of *White Knight* when it was released earlier this year made many realise how relevant Todd Rundgren still is, but it's

performances like tonight that will make sure you'll never doubt it.

This tour seems a slightly odd retrospective, as no members of the current incarnation of **Yes** were involved in the creation of tonight's opening track. But as ever on a Yes tour, with players like this, it's no problem. Once they walk on to the customary fanfare and light show, they kick the evening off wonderfully with *Survival*. Billy Sherwood, having moved over to bass, buzzes right through Geoff Downes' majestic organ keys while Steve Howe quickly pivots between guitars.

They appear practised and together. Howe, in particular, is absolutely tuned in: he even ushers roadies off the stage as they attempt to help perfect the setup around him. There are to be no distractions tonight.

Jon Davison, a relative local having grown up a bit south of LA in Laguna Beach, also dials it in firmly tonight, delivering his lines with calm passion. As you hear him uncannily near-mimic Jon Anderson's distinctive voice, Davison is probably the best vocalist that Yes could have right now.

Along with Howe's son Dylan, who's joined the band as second drummer on this tour, Davison adds some (relatively) youthful exuberance to proceedings. With his leather trousers and enthusiastic Californian drawl emerging between songs, he's a keen and necessary focal point for the band. *Machine Messiah* is testament to this, as Howe Jr

adds vibrancy to Alan White's drums, while Davison locks in to Sherwood's vocals to give the song the sheen it deserves.

Emerging for an encore with a second acoustic showcase for Steve Howe on *Madrigal*, with Davison accompanying him, and then finishing proceedings with the classic *Roundabout* for folk to sing and dance along with, is a nice touch. But the final word from the guitarist comes as the screens either side of the stage display graphics for 'Yes 50'.

If you weren't looking forward to 2018 already, that's your ticket. Who knows who they'll be bringing with them next time.

RAZIQ RAUF



"Yes appear practised and together. Howe, in particular, is absolutely tuned in."

Billy Sherwood: filling Chris Squire's huge boots.



Rhythm Royalty: Alan White.





Big (Money) Generator:
the band's merch stall.



Dylan Howe manning
the second drum kit.

Howe's That: the
guitarist is tuned
in and on fire.



Relayer: Jon Davison
sends out good vibes
to the ecstatic fans.



Starship Troopers:
the futuristic stage
set and light show.



Steve Howe and
Jon Davison encore
with Madrigal.



Vital Organ:
Geoff Downes.

AYREON UNIVERSE

VENUE	POPPEDIUM 013, TILBURG, NETHERLANDS
DATE	16/09/2017

For a self-proclaimed recluse with a pathological fear of performing live, Arjen Lucassen is making a pretty good fist of looking for all the world like a dedicated rock star. As his band turn their hand to *The Castle Hall* from 1998's *Into The Electric Castle*, the tall, lithe, black-clad figure takes to the stage to tumultuous cheers from the packed throng, and throws the prerequisite rock star shapes. Later he'll sing the same album's *Amazing Flight In Space* and address the crowd like a veteran stage performer.

Eight hours earlier he'd been adamant at how terrifying the prospect was for him. Yet half an hour after the gig, a buoyant, beaming Lucassen is asking *Prog* what we thought of the show, clearly buzzing from the experience. Of course, if you sell out three nights at Tilburg's biggest venue, and could have probably sold it out ten times more, you'd be buzzing too.

It's an interesting scenario to someone from another country, where Lucassen's reluctance to perform live means we're limited to just his music – largely Ayreon, but other side projects too. Admittedly, the scope of that music is far from limited, but devoid of the personal touch of live performance, sometimes things get lost in translation.

There's no problem translating what lies before us in Tilburg, though. The place is awash with prog musicians and fans, all focused on the 013, many of whom have, we're told, travelled from 51 different countries. There's no doubting that when Arjen Lucassen does perform a show, a lot of people want to see it.

I suppose it takes an obsessively singular creative vision to manage 16 singers from the worlds of prog and power metal, plus eight additional musicians, and work them into a show featuring music from all nine Ayreon albums (plus two tracks from *Star One*'s 2002 *Space Metal* debut). But then Lucassen is to his unique sci-fi universe what Chris Carter was to *The X-Files* or Joss Whedon to *Buffy*.

Once you know Lucassen was hugely inspired by *Jesus Christ Superstar*, this evening's spectacle become easier to unravel. With so many singers wandering on and off the stage (sometimes announced on the giant HD screen that spans the stage), the night often has more of the feeling of musical theatre, which is a little distracting at times. And it has to be said that one or two of the more metal-orientated singers overdo the vocal histrionics in a way that tends to explain why a lot of people on this side of the channel can't take power metal that seriously.

There's no such OTT melodrama with the prog-friendly contingent, though. Damian Wilson (a veteran of four Ayreon albums, as well as *Star One* and *Stream Of Passion*), Nightwish's Floor Jansen (Ayreon and *Star One*), Katatonia's Jonas Renkse (just 01011001 for now), Kayak's Edward Reekers (Ayreon) and Anneke van Giersbergen (Ayreon, *The Gentle Storm*) all acquit

themselves with aplomb, delivering the right blend of bombast and restraint. It's particularly enjoyable to see the normally reticent Renkse come out of his shell somewhat. However, that said, he's not a patch on the naturally ebullient Wilson.

Perhaps the best moment is a pyro-laden *Everybody Dies*, helmed by the Nightwish duo of Jansen and Marco Hietala, Nightmare's Maggy Luyten and Kamelot's Tommy Karevik. This hits such exquisite highs that Lucassen's own appearance, for just three numbers at the end, does seem like selling things a bit short.

Not that the crowd care one jot. They go predictably crazy, not even noticing that their hero has actually departed for closer *The Eye Of Ra*. He's back to take a final bow, though. Fitting every one of the night's performers on the stage for it is as impressive as pulling off this whole feat in the first place.

JERRY EWING

The fantastic Floor Jansen.



"The prog-friendly contingent acquit themselves with aplomb, delivering the right blend of bombast and restraint."



SIGUR RÓS

VENUE	APOLLO, MANCHESTER
DATE	17/09/2017

There are few bands as aurally mesmerising as veteran Icelandic post-rockers Sigur Rós, and with their newest light show and stage set, there are now few bands with such engrossing visuals. Skeletal pylons imply false

perspective or a vanishing point behind the stage, and a screen partitions it in two, with projections across it as the band play either in front or behind it.

Playing the second night of a three-night residency, the band are performing to what are for them intimate crowds. Although they've been a three-piece since the departure of keyboardist Kjartan

Sveinsson in 2013, they've usually toured with an expanded line-up. However, for these shows the band are on their own, and the sparse set up makes for a completely different feel.

Famous for singing in an imagined dialect of Icelandic, dubbed 'Hopelandic', on some tracks, as well as for playing the guitar using a cello bow, their frontman

Jónsi Birgisson leads the band through a set that takes in not only their more commercial material like *Festival* and *Glósóli*, but also sinister fare like the title track from *Kveikur*, arguably the darkest and bravest record in their discography.

Of the new tracks, latest single *Óveður* is the easiest to get a handle on, though it's a more angular, electronic tune



Reluctant Rock Star: Arjen Lucassen.

Mike Mills, of Aussie band Toehider.

The "naturally ebullient" Damian Wilson.

Tonight's Spectacle: more like a musical than a gig.

CRISTEL BROUWER

HAKEN

VENUE	THE FOUNDRY AT THE FILMORE PHILLY, PHILADELPHIA
DATE	01/09/2017
SUPPORT	SITHU AYE

Having released four critically acclaimed studio albums since forming in 2007, London's Haken have spent this year celebrating their 10th anniversary in several ways, such as a series of retrospective North American concerts. Their performance here demonstrates why they have had such a meteoric rise since starting out. While not perfect, it's a thrilling, endearing and varied show in a very leisurely setting - one with sofas and a sizeable bar.

Opening act Sithu Aye serve up a kind of technical instrumental wizardry that overtly emulates acts like An Endless Sporadic, Scale The Summit, and Nova Collective. Unfortunately, they lack much of the diversity and dynamics that make those better-known ensembles so fascinating, instead focusing almost entirely on an aggressive style of showmanship that rarely, if ever, offers anything distinguishing. They even play a song called *Anime As Leaders*, insinuating that even they regard themselves as copycats.

It's impressive on a musicianship level, but there's little added depth to their sound, and even their banter between tracks, though charmingly humble and humorous at first, becomes repetitive before too long.

Haken take to the stage and launch into several highlights from their latest album. Of particular note is the early one-two synth punch of 1985 and *Red Giant*, both of which sound very close to their studio counterparts (albeit being a bit muddled, with too much low-end) as vocalist Ross Jennings encourages audience participation while wearing glowing blue sunglasses.

Playing in front of an *Affinity* backdrop while adorned in blue, green, orange and white lights, they also replicate the rhythmically manic *The Endless Knot* and throwback agitator *The Architect* (featuring Next To None's Thomas Cuce in lieu of Leprous' Einar Solberg on growls) with great accuracy and joy.

The group also delve deeply into their back catalogue to honour their entire career. Fan-favourite *Cockroach King* earns deafening applause (though it was a bit lacking in terms of its trademark vocal counterpoints), while *Premonition* from *Visions* serves as a thrilling way to kick off their whole set.

Arguably the highlight of the entire night is the *Aquarius* medley, during which they offer a survey of the entire record with a seamless focus. All in all, it is a wonderful, if slightly flawed, way for the band and fans to commemorate how far Haken have come over the last decade.

JORDAN BLUM

that suggests an even more dramatic stylistic departure awaits on the band's upcoming album. By contrast, *Niður* and *Varða* suggest a return to the stripped-back version of the band at their mid-2000s commercial peak.

Though the band are relatively sedate on stage, there are moments of drama - Jónsi hurls his cello bow away

during one climax, and his face contorts on multiple occasions as he holds acrobatically high falsetto notes.

The set peaks as they crash into the climax of *Popplagið*, also known as *Untitled 8*. Jónsi flings himself across the stage and smashes the headstock of his upturned guitar against the floor, provoking howls of feedback.

To some consternation from a seated audience, he moves to the front of the stage and kicks several lights off the edge. He then knocks over both guitar cabs behind him, with a crash. It's a fittingly dramatic end to a squalling set that provokes a standing ovation from the crowd.

ALEX LYNHAM

MOSTLY AUTUMN

VENUE ISLINGTON O2 ACADEMY, LONDON
DATE 03/09/2017

With a chill in the air and drizzle hanging over the city, summer is definitely heading for the exit tonight as Mostly Autumn return to London for a mammoth two-part, three-hour show. The opening set sees the band play their latest album, *Sight Of Day*, in full.

"It's the first time we've had a go at that!" announces guitarist Bryan Josh after they successfully navigate the epic title track, and there's a sense that several of these new songs have yet to become muscle memory. In some cases that lends the proceedings a certain frisson as the musicians are at their most focused, but it does mean that some tracks sound a little stiff and self-conscious.

The septet temporarily become a quartet for the stripped-back *The Man Without A Name*, providing a showcase for the lofty tones of Olivia Sparnenn-Josh.

Tackling an album in full means taking the highs with the lows, and *Hammerdown* plods along without raising the pulse. Fortunately, that's followed by *Changing Lives*, one of only two songs where guitarist Chris Johnson takes the lead vocal. Mostly Autumn might be missing a trick here as Johnson is a strong singer, and *Changing Lives* has an alternative rock vibe that really lifts the room's energy.

Only *The Brave* has a mighty stomp that blends Big Country and Thin Lizzy with Jethro Tull. *Native Spirit* is an odd one – it's loaded with drama, featuring a ripping Josh guitar solo and wicked drumming from Alex Cromarty, but when Josh starts singing 'Give me Indians', you have to wonder what the hell he's on about. Anthrax's Native American anthem *Indians* this is not.

The first set reaches its crescendo with *Forever And Beyond*, then there's a short interval before the band delve into the back catalogue for the remainder of the evening. With a sweet but all too short drum solo from Cromarty and a massive jam at the end, *Skin On Skin* suggests Led Zeppelin in both folk and rock modes, although Josh and Sparnenn struggle to blend their very different voices.

Evergreen boasts another tasty lead workout from Josh and it's clear the players feel more confident and comfortable with the older material. *Silhouettes Of Stolen Ghosts* is played as a duet between Sparnenn, in very fine voice, and Iain Jennings on keys, before Johnson returns to the spotlight for the Pink Floyd vibes of *Silver Glass*.

The band encore with *Heroes Never Die*, by which point they've been playing for almost three hours, and those who've lasted the distance – presumably the punters without trains to catch – are left thoroughly sated. Autumn arrives in style.

DAVID WEST



"It's clear the players feel more confident and comfortable with the older material."



Iain Jennings adds keyboard flourishes.

WILL IRELAND

Olivia Sparnenn-Josh tackling *Sight Of Day* during an epic show.



Rhythm King: bassist Andy Smith.



Mostly Magic: Bryan Josh in full flight.

THE KVB

VENUE OSLO, LONDON
DATE 19/09/2017

So is there any black in a rainbow? It's a question that nags as The KVB bring a shroud of darkness around the usually multicoloured idiom of psychedelia. Not for them a swirl of lights and giddy euphoria, but a presentation that's as austere and glacial as the electronically driven music they present tonight.

The duo of singer/guitarist Nicholas Wood and singer/keyboardist Kat Day have clearly been stung by previous criticisms of their onstage performances that have occasionally gone beyond insouciance and into the realms of the utterly dispassionate. The more forgiving might have put this down to the tenderness of their years, or quite possibly a stagecraft hampered by shyness or stage fright, but the fact remains that their aloofness proved alienating to many audiences.

Not so tonight - Wood is clearly relishing his time on stage. Though his voice barely rises above a whisper at certain junctures - for instance, *Always Then* - his treated and flanged guitar blends seamlessly with the beats as a variety of throbs and drones emanate from Day's corner. And on more than one occasion, the once-static musician stalks across the stage with his instrument while exhorting reactions from his audience.

For her part, Day still plays the role of the ice maiden, but rather than any disdain for those gathered here tonight, this is more down to her concentration, as she presides over an array of keyboards, sequencers and mixers.

The mechanised beats that drive The KVB's sound are doing their job, and there's an encouragement to be had in seeing a London audience actually moving in time with the music.

The band are canny enough to realise that the presentation of just two musicians on stage - one of whom is anchored behind a bank of electronic weaponry - provides hardly any visual satisfaction, so it's to their credit that their icy music is accompanied by a wall of preprogrammed visuals that dominate the rear of the stage. Images of brutalist architecture, iron structures and desolate, industrial landscapes are all present and correct, and the shots of the slowly breaking ice floes that complement the chill of *In Deep* are a particularly nice touch.

Not all of it works, unfortunately. For instance, their reworking of the Rolling Stones' *Sympathy For The Devil* is a serious misfire. The funk of the original song is replaced with a martial delivery, and its menace is totally lost thanks to what appears to be an unfamiliarity with the characters that lie at the heart of the song, as well as a rather cut'n'paste approach to the lyrics.

The hooks of *Never Enough* redeem the band though, and prove that there's black running through this rainbow like the colours through a stick of rock.

JULIAN MARSZALEK

THE PINEAPPLE THIEF

VENUE ULU, LONDON
DATE 16/09/2017
SUPPORT GODSTICKS

"We're going to play quite a few songs from an album that's not out yet, so you can't sing along even if you want to," announces Godsticks frontman Darran Charles.

In fact, the Welsh band are brave enough to pretty much base tonight's set upon their forthcoming fourth record, *Faced With Rage*, spitting out three newbies in a row. Based on churning metal riffs, the music is perhaps a little heavier than genre purists might prefer from a support act. Songs such as *Revere*, *Guilt* and *Lack Of Scrutiny* are somewhat bare in the hooks department, but their Frippian solos elevate them from a status that could otherwise be considered mediocre.

Having begun life with a gig in a skittle alley just down the road from leader Bruce Soord's house in Somerset, The Pineapple Thief have come a long way from 'bedroom band' status, and are now popular enough to sell out mid-sized venues such as Islington's Assembly Hall.

Quite why they're back in London a mere nine months after doing precisely that, filming a multimedia DVD/Blu-ray package on the night is a little beyond *Prog's* comprehension. However, on one of the final warm Saturday nights of the year, a packed-out ULU is buzzing for a last chance to hear the band's current album *Your Wilderness* in its entirety, plus a Facebook-voted trawl through the remainder of their 10 albums.

Just like labelmates Godsticks, the headliners' sound has an underlying heaviness that doesn't



Lost in Your Wilderness: Soord feels the vibes.

always sit comfortably with the more complex aspects of their oeuvre, though The Pineapple Thief boast a far superior command of melody and songcraft. They resist the temptation to perform *Your Wilderness* in its original running order, while also adding its final track, *Where We Stood*, omitted last time out, to the setlist.

The presence of Gavin Harrison on *Your Wilderness* and as part of tonight's line-up explains a proliferation of Steven Wilson T-shirts in the audience, but for the most part, the Porcupine Tree/King Crimson drummer reels in any possible sense of showboating. This is fitting as Soord recently revealed that Harrison is "up for doing the band's next album", to be recorded once this tour is over.

The best tune of the night is also the group's proggiest - surprise, surprise!

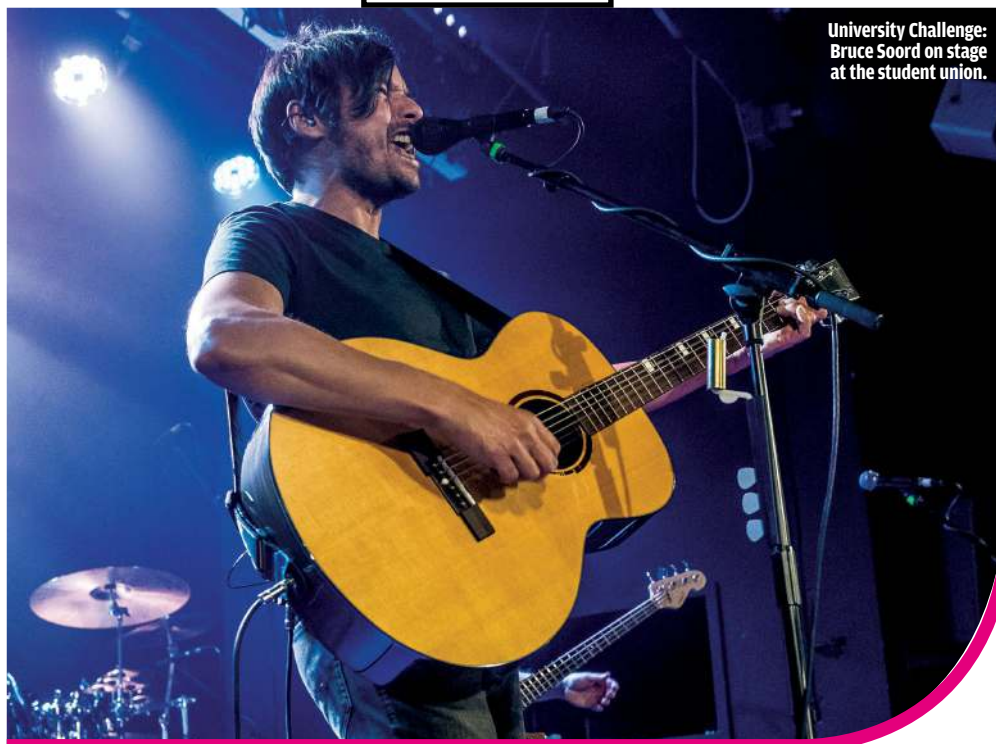
- a 10-minute piece from *Your Wilderness* called *The Final Thing On My Mind*. The song closes the show proper, Harrison's drums going off like cannons during its eye-watering midsection.

Returning for a well-deserved two-song encore, featuring *Snowdrops* and *Nothing At Best*, this correspondent departs the ULU musing upon a set that was undoubtedly enjoyable, if sometimes a little directionless.

DAVE LING



"There's an underlying heaviness that doesn't always sit comfortably with the more complex aspects of their oeuvre."



University Challenge: Bruce Soord on stage at the student union.

WILLIAM D DRAKE

VENUE	NEW CROSS INN, LONDON
DATE	06/09/2017

Outside the venue, there's the whiff of uncomfortable aggression on the streets tonight. Inside, though, there's a serenity, a sense of smiling calm. This gig celebrates the 10th anniversary of Onomatopoeia Records, and Drake is headlining the all-day event.

Given that many have been here for several hours by the time he goes onstage, Drake's opening comment seems apposite: "Is there anybody here still sober?" To his surprise, several hands shoot up.

The location itself is rather odd. The five-piece ensemble are all crammed onto the tight stage. Much of the floor space is taken up with benches and tables, set at angles, which makes it awkward to watch the stage, while many play pool throughout the performance, just a few yards away. However, this all adds an appropriate intimacy to proceedings.

Drake's music has a baroque eccentricity and melodrama, and it's also laced with a quirky English eccentricity. This is early Genesis mixing things up with Elgar, while under the influence of Gentle Giant and *The Goon Show*. It's certainly surreal, but carries an affecting charm. Drake himself is an expressive pianist, and while he doesn't have an obviously tuneful vocal style, the way he modulates his tone has a thespian conviction as he recounts stories through the lyrics.

Many of the songs are short, catching out the audience as they unexpectedly end. Occasionally it takes a second or two for the deserving applause to ring out. *The Catford Clown* and *Distant Buzzing* are particular highlights, allowing Drake and guitarist Richard Larcombe to complement each other. There's a real rapport between the pair, which becomes obvious later when they spontaneously grab each other's hands and break into a burst of pogoing! Meanwhile, James Larcombe on the hurdy-gurdy adds some neat fairground touches.

While the set has clearly been meticulously worked out, there's room left for spontaneity. So, when *On The Dry Land* gets a good reaction, Drake decides to repeat it straight away, and this gets an even more dynamic response. In fact, there are a few in the crowd asking him to play it for a third time, but the temptation is resisted.

The main performance ends with the breathtaking *Melancholy World*, one of the few lengthy excursions that goes through several tempo changes and is wrapped in a rhythmic coat of weariness. The song is imaginative and careworn, showcasing Drake's talent for weaving a dark tale.

By contrast, the jaunty *Love In An Overcoat*, during the encore, has a lightness that could easily cross over to the mainstream.

Drake and his ensemble never lose sight of being entertaining, and combine this with a musical depth that's remarkable. It works splendidly in this most unusual locale.

MALCOLM DOME



"While the set has clearly been meticulously worked out, there's room left for spontaneity."

Drake has "Baroque eccentricity and melodrama".



MINAMI DEUTSCH

VENUE	SHACKLEWELL ARMS, LONDON
DATE	16/09/2017

Information on Minami Deutsch is difficult to come by. Appearing in 2014, the Japanese trio put out a tape in 2015, also released on 12-inch by UK label Cardinal Fuzz. Word of mouth led to initial pressings selling out, and a 2016 performance at the Liverpool International Festival Of Psychedelia proved to be a highlight. All this has led to a boisterous crowd packing in for their debut in the capital.

For this evening's performance, the band have expanded the line-up to a quartet, with the addition of Keita Ise on bass. Wasting no time, the four launch into a new number that has much in common with the power-minimalism of early Hawkwind or Spacemen 3, a simple, steady riff that sounds like it will just repeat until fade, but seven minutes in, this starts to phase in and out as the band mess with the formula.

The first sign of the Neu! influence the band are renowned for occurs during *Futsu Ni Ikirenai*, another song that quickly settles into a groove, but halfway through, a fuzzed solo from

guitarist Kyotaro Miula comes in that genuinely makes people jump. Not to be outdone, Taku Idemoto takes his own wah-wah solo over the fade-out of his bandmate's one.

The Michael Rother/Klaus Dinger sound continues on *Sunrise, Sunset*, a circular guitar pattern that sticks in the head. It would be an obvious set closer from the released material, but the band are obviously confident in their new songs, and push on with a number that resembles the pastoral prog psych of labelmates Kikagaku Moyo.

The actual set finale is a frantic number that summons the spirits of

Can's recently departed Holger Czuckay and Jaki Liebezit to the room. Idemoto signals for the drummer's attention, and taps out a suggested beat on the body of his guitar for the final number, a high-speed run-through of single *Tunnel*.

Gigs like tonight are starting to shine a spotlight on a band that have been in the shadows quite long enough, and the skills honed on their Live Krautrock Night covers events back in Japan are now rendering audiences near speechless. Tonight, all that could be heard are cries of, "Oh yeah!" Can would've been proud.

GAVIN HOBSON

DEADLY CIRCUS FIRE

VENUE	THE BLACK HEART, LONDON
DATE	24/08/2017
SUPPORT	TACOMA NARROWS BRIDGE DISASTER

A charity show in aid of the Heavy Metal Truants, tonight's bill promises to raise money for good causes, and also to raise awareness of two young British bands operating at the heavier end of the prog spectrum.

Tacoma Narrows Bridge Disaster have undergone two personnel changes since 2015's excellent *Wires/DreamWires* album. Guitarist/vocalist Drew Vernon and bassist Tom Granica have recruited drummer Ben Wilsker and also second guitar player Andrea Longo.

The elegiac closing track on that album may mark this transition, but is not a wholly successful set opener. *Passing* probes the air hesitantly, oozing atmosphere with Vernon's disembodied vocal and clean guitar motif. But it's not until the instrumentals *Murasame* and *Oko* that the climate changes and the band fully hit their stride.

With obvious influences from Tool and Pelican, their dynamic post-rock begins to surge. Themes ebb from initial capitulation into ambient ghosts and return as sonic tsunami. This is mesmeric, deftly-crafted music on a par with Russian Circles.

Two brand new tracks close the set; one is another vocal song with guess-the-time-signature complexity. They whet the appetite for the next release from this exciting London outfit.

Deadly Circus Fire are also showing off a new line-up. Founding vocalist Adam Grant left in 2016. His diversity and range was never going to be easy to replace, so it's all eyes and ears on new boy David Pear.

With only a month of rehearsals under his belt, this could prove a Herculean task. Appropriately, astride the stage monitors with flowing blond hair, Pear looks like he has stepped from the pages of Roman legend.

Leviathan, from the 2013 debut *The King And The Bishop*, puts him through his paces, alternating between clean baritone and gruff metal. Deadly Circus Fire are clearly in debt to Tool, but rebrand it as a more mercurial, lithe beast, as evidenced by the gymnastic shapes being thrown by bassist Mike Enort and guitarist Save Addario.

Rise Again and *House Of Plagues* combine Eastern modes and fist-pumping, pummelling heaviness, while new song *Shinigami Fall* is the equal of these fan favourites. This is very strong material, and passionately performed, but there is one problem.

The subtlety and intricacy of the recordings are lost in the room. This is an accomplished band, with songwriting-savvy maturity well beyond their two-album career. Victims of their own vision, they need to convey those intricacies that they capture so well in the studio in a live setting. Let's hope their continued rise allows that to happen soon.

CHRIS MCGAREL

DREAM THEATER

VENUE	PALAIS THEATRE, MELBOURNE
DATE	20/09/2017

The grand old masters of prog rock and metal take the stage in the grand old dame of Melbourne's live music scene. A crescendo of orchestral music heralds Dream Theater's return to Australian shores for the first time in three years on a night of celebration. It's 25 years since the release of the album that truly broke the band worldwide, the soaring *Images And Words*, and both the band and the almost-capacity crowd are in a festive mood.

Before revisiting their classic album, the five-piece build a little tension with an hour-long set of tracks from their back catalogue. There's monstrous opener *The Dark Eternal Night*, *As I Am* (which includes a snippet from Metallica's *Enter Sandman*), the excellent instrumental track *Hell's Kitchen* and the epic *Breaking All Illusions*, plus a rather discordant John Myung tribute to classic jazz bassist Jaco Pastorius, namely *Portrait Of Tracy*.

After a 20-minute breather, the band return with a mock radio show coming over the PA. Playing several hits from the era in which *Images And Words* was released, it illustrates the point that they were seriously

going against the grain, stylistically, compared to what was going on at the time. It didn't matter – they have survived, prospered and excelled since then by forging their own unique path.

Has this album stood the test of time? As the anthemic *Pull Me Under* leads into second track *Another Day*, and as the band progress through the track list to the triumphant closer *Learning To Live*, the answer is a resounding yes. These songs transcend time and trends, and tonight they're delivered with an exuberance that belies the band members' years, and with the level of technical wizardry they're famous for. That's particularly true of John Petrucci, whose guitar style juxtaposes technique and feel like few other players in history, and who is ageing like the finest of wine.

For many bands, an hour's opening set and then a classic album played in its entirety would have been enough. Many would have taken their bows and retreated to the after-

party and the rider at this point, but not these guys. They believe in the concept of giving their fans value for their hard-earned cash, so they delve into another DT classic from the 90s, tackling all 23 minutes of the *A Change Of Seasons* EP. Played end to end, this music sounds as fresh and majestic as it did the day it came out.

If there's a band on the planet who can lay claim to the title of 'greatest prog metal band of all time', here they are. Dream Theater add further lustre to their illustrious aura tonight.

ROD WHITFIELD

"These songs transcend time and trends, and tonight they're delivered with an exuberance that belies the band members' years."



Dream Theater evoke a "festive mood" tonight.



Keys man Jordan Rudess.



James LaBrie reaches for the stars.

JUSTIN HAYWARD

VENUE CLIFFS PAVILION, SOUTHEAST
DATE 18/09/2017

A packed house greets Justin Hayward on the Essex coast tonight. It's the sort of venue where usherettes sell ice cream in the auditorium between acts, and Justin Hayward is on at an unfashionably early 8.15pm, but while it might not be very rock'n'roll, the sound is crystal clear. Hayward, on acoustic guitar, is joined by Julie Ragins, a touring member of The Moody Blues, on keyboards and backing vocals; and guitarist Mike Dawes, who switches between acoustic and electric.

The opening *Out And In* establishes that Hayward isn't trying to replicate the sound of

the band with which he's most associated, however much the set draws on their greatest hits. The crowd recognises *Tuesday Afternoon* almost instantly, and the bouncy riff brings the room to life. *This Morning*, from 1975's *Blue Jays* album, lends itself to the acoustic format, with nimble finger-picking guitar work from Hayward that was smothered by strings on the studio version.

"We're going to do some new things and old things in the show. I've got a lot of old things," Hayward jokes before *Lovely To See You*. And the middle of the set sees the singer dipping into his solo work, particularly 2013's *Spirits Of The Western Sky*, while passing through his 70s and 80s releases like *Songwriter* and *Night Flight*.

In *Your Blue Eyes*, *The Western Sky* and new composition *The Wind Of Heaven* are all well crafted and gracefully performed, although they lack the progressive scope and ambitious structures of the Moodies material. They're just a bit Radio 2. Hayward's voice has aged well, and while he seems slightly careful in the early stages whenever the high notes

come into view, by the mid-point he sounds confident and comfortable.

Dawes, all tossed hair and sculpted cheekbones, provides tasteful accompaniment, and his percussive use of the body of his acoustic guitar adds a little drive to *One Day*, *Someday*. *Forever Autumn* goes down a storm, while the folksy *Never Comes The Day* gets the audience clapping along.

The final stretch features the sort of material most songwriters can only dream of, beginning with *Your Wildest Dreams*, which sounds gorgeous in this acoustic format, without the heavy production of the 1988 recording. "I need your help in this song," confesses Hayward before *Question*. "There's a line in the middle I can't get to any more."

And true to his word, Hayward leaves the high notes for the audience, who are only too happy to oblige. But he has no trouble hitting all the big moments in *Nights In White Satin*, which earns a standing ovation, and he encores with *I Know You're Out There Somewhere*. With material like that, Hayward just can't miss.

DAVID WEST

KEVIN NIXON



L-R: Justin Hayward, Mike Dawes, Julie Ragins.

Man Of The Hour: Justin Hayward.

KINDRED SPIRIT

VENUE THE MILL, PLUMSTEAD
DATE 23/09/2017

Deep in suburban south-east London, Kindred Spirit are playing in the corner of a pub beneath a sign that reads, 'One Prosecco, Two Prosecco, Three Prosecco, Floor'. There's no stage, and they're competing with chatter from nearby tables and the clatter of balls on the pool table. Elaine Samuels is playing a guitar that looks less like an instrument and more like a piece of revolutionary fitness equipment, the kind of thing

advertised on late night shopping channels. She also has what she describes as a "stinking" cold, but you'd never know.

Ostensibly a folk rock band with loftier ambitions than most – new album *Phoenix Rising* features a cover of America's *Horse With No Name* that's half reel, half supper jazz – Kindred Spirit's songs tend to veer away from hey nonny nonny towards the bigger picture: science, fantasy, the future of humanity, that sort of thing. And while some of the lyrics might be considered trite, the music is genuinely ambitious, with thoughtful, grown-up arrangements. Samuels' subtle guitar work underpins everything, while

Martin Ash's dazzling violin and Stevie Mitchell's flute and sax lead the way. Ash is particularly entertaining, with a shaggy hair/beard combo and a proclivity for leaping about. It all sits somewhere between Solstice, Lindisfarne and The Moody Blues, and the first half highlights include the wistful, whimsical *Children Of The Stars*, and a version of *Wolves At The Gate* that feels genuinely cinematic, even in these surroundings.

The second half gravitates towards older material, with two tracks from 2005's *In The Doghouse* and four from 2009's *Metamorphosis*. During the latter's title track, a battered ice bucket is ferried

around the pub so the grateful may reward the band. There's even some attempts at audience participation, with requests to pump fists as the rousing *Best Days* peaks, and to point at fellow punters during *One More Day*.

The climax comes with a cover of Fleetwood Mac's *The Chain*, and even the bar staff applaud. The crowd has thinned, and at this point Kindred Spirit appear to be playing as much for each other as for what's left of the audience. They deserve better, but seem determined. "Give us a like or a share," suggests Ash. "So we don't feel friendless and miserable."

FRASER LEWRY

DIVISIONISTS

VENUE THE BETSY TROTWOOD, LONDON
DATE 08/09/2017

“We are Divisionists, and we play rock music,” is vocalist Brendan Quinn’s introduction to tonight, but he might be underselling their scope. Over the course of three albums, his previous band, Boston-based Abunail, covered psychedelia, folk rock, space rock and, on one album, too many genres to even list. Divisionists have been posited as a return to a more straightforward sound, but there’s still so much happening here.

Opener *Success* instantly brings to mind The Beatles, but William McGregor’s drumming and backing vocals push it into The Who’s early territory, being three minutes of forceful pop. Lifting guitar work from Mark Bennett introduces *Fraction Of Grace*, a subtly psychedelic number resembling an uptempo Galaxie 500. That then flows into *Dream Landscape*, where the band’s folk influences begin to show, coupled together with a solo that wouldn’t sound out of place on one of Marillion’s early albums.

Just as it seems we’ve settled into a mellow groove, Quinn dedicates a song to the world leaders who have taken away his peace of mind, and grinding distortion signals the start of *The First Casualty*. Coupled with Mike Whitaker’s bassline, this conjures images of Neil Young stomping around the stage.

Temporarily spent, the band then drift into *Colours*, the longest, most atmospheric song of the evening. *Moonlight Devil* sees their folk side once again coming to the fore, a cautionary ballad on the demonic perils of love that’ll have fans looking for ‘trad. arr.’ on the album cover (the song is all theirs).

A straight-ahead rocker, *All Fall Down* pounds along relentlessly, the bass occasionally twisting away from the main thrust of the song. Up next is *Say Can You*, which is the album’s lead single, and has seen comparisons to the melodic, alternative rock of Teenage Fanclub and the Lemonheads, but with its melancholy tone and wah-wah soloing, it arguably more closely resembles The Bevis Frond, whom Quinn has shared stages with in the past.

For the closer we finally get that trad. arr. number threatened earlier, *Barbara Allen*, which was reputedly Samuel Pepys’ and George Washington’s favourite song, although the frontman confesses, “I first heard it from that noted underground figure Porky Pig.” It’s an acid folk raga that sees the venue flooded with psychedelia from both the band and the visuals, which are provided by one-time bandmate Joe Turner.

Divisionists manage to take a whole heap of influences and roll them into a coherent whole. Not bad for a band that just play rock music.

GAVIN HOBSON

JOHN HACKETT

VENUE EAST MOLESEY METHODIST CHURCH, SURREY
DATE 08/09/2017

This charming church in a quiet residential side street can’t host many gigs, which may explain the apologetic greeting at the door – “You do know that this isn’t a regular rock gig, don’t you?” But tonight they are showcasing John Hackett, with his prolific five-decade long career encompassing classical and full-on rock.

Easing in gently, Hackett kicks off a varied night by playing a short duo set with collaborator Nick Fletcher on classical guitar. With Hackett playing a strange looking instrument – “It’s a vertical flute, not a plumbing tool!” – they open with the spritely yet gentle *Entr’acte*, by French composer Ibert, and Hackett’s own *Freefall*, a pastoral musical sketch evocative of wide open skies. The involved unison playing and Vivaldi meets the Gipsy Kings style of Hackett’s *Red Hair* and the slow yearning of Gismonti’s *Agua e Vinho* create a rich, aural tapestry complemented by the venue’s acoustics.

Three solo tunes from Fletcher follow, demonstrating both accomplished talent and great taste, with a couple of classical guitar pieces and the more contemporary ballad feel of his own composition, *Letter From Vermont*.

Ushering in a full plugged-in band set, celebrating their first proper album release *We Are Not Alone*, the multi-talented Hackett switches to keyboards and they start boldly with the decidedly 80s neo-prog feel of *Whispers*. Cranked up guitar and bright cymbals feel suddenly overly loud and brash and, although the sound does settle, Hackett’s keyboards sadly remain buried in the mix.



Piano Man:
John Hackett.

Look Up evokes early Marillion, before Hackett demonstrates his versatility by taking the warm, slightly vulnerable lead vocal of the languid *Life In Reverse*. The evening’s first half closes with the multifaceted *Take Control* which, while featuring some great instrumental breaks and playing from both vocalist/bassist Jeremy Richardson and Fletcher on lead guitar, does feel a little disjointed.

The band really warm up post-interval – an exhortation to dance introducing the syncopated blues/prog of *Burnt Down Trees* quickly followed by the jazz funkiness of drummer Duncan Parsons’ instrumental *Queenie And Elmo’s Perfect Day*. This half of the evening introduces further variety – the organised chaos and space rock of *Ego and Id*, Parsons’ part spoken word part stand-up routine, the 5/4 acoustic pop ballad *Stella*, and Hackett’s part auto-biographical *Never Gonna Make A Dime* all vying for attention, and a furious, spirited full band encore of *Red Hair* is met with warm, rapturous applause.

At times this evening’s performance does lose a bit of focus and direction. However, it’s still relatively early days for the band, and with the enormous experience, talent, variety and fine tunes at their disposal, finding a consistent, potent collective voice is surely just a matter of time.

GARY MACKENZIE

“At times this evening’s performance does lose a bit of focus and direction.”



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KEVIN NIXON



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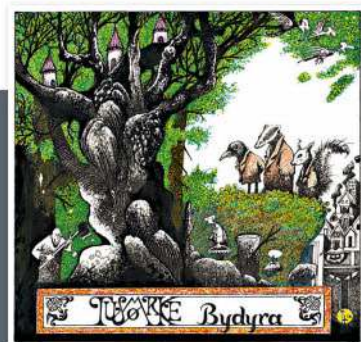


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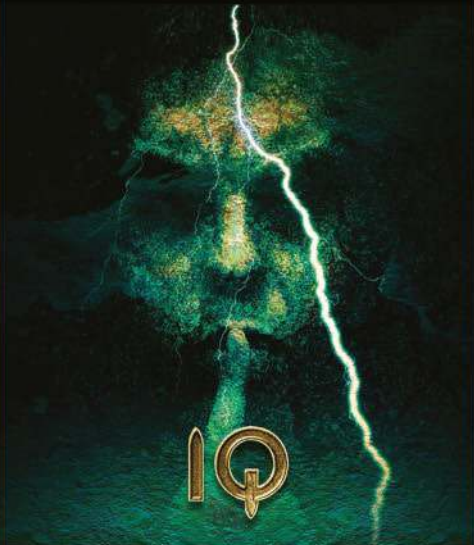
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Where's home?

The planet Treskelion in the Beta Quadrant – I am here on reconnaissance.

Your earliest prog memory?

Star Trek and *Dark Side Of The Moon*. *Star Trek* is so prog, the mantra is to boldly go where no man has gone before and at its purest, most ideal inception, that's what prog music is.

First prog record you bought?

Duran Duran, *Rio*. That's me being stupid, but it's one of the first records I had



and when you are a kid, everything is revolutionary and new to you. And a lot of the pop songwriting in the 80s wasn't

obvious, so this is prog to me.

First prog gig attended?

Bryan Adams on the *Reckless* tour for the same reasons as before. I'd never been to a gig, it was as mesmerising and thrilling as *Live At Pompeii*. But if we're talking about a real prog band... that's more complicated cos I'll have to engage my brain and go back through the archives of my mind.

Favourite gadget?

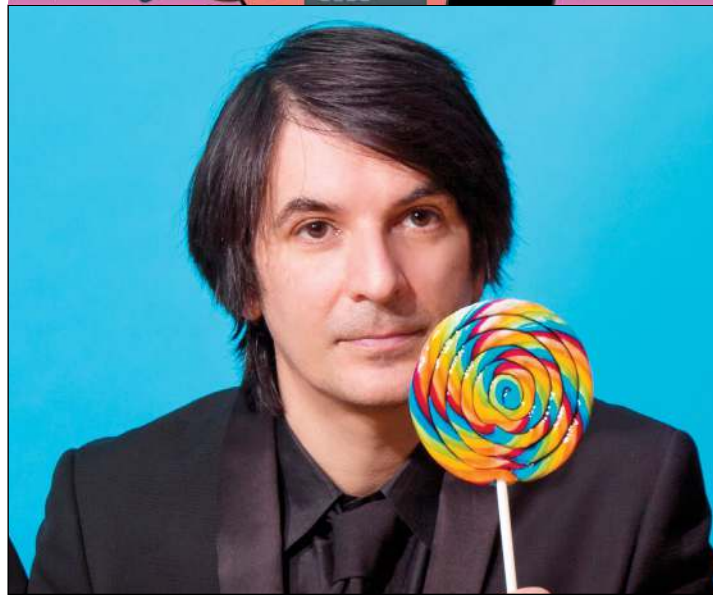
The Swarovski HotFix™ Rhinestone Applicator, as featured very lateat night on The Shopping Channel. I've never used it, it was an impulse buy. But next time you see me I'll be covered head-to-toe in rhinestones. I'm going to do a massive comedy cock on the back of my jacket.

Any guilty musical pleasures?

Making love to *The Flight Of The Valkyries* while eating Ferrero Rocher chocolates. That speaks for itself.

What would be your specialist subject on Mastermind?

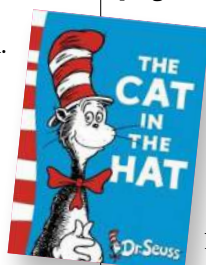
I had this conversation with my family recently. The kids didn't know *Mastermind* so we were watching it and saying we should play it together this Christmas, then I realised I don't have a specialist subject. I'm fascinated by everything. Or I could do the History Of Specialised Subjects On *Mastermind*.



Sel Balamir

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Jo Kendall.**

Who would be your all-time prog hero?



Dr Seuss. Maybe that's my *Mastermind* subject. He's a nebulous, ambient thing that comes to you in moments of crisis: would you pull a tooth from a Rinkadink Fink? No, I wouldn't.

Favourite prog venue?

The Rockosmos Turntable. That's where things really start happening. The Deaf Institute in Manchester is hard to beat, though, for a really good, quaint venue. It used to be a philanthropic place for disabled people in the late 1800s, then it became a cinema/theatre, now it's a new venue but still got the old school style seating. I think it's great.

Outside of prog, what else are you into?

I like handicrafts and extreme sports, particularly wind-surfing. It's like playing guitar, I get

the same feeling as jamming with my friends when I'm on the water. It's meditative and you're at one with the elements, but it's the same energy as being plugged in, feeling that emotion and electricity.

What do you collect?

Currently, parking tickets from Brighton And Hove Council. I collected stamps when I was a kid, still impressed by Stanley Gibbons, a great name.



Star Trek is so prog, the mantra to boldly go where no man has gone before...



What was the last prog album you bought?

The Dead Pirates' *Highmare* on deluxe 180 gram vinyl. They're a London band, I found on Spotify and I've binged on about them ever since.



Last prog gig you saw?

Spratleys Japs at The Green Door Store in Brighton. They came out of the Cardiacs, formed by Tim Smith and Jo Spratley. Tim can't perform right now, but Jo has this tiny doll-like demeanour and can sound quite creepy.

Ever had a prog date?

Yes. She even sang a Cardiacs song to me. It ended in marriage and children.

Most important prog song?

Carmina Burana by Carl Orff. It's the most over-the-top and flamboyant thing – ideally it would feature Ozzy Osbourne on handclaps and dancing.

Prog muso you'd like to work with?

Les Dawson. He could take something, deconstruct and reconstruct it in any way. He'd take it to a new dimension. *You Hum It – We'll Kill It*, that would have been our first full length album.



ITV/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

Your all-time favourite prog album cover?

The one which was just white because The Beatles couldn't be arsed to pay for a designer, the tight arses. It's pretty prog thinking though. They were the first to go backwards in making elaborate sleeves, the anti-*Sgt Pepper*.

What are you up to at the moment?

Working on releasing the new Thumpermonkey EP and LP on my Rockosmos label. There will be more gigs and more records next year. God damn.

Trippin' With Dr Faustus is out now via Rockosmos. See www.rockosmos.com.

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"Radiohead meet Hawkwind"

THE GUARDIAN



PANEGYRIC & DGM proudly present:

King Crimson

Sailors' Tales

King Crimson 1970-1972 27 Disc Boxed Set

With a wealth of previously unheard studio recordings from band rehearsals to full alternate mixes and a vast array of live material, much of it on CD/Blu-Ray for the first time, including four recently found, never before released concerts, this set presents the complete King Crimson recorded history of the period in the best quality audio possible.

- **3 CDs** featuring Steven Wilson and Robert Fripp stereo mixes of *In The Wake Of Poseidon*, *Lizard & Islands* + additional tracks.

- **6 CDs** feature the Islands line-up's early concerts from Germany (new to CD) & the UK (1971).

- **9 CDs** feature live recordings (several new to CD and/or previously unreleased in any format) from the 1972 US tour, including a new stereo mix of *Summit Studios* and an expanded *Earthbound*.

- **3 bonus CDs** feature auditions for the Islands band and two further, as yet, unidentified concerts from 1972 (all previously unreleased)

- **4 Blu-Ray discs** contain the main studio albums in 5.1 Surround Sound & recent stereo editions mixed by Steven Wilson & Robert Fripp + 30th anniversary masters of the original stereo album mixes (all in 24/96 hi-res), plus extensive additional material with each disc also featuring a complete alternate album + a further selection of additional, related studio/live material in hi-res.

Lizard Blu-Ray also contains the audition material from bonus CDs

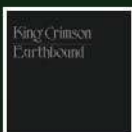
Islands Blu-Ray also contains the following concerts in stereo: Zoom Club (4 shows), Marquee, Plymouth, Glasgow, Detroit all from 1971.

Earthbound Blu-Ray features an expanded version of the original

album, *Summit Studios* gig newly mixed in Stereo & Quadraphonic, the *Schizoid Men* sequence from the *Ladies of the Road* album, 2 newly discovered concerts in hi-res stereo & every existing soundboard concert recording from the 1972 US tour:

- **2 DVDs** feature the expanded *Earthbound*, *Summit Studios*, *Schizoid Men*, *New York 1972* & the recently discovered live concerts.

- **Also includes:** 40-page album-sized booklet with previously unpublished photos, sleevenotes written by Sid Smith, Jakko Jakszyk & David Singleton, 3 posters, concert programme, & other memorabilia + access code for a further downloadable concert.



Earthbound expanded edition also available on CD/DVD

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