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ISSUE 95 01.02.19

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VARIOUS ARTISTS

'REVOLUTION: UNDERGROUND SOUNDS OF 1968'

(3CD CLAMSHELL BOX EDITION)

- Esoteric Recordings are pleased to announce the release of "Revolution – Underground Sounds of 1968", a 3CD clamshell boxed set celebrating the so-called "underground" rock music 1968, a year that saw huge changes, both musical and social. Aside from featuring better known acts such as Crazy World of Arthur Brown, Procol Harum and Pentangle, this compilation also features lesser known acts that produced work of a wide breadth such as Eyes of Blue, Love Sculpture, The Action, Dantalian's Chariot, Elmer Gantry's Velvet Opera, Gun, Second Hand, The Moles and Blonde on Blonde.





RENAISSANCE

'ASHES ARE BURNING'

(REMASTERED & EXPANDED EDITION)

- Esoteric Recordings are pleased to announce the release of a newly re- mastered and expanded edition of the classic 1973 album by Renaissance, "Ashes Are Burning". Re-mastered from the original Sovereign Records master tapes, this edition adds a previously unreleased thirty minute live performance for BBC Radio One's In Concert programme in 1974 (recently discovered in the archives).



TEAR GAS

'TEAR GAS'

(REMASTERED EDITION)

- Esoteric Recordings are pleased to announce the release of a newly re-mastered official CD release of the 1971 self-titled album by TEAR GAS. Tear Gas recordings are now highly sought after by collectors. This edition has been re-mastered from the surviving master tapes and the booklet features a new essay and restores the original album artwork.



PFM

'CELEBRATION, LIVE IN NOTTINGHAM 1976'

(2CD REMASTERED EDITION)

- Esoteric Recordings is pleased to announce the release of a 2CD live album featuring a concert by PFM, recorded at the University of Nottingham on 1st May 1976 during the UK tour to promote the album "Chocolate Kings". This album presents the entire concert over two CDs and features an illustrated booklet with essay.

ANTHONY PHILLIPS & ANDREW SKEET

'SEVENTH HEAVEN'

(3CD/1DVD REMASTERED & EXPANDED EDITION)

- A 4 Disc Clamshell re- mastered boxed set of the album "Seventh Heaven" by Genesis founder member ANTHONY PHILLIPS and ANDREW SKEET. This new edition features the original album newly re-mastered, along with a bonus CD featuring ten previously unreleased recordings. Also included is a DVD featuring a new 5.1 Surround Sound mix of "Seventh Heaven". This clamshell boxed set features an illustrated booklet with a new essay by Anthony Phillips archivist Jon Dann.





GREENSLADE

'GREENSLADE 'TIME & TIDE'

(EXPANDED & REMASTERED 2CD EDITION)

- Esoteric Recordings is proud to announce the release of a newly re- mastered and expanded 2 CD edition of the classic 1975 album, Time & Tide by GREENSLADE. Considered by many to be a band at their finest on stage, this edition includes a bonus CD featuring a superb sixty-minute concert recorded for Swedish Radio in March 1975 in Stockholm, re-mastered from the original Swedish Radio master tapes, offering a glimpse of the excellence of this short-lived line-up of band in a live environment and released officially for the very first time.



THE BYRDS

'BIRDS'

(REMASTERED EDITION)

- Esoteric Recordings are pleased to announce the release of a new re-mastered edition of the legendary 1973 reunion album by THE BYRDS; "Byrds". Released on the Asylum label in March 1973, "Byrds" saw the classic line-up of GENE CLARK, CHRIS HILLMAN, DAVID CROSBY, ROGER McGUINN and MICHAEL CLARKE fully reunited for the first time since 1966 (when Clark departed the group due to his fear of flying) and following the departure of Clarke and Crosby in 1967 – Clarke to the Flying Burrito Brothers and Crosby to Crosby, Stills and Nash (and Young).



THIRD EAR BAND

'MUSIC FROM MACBETH'

((REMASTERED & EXPANDED EDITION)

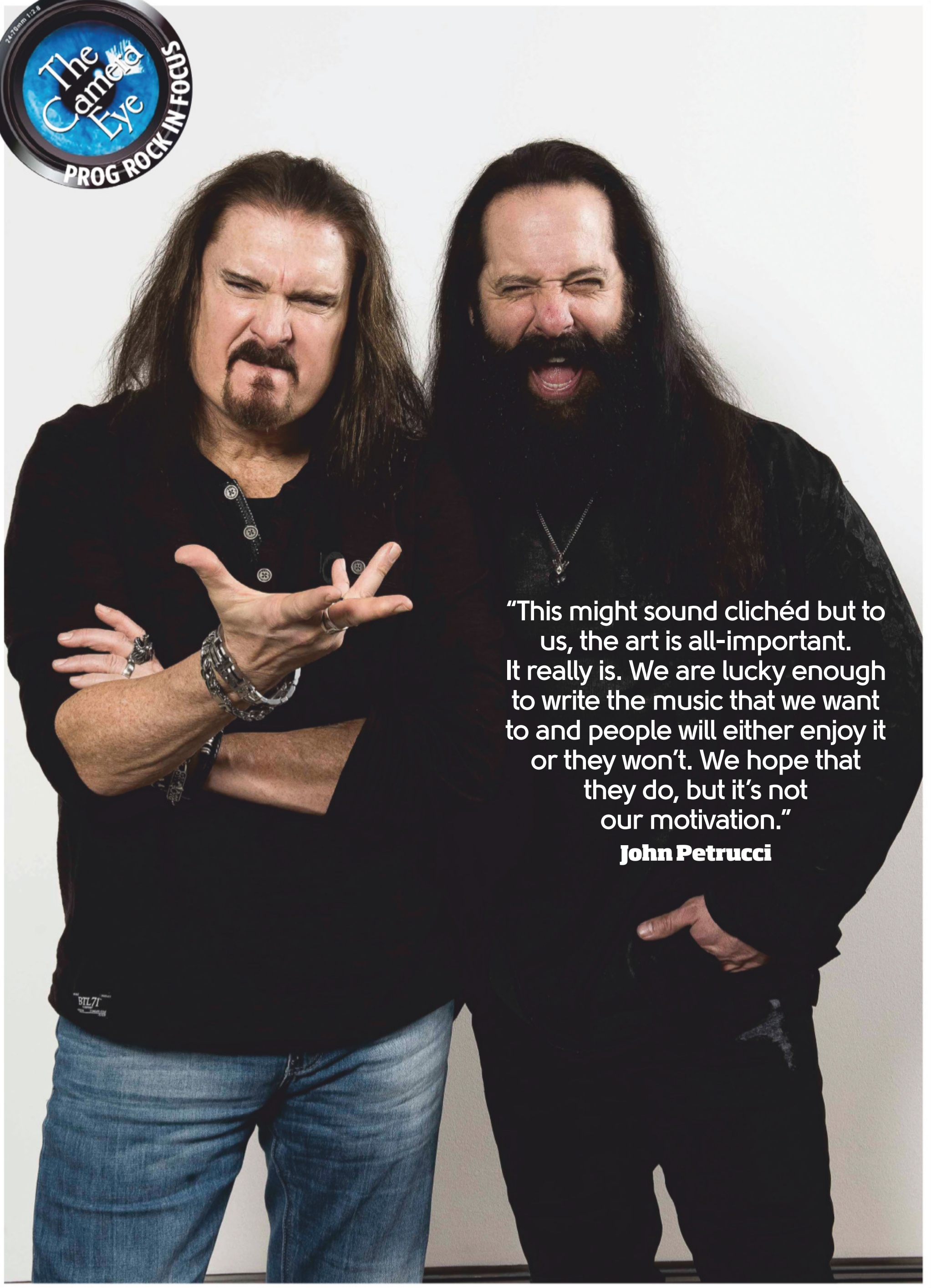
- Esoteric Recordings are pleased to announce the release of a new re-mastered and expanded edition of the classic 1972 soundtrack album to Roman Polanski's gritty film of Shakespeare's "Macbeth". Newly re-mastered from the original Harvest master tapes and includes four previously unreleased bonus tracks. The reissue restores the original album artwork and features an illustrated booklet with essay.

TANGERINE DREAM

'TANGERINE DREAM 'THE BLUE YEARS STUDIO ALBUMS 1985-1987'

(4CD REMASTERED CLAMSHELL BOXSET)

- Esoteric Recordings' Reactive label is pleased to announce the release of a newly re-mastered 4 CD clamshell boxed set which gathers together the first four legendary albums by Tangerine Dream, originally released on the Jive Electro label between 1985 and 1987, known by fans as "The Blue Years" albums. This clamshell box of "The Blue Years Studio Albums 1985 – 1987" features "Le Parc", "Green Desert", "Underwater Sunlight" and "Tyger" packaged in replica card sleeves and also includes a poster.



"This might sound clichéd but to us, the art is all-important. It really is. We are lucky enough to write the music that we want to and people will either enjoy it or they won't. We hope that they do, but it's not our motivation."

John Petrucci

WILL IRELAND

Ed's Letter



Welcome to the very first issue of *Prog* in 2019. A new year beckons, full of hope... Well, musical hope, at least. Twelve months of new releases, reissued old favourites and gigs galore. As with every new year, I'm always particularly excited about what delights lie ahead.

Of course, this being prog (and *Prog*), we also look back over our shoulders at what 2018 offered with the results of the Readers' Poll, in which you, the readers, get to have your say on the state of play. As usual it makes for fascinating reading, with new artists breaking through and topping their respective polls. And, shock of shocks, a one-time dead cert not winning anything at all! You'll find all the results on page 34. Endless debate will undoubtedly ensue.

Respecting our heritage is something we hold dear, and we've gone in depth for the cover story with Jethro Tull's *Stand Up*, an album, 50 years old this year, that saw Ian Anderson and co embrace new progressive sounds and gain their very first No.1 record. If old's your thing, there are also great interviews with Greenslade, Focus, Be-Bop Deluxe and Michael Rother too.

If it's new, then Dream Theater's *Distance Over Time* is a stonking return to prog metal form. Neal Morse is back with a new double concept album and there's The Claypool Lennon Delirium, The Windmill and Hexvessel to discover too.

No matter what the world throws at us, we have our music to savour, celebrate and enjoy. So strap yourselves in for another year of celebrating the finest genre of music there is in all its myriad forms.

As ever, prog on my friends. Prog on...



Jerry Ewing - Editor



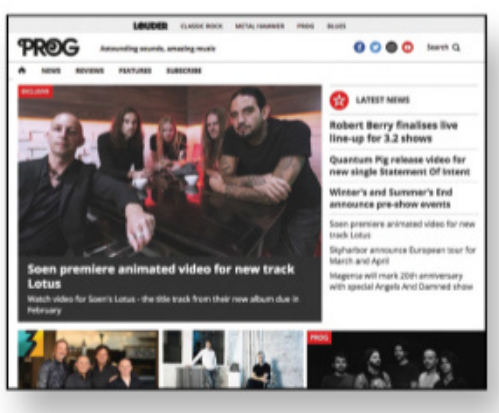
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Steve Hackett

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Bloody Well Write

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HOORAY FOR HACKETT

After reading the excellent Steve Hackett interview in *Prog* 94 (January 2019), I just want to say how totally impressed I am with him both as a musician and a person. My next album purchase will be his new one. That is an absolute given. Thanks, *Prog*, for the great insight into Steve as a musician and a thinker. As a music fan who enjoys this sort of thing very much, it was an absolute privilege to read.

Jeff Cooper



Above: *Prog* 94.

A MATTER OF OPINION...

I'm a little confused about your contradictory coverage of Valis Ablaze's *Boundless* album. In April, the magazine published a lukewarm review saying the album "fails to break new ground". However, in November the magazine published a glowing article saying the album is "breathing new life into the djent genre" and that the band are the "heirs to their forebears' throne". Whatever the reason for the change, I'm happy for it, as *Boundless* was my favourite prog album of 2018, just ahead of Voices From the Fuselage's *Odyssey: The Founder Of Dreams*. Incidentally, the *Odyssey* album also received a lukewarm review from the magazine, so I hope your view on that disc will eventually change just as it did for *Boundless*. Both are fantastic albums!

Michael Ebert

Hi Michael, this is simply a case of differing opinions between the writer of the review, and the writer of the feature. — Dep Ed



PRESS/ZAIN ZIA

Below: Valis Ablaze: *Boundless* praise or criticism?



Steve Hackett: an excellent human being.

CARSTEN WINDHORST

SNOBS OR SNUBBED?

I am writing to offer another view to the writer of your 'Star letter' and even more disappointingly the comments of InsideOut record label Thomas Waber, who were both moaning about the so-called 'Prog Snobs'.

From my own point of view, I found these comments to be of poor judgement. What they have to realise is that times are different from back in the 60s and 70s as to what they are now.

When I was growing up, musical taste was formed by the vinyl LPs that our brothers and friends were playing. It was an all-too-frequent sight seeing long-haired guys walking down the street with LPs under their arm on their way to educate another friend. We used to share/borrow albums and it was a very

TWEET TALK

Follow us on twitter.com/progmagazineUK

THEFIERCE&THEDEAD
@TFATD
Our friend Paul Hickman has made this amazing art for Stu's bass drum, thanks mate



MATT STEVEN

STEVE HACKETT
@HackettOfficial
This week rehearsing for Cruise To The Edge and On The Blue cruise... fab drummer Marco Minnemann has joined us for this...



STEVE HACKETT

RICK WAKEMAN
@GrumpyOldRick
Early this morning I was considering jogging to the village shop... Later this morning I will be reconsidering.

LETTER

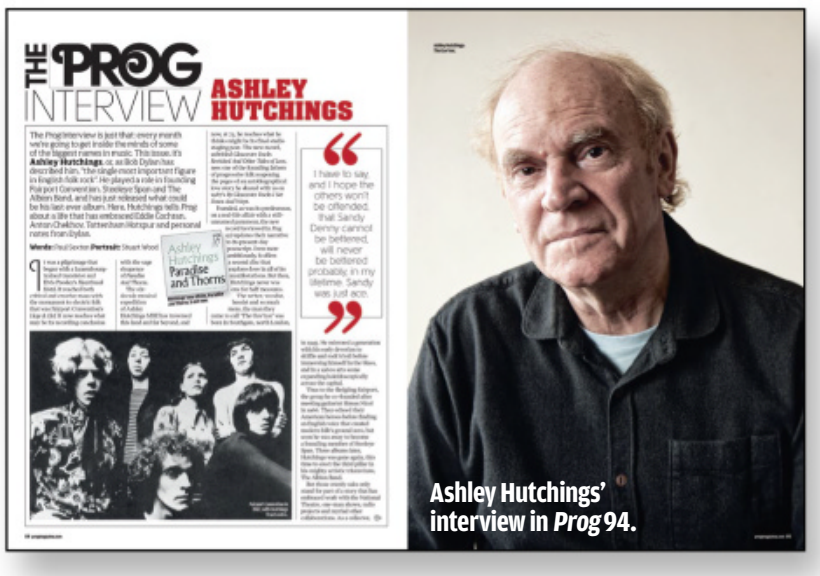


I really enjoyed the wide-ranging interview with Ashley Hutchings [*Prog* 94] but was surprised that Fairport Convention's eponymously titled first album on Polydor didn't get a mention. Released in 1968 when half the band were still in their teens, they had obviously been listening to a lot more than just American folk singers. It's their most prog album by far! Check out *Decameron* and *Sun Shade* — two tracks written by Richard Thompson with former schoolmates Paul Ghosh and Andrew Horvitch.

Above all, listen to *The Lobster,* a poem by George Painter set to music by Ashley and Richard. It is pure 1968 vintage prog rock.

Even at that early point in their career, Fairport were very accomplished musicians, and sharing bills at places like The Roundhouse and Middle Earth with the likes of Pink Floyd and Soft Machine was obviously having an effect! It's interesting to speculate what directions they might have gone in if the urge to reinvent British traditional folk music hadn't taken them. Thompson, incidentally, never lost his interest in stretching out, and the two albums by French Frith Kaiser Thompson, *Life, Love, Larf & Loaf* (1987) and *Invisible Means* (1990) are well worth checking out.

Frank Wilson


THE PROG INTERVIEW

ASHLEY HUTCHINGS

Ashley Hutchings' interview in *Prog* 94.

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

social scene back then, while the internet has all but made people insular. I am a dad of two and can tell you that this education system has long gone. There were also three local record shops, so you could go in and browse, and in some cases get a listen to bands or artists you had never heard of. Record shops have all but gone, and with it the social side.

Just because we like the older prog acts doesn't mean we don't like what's new and trending — it's just harder to find or have a listen to. We can't nip into the nearest record shop and find the latest single or album by new acts, or have a listen with friends. Old proggies like myself still play vinyl and I prefer to listen to music this way rather than through my Mac on YouTube. I know there is the sampler on the cover of your magazine, and this has introduced me to some acts that I quite like, but as I have pointed out, it's not snobbery, it's just that times are different.

Alex Aikman (not a snob in any way!)

DISCS OF DELIGHT

Just wanted to praise the last mag of 2018 [*Prog* 94]. The 'It's Prog Jim…' column has now cost me four CDs! Also, I cannot agree more with Jonny Sharp's essay on the CD. The "bottom and top" end of music always has to be "rolled off" for a vinyl album and that was then "restored" on playback (RIAA eq — or the so called Phono stage of your amp). CDs meant that the full frequency could be cloned, and the players have never stopped being improved.

Andrew Halley


PAPER LATE

IN PRAISE OF THE HUMBLE CD

A Prog writer on the wonders of the compact disc.

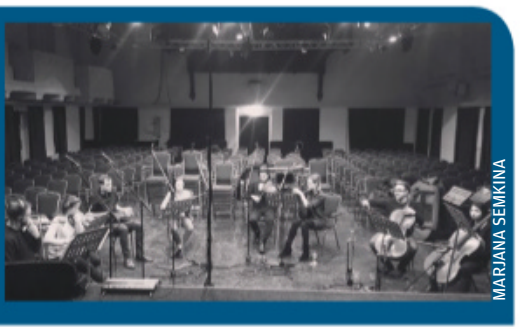
Is vinyl really the best format?

Our ode to the humble CD, in *Prog* 94.

ALAN REED
@3hobbits
'This beer is close, that beer is far away, Dougal' Drums completed for #album3. #huzzah


ALAN REED

MARJANA SEMKINA
@marjanasemkina
Today's my first time overseeing chamber orchestra recording and I'm so excited. Also, massive thanks to everyone who helped make this happen by ordering handwritten lyric sheets <3


MARJANA SEMKINA

PROG

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INTRO

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

PROGNOSIS: A NEW FESTIVAL COMES TO THE NETHERLANDS

Dutch festival organisers team up with Anathema's management for *Prog*-sponsored two-day extravaganza this March.



Party like it's 1985! Haken and TesseracT (right) are headlining the first Prognosis.

TesseracT and Haken are among the acts performing at a brand new *Prog*-sponsored event in Eindhoven on March 22 and 23. The organisers of Prognosis say they want to bring the genre's modern sounds to a wider audience.

"Although there are some smaller prog events, there isn't really a huge prog fest in Holland so we talked about organising this kind of event with big names and a conference, clinics and exhibitions attached. Like Nike, our company statement is: just do it. So we did! And we're organising this together with The Northern Music Company's Andy Farrow (Anathema/Opeth)," says founder Paul van Berlo from Loud Noise, the promotions company also behind the annual metal festival Dynamo.

Last November, van Berlo and the Loud Noise team tested the waters with The Progressive Alliance all-dayer at the Effenaar, which featured a line-up including Ihsahn, Ne Obliviscaris and VUUR. Now he's bringing an even bigger selection of progressive acts to the popular music venue. More performers and further details are still to be announced but so far 17 bands have been confirmed to play across two stages. Among them are Leprous, Soen, Golden Caves and The Gathering, who'll be showcasing classic songs as part of a very special 'Auto-Reverse' set. Experimental cellist Jo Quail is also on the bill, along with local post-rockers Our Oceans, who'll be making their live debut at the festival.

"There's such good music out there and once you discover it, you want other people to experience it too," says the founder. "We really wanted Haken and Leprous on the line-up, and TesseracT are doing really well at the moment, too. We've got Witchcraft, who might be a strange duck in the pond but they're very progressive and I'm a big fan. We also talked about including one or two classic bands, but that hasn't been possible yet this year.

"Everybody has been making suggestions. We've been listening to the bands, seeing if we could make a coherent running order, but we had more ideas than we could fit on the bill, so we already have a long wish list for next year! We also talked a lot about having shows in venues outside the main one but we just couldn't make it work this year. It was enough of a challenge just to do the festival, but we'll look at special venues, like churches or abandoned warehouses, for future editions. It's the first Prognosis so we'll see how people respond and what we can do next year."

Despite an eclectic line-up, Prognosis isn't just about live music. Festival-goers will be able



PRESS/HAKEN: STEPHEN SCHMIDT TESSERACT: STEVE BROWN

to enjoy prog-related art exhibitions and merchandise stalls at Effenaar, and there will also be industry-based conventions and musician clinics. These will run at the nearby Dynamo, a purpose-built creative space that hosts musical workshops as well as local concerts.

"The idea behind the conference is to give people more insight into the world behind the artist; what's going on with cover art, with management, with publishing, booking and all these kinds of things," van Berlo reveals. "There will be music professionals talking about their experiences and some Q&A sessions. We'll even be flying in musicians to do the clinics, for example Devin Townsend will be doing two clinics even though he's not playing the festival."

> **"We already have a long wish list for next year!"**

Entry to the convention and clinics will be pre-bookable due to space restrictions, and the team hope it'll be both inspiring and informative for everyone who attends.

For the latest announcements, visit www.prognosis-festival.com. Keep an eye out for the next issue of *Prog*, which will include a handy guide to the full event. **NRS**

This month, Intro was compiled by
Jeremy Allen
Malcolm Dome
Jerry Ewing
Dom Lawson
Jo Kendall
Martin Kielty
Hannah May Kilroy
Rhodri Marsden
Natasha Scharf
Nick Shilton
Rick Wakeman
Kez Whelan

LODGE ANNOUNCES 2019 UK TOUR DATES

The Moody Blues bassist promises some intimate shows packed with fan faves.



The other side of life: John Lodge prepares for his solo shows.

John Lodge has confirmed he'll be playing some shows in the UK this April, ahead of an extended reissue of *10,000 Light Years Ago*. Gigs have already been confirmed for Milton Keynes Stables (12) and London's Cadogan Hall (13), with further dates expected shortly. And Lodge says he's hoping to return later in the year for a more comprehensive tour.

"I started off in small clubs and I really like being able to be in front of an audience that you can be part of so I'm going back to the roots of who I am," he tells *Prog*. "With the Moodies, we play arenas but one of the great places for me to play was the Royal Albert Hall because the audience is right by you. I do enjoy that."

He reveals that the set list will include material from his most recent studio album as well as reinterpreted The Moody Blues classics.

"I'm exploring my songs like *Isn't Life Strange*, and I've gone back and listened to them from the original perspective. I've tried to interpret them as I'd like to do them now, which is probably with a bit more energy than the recorded versions."

He adds, "I'll also put some deep cut songs on there like *Nervous* and *Candle Of Life*, which aren't usually associated with the live version of The Moody Blues."

Lodge will play Cruise To The Edge from February 4-9. For the full list of live shows, visit www.johnlodge.com. **NRS**

VANGELIS HARKS AT THE MOON FOR INSPIRATION

Legendary Greek composer returns with new recordings and reinterpretations of old classics.

Vangelis has searched the skies for inspiration for his latest album, *Nocturne*, which is out now through Decca. For the first time, he's recorded the classical release on grand piano instead of his more traditional synthesisers. The 17-track disc contains 11 brand new instrumentals, including the recently released single *Nocturnal Promenade*, as well as reworked versions of a selection of classics including his chart hit *Chariots Of Fire* and the *Love Theme* from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*.

Fuelled by his passion for space and night time, the influential composer has launched the new material with a request to fans to upload their own images of the moon to his website. The long player contains his first new recordings since 2016's *Rosetta*; an album that saw him not only team up with the European Space Agency to commemorate the Rosetta space probe mission, but also break his 15-year hiatus.

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



Night writer: Vangelis.

STATHIS ZALIDIS


The triumvirate! Roger King, Nick Beggs and Marco Minnemann.

THIRD ENCOUNTERS OF THE MUTE GODS

Alex Lifeson guests on new album, but is this farewell from Nick Beggs' super-trio?

The Mute Gods release *Atheists And Believers* via InsideOut on March 22 and, says founder Nick Beggs, it could be their last ever recording.

"I started it with three albums in mind; it was a triumvirate," he reveals. "It's been great working with [Marco Minnemann and Roger King] and they're totally fantastic but what I don't have is an idea to go for a fourth. Luckily, with this third album, I feel like I've managed to say everything I wanted to say. It feels like a nice completion."

Atheists And Believers builds on the anger of *Tardigrades Will Inherit The Earth* and debut *Do Nothing Till You Hear From Me*, but expresses it in what the Chapman Stick player considers to be a more accessible way.

"This one is more melodic and I think it might have a bit more of a pop edge to it. Musically, it didn't feel like it needed to have the angularity to get the ideas across; the actual lyrics seem to do it strongly enough. It's anti-religion, it's humanistic, it's angry with mankind, and it shines light on the dysfunction of humanity. It's a wake-up call."

The 10-track is produced by fellow Steve Hackett Band member Roger King and includes three mixes by Tom Lord-Alge (Peter Gabriel). It also sees the return of Beggs' vocalist daughter Lula, and finds the trio teaming up with Steven Wilson drummer Craig Blundell, multi-instrumentalist Rob Townsend, and guitarist Alex Lifeson. The Rush musician has recently been working with Minnemann on an unnamed project and guests on the song *One Day*.

"What he sent back was totally revolutionary in terms of the song; he'd put a 12-string on it and a mandola and an ambient guitar part. I think it's the most important track on the album and probably the most important Mute Gods track," says Beggs. "You don't have the chance to play with icons every day so when they come to you, it feels like the universe is giving you a present!"

Although there are no immediate plans for any Mute Gods live shows, the musician says it's not something that he would completely rule out.

"I'm waiting to see what happens with the record and what becomes available. Something like Loreley [Amphitheater, home of Night Of The Prog Festival] would be great." **NRS**

"You don't have the chance to play with icons every day."

For more, visit www.themutegods.com.

INTRO extras

THE TANGS' BLUE BOX

Tangerine Dream's Jive Electro albums are to be released via Esoteric Reactive as a special four-CD box. *The Blue Years Studio Albums 1985-1987*, out on February 22, contains newly remastered editions of *Le Parc*, *Green Desert*, *Underwater Sunlight* and *Tyger*. The announcement comes as the highly influential electronic collective prepare to release the follow-up to their 2017 album, *Quantum Gate*.


Deep in thought: Cosmograf leader Robin Armstrong.

COSMOGRAF'S SELF-REFLECTIVE ALBUM

Robin Armstrong teams up with Colin Edwin on his "heavy" new release.

Big Big Train live member Robin Armstrong is driving Cosmograf forward with the project's seventh studio recording. *Mind Over Depth* is out on April 12 via Cosmograf Music and showcases a bold new sound.

"This album is very heavy," the musician tells *Prog*. "I was writing it while I was rehearsing for Big Big Train last year. Whether consciously or unconsciously, it's ended up being a bit of an antidote to the more pastoral side of Big Big Train. I've gone back to some of the heavier music of my youth, inspired by early Black Sabbath."

He promises "big riffs and dark themes; it's a self-reflective album dealing with anxiety. All the songs reflect something I've gone through in the last year."

Previous Cosmograf albums have been rich with guests, and this time Armstrong is joined by drummer Kyle Fenton and former Porcupine Tree bassist Colin Edwin, who plays on two tracks.

"Colin's done an amazing job with the more complicated and faster bass playing that I couldn't get anywhere near," he says.

However, Armstrong says he's stepping back from hiring multiple guests for the side-project.

"The jury's out for me whether that approach still sells albums," he reveals. "My last album [2017's *The Hay-Man Dreams*] had very few guests and it didn't seem to make a huge difference in sales. While I didn't have a huge budget for this album, I also liked the idea of a stripped-down core three-piece band, even if it was all recorded remotely."

For more, visit www.cosmograf.com. **NS**

FIRE AND BRIMSTONE! THE BELTANE LADS ARE BACK!

80s proggers reignite for one-off London show.

Beltane Fire have confirmed they're regrouping to perform at London's Water Rats on April 26. Says frontman Clint Bradley, "There's a strong feeling within the band that we never really finished the job we set out to do back in the 80s."

The four-piece formed in 1983 and released just one studio album, *Different Breed*, two years later, which led to them supporting Marillion on their Misplaced Childhood UK tour in '86. *Different Breed* was re-released in 2016, and the response encouraged the band to reunite for a small number of live shows.

"Folk seem to be a lot more open-minded musically than they were back then," says Bradley. "Had some of the festivals that exist now been around, life would have been a lot easier for bands such as us."

Beltane Fire will be supported by Jump and Mellotronanism. Tickets for the London show are available from http://bit.ly/MattFest. **NRS**


Fortune favours the brave! Beltane Fire.

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SYD ARTHUR COVER BECK ON NEW SINGLE

Brits' experimental collaboration with Canterbury jazz quartet finally gets release.



Shed life: Syd Arthur hang out with Jack Hues And The Quartet.

Syd Arthur release a 22-minute reworking of Beck's *Nobody's Fault But My Own* on March 18 through the Dawn Chorus Recording Company. The track, which features two drummers, has taken nearly seven years to arrive. Inspired by a one-off collaborative pub performance, upcoming prog darlings Syd Arthur and established jazz outfit (and former Wang Chung man) Jack Hues And The Quartet gathered in July 2012 to record the song from the American art popper's *Mutations* album. A Canterbury scene happening that took place in a shed studio.

Syd Arthur bassist Joel Magill's memories of the day are hazy, partly because he was involved in the recording process. But he can't forget the magic created as the combined force of eight musicians laid down a variety of takes before the best were blended into the final cut. "There was quite an experimental little scene happening at the time," he tells *Prog*. "We knew the guys from The Quartet, but when we were asked to do the gig we'd never done anything like it before."

The success of the improvised evening led to the idea of a recording session. "To be honest, we did it and then forgot about it," Magill admits. He and Hues listened to it again while working on a later Quartet recording, and realised they "had to do something with it."

"It was a great day," he continues. "A lovely summer's evening, hanging out, playing music in a farmhouse just outside Canterbury. We had a converted garage, we had a meal, we sat round the fire, played music and chatted about it, had a glass of wine. All the guys have fond memories about it."

Nobody's Fault But My Own was chosen because "it's a bit different for us," Magill says. "Hopefully it's not too rocky for the jazzers and not too jazzy for the rockers. We should have recorded more," he reflects, name-checking Soft Machine's *Face Lift*, which they played at the 2010 gig. "But perhaps it's better that it's all just in the memory."

Since there's only one track on the vinyl, the B-side is "like a black mirror," he says. "But that's cool, too."

Tour dates with the eight-piece line-up are still to be announced via Syd Arthur's website and Magill hopes the flurry of activity will give them the opportunity to reactivate Syd Arthur properly. The band have been distracted with various "real-life" issues (such as becoming parents) since releasing their acclaimed fourth album, *Apricity*, in 2016. **MK**

"We had to do something with it."

For more, visit www.sydarthur.co.uk.

INTRO extras

SYMPHONY X EURO TOUR

Symphony X will head to the UK for three shows in June. They play Coventry Empire (4), Holmfirth Picturedome (5) and the Electric Ballroom in London on June 6. The dates are part of an extensive European tour that sees the New Jersey five-piece playing in 11 different countries between May and June. It's the first time they've toured Europe since 2016's *Underworld* gigs.



The weather men: Australia's Pond.

POONEH GHANA

POND: SPLASHING OUT ON *TASMANIA*

Australian proggers team up with Tame Impala's frontman on eighth album.

Pond, the sibling band of Tame Impala with several shared members past and present, will release *Tasmania* on March 1 via Marathon Artists – and frontman Nick Allbrook says it marks an accidental repurposing of their music that started with 2017's *The Weather*.

"I always wrote a lot of the lyrics, but I don't know if I'd tried as hard," Allbrook tells *Prog*, revealing he was inspired by local culture and history to consider the future of humanity in an increasingly tense global situation. He cites the example of his home town of Perth, which he says can be seen as a "tropical holiday destination – but when the nostalgia is stripped away, there's massive wealth disparity, alcoholism and climate change."

The music remains as experimental, eclectic and surprising as ever, with lead track *Daisy* appearing to hint at *Sgt. Pepper's*-era Beatles along with Joe Strummer-style vocalising, set against an 80s pop background. "I love the more sensitive-sounding Clash – *Lost In The Supermarket* crushed me," Allbrook notes.

He prefers to avoid entertaining expectations for *Tasmania* – produced by Tame Impala's Kevin Parker – and plays down the idea that Pond are becoming a voice for a generation, saying he just wants to move away from "this image of rock'n'roll nostalgia we hold on to, which is really quite destructive. It's a move towards responsibility as reality sets in; but I have no desire to go into a world I don't feel happy in."

Tour dates will be announced at www.pondband.net. **MK**

GOOD TIGER'S GUITARIST WRESTLES WITH GOING SOLO

Derya Nagle announces his one-man super project.

Former Wrestlers release their debut EP, *Champion Of The World*, on March 15. It's the latest project from Good Tiger and ex-The Safety Fire guitarist Derya 'Dez' Nagle.

"I ended up with a bunch of songs that had no obvious purpose, so I decided to record them for this EP," he explains. "The sound is different to anything I've done before but there will inevitably be connections with my past."

Nagle sings and plays every instrument on the EP, except for drums, which he programmed. Perhaps understandably, he says he's keeping the project in the studio for now.

"I've not got the time to think about dates. But if things go really well, I could change my mind. I'd like to develop the idea of wearing a wrestling mask. If Former Wrestlers goes further, then it could become the basis for my alter ego."

For more, visit www.formerwrestlers.bandcamp.com. **MD**



Behind the mask: Derya Nagle.



O.R.k.

Ramagehead

The band includes award-winning composer/ vocalist LEF, Pat Mastelotto **(KING CRIMSON)**, Colin Edwin **(PORCUPINE TREE)** and Carmelo Pipitone **(MARTA SUI TUBI)**. Forthcoming single "Black Blooms" features Serj Tankian **(SYSTEM OF A DOWN)**

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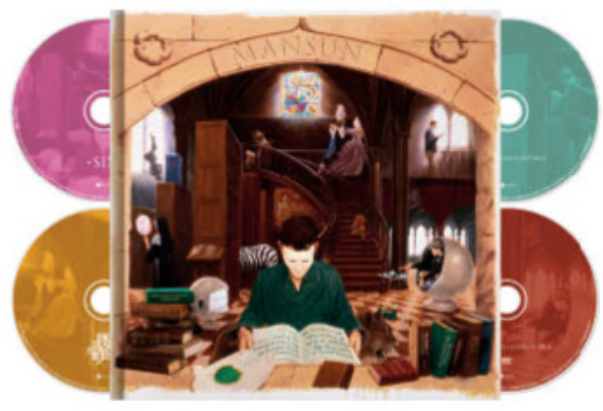
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FAD GADGETS

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

GLOWING GUITAR

There are some extraordinarily gaudy guitars on this planet, from fluorescent pink Ibanez models to the sparkly gold Flying V. However, these weren't garish enough for electronics whiz Andrew England, who's covered his one in a sheet of Plexiglas and used wireless lighting drivers to turn the body into a screen. You may consider our new-found ability to watch moving images on a guitar as either a bold step forward for humanity or a sacrilegious distraction, but maybe, one day, all instruments will look like this. Fireworks on your trombone, madam?



www.bit.ly/glowingguitar

MBAH JENGGOT'S KINETIC ART

An idle YouTube trawl not only brought the Indonesian artist Slamet Wiyono, aka Mbah Jenggot, to my attention, but more specifically a mechanical instrument he started building in 2012 that now weighs half-a-tonne. He's bolted together car parts, frying pans, typewriters and portable stoves to create something which, he believes, voices his "anxiety about the world". This magnificent, clanging, twanging machine isn't for sale. But if you fancy having a go on it, he holds workshops every weekend at his studio just outside Jakarta. See you there!



www.bit.ly/slamet-jenggot

CROSLEY CT100

Few of us mourn the passing of the cassette, but many of us still have boxes full of the damn things, crammed with stuff we taped off the radio, and obscure compilations. To facilitate the exhuming of these relics, Crosley have launched this stereo AM/FM cassette recorder, and it says something about the modern world that something deemed mundane in 1985 is now considered to be retro cool.



www.crosleyradio.com



OF SAUSAGES AND WOE

Rick learns that one man's meat is another man's burned chipolatas.

I've toured a lot over the years and have enjoyed many of the different cuisines that I've sampled on my travels. However, there's one meal I'm particularly fussy about and that's breakfast. I've often wondered why Britain is the only place that really gets it right, and it was only the other day when the penny finally dropped.

On a recent trip to a country that will remain nameless (as I love going there), I toddled off to the hotel's breakfast room with my stomach rumbling for a full English. Poached eggs, crispy bacon, well-done sausages, grilled mushrooms, grilled tomatoes, baked beans, wholemeal toast with marmalade, and a large pot of English Breakfast tea on the side. I'm salivating just typing this.

"But zeese are cremated! Zey should be pink and raw!"

Breakfast was a self-service buffet with the usual row of stainless steel serving dishes, but when I lifted the first lid, I recoiled in horror.

"I'm sorry to bother you," I said to a waitress who was hovering around the serving area, "but I think a baby has been sick on this dish..."

"It is scrambled egg, sir," she replied.

"But it's *green*! I don't suppose you do poached eggs?" I asked optimistically.

"No, sir," she replied politely.

The second tray housed the even more horrific sight of piles of pink willies.

"They are sausages, sir," said the waitress before I even had a chance to comment.

The third lid was just as shocking. Beneath it lay what seemed to be sliced jellyfish swimming in tons of grease.

"Bacon," she added. By then I'd lost my appetite so opted for some rock-hard bread with a pot of lukewarm coffee.

Two weeks later, I was staying in a really nice London hotel. Once again I found myself queuing at the breakfast buffet but this time, there just happened to be a foreign gentlemen in front of me. He lifted the lid on the first dish to reveal a platter of beautifully prepared scrambled egg. He gasped and gestured to the waiter.

"Vot is dis? Is like wallpaper paste!" he exclaimed.

"It's scrambled eggs, sir," replied the waiter.

"But it is not green!"

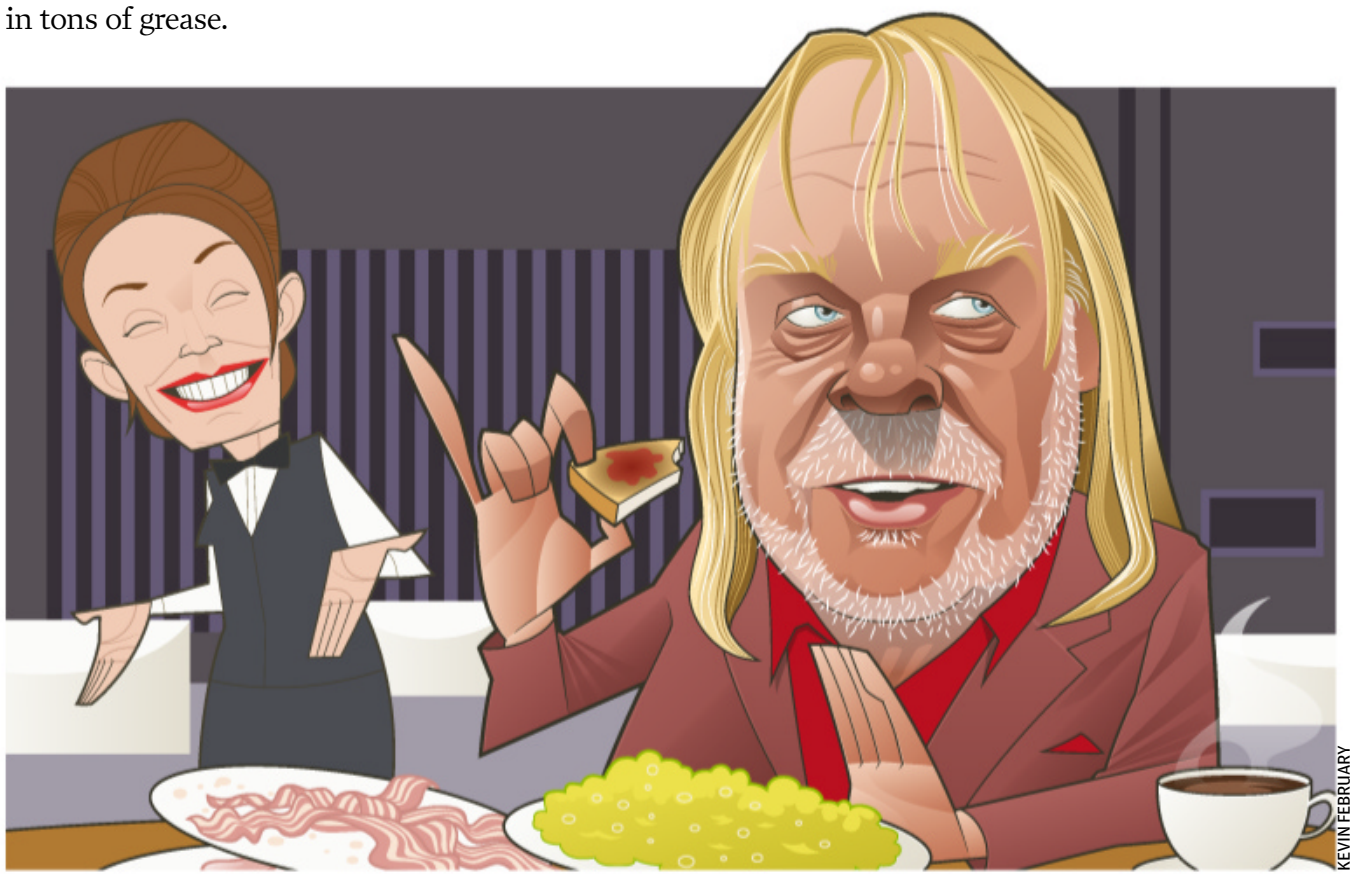
He moved to the next tray to reveal some perfectly cooked pork sausages. He tutted loudly and remarked, "But zeese are cremated and not eatable! Zey should be pink and raw! Don't you British know how to cook?"

The next dish housed some deliciously crispy bacon, but it was all too much for the guest. He threw his hands in the air, picked up a couple of slices of toast and asked where the salami was.

"We have marmalade, sir," the waiter replied, gesturing to a neat pyramid of tiny jars.

As the guest huffed and puffed back to his table with his plate of freshly-toasted bread, the waiter just looked at me and asked, "Why is it that people always want what they get in their own countries?"

I loaded up my plate and replied, "How right you are!"



KEVIN FEBRUARY

DARWIN

Ambitious and mysterious prog project that yearns to inspire social change...

AS *PROG* INTERVIEWS DarWin, 10,000 firefighters battle devastating Californian wildfires.

"In our current era we will probably never face bigger challenges to humanity – both climate change and the human destruction of our environment," DarWin laments. "But there isn't really any music out there capturing this. We're yearning for meaning returning to music. In the 1960s, music was created to inspire social change."

Under President Trump, the perspective is bleak. "The United States was facing challenges before Trump, but it's reached a fever pitch of insanity recently. It's heartbreaking to see so many homes burning uncontrollably across California.

"People don't pay attention to what's really important," DarWin continues. "How do we make our planet safer, manage fire risk and ensure there is enough food, energy and water for everyone? These are all questions without quick, cute political answers. The issues are grounded in science. If we don't get things right, we're going to drive off the cliff."

Hence DarWin's extraordinary debut album. "There was a lot of thinking about the future, combining music with concerns for our planet," explains DarWin. "We wanted to make an album capturing those ideas in an open musical exploration using all kinds of instruments and songwriting approaches." Four years in the making, *Origin Of Species* is ambitious and expansive, containing almost 90 minutes of rich but accessible progressive rock.

Multi-instrumentalist DarWin wrote and demoed the material before involving drummer Simon Phillips, formerly of Toto, who also co-produces, and bassist Matt Bissonette. "When they play something it sounds 100 times better. Matt is best known as a bass player, but he has a fantastic voice that complements the music and has always been my favourite singer."

While DarWin is principally a guitarist, virtuoso Greg Howe provides some solos. "When you've reached your own limitations, Greg can realise a vision for a solo and execute it beyond what I thought was possible."

Other guests, an orchestra recorded at Abbey Road and a string quartet in Reykjavik embellish the album, "ensuring that each song realised its full potential and made a unique statement. We wanted to make the absolute best-sounding progressive rock album without constraints."

But who is DarWin? Describing himself as "an American in exile, now living at an undisclosed location outside America", DarWin steadfastly declines to reveal his identity. "I want people to focus on the album's very important concept. It's really not about the individual: it's important to remove celebrity from this project. Celebrity can be poisonous: we have enough of it in society." *Prog* devils out only that he's originally from California and "has some roots in Silicon Valley".

Alongside a graphic novel accompanying the album, there's a spectacular video for single *Escape The Maze*. Clearly, considerable funds were lavished upon this project. "I stopped counting three years ago how much it was costing," DarWin laughs.

So how was the self-released album financed? "I have been working with nation states," DarWin says. "I have deep relationships in the technology industry and with financiers who felt this project was important. When I'm not working on music, I focus on using technology to improve life on earth and human survival." **NS**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Simon Phillips *(drums)*, **Matt Bissonette** *(vocals, bass)*, **DarWin** *(guitars)*, **Jeff Babko** *(piano)*

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Origin Of Species is out now via Origin Of Species

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www.darwin.is

"There was a lot of thinking about the future, combining music with concerns for our planet."



DarWin: "Anyone know where I can plug in?"



YOUR PROG CHEF:
NAD SYLVAN
On the menu: The Vampire's Bite (aka Chicken Jambalaya)


Nad shares a bite with his friend Maria Thelenius.

"I started to cook when I moved into my first apartment some 40 years ago. The best dish I've ever had is yet to be discovered, but I believe in simplicity. My mum (who sadly passed away almost 10 years ago) was a cook extraordinaire, and I learned a lot from her. Her butter-cooked spinach with grated parmesan and roasted pine nuts was a favourite of mine.

"Nowadays, I get my inspiration from all over the world since I often tour for months on end. There's always something new and intriguing out there, but I don't cook on the road as we have a fabulous caterer who spoils us rotten!"

Ingredients (serves 4)

Cooked chicken breast, 4 spicy sausages, 1 tbsp butter, 2 onions, 3 garlic cloves, 3 tbsp olive oil, 300g long grain rice, 800ml boiling water or chicken stock, 400g can chopped tomatoes, 2 tsp sambal oelek or other chilli paste, 1 red pepper, 1 yellow pepper, 6 spring onions, salt and pepper, 3 tbsp roughly chopped parsley, a splash of smoky whisky.



For the sauce: *180g Turkish yoghurt, 70g mango chutney, honey (optional, to taste).*

Preparation

"Peel and chop the onions and garlic. In a large frying pan, heat 2 tbsp oil and add the rice. Allow it to sizzle for about 1 minute while stirring. Add the boiling water or stock, canned tomatoes and chilli paste, and leave the mixture to cook down. This should take about 20 minutes. Make sure you stir every now and then to prevent burning.

Meanwhile, cut the cooked chicken into pieces and remove the skin. Slice the sausages at an angle and fry in the butter. Set aside. Deseed and dice the peppers, and shred the spring onions. Quickly fry both in the remaining oil. Transfer the cooked vegetables, meat and whisky to the saucepan and stir to combine. Season with salt and pepper, and sprinkle over the parsley.

To make the sauce, mix the yoghurt with the mango chutney and season. If you prefer a sweeter sauce, add a little honey to taste. Serve with the jambalaya and some freshly-baked bread.

I've always wanted to make a hearty Jambalaya as it's not so common here in Sweden, so I made this for my dear friends and neighbours. Next time, I'll spice it up even more!" **NRS**

MY PROG HERO
Inspiring the wider music world...


Bon Jovi's David Bryan (inset) keeps the faith in prog and Yes.

DAVID WARNER ELLIS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

DAVID BRYAN
Bon Jovi's keyboard player-turned-composer of musicals loves *every little thing* about Yes.

"I remember hearing *Roundabout* on the radio in the 70s and I loved it. I was just a kid and I thought, 'Wow, that's amazing! I gotta get this record.' Rick Wakeman's such an amazing keyboard player. Being a classical guy, he had the [same] background that I had so it was wonderful to hear it and try to learn that solo, like every other keyboard player in the world!

I started my first band when I was 13 and we were jamming out everything that we liked. We tried *Roundabout* and we made a valiant attempt [laughs]. We didn't have computers then where you could slow things down, you just had to listen to it a million times, mimic it and figure it out. You have to be really good to play that solo though. It was a great sound.

I started learning classical piano when I was seven so I'd played for many years before I was a teenager, but Rick was 100 percent original. What a virtuoso. His playing came out of his training and he was putting that into his vibe. I remember when he did the solo album, *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth*. I went to Madison Square Garden to see him do it but it wasn't just the keyboards I enjoyed, it was the musicality of it.

I bought so many records [during my youth]; whatever I could get my hands on, but my favourite album was *Yessongs*. I just really liked all the songs; I still listen to them and I'm still a fan. Even in the 80s, Yes were more complicated than a regular rock band with chord progressions and timings that were very complicated. I loved *Owner Of A Lonely Heart*, that was cool. And I love other prog stuff, like Jellyfish too. I'm a fan of music so I'm always listening to see what's new, what's coming out.

For the last 18 years, I've been working on musicals and I get to write songs that challenge my brain. We have a new one out on Princess Diana and it's been fun giving the Royals 'voices'. I love it because it's so complicated. All the Yes stuff and all the really complicated music — ELP and all the stuff I've ever listened to — fits into that melting pot." **NRS**

"Even in the 80s, Yes were more complicated than a regular rock band with their timings."

Diana The Musical is playing now at California's La Jolla Playhouse. Bon Jovi's UK tour starts in June. See www.bonjovi.com.

PROG IN BRIEF



A limited edition box of **Mike Oldfield's** (right) soundtrack to *The Killing Fields* is out this spring. The new package contains the full album plus a DVD of the 1984 movie and memorabilia. Pre-order yours from www.pledgemusic.com/mikeoldfield.

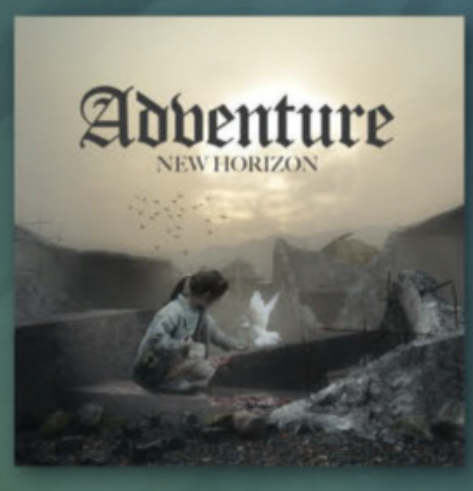
Frank Zappa and Tony Palmer's surrealist film, *200 Motels* has been remastered and will be out this year. The revamped CD/DVD package also includes the movie along with collectables and an A4 book exclusively compiled by Palmer for the new set.



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THE DEEP FREEZE MICE

I LOVE YOU LITTLE BOBO WITH YOUR DELICATE GOLDEN LIONS

(CORDELIA, 1984)

Forget Sir David Attenborough. Forget Gary Lineker and his crisps. The greatest thing to come from Leicester was a very peculiar band called The Deep Freeze Mice. Purveyors of post-punk psych-pop with regular detours into wild experimentation and endlessly bizarre lyrics, they released eight extraordinary studio albums between 1979 and 1989, with titles like *Teenage Head In My Refrigerator* and *The Tender Yellow Ponies Of Insomnia*. Fervently DIY, most of their recordings came out through singer and guitarist Alan Jenkins' own Cordelia imprint.

Every one of the band's records is worth exploring, but they reached a synapse-tickling creative peak on 1984's sprawling double album *I Love You BoBo With Your Delicate Golden Lions*. Partly inspired by Jenkins' anticipation of what he called "the Margaret Thatcher Apocalypse", it's a mind-frazzling journey through multiple musical styles, all held together by those remorselessly acerbic and unsettling lyrics. Side one is as conventional as the Mice ever got, with more straightforward tunes like opener *Something Else Instead* (which seems to be about a couple arguing about which of the man's body parts to preserve in a pickle jar) and the reggae-tinged *Most People Arn't Fit To Live* (sic) showcasing the band's spiky, garage band side. Then there are a couple of weird, one-minute instrumentals and two bursts of noise, *O.P.1* and *O.P.2*, that were programmes for the now obsolete Oric computer.

Side two removes the goalposts and fires them into the heart of the sun. An untitled, 25-minute splurge of free jazz and amorphous improvisation, it sounds like Sun Ra jamming with Ash Ra Tempel in a garden shed. According to Jenkins, the piece was performed under three rules: firstly, that "you could only play in response to something that somebody else had played"; secondly, that "you weren't allowed to play tunes or rhythms"; and finally, that trumpet/euphonium player John Grayland "had to stop talking before we started".

Side three notches up plenty of prog points with the 13-minute *A Trillion Sprods*; a breakneck krautrock freakout that reaches a sanity-threatening climax when Jenkins lets rip with a gloriously wonky, Zappa-esque guitar solo that, seemingly, never ends. After that, side four's mixture of snotty buzz-pop songs about *Zoology* and *Roget's Thesaurus*, and swivel-eyed instrumentals with titles like *A Motor Throbbed Above The Rim Of The Brush* provide deeply weird but much-needed comedowns.

More than three decades on, Jenkins is still making music and doing strange things in studios. You can find him, much of the Deep Freeze Mice catalogue and tons of other mind-bending projects at the Cordelia Records website.

DOM LAWSON

ALL AROUND THE WORLD

Our far-out trip to far-flung prog



Guiding lights: Norwegian instrumentalists Pymlico.

PYMLICO

Their name's inspired by an area of London, but **Arild Brøter** says these Norwegians want to travel the globe!

Oslo has a long association with progressive music so it might come as a surprise to discover that one of the city's up-and-coming instrumental outfits have taken inspiration from England's capital.

"All the good names were taken, so I decided to go for something that was unexpected!" says Pymlico's founding drummer Arild Brøter.

Although the seven-piece have not played any shows outside of Scandinavia yet, their musical approach definitely has an international basis.

"Early on, I wanted to sound like The Flower Kings, Transatlantic, and Genesis. But more recently, I've been very much into fusion bands like Snarky Puppy and Weather Report. I like to think we have a wide-ranging sound," he says. "My aim is not to go for 70s distorted production, but more of a polished American approach. I love vocalists, but as I don't sing myself I never wanted to bring in someone else to do that, which is why we just concentrate on doing instrumentals."

Like many young Norwegians, Brøter cut his musical teeth playing in marching bands. Then, in 2009, he decided he wanted to create his own project and Pymlico was born. The band released three albums — *Inspirations*, *Directions* and *Guiding Light* — and 2015's *Studio Live* EP independently before signing to Apollon. However, Brøter still sees Pymlico as *his* project.

"I'm still the band leader; I come up with most of the ideas. However, a lot of the writing is now done with my brother Øyvind, who plays keyboards. But it's not an equal partnership," he adds. "He's the junior guy in Pymlico!"

The Norwegian band spent six months working on material for their fifth album *Nightscapes*, which is out now, before spending another six months in the studio.

"It reached a point where having a label meant we could spread our music much further," says Brøter. "Right now, apart from the debut, all our records are available and we're starting to get noticed in other countries. Through our website, we're getting lots of good feedback."

And Pymlico hope the positive reaction will give them the opportunity to finally play outside their native Scandinavia. **MD**

See www.pymlico.no.

"I love vocalists, but I never wanted to bring in someone else to do that."

PROG IN BRIEF

XTC's history is dissected in the book, *What Do You Call That Noise?* out in March. It's written by former *Limelight* fanzine editor Mark Fisher and includes contributions from Peter Gabriel, Big Big Train and Chris Braide. Order from www.xtclimelight.com.



Bent Knee (left) are heading out on the road from February. The Boston-based outfit will be supporting Haken on their extensive European tour, which includes four UK dates. Bent Knee are due to release the follow-up to their 2017 album *Land Animal* later this year.

LOST CROWNS

Quintessentially English, creative psych-pop from 'funny music supergroup'.

GLINTING IN THE sunlight of 2019's dawn, Lost Crowns could be a new national musical treasure waiting to be unearthed. Conjuring images of the headwear of figures such as Richard III, whose crown toppled into a bush at the Battle Of Bosworth Field, it's a very English kind of out-there psych pop, ruled by Plymouth-born but London-based guitarist Richard Larcombe. After 20 years in folk/art rock duo Stars In Battledress with his brother James, Richard's universe expanded.

"Doing Stars In Battledress for years, I found myself surrounded by outstandingly good musicians," he says. "I had this vision of elaborate yet psychedelic music that's difficult to play, although it doesn't sound like that. It's like when a hummingbird beats its wings very fast, you know there's a lot going on but you don't hear each beat."

That's a graceful analogy, and there's certainly *lots* going on in Lost Crown's just-released debut album *Every Night Something Happens*, brought to life by an A-list of British psych-proggers. Featuring Charlie Cawood and Josh Perl from Knifeworld on bass and keys respectively, *Prog* columnist Rhodri Marsden also on keys and arrangements, clarinetist Nicola Baigent from North Sea Radio Orchestra and the mysterious drummer 'Keepsie', Lost Crowns live up to their 'funny music supergroup' title. It's 'funny' as in 'weird', although Larcombe feels there are jokes, too. "It's about the lyrics. You can go as grandiose as you like with the music but there's an in-built pomposity when you're sitting writing lyrics. I start to feel like a teenager, gazing into the air with a pen in my hand. That's when I get a bit more self-mocking and sarcastic. I'll scrub it all out and write something ridiculous instead."

Keeping it real — and close to Larcombe's heart — songs such as *She Saved Me* and *Let Loving Her Be Everything* are inspired by his wife ("she's the central thing in my life"), with others by their Boston terriers Dandy and Twinkle (*Dandy Doesn't Know*). Then there's the importance of Syd Barrett. "I learned to play guitar through albums like *Piper At The Gates Of Dawn*," Larcombe explains. "One of the things I love is how Syd has these humorous songs but he never sounds like he thinks they're funny. He had a slightly 'dead' way of delivery. I like that quality, where a very wistful, psychedelic lyric comes across with detachment. There's a real pathos in that."

The Incredible String Band are also an influence ("I heard them in my teens and thought, 'Right, a song can be *anything*.'"), as well as Cardiacs. "There's a band of wonderful unpredictability, teeming with details, vying for your attention.

"That's what I want to do with Lost Crowns," he explains. "It's musical cross-hatching, reflecting how complicated and difficult life can be, but is also offering an escape from it.

"I want us, and the listeners, to leave the Earth," he says. "It's our tagline, 'The head will leave the body.' That's what I say before we go onstage: 'I don't mind a few bum notes but the head must leave the body.'" 'Losing your crown', indeed. **JK**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Richard Larcombe *(vocals, guitar)*, **Charlie Cawood** *(bass)*, **Rhodri Marsden** *(keyboards, vocals)*, **Josh Perl** *(keyboards, vocals)*, **Nicola Baigent** *(clarinet)*, **Keepsie** *(drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Head-spinningly elaborate psychedelic pop with bright, fun hooks and lyrics

CURRENT RELEASE

Every Night Something Happens is out now via Bad Elephant

WEBSITE

www.facebook.com/lostcrowns

"I get a bit more self-mocking and sarcastic with lyrics. I'll scrub it all out and write something ridiculous instead."

Listen to Lost Crowns and bid farewell to your head.





THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING LYRICAL

A *Prog* writer examines the role of lyrics in modern prog.

Last autumn, I spent an insightful and enjoyable day with one of the UK's leading progressive rock bands who were in the studio recording vocals for an album which will be released later this year. While working on a 15-minute track, the lyricist became troubled as the realisation dawned on him that one word – a single word – didn't work as well sonically as it had on paper. Recording tools were downed while the lyricist agonised, and 30 minutes later found a replacement for the offending noun.

So, how do you like your lyrics? Opaque? Abstract? Explicit? Open to multiple interpretations? All of the above? None of the above? Or are you simply ambivalent? Unsurprisingly, different songwriters take different approaches. For some, lyrics are meticulously crafted and form an integral and often indivisible part of a song. Others, when pressed, will confess that their lyrics are at best subsidiary to the music and at worst a necessary evil.

There are some prog bands who, more recently, have expended just as much effort with their lyrics as with their music, but with different degrees of return on that investment. Take another two UK bands for example: a core feature of Big Big Train's songs is the storytelling that's captivated their expanding fan base. Similarly Andy Tillison of The Tangent puts considerable time into his lyrics. Nevertheless, he was irked by the singular lack of response that his lengthy Brexit protest, *A Few Steps Down The Wrong Road* (from the album *The Slow Rust of Forgotten Machinery*) generated a couple of years ago.

How much attention do prog audiences really pay to lyrics? The answer: it depends. Some lyrics simply resonate far more powerfully with listeners than others. Why did Tillison's Brexit protest get largely overlooked when the lyrics to Marillion's *F.E.A.R.* were celebrated? Was it just down to the disproportionate size of the fan bases?

But do carefully considered words really matter? Nonsensical lyrics hardly proved a barrier to great success for Yes in the 1970s. Their anodyne, cliché ridden verbiage in the 1980s was little better of course – as AOR fans will tell you – any album containing a song titled *Hold On* seldom innovates lyrically. But in both decades, Yes gave fans words to sing along to, whether in the comfort of their own home or in a large concert venue.

Two of my albums of 2018 weren't exactly notable for their lyrics. Glass Hammer's *Chronomonaut* was a silly and/or fun concept, while even their most ardent admirers would struggle to make a persuasive case for the lyrics being key to the acclaim earned for Southern Empire's *Civilisation*.

Ultimately, while there are notable exceptions that prove the rule, there's a strong argument that far greater attention is generally paid by bands and fans alike to music than lyrics.

NICK SHILTON

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

HAVE A CIGAR

Saluting the scene's supporting crew



Hats off to the Progmeister! Fusion 2019's Steve Gould.

FUSION 2019

Steve 'Progmeister' Gould is putting the prog into 'port with the Midlands' newest festival.

Organising a music event is no easy task: just ask radio presenter and prog fan Steve Gould. Last year, with no prior experience, he put on a prog-friendly all-dayer in Stourport-on-Severn. Fusion: Music Without Boundaries took place at the Civic Centre, and he's holding the second edition on March 22-24.

"I was a bit wet around the ears regarding time schedules [with the first one]," Gould admits. "A few people said, 'You really haven't left yourself enough time.' I thought we'd be alright but as time progressed I thought, 'Oh shit, we haven't *really* allowed ourselves enough time!' We pulled it off and even though the turnout was poor, we had nothing but positive feedback. It made me think that maybe there's something here."

Prog readers may know Gould from his The Lost Art show on Midlands Metalheads Radio, but his life-long love of the genre began when he heard Emerson, Lake & Palmer and Hawkwind as a teenager. He now lists Southern Empire and Frost* among his current favourites, and his ongoing passion has resulted in Fusion 2019's eclectic line-up.

"We have Focus, England, and IO Earth; we've also got some of the newer prog bands like I Am The Manic Whale and Emperor Norton, and the more established guys like Dec Burke," he says. "It was [The Gift's] Mike Morton who came forward with England and initially I was a bit apprehensive. They haven't toured for ages but their album, *Garden Shed* is something of a classic and they're only doing our event."

The 500-capacity Stourport Civic Centre offers many of the same facilities as larger venues. There's wheelchair access, plenty of nearby parking, and catering both inside and out, so fans won't need to wander too far for the essentials. And, with tickets selling well, Gould has begun thinking about Fusion 2020!

"I've provisionally booked a weekend next March and we've already got six bands!" he reveals with a laugh. "There's that much new music coming out, it's totally mind-blowing. It's nice to think that this event could become a catalyst for that." **NRS**

"There's that much new music coming out, it's mind-blowing."

Fusion 2019 tickets are on sale now from www.bit.ly/FusionProg.

PROG IN BRIEF


ALEXEY TESTOV

RPWL (right) are dipping into their sci-fi collections for their concept album *Tales From Outer Space*, out via Gentle Art Of Music/ Soulfood on March 22. The Bavarian four-piece will air the new songs during their European tour this April.

French prog-jazz-metal trio **Mörglbl** release *Story Of Scott Rötti* via Laser's Edge imprint Free Electric Sound on February 1. It's the band's seventh album and will be followed by a live DVD commemorating their 20th anniversary later this year.

Tony Patterson and Riversea's **Brendan Eyre** are following up their 2014 album *Northlands* with *Light* this year. Says Patterson, "Where *Northlands* was more organic sounding and orchestral in parts, *Light* will be more experimental and electronic."

Brighteye Brison are releasing their long-awaited fifth album *V* in May as part of a new deal with Bad Elephant Music. It's the Swedish quintet's first recording since 2011's complex symphonic offering *Magician's Chronicles Part 1*.

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Official Progressive Albums Chart

The prog top 30 albums

December 2018

Compiled by Official Charts Company

1	**MUSE**	Simulation Theory *HELIUM 3/WARNER BROS*
2	**RICK WAKEMAN**	Piano Odyssey *SONY CLASSICAL*
3	**JEAN MICHEL JARRE**	Equinoxe Infinity *RCA*
4	**SPIRITUALIZED**	And Nothing Hurt *BELLA UNION*
5	**ROXY MUSIC**	Roxy Music *VIRGIN*
6	**RUSH**	Hemispheres *UMC/VIRGIN*
7	**MATT BERRY**	Television Themes *ACID JAZZ*
8	**A PERFECT CIRCLE**	Eat The Elephant *BMG*
9	**JEAN-MICHEL JARRE**	Planet Jarre *SONY MUSIC CG*
10	**COHEED & CAMBRIA**	The Unheavenly Creatures *ROADRUNNER*
11	**MARILLION**	All One Tonight – Live At The Royal Albert Hall *EAR MUSIC*
12	**MARILLION**	Clutching At Straws *PARLOPHONE*
13	**MOODY BLUES**	In Search Of The Lost Chord *UMC*
14	**ROGER WATERS**	Is This The Life We Really Want? *COLUMBIA*
15	**MOGWAI**	Kin – OST *ROCK ACTION*
16	**URIAH HEEP**	Living The Dream *FRONTIERS*
17	**MOODY BLUES**	Days Of Future Passed *DECCA*
18	**RUSH**	A Farewell To Kings *UMC/VIRGIN*
19	**JETHRO TULL**	This Was *RHINO*
20	**MASTODON**	Emperor Of Sand *REPRISE*
21	**PINEAPPLE THIEF**	Dissolution *KSCOPE*
22	**HAKEN**	Vector *INSIDE OUT*
23	**HAWKWIND**	Road To Utopia *CHERRY RED*
24	**WARDRUNA**	Skald *BY NORSE MUSIC*
25	**WIRE**	Pink Flag *PINKFLAG*
26	**WOODEN SHJIPS**	V *THRILL JOCKEY*
27	**BE-BOP DELUXE**	Sunburst Finish *CHERRY RED/ESOTERIC*
28	**TIM BLAKE**	Lighthouse An Anthology 1973-2012 *ESOTERIC RECORDINGS*
29	**RIVERSIDE**	Wasteland *INSIDE OUT*
30	**BLACK PEAKS**	All That Divides *RISE RECORDS*

Find out more at **www.officialcharts.com**

WIN! MARILLION *CLUTCHING AT STRAWS* DELUXE EDITION!



Marillion recently reissued their classic 1987 album *Clutching At Straws* as a deluxe 4-CD/Blu-ray box set via Parlophone, featuring unreleased demos, concert recordings, a 60-minute documentary and more... and we have one set to give away.

The box set features a new stereo remix by Andy Bradfield and Avril Mackintosh, and also includes the band's concert at the Edinburgh Playhouse from December 19, 1987. The live show has been remixed by Michael Hunter.

The collection also includes demos from the 1999 2CD remaster and will also feature previously unreleased demos: *Hotel Hobbies, Warm Wet Circles, Just For The Record, Torch Song* and *Slainte Mhath*.

The Blu-ray contains a 48/24 audio mix of *Clutching At Straws* and in stereo 5.1, *The Last Straw* documentary, the original album, bonus tracks and promos for *Incommunicado, Sugar Mice* and *Warm Wet Circles*.

A vinyl edition of the box set is also available which features the Andy Bradfield and Avril Mackintosh remix, along with the Edinburgh Playhouse show.

For your chance to win, just answer the following question:

What chart position did *Clutching At Straws* reach in the UK?

A) 2

B) 3

C) 4

Enter the competition at www.bit.ly/MarillionComp.

See www.marillion.com and http://fishmusic.scot for more information.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This competition will be open from 1 February to 5 March. By entering the competition you agree to our competition rules (available at www.futureplc.com/competition-rules). The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received by the closing date. No employees of Future Publishing or any of its group companies or the employees of any entity which has been involved with the administration of this competition or any member of their households may enter this competition.

Now our turn...

The Editor
Jerry Ewing



POND

Tasmania
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Russell Fairbrother



DET SKANDALØSE ORKESTER

Tenk Om Noen Ser Deg
APOLLON

The Lone Office Lady
Hannah May Kilroy



HEXVESSEL

All Tree
SECRET TREES/CENTURY MEDIA

Musician
Plini



TESSERACT

Sonder
KSCOPE

The Writer
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IT BITES

Live In London
SELF-RELEASED

The Reader
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VAN DER GRAAF GENERATOR

The Least We Can Do Is Wave To Each Other
CHARISMA

FLAVIEN BERGER

Humble French maestro traverses trippy landscapes and pop with bite...

COMPUTER GAMES CAN rot your brain if you play them too much, but try telling that to Flavien Berger. The Paris-born musician has the Sony PlayStation gaming console to thank for his interest in writing songs. "I started out making music on my PlayStation," he says, "on a game called *Music 2000*. By playing the game, I started making music. Soon I realised that I was composing."

Flavien's autodidactic explorations became more serious with time, as did his interest in music-making machines, but it was a decade before he plucked up the courage to play anything to his friends. Initially he began scoring soundtracks for short films, a sideline that has kept him busy since 2012. But with the release of his first album, *Léviathan*, in 2015 and his second album, *Contre-temps*, that arrived late last year, Berger has grown from cult concern into a cover star for French weeklies like *Les Inrocks*.

"I didn't really want to release my stuff," he says. "I brought out my first album four years ago and I'm 32 years old now, so releasing music has been something I've come to late."

Berger is a humble soul who makes his career sound like a hobby, but evidence is to the contrary. He's becoming a star in France, and across Europe too, and he's still worshipped by cool underground papers like *Gonzaï*. It's easy to see why. He's a blue-eyed musical maverick with flowing Viking locks and a well maintained Bavarian moustache. *Contre-temps* is a touched double player that throws up variegated splashes of genius, full of dreamy sonic experiments.

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Flavien Berger *(programming, synths, etc)*

SOUNDS LIKE

An analogue toboggan sledding down an electro mountain into a digital sea

CURRENT RELEASE

Contre-temps is out now via Pan European Recordings

WEBSITE

www.bit.ly/Flavien_berger

Berger also peddles a fine line in space bossa nova. He's not quite as well-known over here in the UK, but he recently packed out London's Village Underground with a swinging crowd of international hipsters and white-trousered sophisticates.

The titular *Contre-temps*, which, like the rest of his work oozes with *jeux de mots*, is a 14-minute title track recorded with avant-garde R&B chanteuse Bonnie Banane, who is one of the most interesting artists working in France today. Together they traverse a trippy landscape that's one part D'Angelo, one part Brigitte Fontaine. "My plan was to make a psychedelic R&B song," says Berger, "which doesn't really exist. Psychedelic R&B isn't really a genre, so I wanted to try it."

Contre-temps is a labyrinthine world that only really gives up its secrets with repeat visits, though there are pop moments like *Brutalisme* and *Maddy La Nuit* to try to ease you in. When *Prog* suggests that the record might be difficult to get into at first, Berger sounds a little offended. "It's not my job to sell my music — my job is to make it," he states, matter-of-factly. "As for how accessible it is? I think what I did on this record was more pop than my debut. Simpler structures and uncomplicated words. I didn't do it to sell records or be on the radio — I did it because we are surrounded by pop and I wanted to know what I could do with it."

Contre-temps is pop *sui generis*. **JA**

"Psychedelic R&B isn't really a genre, so I wanted to try it."



Flavien Berger: a cool breeze blowing in from the Continent.

JULIEN BOURGEOIS

THE END OF THE OCEAN

Former punks breathe new life into post-rock.

YOU'D BE FORGIVEN for experiencing post-rock fatigue as of late, with the genre so heavily saturated that it takes something really special for a band to stand out from the crowd. Fortunately, Ohio's The End Of The Ocean are a breath of fresh air. Coming from a predominantly punk and hardcore background, the group began as an ambient bedroom project before evolving into the sprawling, emotive, dual-guitar-wielding behemoth they are today. The quintet's 2011 debut, *Pacific.Atlantic*, was a big hit, swiftly racking up thousands of Spotify plays.

"That was totally out of left-field – I think all of our minds were blown, and still are!" laughs guitarist Kevin Shannon on the album's success. "It was totally random, nobody expected it and we didn't push for that to happen. We were just kind of dumbfounded, like, 'What the heck is going on?'"

With poor pay-outs for artists and a distinct lack of gatefold sleeves, streaming services may not be the discerning prog fan's format of choice, but The End Of The Ocean take a refreshingly open-minded stance on the service.

"Up until we got with Equal Vision Records, it's been pretty much DIY," explains drummer Wes Jackson. "We took the DIY route from punk and hardcore, and when you're in that scene, people are handing out music for free anyway. Personally I like streaming stuff because you can easily reach more of an audience. As a monetary thing, maybe not so much, but for getting new ears on your music, I love it."

"I would definitely rather 100 people hear our music for free than only five people hear it paying for it," says Shannon. "We all work very hard on it, I would hate for it to not be heard. I'd rather people hear it at the expense of us making money, for how hard we worked on it."

It's been worth the wait for second full-length *.aire*, which is a much more mature, well-realised and expansive affair, and looks set to continue that upwards trajectory.

"It took us a while to write this record and to get everyone in one room: we had logistical issues," Jackson groans. "Mostly it's just a lot of emotions: frustration, sadness, anger… a lot of what we were all just experiencing over the last few years, as we've been trying to get together to write the record itself. We all individually were going through some things over the past few years – some things great, some things not so great – and I think that's what we just channelled into [the record]."

As for the meaning behind the album's title…

"I could make it really mysterious and tell you it might be related to a certain Keanu Reeves film… because it is!" laughs Shannon. "I think we definitely pride ourselves on not taking ourselves seriously, and just having fun with what we do with the band. We feel like the genre as a whole is very stiff and rigid, and very serious – which isn't fully a bad thing obviously, but at the same time, it can seem a little bit convoluted and bland, like there's no personality to it. We just try to have fun with it, and try to enjoy it and throw some fun into it rather than keeping everything super-serious and very stiff." **KW**

"Post-rock can seem a little bit convoluted and bland - we just try to have fun with it."



PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Kevin Shannon *(guitar)*, **Trish Chisholm** *(guitar)*, **Bryan Yost** *(bass)*, **Tara Mayer** *(keyboards)*, **Wes Jackson** *(drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Epic, cathartic and enveloping post-rock that fuses yearning, melancholy atmospheres with empowering punk rock energy

CURRENT RELEASE

.aire is out now on Equal Vision

WEBSITE

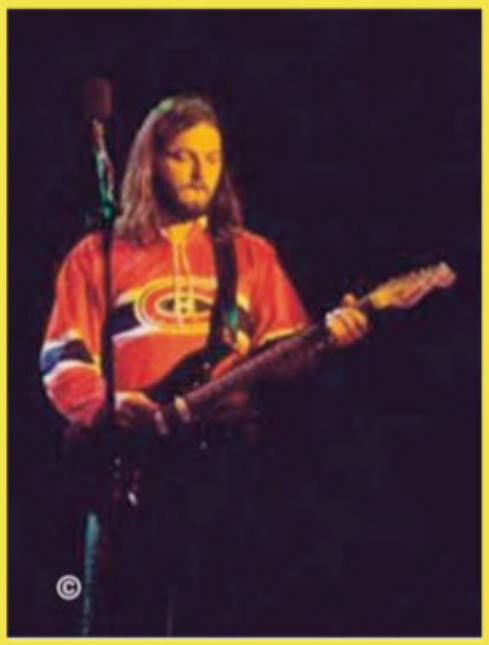
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My Record Collection

MICHAEL LIVESLEY

Bringing his 'Viv' to Liverpool, the actor-comedian and *I'm A Celebrity* voiceover man reveals his prog faves – and how *Sir Henry At Rawlinson End* changed his life.

Words: Jo Kendall **Portrait:** Mark Latham

"Prog captures a mood for me, growing up in the 70s with things like [TV show] *Children Of The Stones*, Dennis Wheatley, and Hammer Horror. The 70s was a junction between old England and modern times and I'd always been struck by Merrie England and history. For me, it's in this junction where prog resides.

I would've been about three or four when I first saw **Rick Wakeman** on TV. He was doing some of *King Arthur*. Later my obsession with keyboards and synth would start, but what he was doing chimed with my interest in history. Where I lived, among farmers' fields in Haydock, it still felt like the 19th century.

My background was steeped in Catholicism — morality and tradition — and also my mum's record collection of T. Rex, Bowie and Motown. I got really into **The Beatles** when I was 14. By 16, we were living in Widnes and I left school and started hanging about with a bunch of ne'er-do-wells [laughs] who wanted to be in bands. One guy, Si, had a massive detached Victorian house. His dad was working in Saudi Arabia, so he had the house to himself and access to his dad's record collection — crates of 747 rock cassettes; Saudi pirate tapes of albums. The first one I remember hearing was *The Yes Album* backed with *Close To The Edge*. I remember thinking 'I'm home.' That's how I first heard Alan Parsons Project, Pink Floyd, Genesis, Gong… I'm looking at the 747 edition of *Fragile* right now, it's my favourite **Yes** album. That had so many amazing tunes on there. Rick's overflowing with creativity and it's his chance to shine.

I went to see Rick play; I'd found a secondhand shop called Simms Cross Curios and they had racks of cheap records. I got all the Yes albums and took them to Rick to be signed. I was so green, he's signing away and gets to *Relayer* and goes 'I'm not even on that one!'

I heard *The Yes Album*. I thought, 'I'm home.'

My next big discovery was **Jethro Tull**'s *Songs From The Wood*. That crystallised the whole 70s crossover of English folklore and paganism viewed through the prism of a 20th-century human being. I was obsessed with Tolkien and medieval music, so to hear it all brought together was so appealing.

The crate threw up *Nursery Cryme* next and it was around the same time that the BBC put on a docu about **Genesis**. That starts with them jumping on the helicopter to do the Knebworth gig, then it's got all the footage of Gabriel as the flower, and so on. It was like, 'Wow!' Because of the synth sound I knew *Solsbury Hill*, but this was all new. Drama had been in my mind; when I was 11 I'd said to my teacher, Mrs Berry, 'I'd like to go to drama school.' She looked up from her book, took her glasses off and said, 'People who speak like you don't go to drama school.' Getting into prog showed me there was a combination of the dramatic and the musical. I kept that in the back of my mind. Meanwhile, my mum had met a man called Barry who was up on his music. He passed the house on his way to work and one day, in an effort to curry favour with her, he dropped a bag of records into our coal hole for me. Inside was *Recycled* by **Nektar**. It had a huge warp on the first centimetre of vinyl — I needed a lot of 2p pieces on the tone arm to play it. It was one glorious continuous track, and I heard it at half five in the morning. It still feels like dawn breaking now when I listen to it.

I was into The Smiths, Doors and the Inspiral Carpets so I had a quiff, 20-inch-bottomed jeans, a small synth under my arm and a Yes T-shirt. It confused the hell out of everyone, including the police who thought I was up to no good. Si called me Jim Morrissey.

When I was on the dole I took part in a government scheme called The Musicians' Workshop. You got your dole money and you attended this centre where you jammed all day and they put gigs on. That's how I first heard **Ozric Tentacles**' *Pungent Effulgent*. With them as inspiration me and my friends started a dancey, festivally band called Urm. That took me in a different musical direction, listening to underground bands such as Poisoned Electrick Head. On May Day 1993 we went to a free festival in Sefton Park and I heard this sound wafting across the park of trumpets and things. I ran over to the stage and that's when I first saw **Wizards Of Twiddly**. I bought *Independent Legs* that day. The Twids took *Magical Mystery Tour*'s music hall rock'n'roll, jazz, Motown, 80s alt and classic prog, and brought it all together. A fantastic album, and quite anarchic. Even though I didn't know about them yet, it's very close to the spirit of the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band.

By now I was a student with my own radio show, Hulton FM. I met a guy called Alistair on the Rock And Pop course and he was a musical guru for us. He played us Egg, Hatfield & The North and Caravan's amazing *In The Land Of Grey And Pink*. One thing he played, and I could immediately hear the Twids, was the **Cardiacs**' *A Little Man And A House And The Whole World Window*. Suddenly, we were going to London to see them. They were like the Twids but with organ and piano in, hooray! My obsession with keyboards was sated. I managed to interview Tim Smith in Manchester for the radio show. He was obsessed with Yes and I gave him a DVD of the QPR gig.

Often, in the pub, older friends would have reminiscences of **Viv Stanshall**'s *Sir Henry At Rawlinson End*. One day, at a party, someone put it on. It was like, 'Wow, this is even more amazing than the recitations!' I thought no more about it, then, four years later and living in Vancouver, I found myself thinking about Sherbet Dip Dabs, baked beans, Viv Stanshall and this album.

I came back to Liverpool and I decided to pursue acting. I'd lacked the bottle, thanks to Mrs Berry's admonishment. I was 34 and started to get fit, cycling down the waterfront in Liverpool every day. On my journey I found myself listening to one album more than others: *Sir Henry*. I thought about Rik Mayall reading *George's Marvellous Medicine* on TV and I pondered, 'Imagine if Viv was still alive and they got him to do a *Jackanory* of this.' I presumed someone would be doing a stage show and I looked all over the internet. They weren't. I felt like a dhobi wallah in a Kipling story who'd been sent to do the washing by the river and found a ruby. So I washed off the ruby with my loin cloth and thought 'This will do me.' The *Sir Henry Show* began.

I'm now writing a new biographical show, hopefully for Edinburgh, called *Half The Man*, about losing five stone. Working out to prog songs such as *Nine Feet Underground* certainly helps!"

Find Michael at www.sirhenrylives.com and hear his podcast, The Livo Lounge, at www.livo.co.uk.


VIVIAN STANSHALL
"Sir Henry at Rawlinson End"
GENESIS
Nursery Cryme
JETHRO TULL
THE WOOD
twiddly

Q&A

FERNANDO PERDOMO

From recording in the ground zero of rock to paying tribute to prog's greatest underdog, Fernando Perdomo's music is powered by unpredictability, his childhood record collection and the love of a great melody.

Words: David West **Portrait:** Cyndi Trissel

It's tempting to believe that Fernando Perdomo never sleeps. In addition to being a multi-instrumentalist and playing guitar with the Dave Kerzner Band, he owns Reseda Ranch Studios in California — "It's wonderful to be able to roll out of bed and make music," he says — and is a tirelessly prolific producer and songwriter. He released two excellent albums last year, *Zebra Crossing* and *Out To Sea*, and a sequel to the latter is already on the way.

How was it recording *Zebra Crossing* at Abbey Road?
It was a lifelong dream of mine. Abbey Road is not the easiest studio to book — it's very busy — and the one day that they were able to give me was July 25, 2018. Being a complete Beatle nerd, I popped out my book *Beatles Recording Sessions* and I found out that July 25, 1968 was the day the original version of *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* was recorded. I had a eureka moment: I needed to do a version of that song, 50 years to the day. I called all my friends from London and the surrounding areas and we put together a band and did the song in the last two hours of the session. The soundtrack of our lives was made there, whether you're a Beatles fan, a Pink Floyd fan, a Kate Bush fan: it's where everything happened. To be making music in the ground zero of rock'n'roll and prog, it was definitely full circle for me because even before I became obsessed with prog and Yes and Genesis, I was a Beatle freak and I'll always be a Beatle freak. It was incredible to be able to walk into Abbey Road for the first time as a client. Whenever I visited London, I would just walk over the zebra crossing and stare at it from the outside.

"I became a Curved Air freak when I was eight years old."

Your music goes from power-pop to prog and beyond. What fuels your eclecticism?
When people ask me, "Did you go to school? Did you study this?" Man, my instructor was my record collection. I'm from Miami Beach, Florida, I come from a Hispanic family. I didn't grow up around rock'n'roll — I discovered it at a very early age through MTV of all things. My family used to go to thrift stores and flea markets. Back in the 80s, you could still buy records for 50 cents, a dollar, and I would take home five to 10 records a week from the age of six. I was buying anything that looked cool. That's how I became a Curved Air freak when I was eight years old, and a King Crimson nut, listening to Chris Squire's *Fish Out Of Water* on the way to school. Right now, I'm very lucky to say that I'm making music that pretty much represents every side of what I like. I make power-pop, I make progressive rock, I make instrumental prog-fusion-jazz stuff. I produce folk and Americana records, I produce TV music. I've written classical stuff. A great artist that I think is my template is Todd Rundgren, because he has similar influences. One minute he'd be doing *Hello It's Me*, and the next minute he'd be doing *The Ikon*, 30-minute long progressive rock. When you listen to my stuff, even though it's very different from *Zebra Crossing* to *Out To Sea*, it all has the same heart and soul. I'm obsessed with melody, with hooks, with passionate performances, and that's really the essence of what I do.

Watching you onstage with Dave Kerzner, you clearly love performing too?
Dave Kerzner has changed my life. He is so incredible and so talented and so good at bringing people together. It's amazing to say I've played on records with Steve Hackett, Keith Emerson, Marco Minnemann, Simon Phillips… all these people that he puts together. I've been playing live professionally since before I was recording. I love performing, I love the feedback from the crowd. On the other hand, I don't love the technical side of it, because lots of things can go wrong. It's gotten around that I'm unpredictable onstage and I like that because one of my biggest pet peeves is bands that play the same thing every show because they're playing to tracks. I feel like that's not what live rock'n'roll is about. It's all about an experience that could be one of a kind. I'm a little old school: I don't like running tracks, I don't like using extremely modern equipment, I like vintage guitars that don't strictly stay in tune. I like taking advantage of the limitations of live performance and making it unpredictable and fun.

Your track *The Architect* pays tribute to Peter Banks. Was he a hero of yours?
He is such a great guitar idol to me because in the world of progressive rock, everybody loves the underdog, and he is the ultimate prog rock guitar hero underdog. He was the original guitar player in one of the greatest bands of all time, yet he's constantly forgotten. One of my earliest purchases was the *Yesyears* boxset and it starts with stuff off the first two records. I immediately lost my mind about how cool the guitar playing was. Then I found Flash, *In The Can*, and that became my favourite record very fast. One of the things that's cool about Peter Banks is he was never alienating to the pop crowd because he was always more heart than technique and that's basically what I'm going at. I'm not a super-skilled player, I'm not very fast, I don't do tapping, I don't do sweep arpeggios, I'm more of a classic rock guitar player that dabbles in prog. That's the thing: I identify with Peter. It's just so sad that he passed away, and when Yes got inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame he was forgotten. When I went to do the *Out To Sea* record, the first thing I did was *The Architect*. I thought, "The world needs a tribute to Peter Banks." Now I'm recording his music with Mark Murdock of Empire to create a celebration album under the name *The New Empire*. I want to build more awareness for him because he was brilliant, absolutely brilliant.

***Zebra Crossing* is out now via The Right Honourable Recording Company. See www.fernandoperdomo.com for more information.**


GUILD
GUILD

The PROG

READERS' POLL 2018

This being our first actual issue of 2019, *Prog*'s new year starts with a glance over our shoulder at the picks of 2018. Last issue you had the chance to take in the *Prog* writers' favourite albums of the year. Now it's your turn, the readers, for your choices for the 2018 Readers' Poll.

I read some comments online suggesting that 2018 was a bit of a fallow period for the genre. Really? Casting my eye over the results this year, I'm not so certain that rings true. Okay, so there were no new releases from the perceived 'big hitters' of the genre, but that doesn't mean what was released lacked quality. Far from it. And it didn't stop more of you than ever sending in your votes. What it *does* do is open up the prog world and allow some artists who are very much in the upward trajectory of their own careers to bask in some deserved limelight. And it is good to see different talent in the spotlight. He may have won two Progressive Music Awards in 2018, but this is the first year that Steven Wilson hasn't won a category in the Readers' Poll! A changing of the guard?

A big thank you very much to you, the readers, for taking the time to vote. And a big congratulations to the winners and everyone who features in their respective categories, who are all doing their part to keep the scene thriving. It points to a fascinating 2019 for progressive music. I'd be keen to hear your thoughts. Drop me an email at: prog@futurenet.com. Thanks.



Jerry Ewing - Editor



PRESS/SOPHOCLES ALEXIOU

BAND

1. BIG BIG TRAIN

2. RIVERSIDE
3. MARILLION
4. KING CRIMSON
5. THE PINEAPPLE THIEF
6. CAMEL
7. IAMTHEMORNING
8. LIFESIGNS
9. SOUTHERN EMPIRE
10. MAGENTA

"We are so grateful for the support of the wonderful prog rock community. We look forward to meeting listeners on our first UK tour in the autumn and further afield in 2020."

Big Big Train

The PROG READERS' POLL 2018



PRESS/WILLEM KLOPPER

"Thank you to those of you who cast your votes, I greatly appreciate it. It is an honour and a privilege to be voted best male vocalist. A huge thank you to *Prog* magazine staff and readers for championing and supporting our genre."
David Longdon

MALE VOCALIST

1. DAVID LONGDON (BIG BIG TRAIN)

2. STEVE HOGARTH (MARILLION)
3. MARIUSZ DUDA (RIVERSIDE)
4. JOE PAYNE
5. ROSS JENNINGS (HAKEN)
6. DANIEL TOMPKINS (TESSERACT)
7. PETER JONES (TIGER MOTH TALES)
8. PAUL MANZI (ARENA)
9. JAKKO JAKSZYK (KING CRIMSON)
10. PETER NICHOLLS (IQ)

"On behalf of all of us in The Pineapple Thief, I want to thank the readers of *Prog* who voted for our album. It's a huge honour to get the number one spot and to be recognised by such discerning music lovers! Cheers!"
Bruce Soord

ALBUM

1. THE PINEAPPLE THIEF *DISSOLUTION*

2. RIVERSIDE – *WASTELAND*
3. HAKEN – *VECTOR*
4. SOUTHERN EMPIRE – *CIVILISATION*
5. THE TANGENT – *PROXY*
6. SANGUINE HUM – *NOW WE HAVE POWER*
7. GALAHAD – *SEAS OF CHANGE*
8. GLEB KOLYADIN – *GLEB KOLYADIN*
9. RIKARD SJÖBLOM'S GUNGFLY – *FRIENDSHIP*
10. GAZPACHO – *SOYUZ*





PRESS/RICHARD SHAKESPEARE.SHAKEYPIX@GOOGLEMAIL.COM

FEMALE VOCALIST

1. AMY BIRKS
(BEATRIX PLAYERS)

2. MARJANA SEMKINA (IAMTHEMORNING)
3. LEE DOUGLAS (ANATHEMA)
4. NINET TAYEB
5. CATHERINE ANNE DAVIES
(THE ANCHORESS)
6. CHRISTINA BOOTH (MAGENTA)
7. HAYLEY GRIFFITHS
8. ANNEKE VAN GIERSBERGEN
9. ANNA VON HAUSSWOLFF
10. FLOOR JANSEN (NIGHTWISH)

"I am both thrilled and honoured to receive this accolade. Thanks to everyone that voted for me and to *Prog* magazine for bringing us all together. It gave myself and Beatrix Players the perfect stage to perform in front of such a warm and welcoming crowd, which I'm sure will continue into 2019 with Birks&Kroon."
Amy Birks

The PROG READERS' POLL 2018



"I'm extremely honoured. I'm not a technical musician but I'm very happy that my approach resonates with your readers. I'm currently in Mexico City having played a fantastic Steve Rothery Band gig to our fans here. I feel a large tequila coming on to celebrate!"
Steve Rothery

GUITARIST

1. STEVE ROTHERY (MARILLION)

2. STEVE HACKETT
3. ANDY LATIMER (CAMEL)
4. DAVE BAINBRIDGE (LIFESIGNS/STRAWBS/ CELESTIAL FIRE)
5. ROBERT FRIPP (KING CRIMSON)
6. LUKE MACHIN (MASCHINE)
7. DAVE GREGORY (BIG BIG TRAIN)
8. RICHARD HENSHALL (HAKEN)
9. GUTHRIE GOVAN (THE ARISTOCRATS)
10. STEVE HOWE (YES)



KEVIN NIXON



PRESS

"Oh, not again? This is getting embarrassing."
Nick Beggs

BASSIST

1. NICK BEGGS (STEVEN WILSON/ THE MUTE GODS)

2. MARIUSZ DUDA (RIVERSIDE)
3. JONAS REINGOLD (THE TANGENT/ STEVE HACKETT)
4. TONY LEVIN (KING CRIMSON)
5. JON POOLE (LIFESIGNS)
6. GREG SPAWTON (BIG BIG TRAIN)
7. LEE POMEROY (YES FEAT. ARW)
8. CONNER GREEN (HAKEN)
9. GEDDY LEE (RUSH)
10. GUY PRATT (NICK MASON'S SAUCERFUL OF SECRETS)

The PROG READERS' POLL 2018

DRUMS

1. GAVIN HARRISON (KING CRIMSON/ THE PINEAPPLE THIEF)

2. NICK D'VIRGILIO (BIG BIG TRAIN)
3. CRAIG BLUNDELL (STEVEN WILSON)
4. MARCO MINNEMANN (THE SEA WITHIN)
5. MIKE PORTNOY
6. NICK MASON
7. GARY O'TOOLE
8. IAN MOSLEY (MARILLION)
9. PAT MASTELOTTO (KING CRIMSON)
10. RAY HEARNE (HAKEN)



"Thanks to all those who voted for me. It's always a surprise and always a pleasure."
Gavin Harrison

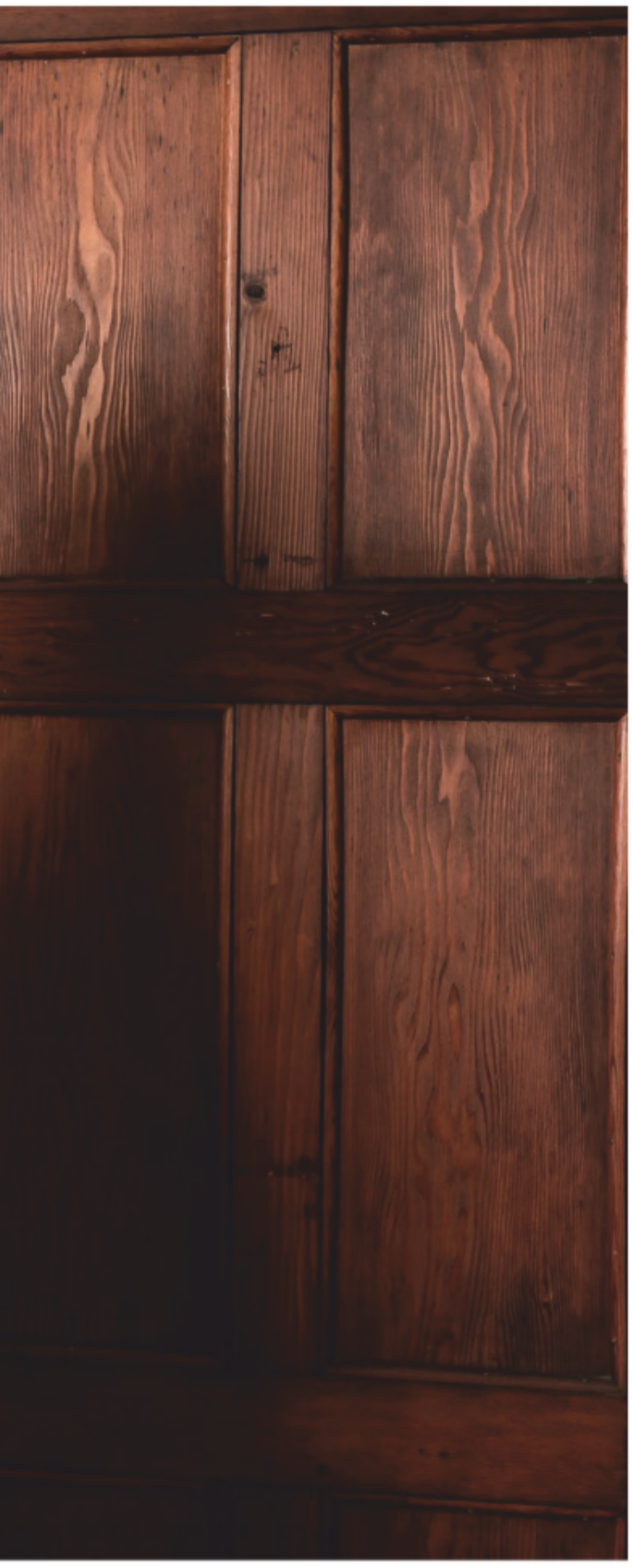
KEVIN NIXON



REISSUE

1. MARILLION *CLUTCHING AT STRAWS*

2. MARILLION – *BRAVE*
3. IQ – *EVER*
4. RUSH – *HEMISPHERES*
5. CHRIS SQUIRE – *FISH OUT OF WATER*
6. THE BEATLES – *THE BEATLES*
7. KATE BUSH – *REMASTERED*
8. COSMOGRAF – *WHEN AGE HAS DONE ITS DUTY*
9. YES – *THE STEVEN WILSON REMIXES*
10. JETHRO TULL – *HEAVY HORSES*



UNSIGNED BAND

1. SYLF

2. I AM THE MANIC WHALE
3. BLACKHEART ORCHESTRA
4. ZIO
5. SERVANTS OF SCIENCE
6. THIS WINTER MACHINE
7. EMPEROR NORTON
8. EXPLORING BIRDSONG
9. JOHN HOLDEN
10. THE KENTISH SPIRES

"Thank you so much, *Prog* readers! After looking up to the incredible artists in this magazine for so many years I am beyond honoured to be voted as Best Unsigned Artist. 2018 has been an amazing year, supporting Marillion alongside the genius Riccardo Romano, and I'm so excited to release my debut EP, *Opia*, in 2019!"
Jennifer Rothery



PRESS

"We are delighted to see two of our recent Deluxe Reissues in first and second place. We are so glad that they are being received so well by the fans. It's been interesting for us to put them together and it's great that after all these years the fans are still enjoying our back catalogue."
Ian Mosley

The PROG READERS' POLL 2018

KEYBOARDIST

1. GLEB KOLYADIN (IAMTHEMORNING)

2. PETER JONES (TIGER MOTH TALES/CAMEL)
3. ADAM HOLZMAN (STEVEN WILSON)
4. ANDY TILLISON (THE TANGENT)
5. JOHN YOUNG (LIFESIGNS)
6. DIEGO TEJEIDA (HAKEN)
7. JORDAN RUDESS (DREAM THEATER)
8. MICHAEL ŁAPAJ (RIVERSIDE)
9. ROB REED (MAGENTA)
10. CLIVE NOLAN (ARENA)



"Thanks to *Prog* readers and my listeners for your support and confidence in me. The previous two years of self-discovery have resulted in an incredible musical journey and this result suggests that 2019 will be just as cool."
Gleb Kolyadin

PRESS/SOKOLOV ROMAN

EVENT

1. NIGHT OF THE PROG

2. STEVEN WILSON, ROYAL ALBERT HALL
3. KING CRIMSON TOUR
4. CAMEL, ROYAL ALBERT HALL
5. CRUISE TO THE EDGE
6. ROGER WATERS, HYDE PARK
7. YES 50TH ANNIVERSARY CONVENTION
8. WINTER'S END FESTIVAL
9. PROGTOBERFEST
10. TRINITY III

"After running the Night Of The Prog Festival for 14 years now, we'd like to thank *Prog* magazine for their support over the years, and especially the readers of the magazine for your votes. To win this category is a great honour and proves that all the efforts, energy and passion we have put into this Festival during the past 14 years was definitely worth it. We hope to see as many of you as possible next July at the beautiful Loreley Amphitheater, when the 14th edition of the Night Of The Prog Festival will take place."
Winfried Völklein



PRESS/SIMON HOGG



NICOLAS ECONOMOU/NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES

VENUE

1. ROYAL ALBERT HALL, LONDON

2. ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON
3. DE BOERDERIJ, ZOETERMEER
4. TRADING BOUNDARIES, SUSSEX
5. BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY HALL
6. ROBIN 2, BILSTON
7. LONDON PALLADIUM
8. UNION CHAPEL, LONDON
9. 013, TILBURG
10. ACAPELA STUDIOS, CARDIFF

"We're delighted to be recognised as *Prog* readers' favourite venue for the fourth consecutive year. Welcoming prog legends, and their amazing fans, is always a huge pleasure for us, and we're proud that the feeling is mutual. It's always special when the hard work that goes into staging these shows is recognised, but that's especially true when it's an award voted for by the fans. We look forward to more of the same in 2019, as Roger Hodgson, Marillion and Hawkwind take to our famous stage. We'll see you there."
Lucy Noble, Artistic Director at the Royal Albert Hall

The PROG READERS' POLL 2018

UNSUNG HERO

1. LUCY JORDACHE/ STEPHANIE BRADLEY (MARILLION'S QUEENS)

2. NELLIE PITTS (THE MERCH DESK)
3. OCTAVIA BROWN (2DAYS PROG +1 ROSFEST/UPF)
4. DAVID ELLIOTT (BAD ELEPHANT)
5. WINFRIED VÖLKLEIN (NIGHT OF THE PROG)
6. GRAHAM HARRIS (STAGE MANAGER/ KEYBOARD TECH PAR EXCELLENCE)
7. STEPHEN LAMB (SONICBOND/SUMMER/ WINTER'S END)
8. RACHEL WILCE (PENDRAGON'S MOTHER HEN)
9. CHRIS TOPHAM (PLANE GROOVY)
10. DANNY MAYO (DANFEST)



PRESS

"Wow! Thank you so much to the readers of *Prog* magazine for voting for us. We work as part of a great team at Marillion (including Rich, Mike and Mark) and it's wonderful to be recognised by the fans for doing our jobs that we both love to do."
Lucy Jordache and Stephanie Bradley



PRESS/ANDREW MACNAUGHTAN

DISAPPOINTMENT

1. RUSH CALLING IT QUITS

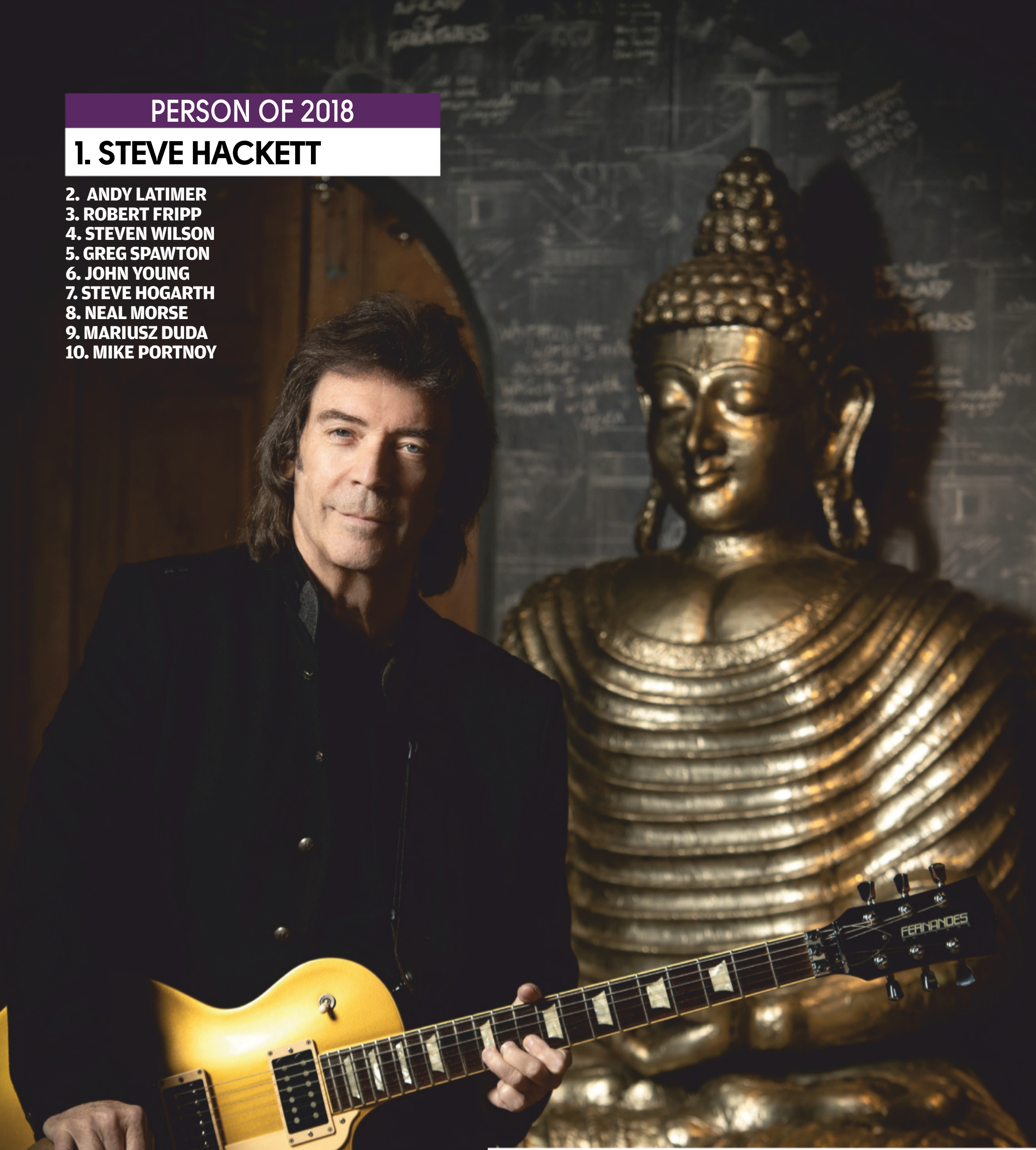
2. CANCELLATION OF BE PROG! MY FRIEND
3. CANNED APPLAUSE ON ARW'S *LIVE AT THE APOLLO*
4. CLOSURE OF SOUTHAMPTON'S TALKING HEADS VENUE
5. HMV IN TROUBLE
6. GARY O'TOOLE LEAVING STEVE HACKETT'S BAND
7. JADIS POSTPONING TOUR
8. BREXIT
9. NO NEW TOOL ALBUM
10. NO NEW KING CRIMSON MUSIC

PRESS/TINA KORHONEN

PERSON OF 2018

1. STEVE HACKETT

2. ANDY LATIMER
3. ROBERT FRIPP
4. STEVEN WILSON
5. GREG SPAWTON
6. JOHN YOUNG
7. STEVE HOGARTH
8. NEAL MORSE
9. MARIUSZ DUDA
10. MIKE PORTNOY



"I'm thrilled to win the *Prog* Person Of The Year! My thanks to all voters. 2019 promises to be an extraordinary year for progressive music. I'm incredibly pleased to be a part of it and to have such an outpouring of enthusiasm from so many people. Love to all..."

Steve Hackett

Arguably the first prog album to reach No.1 in the charts, **Jethro Tull**'s *Stand Up* celebrates its 50 year anniversary in 2019. From Elvis encounters to penning hits in 5/4, **Ian Anderson** remembers the making of one of the band's most pivotal albums.

Words: Dave Everley **Image:** Heilemann/Camera Press

A NEW DAY yesterday

When Elvis Presley summoned you, you came. It was August 1969, and the King Of Rock'N'Roll was in the midst of a lucrative four-week run of shows at Vegas' International Hotel, where he received a stream of awestruck visitors before and after his sets. No one said no to an audience with Elvis. No one except Ian Anderson.

"We were playing in Las Vegas around the time of the *Stand Up* record, and we were dragged by the scruff of the neck to some casino where he was appearing," says Anderson, 50 years on. "I was never really a big Elvis fan but I suppose the first couple of songs that he ever recorded were part of my childhood fascination with music."

Anderson wasn't impressed with what he saw. "I was just appalled by the commerciality and the triteness of it all. And he was clearly out of his box. He was slurring his words, he didn't know where he was, he would stop the band halfway through his song. It just wasn't the way to see Elvis."

But the King had heard that this hotshot new Limey band with the crazy hair and the flute were in the audience, and he wanted to meet them. Or at least that was the message Anderson got from the Elvis camp.

"They said, 'Elvis would like to see you in his dressing room.' I replied, 'Tell Mr Elvis that it is a really great honour to have been here tonight, but we've got a show tomorrow, we're a bit tired and we need an early night.' And they said 'No, you're not listening — Elvis *will* see you backstage in the dressing room.' I thought, 'This is not this is not an invitation, it's a fucking instruction.'"

Jethro Tull leader Ian Anderson is many things, but bulliable isn't one of them. His heels were dug in so deep that not even the Memphis Mafia could strong-arm him into meeting the King in his court.

Stand Up-era Tull, L-R: Martin Barre, Ian Anderson, Clive Bunker, Glenn Cornick.

> "I've always said that the biggest driving force behind prog rock is boredom. That's the thing that pushes people – they get bored with three chords."

"I think a couple of bandmembers were miffed," he says. "But I felt so embarrassed for him and I didn't want to make things even worse. And obviously he would have had absolutely no idea who we were, no matter what they said."

It was a typically Ian Anderson-ish reaction. He has built a career on confounding expectations, turning left rather than right, marching to no beat other than his own. It's an approach has served him well during his band's 50-plus year career. And never more so than on their second album, *Stand Up*: a transformative record and a key point in Jethro Tull's half-century-long journey — one that marked the beginning of the band as we know them now.

We're a long way from Las Vegas today. It's a crisp winter morning, and Anderson and *Prog* are sitting in a lounge room in the grand Wiltshire pile that he and his wife, Shona, have called home for decades.

2019 doesn't quite mark Tull's 50th anniversary. The band formed in 1967 and their debut album, the blues rock-indebted *This Was*, followed in 1968. Anderson grudgingly marked the latter with an anniversary tour that began last year and extends into this. "I did think about hiding under the bed and not coming out for 12 months," he groans.

But the fact remains that 2019 is a milestone year, if only because it marks the half-centenary of one of their most pivotal albums. Released in July 1969, *Stand Up* was a watershed for the band, one that put them in vanguard of the burgeoning progressive rock movement and turned them into ascendant stars in their own right.

In late 1968, Jethro Tull had seemingly little need to change anything. *This Was* had positioned them in the midst of the Brit-blues pack, alongside Savoy Brown, Chicken Shack and Fleetwood Mac. Titling their debut *This Was* was a sly indication on Anderson's part that Jethro Tull had moved on from their initial sound before the album had even hit the shelves. The singer was already itching to broaden the band's horizons.



TED WEST/CENTRAL PRESS/GETTY IMAGES



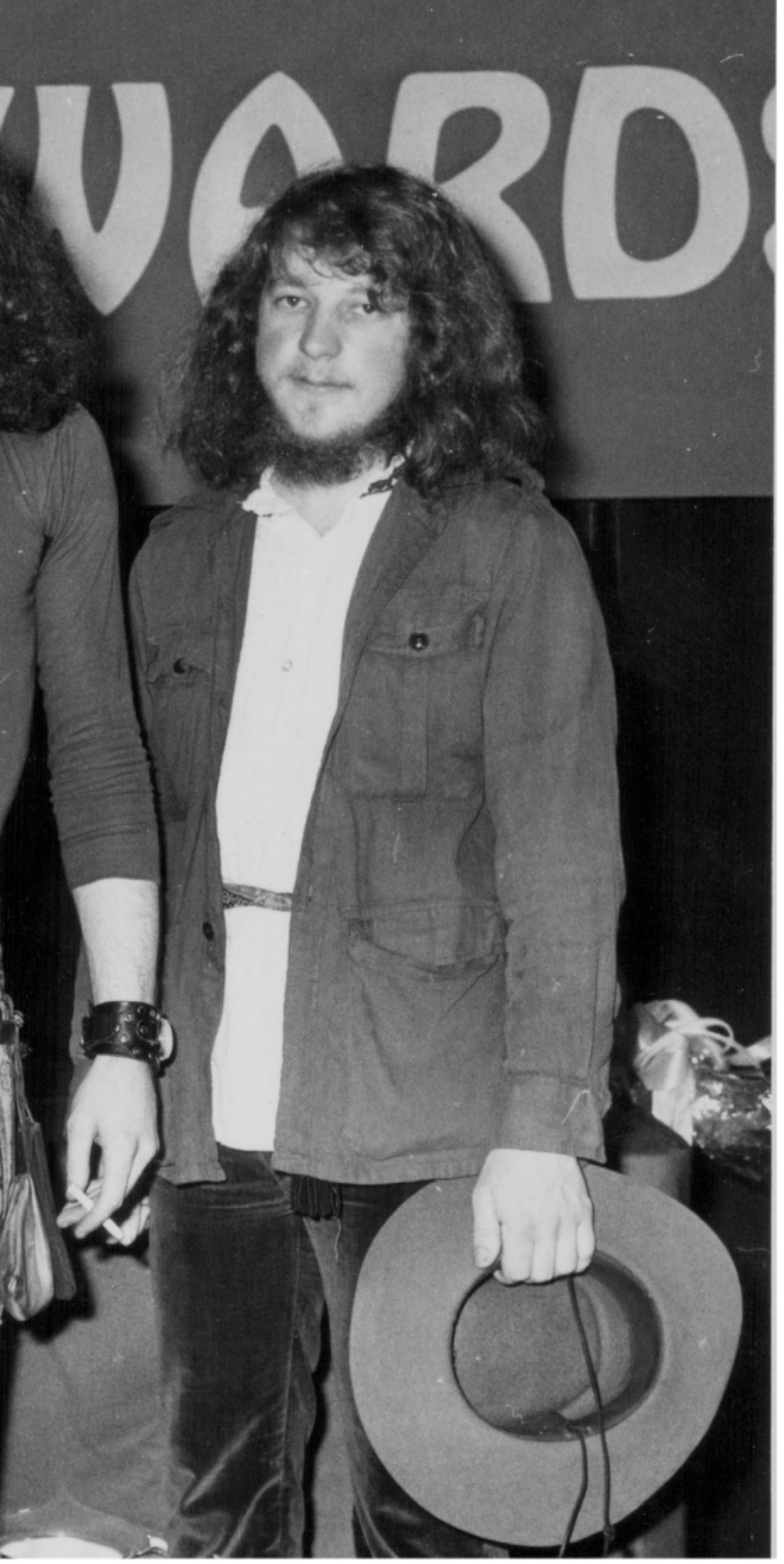
PRESS/TULL ARCHIVES

Below: Jethro Tull and their manager Terry Ellis (right) at Elvis Presley's show in 1969.

"At that time I was going to see, at the Marquee Club, King Crimson, and the very first concerts by Yes," says Anderson. "They gave me confidence that I could be more adventurous, at least if I had the musical chops to do it. Of course, I didn't have the musical chops. I had to spend a bit more time learning to play a bit better and write songs that were a little bit more evolved."

Anderson was writing songs for the follow-up that fitted his new brief before *This Was* had even come out. He ran through some of these ideas with guitarist Mick Abrahams, who was unimpressed.

"It wasn't that he wasn't interested and it wasn't that he was incapable," says Anderson. "It was just out of his comfort zone. Mick was a dyed-in-the-wool blues and R&B guy. He wanted to do more of the standard



blues kind of thing. He wanted to make *This Was Pt II*."

Anderson persuaded Abrahams to record a new song, *Love Story*, for a single. The track swapped earthy R&B for galloping folk rock. The B-side, *A Christmas Song*, was an even greater departure: a knockabout Yuletide ditty complete with mandolin, jingle and tart festive ambience, it was a marker of Abrahams' disinterest that he didn't even play on the latter.

Above: Jethro Tull with their Best Group trophy at the *Melody Maker* Pop Poll Awards in 1969.

"It was I who had to have the showdown with Mick," says Anderson. "He got a bit puffed up and made some veiled threat. At which point I put down my flute and guitar and said, 'Right, let's have it out, man to man,' knowing that Mick was a big bluffer and of course he would back down. Which was just as well, as he was twice my size."

Fisticuffs averted, Abrahams left the room and the band. Jethro Tull might have lost their best musician, but they'd gained a future.

Love Story managed to sneak into the Top 30, justifying Anderson's bold new vision, but there was still the matter of recruiting a new guitarist. One of these was Davy O'List, until recently a member of proto-prog trailblazers The Nice. Anderson was a fan and invited O'List to his North London bedsit to try a few ideas.

"We went through a few ideas and thoughts, but he was at least as odd a character as I probably appeared to him. We weren't really making contact. He seemed to be very ethereal and weird and not really capable of a punchy conversation. I don't think he was comfortable with me and vice versa."

Slightly more successful was an unassuming young guitarist from Birmingham named Tony Iommi, who was a member of a heavy blues band named Earth. Anderson liked Iommi, and he seemed to be more broad-minded than Mick Abrahams.

"He was much more open to different ideas," says Anderson, "I didn't realise that he had lost the tips of several of his fingers in an industrial accident, and he did have a little physical difficulty in playing some of the things that I outlined to him. He had to simplify it in a way that might not have been a bad thing for some of the songs but it just wasn't right for others."

> "*Stand Up* is the first album that I felt creatively responsible for. It was a first wet dream involving somebody else at the same time."

"I'm lucky to have done something so iconic..."

Artist **James Grashow** discusses *Stand Up*'s iconic cover.



James Grashow (left) was a young art student in New York City specialising in woodcuts when he got a call from Jethro Tull's manager Terry Ellis asking if he would be interested in designing the cover for their second album, *Stand Up*.

"I have to be honest, I hadn't heard of them," he tells *Prog* today. "A friend of mine at school knew Terry and told them I could be great. I'd done things for magazines and advertising, but never an album cover."

Ellis and Ian Anderson really liked the idea and sent a limousine to pick up Grashow and drive him from his apartment to New Haven, Connecticut, where the band were playing. "I was so excited, I'd never been in a limousine before," he says. They told Grashow that they wanted a drawing of the band that popped up when the gatefold album was opened. "I think to this day Terry Ellis and Ian Anderson are discussing whose idea it was to have the pop-up in the centre," he says. "But I wanted to make them sitting down on the cover, standing up in the centre, then walking away on the back cover."

Grashow says the process of creating the artwork took two or three months of work. Anderson dropped by his apartment at one point. "Here's this English guy in red leather pants, fuzzy hair, looking completely out of place."

In subsequent years, Grashow has seen his work on everything from T-shirts to rugs. "I'm lucky to have done something so iconic," he says.

Of course, there's one element of the cover that has kept Tull fans curious for years. Look closely and you'll see that Ian Anderson has 11 fingers rather than the customary 10.

"I was just cutting away and didn't notice," says Grashow. "After it got published, I started getting letters from all over the world asking what it meant. I can imagine people sitting round, getting stoned, counting the fingers and asking what the significance of the 11th finger was." And was it significant? "No," he laughs. "It was just an accident." **DEV**



JAMES GRASHOW

Iommi was briefly a member of Tull, long enough to appear in the Rolling Stones' *Rock And Roll Circus* concert movie, where the band played their 1968 single *A Song For Jeffrey* and a new number, *Fat Man*. But by mid-December, he returned to Birmingham, and to his old band, Earth, who would soon change their name to Black Sabbath. "He did alright for himself, did Tony," says Anderson warmly.

One guitarist who had auditioned at the same time as Iommi was Martin Barre, whose band Gethsemane had played with Tull at a gig in Portsmouth. Barre's audition had been a disaster: his amp didn't work properly and the guitarist was a bundle of nerves. Yet Anderson had spotted a glimmer of potential amid the technical and personal snafus. "I invited him back for a more private, less pressured little get together," he says.

The pair crammed into the singer's bedsit. Barre began playing once more, this time without an amplifier. Afterwards the two of them went for food at a greasy spoon café on nearby Highgate Road. "I seem to remember thinking, 'He's a good guy, he seems interested in a lot of the same sort of things as me and he's probably about as unformed as a musician as I am, so we could sit down and learn together,'" says Anderson.

It helped that, temperamentally, Barre was a world away from his predecessor, Mick Abrahams. "Mick was a strong character, but he was terribly insecure," says Anderson. "He would needle people, test them out. He was a tricky guy to be around. Martin wasn't like that at all. He just wanted to be on his own most of the time. His idea of rock'n'roll was retiring early with a sandwich and an Agatha Christie book, which wasn't a million miles away from mine."

By the time 1968 turned into 1969, Barre was the band's new guitarist. The reimagining of Tull was underway.



PICTORIAL PRESS LTD/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

If Barre was hoping for a gentle entry into the world of Tull, he was in for a shock. The first few months of 1969 were a whirlwind. In January, the band played a three-week UK tour, then flew to the US, where they'd spend the best part of the next three months, sharing stages with everyone from to Detroit firebrands the MC5 to Led Zeppelin.

"You knew that was a pretty racy lifestyle going on," says Anderson of the latter. "At least in some parts of the band. Of course, there was quite clearly a difference between the behaviour of the rather remote and calm John Paul Jones and Jimmy Page, that boyish, smily, fun-loving guy who always wanted to share his photos with you. Photos usually involving soft fruit…"

It was in the US that Jethro Tull wrote and recorded the song that would become a key stepping stone in their transition from blues rock eccentrics into full-blown prog pioneers.

Anderson remembers being in a hotel somewhere in the Midwest when the band's manager, Terry Ellis, collared him in the lobby and told him he needed to write a hit single. "So I said, 'Right, so you want me to pop back to my hotel room and write a hit single?' and he said, 'Yes!'"

Tull in 1969, L-R: Martin Barre, Ian Anderson, Clive Bunker, Glenn Cornick.

Below: Tull on *Top Of The Pops* in 1969.

Challenge accepted, Anderson returned to his hotel room to knuckle down. Awkward bugger that he was, he opted to write it in 5/4 time — emphatically not the tempo hit singles are made of. Despite this deliberate cussedness, *Living In The Past* gave Tull their first proper hit single, reaching the Top 3 in June 1969.

By then, Jethro Tull had already begun recording *Stand Up* at Morgan Studios in North London. They had road-tested a handful of new songs on their US tour, among them *Back To The Family*, *For A Thousand Mothers* and the muscular *A New Day Yesterday*. They sounded little like anything Tull had recorded on *This Was*.

"I've always said that the biggest driving force behind prog rock is boredom," Anderson says now. "That's the thing that pushes people — they get bored with three chords or repetitive things, they go looking for something else. Your threshold can become quite low and you can end up feeling a little been-there-done-that. You do need to stretch out a bit."

Jethro Tull certainly stretched out on *Stand Up*. The folk influence that had always buzzed away in the background was brought front and centre on *Back To The Family*, the gauzy *Look Into The Sun* shimmered with the faintest psychedelic haze, while *Reasons For Waiting* possessed what Anderson today describes as "something there that was evocative of a very quiet, more spiritual, almost church music. The kind of thing that I grew up with as a child in Edinburgh."



PRESS/TULL ARCHIVES

"Our necks were on the line!"

Martin Barre recalls joining Jethro Tull and recording *Stand Up*...



Martin Barre very nearly missed his chance of joining Tull.

PRESS/TULL ARCHIVES

How did you end up joining Jethro Tull between *This Was* and *Stand Up*?
The connection was through flute playing. Ian and myself were pretty much the only two people in England playing flute in a rock style. I knew about him because I had friends who were musicians who had been to see Tull at the Marquee and other places, and had excitedly told me there was somebody else doing what I did – probably a lot better! Then my band, Gethsemane, supported Tull at a club in Plymouth. We found we had a lot in common, we listened to them, they listened to us. And that carried through to when I heard that Mick Abrahams had departed and they were looking for another guitar player.

Did you approach the band or did they approach you?
It was a bit of both. They were looking at options, but they'd forgotten my name and the name of my band, so they had no way of getting in touch with me. I heard about an advert in *Melody Maker* where they were looking for another guitar player, but I didn't have the courage to phone up so I left it. Then at a very last gig Gethsemane played before we split up, this guy approached the stage and said, "You're Martin, aren't you? My name's Terry Ellis, can you give me a call in the morning?" He handed me this card, and I'm like, "Oh my god." It was very exciting. And if he hadn't caught me at that last show, he probably wouldn't have found me at all.

Did it feel like you were joining a band on the way up?
Definitely. It was everything I'd worked for. I'd spent three years with my old band trying to be successful, and we'd given up. For me, this was a like a door had opened to this whole world. Finally, I had a chance to do something with music. And I wasn't a particularly studied musician. We were all still learning to play our instruments. But there was the excitement of finally having the opportunity to play good music and great gigs with a great band. As far as I knew, it was going to change my life for a few weeks or a few months or maybe a year. But even just that was exciting.

The first single you recorded with Tull, *Living In The Past*, was a hit. Did you think, "Wow, I've made it!"?
It was never like that. The first few shows were really bad. The audience were expecting 12 bar blues like they'd always heard. And when they heard the songs we'd written for *Stand Up*, they weren't expecting it and most of them didn't like it at all. It was a very negative response to that. We were all, like, "Oh dear, is this going to work?" Ian was very nervous about this big step he was taking in his writing, and my neck was on the line – if they didn't like this music, I was going to be out of there.

What was the turning point?
A gig at Manchester University. All the previous gigs had had a very lukewarm reception, and at this point we were all getting very nervous. But that night they loved it. I remember coming offstage and smiling, and Ian was smiling. And we just thought, "Okay, the first step has worked." And the next thing, we were supporting Hendrix in Europe.

> "People thought we were old men because they'd seen cover of *This Was* and they though the photograph was real: 'Oh wow, we thought you were in your 60s.'"

What do you remember about making *Stand Up*?
It was exciting. The songs were new, the direction was new, there was nobody else playing that style of music. We all had elements of naiveté – we were all learning how to play that music together and try and be better players. It was a real discovery for us. It was very spontaneous – a lot of nervousness and anxiety because it was an important album. We were serious, but then Jethro Tull always took ourselves seriously. Maybe too seriously in retrospect. We weren't like other bands – we didn't party, we didn't go crazy. We were always on tour, always writing.

That must have made it interesting when you supported Led Zeppelin in America, given that you weren't interested in the kind of behaviour they were into...
Oh, I was! But only as an observer. It was like being a reporter with a notebook going, "No! Wow!" It was hilarious. We had all the fun but we didn't have to go through the lifestyle.

Why did you recoil from it?
I dunno. There's probably something wrong with me.

What did American audiences make of you?
They loved it. They were so hungry for British music. It was all laid out in front of you – if you messed up the process of getting through to them, you were pretty bad. And they didn't know what to expect. A lot of people thought we were old men because they'd seen the cover of *This Was* and they thought the photograph was real: "Oh wow, we thought you were in your 60s."

How did *Stand Up* change your life?
Not long after *Stand Up* reached No.1, Terry Ellis got us in a room and said, "Right guys, you all need to buy a house." Before then, we'd been on 50 pounds a week, with meals and hotel rooms in when we were on tour, and we thought we were in heaven with that. So when Terry said that, we just stared at him: "But Terry, why would I buy a house when I've got a nice flat in Shepherd's Bush? It's a bit damp and it smells, but it's cheap." And he just said, "No, you've made some money, I advise you to buy a house." "Right, so how do we do that...?" We really had no clue.

Other than financially, how did it change your life?
It gave me freedom. It meant I could listen to music and play guitar whenever I wanted. But all along we were just touring like crazy – this express train was still going. Although I did get a house as a base in England, I was never there. There was never a time when you could just sit back and think about things. There was constant pressure to improve because we were playing with every whizz kid and every hotshot band in the world – Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, Hendrix, Paul Butterfield, Chicago. That put pressure on me because I wanted to get better, I needed to survive.

How do you look back on it now?
I love it. I'm doing a 50th anniversary tour this year with my band, and Clive Bunker's joining me. And there's another Tull musician – a very important Jethro Tull musician that I can't mention at this stage – who I want to join us on this tour. I'm doing a big celebration. And in my mind, *Stand Up* is the centre of it. Those songs are so powerful, it's the 21st century, I'm playing *For A Thousand Mothers*, and it's still an amazing piece of music. It still really works. **DEV**

Even more interesting were *Bourée* and *Fat Man*. The former was a playfully manic update of 18th-century composer Johann Sebastian Bach's lute piece *Bourée In E Minor*, while the latter incorporated tabla-style rhythms and other world music flourishes of the kind popularised by The Beatles two years earlier on the *Sgt Pepper* track *Within You Without You*. *Fat Man* itself has been read as a dig at the departed Mick Abrahams.

"No, no," insists Anderson, before changing course. "Well, actually it was perhaps a little bit of a jibe because Mick was self-conscious about his weight. He had a bit of puppy fat because he drank a lot of beer and was fond of a good pie. I came up with the idea when I was sharing a cabin with him on a ferry on the way back from a gig in Denmark. I'd bought a mandolin from a pawn shop. I had no idea how to tune it, and Mick was getting a bit annoyed with me just plucking strings. I jokingly titled it *I Don't Want To Be A Fat Man*, which annoyed him even more, because he thought it was a jibe against him. Which it was and it wasn't."

Anderson is cagey about his other lyrical inspirations today. He firmly rejects the suggestion that *We Used To Know* — a Martin Barre showcase with tang of bittersweet nostalgia for "the bad old days" — stemmed from his own life. In fact, he shoots down the notion that any of his songs were autobiographical.

"Well, hardly any of my songs are actually about a given person or a given relationship," he says. "Someone like Roy Harper would write some quite personal songs that were obviously born of personal experience in some deep emotional or even sexual moment. But I never wanted anybody to think I was writing a song just about them, because somehow that would seem like a betrayal."

Still, he does concede that the inter-generational tensions he addresses on *For A Thousand Mothers* were partly influenced by his relationship with his own parents.

"I based that on my childhood experiences," he says, "but it's not just *my* childhood experiences, it's everybody's childhood experiences of growing up with parents who are telling them what they must do and what they mustn't do. My parents will have listened to that song and they will have possibly wondered, 'Did he really hate us so much he wrote this song about us?'"

The band finished recording *Stand Up* on May 1, 1969. Two days later, they were back on the road in the UK, before once again making another transatlantic crossing to embark on another lengthy Stateside tour.



HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

John Peel may not have approved of these guys' new direction, but plenty of fans did.

Before they left, Jethro Tull played a show at Plymouth club Van Dike. It was an old stomping ground of theirs, and this time they were joined on the bill by Radio 1 DJ John Peel, a big supporter of the band during their early days.

"Afterwards, I said to John Peel, 'Hi John, what do you think of the new songs?'" recalls Anderson. "He said, 'I don't like them. You should never have got rid of Mick Abrahams. You should have carried on doing what you were doing.'"

Anderson was crushed. "I thought he would like it because it had mandolins and balalaikas and weird shit going on. But he didn't. It felt like a stab in the heart. And he never spoke to me ever again."

In the end, John Peel's opinion didn't matter. *Stand Up* was released in July 1969. It came housed in a striking gatefold sleeve featuring an intricate caricature of the band on the cover courtesy of American woodcut artist James Grashow and a 3D pop-up insert that saw the band literally living up to the album's title.

Jethro Tull were in the US when they heard that *Stand Up* had reached No.1 back home. Anderson can't recall exactly where, but he's fairly sure that Joe Cocker was present.

"I remember having breakfast when Joe Cocker walked in and told me that *Stand Up* had gone to No.1 in the album charts. I said, 'Oh wow. That's nice. I don't suppose you're going to finish all that bacon are you, Joe? If you're not going to eat it, could I have a bit?'"

This, too, is a typically Ian Anderson-ish reaction. There would be no celebratory party, not even the popping of a champagne cork, let alone anything more potent.

Even as a hairy 20-something, Anderson seemed out of step with his contemporaries: a young fogey in a tattered army greatcoat, a remote observer rather than an active

> "I was going to see, at the Marquee Club, King Crimson, and the very first concerts by Yes. They gave me confidence that I could be more adventurous."

participant. When the counterculture came knocking on his door, he hid behind the curtains and pretended he was out.

"I had very little relationship with all that," he recalls today. "I remember going to clubs and everyone else being plastered, knocking back beers and brandies and whatever else. I didn't drink, I certainly didn't take drugs. I genuinely felt ruled out of that whole thing."

He doesn't sound regretful when he says this. Instead, he cites Jimi Hendrix as a cautionary tale against the more extreme aspects of the rock'n'roll lifestyle. The pair had crossed paths when Jethro Tull supported the guitarist in Stockholm earlier in 1969. "I only spoke to him once, while we were both smoking cigarettes in a corridor before a press conference that he didn't want to do. He was having a little quiet, private time. He seemed like a man who was really uncomfortable with what he was becoming."

Six months later, Tull found themselves on the same bill as Hendrix at a big US festival. Things had changed. "He was surrounded by this phalanx of groupies-come-drug dealers-come-bodyguard-come-whatever. Harmful people. And we know how that turned out."

What Anderson did share with Hendrix was a sense of showmanship. The first recorded instance of him attacking his flute while standing on one leg was at the Rock And Roll Circus at the end of 1968. But as the stages got bigger and his confidence grew, he began to inhabit the role of twitching, spinning, flute-handed wild man.

"The way it happens is that you get lost in the moment onstage, then you see photographs of yourself and read people talking about you. And you think: 'OK, I'm getting noticed, so I'd better be that guy.' You start to deconstruct the whole thing privately. You think, 'What am I doing that makes people think I'm on amphetamines or just demented?' And then suddenly you're onstage in a codpiece and tights, playing the flute.'"

Contrived or not, it worked. Jethro Tull's profile began to grow in the UK and the US — the latter assisted by a second stint supporting Led Zeppelin throughout the summer of 1969. Anderson could have been forgiven for allowing himself to sit back and think, 'Job done', but there was still a nagging fear that it might all be some kind of horrible accident.

Look Into The Sun
Ian Anderson on what the future holds...



Ian Anderson is adamant he's keeping schtum about new album details.

STUART WOOD

It was a reluctant Ian Anderson who embarked on Jethro Tull's 50th anniversary tour. "I'm embarrassed by that kind of thing," he says. "I wanted to hide under the bed and not come out for 12 months."

The tour also meant that Anderson put the writing and recording of his first album since 2014's *Homo Erraticus* on ice. "I thought I'd rather just put it on the back burner and not think about it until I can press the 'go' button properly again."

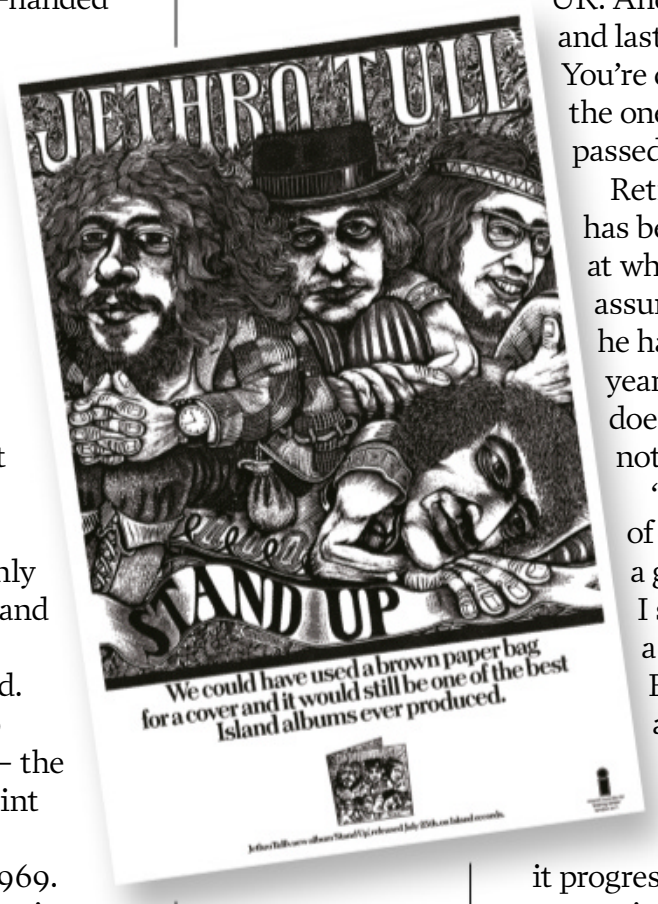
Before hitting the road, Anderson and his band had written and recorded the music for seven songs, and completed vocals and flute for two of them. "We tried to make it as live as possible," he says.

The singer says the album is likely to feature 12 tracks. "The intention is that seven of them are full band rock numbers, and the other five are things I intend to record alone with just an acoustic guitar and voice. I like the variety and dynamic extremes of doing very spartan acoustic things alongside things with full band members."

He's cagey today about specific details. "Oh no, until it's got to the stage where I'm doing artwork, or maybe even the point of release, it's best to keep schtum. The minute you start talking about song titles or album titles or lyrical themes, you're tying your hands behind your back. At this stage, nothing is set in stone."

That isn't stopping him toying with the notion of releasing the album in a different way – or perhaps not even releasing it as an album at all. "Part of me thinks, 'Wouldn't it be nice to do three EPs, each of them four or five months apart? Wouldn't that be satisfying for the fans more than me?" he says. "Having said all of that, this could be a rubbish album and never get released, because I'm getting a bit old and constantly reminded that I only have a little while ahead of me and should probably spend that time doing live shows..." **DEV**

Below: A very modest 1969 advert for *Stand Up*.



NEIL BAYLIS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

"Did I think, 'Blow me, we're famous?" he says. "Yes. 'Blow me, I'm famous in *Melody Maker*, but blow me, I'm certainly not famous and Italy, Spain, North America or anywhere else in the world.' You might have had your first No.1 album but only in the UK. And it could also be your first and last No.1 album anywhere. You're constantly reminded of all the one-hit wonders who have passed through town."

Retrospectively, *Stand Up* has been viewed as the point at which Ian Anderson assumed control of the band he had helped to found two years earlier. It's a claim he doesn't agree with — at least not quite.

"It wasn't really a question of assuming control, it was a gentle transition really. I suppose it was more of a democracy to begin with. But then there wasn't a busting amount to really discuss. There was no formal gathering to thrash out issues. I suppose as it progressed, there was probably more coming from me in terms of input than anybody else in the band. But it didn't really get to be what you would call 'control' until probably 1974 or '75."

Benign dictatorship or not, the approach worked. Tull rounded out 1969 with wind in their sails — wind that would carry them through recording the follow-up, *Benefit*, and eventually onto *Aqualung*, the album that would elevate them to the superstar bracket.

But all that was in the future. After the necessary false start of *This Was*, *Stand Up* provided a significant marker in Jethro Tull's long career. Today, Anderson looks back on it with fondness.

"I see it through slightly rosy spectacles, of course," says Anderson. "But when people ask me what my favourite Jethro Tull album is, *Stand Up* will always be one of the two or three that I mention. The reason is that it's the first album that I felt creatively responsible for. It was a first wet dream involving somebody else at the same time. It's incorrect to say that we wouldn't have carried on without it, but things could have been very different for us."

The Ballad Of Jethro Tull, an illustrated oral history of the band, containing previously unseen photos and items from Anderson's private archive, will be out via Rocket 88 Books in Autumn 2019. The book will only be available from www.jethrotullbook.com, where details and news of the book will be updated.

ADVENTURES IN Modern Recording

Not content with releasing one double album based on a lengthy Christian allegory, **The Neal Morse Band** have gone and made another. **Neal Morse** reveals why, and details his 2019 plans.

Words: Nick Shilton
Images: Robert Smith

Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History Of Time* is a book that many own but few have managed to read cover to cover. *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan is another. But it's this 300-plus-year-old Christian allegory which has served as the inspiration for both The Neal Morse Band's last album, 2016's *The Similitude Of A Dream*, and this year's *The Great Adventure*. And Morse has now actually finished reading *The Pilgrim's Progress* to boot.

Back in 2016, Morse embarked upon recording *The Similitude Of A Dream* with some reservations, both about the subject material and its form, namely, the fact that it was a double album. His long-time foil, former Dream Theater drummer Mike Portnoy, was also nervous about comparisons being made with his old band, given *Similitude...*'s release was shortly after the emergence of Dream Theater's *The Astonishing* double album. Now, however, both feel that making *Similitude...* really paid off.

"*Similitude...* really was a landmark album for us," Morse reflects from his Tennessee home. "Making an album is a whirlwind. I usually have to wait for the dust to settle before I realise the quality of what we've done. But at the end of the *Similitude...* recording sessions, Mike said he thought we'd made the album of our careers. And that may be true. Art is so subjective, but *Similitude...* is one of the best albums I've ever been involved in."

That's a striking statement given Morse's career over the last 25-odd years since Spock's Beard burst onto a somnolent progressive rock scene with their debut album, *The Light*. He subsequently led Spock's for a further five albums (of which he rates 2000's *V* most highly) before forsaking his own band in favour of pursuing a solo career and playing in prog supergroups Transatlantic and Flying Colors.

Following the enthusiastic reception afforded *The Similitude Of A Dream*, the challenge for Morse and his cohorts was how to match – or indeed top – that album. Morse's original intention was to create an album that was markedly different from the end product that *The Great Adventure* represents. "Every album is different, but this one was a strange process," he muses.

Morse initially had some ideas during breaks from the lengthy Similitude tour that related to *The Pilgrim's Progress* concept, including the song *Vanity Fair*, which appears on *The Great Adventure*. He was, however, both resistant to those ideas and not overburdened with others. "Nothing else much came. And I could already feel from talking on tour with the guys that doing another concept album, let alone another concept album based on the same idea, was not what the band wanted to do next."

With Morse's muse temporarily failing to deliver further inspiration, he felt that there was more of the *Pilgrim's Progress* story to tell, but didn't have sufficient pieces in the puzzle to make a convincing overall picture. Gathering in Tennessee in August 2017, the band started working on demos without Portnoy, before convening in January last year with their drummer for what transpired, by the standards of The Neal Morse Band, to be an atypically lengthy writing and recording session: a fortnight.

Initially *The Great Adventure* was shaping up to be a single album. "But I just didn't feel it was quite there," Morse continues. "It had the *Love That Never Dies* theme woven in and out of it. But as I listened to it, it really sounded like a concept album. There were lots of interwoven themes. But nobody, including me, really wanted to do a double album. It would have been so much easier to have left it as the single disc original version. But it just didn't seem to me that it was everything it wanted to be and I couldn't let it go."

Morse then alighted on the pilgrim's abandoned son as a focus, which unlocked the album for him lyrically. While theoretically taking a break from his solo Life & Times tour in March and April last year, he wrote and demoed a two-and-a-half-hour-long version of the album. The band then reconvened in August to finalise the album, which put Morse under considerable pressure, with his annual Morsefest extravaganza to prepare for the following month as well as *The Great Adventure*'s release date this month.



"*The Similitude Of A Dream* really was a landmark album for us," says Morse.

"We were cutting it super-close. It was daring for us to commit to having the album ready to release in January and debut it on Cruise To The Edge in February. It was a leap of faith, but it's all worked out. It's a miracle of God that this album came together and that it's as good as it is."

At around 110,000 words long, Morse made only limited inroads with *Similitude...* into *The*

“Nobody, including me, really wanted to do a double album. It would have been so much easier to have left it as the single disc original version.”

Still going strong, Morse credits his talent to a higher power.

Pilgrim's Progress. Focusing on the abandoned son, *The Great Adventure* is not a sequel in the strictest sense, but rather uses *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a launch pad. "I apologise to fans of the book," Morse laughs. "*The Great Adventure* is all over the place: it's very loosely based on the book. There's hardly any talk in it of the abandoned son. I was only marginally inspired by the book and there's a lot that really has very little to do with the book."

Morse suspects he has now exhausted *The Pilgrim's Progress* for musical purposes. "I don't know if there's much more in there that I feel inspired about. Also, the book is rather heavy on judgment, so I changed a lot of that both on this album and *Similitude*.... *The Man In The Iron Cage* in the book is left without hope — I had to give him hope and tried to make it a little more gracious."

While being one of the prog scene's most prolific musicians with almost 40 studio albums to his name since *The Light*, Morse doesn't ever worry that the wellspring of inspiration will run dry. "I don't fear not being able to write any more," he explains. "It's really up to God whatever he wants to give me — I acknowledge him as the source of all these things and that gives me peace.



"Everyone is great to work with and pretty mellow - except Mike! We all temper and complement each other well."

I'm just thankful beyond belief that I can provide for my family doing music that I love — what a blessing."

He is, however, conscious of the danger of repeating himself. "I don't like to repeat myself or rip anything else off, but sometimes we don't notice," he admits. "I try to surround myself with people that will bust me, because I don't really listen to my own music that much after I create it. After one of my worship albums [Morse engineer] Jerry Guidroz texted me and said, 'Nice rip from another album,' and I listened to the verses and they were exactly the same. I was completely oblivious! It's good to have people around you who can catch you on that stuff."

The Great Adventure is the third studio album being released under The Neal Morse Band banner rather than as plain old Neal Morse. Morse feels it's an important distinction. "It's become a real band. The contributions of the guys are so important." Indeed it transpires that, following the release of 2015's *The Grand Experiment* album, consideration was given to adopting a new band name unrelated to 'Morse'. "But *The Grand Experiment* had done pretty well and we felt for retailers that the name recognition would help, so we stuck with the name. Now it's too late to call it something else. What's in a name? Who cares! It sounds corny, but it's all about the music."

The Neal Morse Band's line-up — rounded out by guitarist Eric Gillette, keyboardist Bill Hubauer and Morse's long-time bassist Randy George — has also proved unusually durable. "Everyone is great to work with and pretty mellow — except Mike! We all temper and complement each other well. The sharpest disagreements have all been about creative decisions. None of those things get nasty and everyone is entitled to their opinions."



The band briefly considered a name change after releasing *The Grand Experiment*.

Being branded The Neal Morse Band may lead to the perception that the shots ultimately are called by Morse personally. But the man himself advocates stridently to the contrary. "It's really not that way," he insists. "We all pick our battles: the things we feel really strongly about. There are many moments on this record where everybody lost something that they really liked, but someone else felt strongly about something else. After the basic tracking we go off into our 'laboratories' and start laying stuff down."

That modus operandi brings with it dangers of musical duplication or clashes "where it can be too much to have it all". Resolving these clashes falls frequently to mixer Rich Mouser, a longstanding Morse associate, to make the choices and thin parts out.

Morse's argument that he isn't always the band's centre of gravity is significantly substantiated by the stunning, uplifting album closer *A Love That Never Dies*, where his own vocal cedes early on to Gillette. "Eric's vocal on that is great," he enthuses.



The Neal Morse Band, L-R: Bill Hubauer, Mike Portnoy, Neal Morse, Randy George, Eric Gillette.

"When we originally took Bill and Eric on as sidemen for touring, I knew that they could sing well. But the way the voices are working and blending on these parts, only the Lord can orchestrate. One of the reasons why these albums are off the chart is like Eric's vocal at the end of the album, which just takes it to a place that I never could never take it. My range tops out at about an F sharp — I do the highest notes that I can do, but there's something at the next level that Eric has."

Following the success of the Similitude tour, where that album was performed in full each night, the band plan to play *The Great Adventure* in its 105-minute entirety each show on their forthcoming dates, with the encore as the only variant. "*Similitude*... delivered every night live when we last toured. All we had to do was get out there and play the piece with all our hearts. People were crying — it was just beautiful. I don't want to go out after tasting that and do a tour where that isn't really delivering.

"I used to think that we had to put on a show, but we didn't," he continues. "The older I've got, I realise it's the material. I go to a lot of classical concerts and it's mainly about the piece of music. *World Without End* [from Morse's 2012 album *Momentum*] is a great piece, but somehow it didn't quite deliver as the closer of the night, so we needed to come back out and do [Morse solo track] *Author Of Confusion* or the end of [Transatlantic's] *Stranger In Your Soul*."



***The Great Adventure* was originally planned to be a single album. Ah well...**

Morse is primed for a very active 2019. Aside from touring with The Neal Morse Band, he's also gearing up for the release before the summer of his musical *Jesus Christ The Exorcist*. Work also continues on a third Flying Colors album for a potential late summer or autumn release. And while there are no concrete plans yet for a further Transatlantic album, Morse is optimistic about the prospect. "I would like to do another Transatlantic album," he says unequivocally. "But it depends what the other guys feel and when it fits. There are a lot of other worlds to revolve around. The stars have to align with Mike [Portnoy], Pete Trewavas and Roine Stolt."

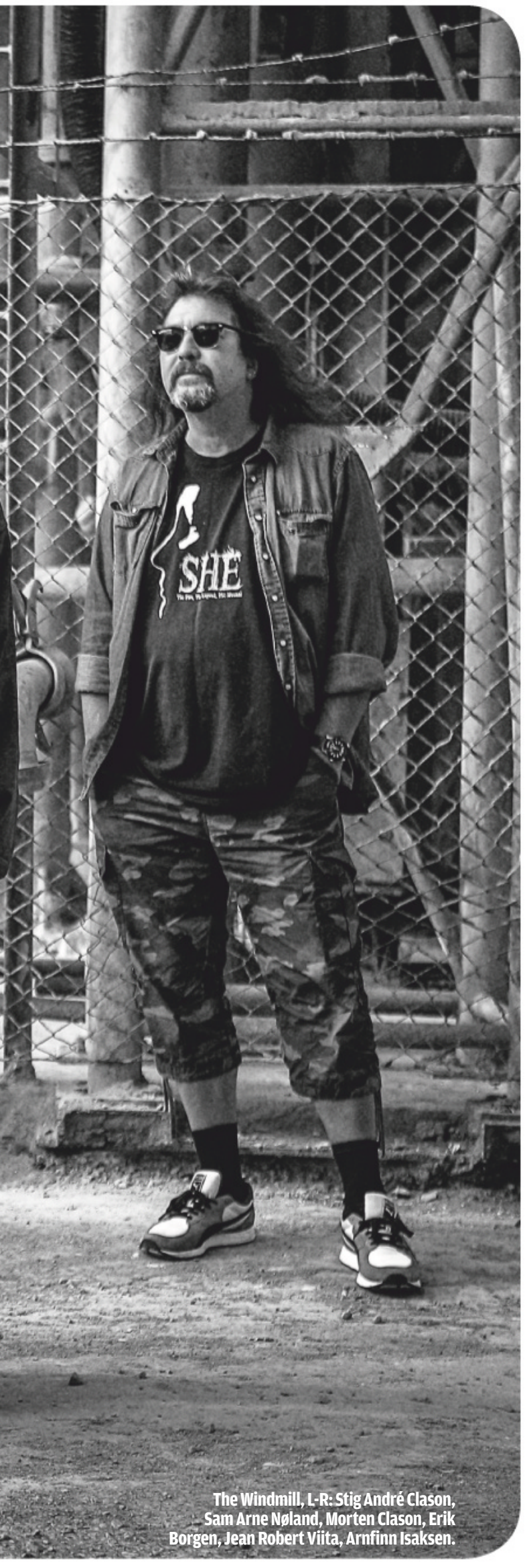
In any event, Morse is working more intensely than he had expected or planned at the age of 58. "I thought I would probably start winding down four years ago," he reflects, "but I try to let God lead my life. My wife is always asking when we're going to do less. But creatively we keep moving forward and climbing higher." For the foreseeable future, Mrs Morse's hopes of them winding down may prove forlorn.

The Great Adventure is out now via Radiant/ Metal Blade. See www.nealmorse.com for more information.

Mischievous otters, trees with feelings and 70s-style prog rock epics: welcome to the ever so slightly wacky world of Norwegian proggers **The Windmill**...

Words: Dom Lawson **Portrait:** Kristine Clason

Mighty Oaks



The Windmill, L-R: Stig André Clason, Sam Arne Nøland, Morten Clason, Erik Borgen, Jean Robert Viita, Arnfinn Isaksen.

It may seem as though human beings are increasingly incapable of agreeing with one another on anything, but one indisputable, unifying truth remains: prog rock fans absolutely bloody love an epic. With that in mind, there is no excuse for not lending your ears to the astonishing opening track on The Windmill's new album *Tribus, The Tree*. With *The Tree*, this fervently old-school sextet have conjured 24 minutes of sparkling, symphonic majesty that instinctively taps into the spirit of prog's greatest sprawls. It also adheres to the largely unspoken rule that the best epics usually clock in somewhere around what we nerds refer to as 'the *Supper's Ready* mark'; filling up one entire side of a shiny, vinyl LP in the process. With a sound that strikes a sublime balance between new school clarity and oomph and the reassuring, woozy gloss of flutes, Mellotrons and Moogs, The Windmill almost seem to be striving for some new, unassailable form of *total prog* and, for the thus far uninitiated, *The Tree* is a startling calling card.

"*The Tree* is basically an abbreviated story about a tree growing up," says Morten Clason, one of several multi-instrumentalists in The Windmill. "Basically, we're expressing some imaginary thoughts that this tree might have when it's experiencing what's going on around it. I guess we assume that a tree can't *see* much – although we really don't *know* that, do we? But we just have to imagine that it might somehow *feel* what's going on. The intro is a musical expression of how a seed would begin to gain consciousness while lying in the dark soil. We hope we've achieved the kind of feeling in the music that this particular seed tries harder and harder to grow and finally breaks through the surface of the earth and starts its lifelong journey to become a fully grown tree."

As any Rush fan reading this will already have noted, this is not the first time that progressive rock has told a tale about trees. But this may well be the first time that any band have pulled off such a refined version of that old interpretative dance trope of *becoming a tree*. All joking aside, *The Tree* is simply an exercise in classic prog storytelling, and one that sparkles with the same kind of gently subversive mischief that informed, amongst others, Gabriel-era Genesis. Eccentricity is an undervalued quality, and The Windmill have it in plentiful supply.

"While growing up, a couple of interesting things happen and we have tried to express the tree's experiences purely musically," says Clason. "Our hope is that people will understand a bit of what's happening by listening to the various parts in that particular piece. For instance, for the part we call 'Otto sneaks back from town', we hope we've achieved a feeling of an otter having a slightly bad conscience about visiting the big town and getting up to some mischievous activities! This is, of course, something that a tree would instantly recognise, as the otter is passing. In the end, it has grown to be a youngster, full of confidence, who's riding off whatever winds or storms coming its way."

"We were all inspired by bands like Camel, Alan Parsons, Genesis and Jethro Tull, and basically the whole 70s progressive scene."

If the story of *The Tree* strikes you as slightly ludicrous, you may be reading the wrong magazine (or have some weird problem with otters… come on, they're cute!). This is prog rock in its natural state: bold, preposterous, intricate and purposefully obtuse. It's a vehicle for enlightened metaphors but also for a musical ethos that knows no limitations. There will always be an ongoing debate about the differences between genuinely progressive music and archetypal retro prog, but to hear the genre's original, questing bravado reborn in the 21st century with so few traces of mothballed nostalgia is an undeniable thrill. The way Clason explains it, writing *Tribus* was about finding the magic that happens when music is plucked from the ether and does exactly what the story requires.

"The album starts with a seed and it ends with fire," states Clason, somewhat cryptically. "As far as the music is concerned, we all worked together as we came up with all the different parts and the arrangements of the various themes. We worked until we found what we felt was


The Windmill are about as prog as it's possible to get...

truly reflecting our intent and also what, in our opinion, sounded the best together. The opening theme is repeated in various forms to signify the different stages of [the tree's] growth, but I think the lyrics are self-explanatory. The whole story could be transposed to be the experience of a human being growing up, but that's up to the listener to interpret it that way."

There is something deeply impressive about the ensemble performances on *Tribus*: clear evidence of a chemistry that has evolved between the band over the last 17 years, albeit with a few obligatory line-up shuffles along the way. First formed in 2001 by keyboardist/vocalist Jean Robert Viita, The Windmill have been far from prolific, with only 2010 debut *To Be Continued* and its 2013 follow-up *Continuation* (see what they did there?) to their credit so far, but it's hard to think of another contemporary band that straddle the divide between old and new with such meticulousness and grace. With material that ranges from *The Tree*'s hefty sprawl to the sparkling brevity of the closing *Play With Fire* (as featured on a recent *Prog* CD!), Clason, Viita and bandmates Erik Borgen (guitar/vocals), Stig André Clason (guitar), Arnfinn Isaksen (bass) and Sam Arne Nøland (drums) are not reinventing the wheel, but they're giving it a damn good polish.

"We started up in 2001 but we went through a few different line-ups before we became more serious in 2005," Clason says of the band's early days. "When we became a steady line-up, we started to create our own music, which was always the intention from the very beginning, of course. We were all inspired by bands like Camel, Alan Parsons, Genesis and Jethro Tull, and basically the whole 70s progressive scene. But I think what makes us unique are the melodies and the sound of six different musicians playing organ, flutes and guitars with our specific sense of harmony."

Digging into the rest of *Tribus*, it's clear that The Windmill are highly adept at ticking every conceivable prog box. This is an album that flows beautifully from start to finish; a conceptual piece that promises to take the listener on a magic carpet ride, with just the right blend of the familiar and the alien to keep everyone happy. The stunning artwork notches up extra old-school prog points, too: created by Kirsten Viita, wife of keyboardist

"The intro is a musical expression of how a seed would begin to gain consciousness while lying in the dark soil."

Jean, it's a wonderfully surreal piece that may or may not be connected to the album's title. Intriguingly, Clason isn't giving anything away. Or at least we think he isn't.

"We are lucky to have Kirsten. She has created artworks for The Windmill from the beginning, and her ideas and our music have been like a married couple from the very start," he says, admiringly. "The artwork has improved alongside our music, we hope. But as for the title? *Tribus* could mean different things. In one sense, it made sense to call it *Tribus* because of the way we think as a band, as a related group of organisms. We are not just a single tree! All of the members, the *branches*, are active."

They do it all in such an unassuming and naturalistic way that The Windmill's skilful blending of prog's past and present would be possible to miss among the many and varied splendours of Norway's flourishing scene. Luckily, the band's assault on hearts and minds is two-pronged, as Clason is not just flying the flag for symphonic indulgence as a musician. In addition, he is directly involved in supporting both homegrown and international prog talent from within, via the We Låve Rock festival which takes place for the second time in May 2019, in the flautist's home town of Hurum.

Run by Clason's own Hurum Progrock Society and boasting a line-up that includes indigenous adventurers Wobbler, Arabs In Aspic and Pymlico alongside the non-Norwegian likes of Threshold and Magenta, it's the kind of humble but ambitious and community-spirited event that speaks volumes about the sincere enthusiasm of everyone involved, from organisers to fans. The Windmill, as you might expect, performed at We Låve Rock in 2018 and Clason admits that the experience has encouraged his band to be more active than ever before. UK fans won't have too long to wait to catch The Windmill either, as the band are due to perform at our own Summer's End festival in October 2019. You can bet that they will be treating punters to a full rendition of *The Tree*. And it doesn't get much more epic than that.

"We hope to fill our time with a lot of gigs and festivals in between now and Summer's End," Clason reports. "The goal is to be able to play across Europe, in venues and at festivals, and to continue to create good music and make more records. We hope that our live show mirrors our musicianship and hopefully shows that it is our true pleasure to perform."

Tribus is out now via Apollon Records. See www.thewindmill.no for more information.

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Thijs van Leer, maestro extraordinaire.

Return Of The **Dutch Masters**

As the sun rises on **Focus**' 50th anniversary year, **Thijs van Leer** talks to *Prog* about recording the first song he ever wrote on *Focus 11*, the new blood in the band, and why he doesn't like being called progressive rock.

Words: David West **Images:** Timo Reisiger

"I don't believe in the words 'progressive rock'… Sorry, because your magazine is called that!" says Thijs van Leer, flautist, keyboard player, yodeller, frontman and founding member of legendary Dutch rockers Focus. It's a surprising declaration from a man and a band so closely associated with the prog scene over some five decades, but he's ready to back it up. "I think the only progressive rocker we ever had, who unfortunately died, was Frank Zappa," says van Leer, "because he combined modern classical music, which he composed himself, with rock. That, to me, was progressive rock. All the bands who call themselves that today, to me, are more regressive rock, because they pick old themes from old times and combine them. Maybe that's a new aspect, but most of it is regressive rather than progressive. But that's my very personal opinion."

Since Focus permanently reformed in the early 2000s, the band have consistently moved forwards, never just content to revisit their past glories. They continue to record and release new music, from the Brazilian flavours of *Focus 8.5/Beyond The Horizon* — "I love that record, by the way," says van Leer — to their latest opus, *Focus 11*. Their sound draws upon classical influences and they're fond of jazz improvisations, but if van Leer doesn't like the prog label, then what do they play? "I call it rock," he says. "Most of the time it's more swinging than a lot of progressive rock bands because we work on that a lot, so I don't consider it to be a progressive rock band that much."

Critics have often written about the classical side of their music — which comes to the fore on tracks like *Clair-Obscur* on the new record — but van Leer believes there's been too much attention paid to that element in their writing. "Bach is my main composer of all time and Bartok is number two, but no, it's not only the classical thing. Of course, Focus is half American-sounding rhythmically. It has too much emphasis all the time, this classical thing," he says.

Perhaps one of the factors that has helped Focus to continue firing on all cylinders creatively has been the presence of new, young blood in the band. Alongside founder van Leer and drummer Pierre van der Linden, who joined in 1970, the roster includes Menno Gootjes on guitar and bassist Udo Pannekeet. Gootjes and van Leer first worked together in the late 1990s when Focus briefly came out of retirement with a line-up that included bassist Bert



RENS PLASCHEK

PRESS/RENS_PLASCHEK

Ruiter, but it didn't last. "Menno and I worked together in 1997, we did some demos and then we did one concert," says van Leer. When the frontman assembled a fresh incarnation of Focus in the new millennium, he wanted Gootjes in the group, but the guitarist was busy with other projects. Happily, when the guitar seat became vacant again in 2010, van Leer was able to bring him into the fold. "Menno is a master guitar player," he says. "He's just a genius and all this genius has an effect on the band every time we play and every time we do recording sessions in the studio. And Udo is the same. As a six-string bass player, he's a miracle, just a genius."

Udo Pannekeet is the newest recruit to the cause, having joined in 2016, a player already on the rise when van Leer reached out to him. "I called Roeland Jacobs, who is the brother of Bobby Jacobs who worked in Focus as the bass player for years," says van Leer. "And I said, 'Roeland, give me the name of that man who did a jam in your studio and I was joining in, and I was so impressed by his playing bass, and later on I saw him on television with some jazz gigs and I was really flabbergasted by his playing.' And then he said, 'Oh, that is Udo Pannekeet.' 'Oh,' I said, 'Could you give me his number?' and Roeland said, 'No, he's having coffee next to me right now, so I'll give the phone to him.' I got Udo on the phone and I asked him, 'Udo, would you like to be in Focus as the bass player?' And Udo said yes immediately, so that was an easy one. We became friends and he's really lifting the band like a monster."

Above: Focus, L-R: Menno Gootjes, Pierre van der Linden, Thijs van Leer, Udo Pannekeet.

Below: 1971's *Focus II* and 1975's *Mother Focus*.



The jazz side of Focus has often found expression in the way the band improvise both live and in the recording studio. "We always listened a lot to Herbie Hancock, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Weather Report, Michael and Randy Brecker, so they had a great influence on us," says van Leer. "I went to a Herbie Hancock concert in Amsterdam which I thought was great, that was more than two years ago already, so that's not so recent. We play a lot of jazz festivals all over the world and it's nice to meet the jazz rockers of this planet: that's fantastic."

Van Leer may be the main songwriter in the group — he composed all but one of the 11 cuts on the new release — but he still wants his bandmates to contribute their ideas and personalities. "I write down parts for the bass and for the guitar and here and there for the drums, but then the freedom of every individual is great. I respect that freedom, of course, and I love it when they take their own direction in it." Yet *Focus 11* is lighter on jams and spontaneous improvisation than many of its predecessors. "I don't know why this happened, but there are a few real, beautiful improvisations, mainly by Menno on guitar, but it's not 50/50 like we used to do. It's a little less than normal. Maybe it's the compositions that urge the soloist to do less than he was used to doing," continues van Leer. Still, once the band take the songs on the road, it's all up for grabs. "We already did a few songs on tour in England, and then there was much more room for improvisation than there was on the record, so it already developed in a positive way."

The bulk of material on *Focus 11* is instrumental, but there are vocals on *How Many Miles?*, while van Leer's yodelling on their classic cut *Hocus Pocus* is the stuff of legend. "I always wanted to open my mouth from the beginning," explains the frontman, who likes to use his voice as a fifth instrument in order "to have a human factor in the band, except for this yodelling, which is more of a solo thing. I use the voice a lot in live performances." But it seems there's little danger of Focus becoming a vocal-

> "I think the only progressive rocker we ever had, who unfortunately died, was Frank Zappa, because he combined modern classical music, which he composed himself, with rock. That, to me, was progressive rock."



TIMO REISIGER

led outfit. “Most of the time it was the other guys in the band who asked me very politely to shut up, except for one song sung in English, because *How Many Miles?* is sung in English,” says van Leer, laughing.

While he’s best known for playing the flute — and yodelling — the flute isn’t the means by which van Leer composes for Focus. “I write most of the time behind a grand piano at home: I’m not a computer writer,” he says. “In studios, of course, we use a lot of computers, but at the very beginning, let’s say the original thoughts, they come old fashioned, with the piano. Actually, I never wrote for the flute as such because most of the things I did with flute solo were covers most of the time from composers that died a long time ago. That became the best-selling album in Holland ever, called *Introspection*; it’s a series of five albums.”

The songs on *Focus 11* spring from a range of times and inspirations. *Theodora Na Na Na* is named after van Leer’s late second wife. “When I was playing on the piano, she always sang ‘na na na na’ and her name was Theodora.” *Heaven* is a track of some considerable vintage. “It’s the very first theme I composed as a child of seven, a very stupid song, and I made a song out of that,” says van Leer, who chose the title to express the innocence of children whose eyes haven’t seen the evils of the world yet, so they’re still in heaven. *Mare Nostrum*, on the other hand, was written by Udo Pannekeet. “*Mare Nostrum* is of course the Mediterranean sea,” says van Leer. “The words are spoken by me with a Vocoder, so you can’t understand them very well, I suppose, but it’s really beautiful. It may be the most Focus-like tune on the record because it starts like under zero and it goes to an ecstatic middle part then it ends again like it began. It’s a journey through all the emotions; it’s a beautiful song.”

> “We have some special thing with England. You could say there is a lot of understanding of our music, appreciation for our music and human warmth.”

Van Leer may hold the distinction of being Holland’s best-selling artist at home, but Focus clearly have a great soft spot for the UK judging by their regular British tours and all the live albums they’ve recorded over here, from 1973’s *At The Rainbow* to *Live At The BBC*, a 2004 release of material from 1976, and most recently 2016’s *Live In England*. “We have some special thing with England. You could say there is a lot of understanding of our music, appreciation for our music and human warmth,” says van Leer, and whenever Focus touch down on these shores, the fans continue to come out in droves. “We nearly sold out every place — it’s really beautiful and astonishing actually,” says van Leer about the band’s winter 2018 tour. Perhaps the audiences have been swelled by the people introducing their offspring to the delights of the Dutch masters. “We have a very faithful bunch of fans, but also the generation that they produced are there, and the generation that *they* produced are there, so three full generations. It’s amazing to see that.”

Above: although van Leer is still the main songwriter in Focus, he encourages input from the rest of the band.

As *Focus 11* adds another chapter to the Focus catalogue, the band have to pick and choose which of the new tracks to introduce to the setlist. “I wouldn’t say that we’ll play them all live because we always have to play our hits, so that is great and very rewarding but also it’s a limitation as far as all the things from *Focus 11*. I don’t think we will cover them all: maybe half of it.” Inevitably, any Focus live show has to include the hits that first brought them to fame — particularly *Sylvia* and *Hocus Pocus*, the latter featuring van Leer’s aforementioned unmistakable Alpine vocal acrobatics. “People want that and I’ll still able to do that yodelling. As long as that goes, we have fun and people get entranced and that’s beautiful,” says van Leer.

The band recorded two shows at Trading Boundaries from the winter tour, so there’s another live release in the works for 2019, and they’ll make their third appearance on Cruise To The Edge. “We will do many other things as well. We will work on *Focus 12*, we will make demos, go into the studio… blah blah blah… and we will have our 50th anniversary, which is going to be celebrated in Holland and in England, maybe even in other countries… I don’t know yet. So that’s going to be a big time.”

Even as Focus and van Leer celebrate five decades of recording and performing, the frontman’s passion for his chosen profession shows no signs of dimming. “It’s a thrill,” he says about still being on the road as he enters his 70s. “I think the band have not sounded better than we do now. It’s really something I would recommend everybody to come and see. It’s really something now, if I may be so impolite. I still love it, it’s still great to see that so many people really take the risk to come to our shows and enjoy it and buy our stuff at the merch table. It’s amazing.”



2017’s compilation album, *The Focus Family Album*.

Focus 11 is out now via Cherry Red/In And Out Of Focus. See www.focustheband.com for more information.

Time Passages

After their wildly elaborate and fan-dividing album *The Astonishing* in 2016, no one was quite sure where **Dream Theater** would go next. Sign to a new label, decamp to the wilderness and write a new album in a month, it seems. *Prog* finds out more about this new chapter...

Words: Dave Ling
Portraits: Will Ireland

Each and every progressive rock band deserving of the mantle, those prepared to take chances and really mess with our heads, have that one difficult album. *Melody Maker* called Pink Floyd's *The Final Cut* "a milestone in the history of awfulness". Genesis could almost do no wrong until *Abacab* sent them down the pop path. *Tales From Topographic Oceans* was so divisive that not even all of the members of Yes liked it. With Dream Theater, it was *The Astonishing*.

More than two hours of music broken down into 34 chapters and two separate acts, the US/Canadian band's double album tale of "a retro-futurist post-

"I can still remember being a fan, cranking and appreciating an album, and that euphoria can get lost when people dissect every little nuance in an audio sense. To me, it misses the whole point. It's kinda stupid."
James LaBrie

apocalyptic dystopia ruled by medieval style feudalism" set on Earth was, perhaps inevitably, received with a mix of joy, despair and complete confusion.

Circa its release in 2016, guitarist John Petrucci was unapologetic, telling *Prog*: "This might sound clichéd but to us, the art is all-important. It really is. We are lucky enough to write the music that we want to, and people will either enjoy it or they won't. We hope that they do, but it's not our motivation."

Looking back, Petrucci still regards *The Astonishing* as something that Dream Theater simply had to get off their collective chest.

"From beginning to end it took three years of planning, but it was immensely satisfying in a creative sense," he says. "The live show took another year to develop and since then a novel was written based on the story. There was also a video game. I found all of that extremely fulfilling."

Perhaps surprisingly, reviewers welcomed *The Astonishing*. Metacritic.com, a website that aggregates the responses of leading writers, calculated an 80 per cent rating. But there's no disputing that some people really, really didn't like it.

"We kind of knew they wouldn't," agrees the guitarist. "I mean, some of its songs were just noise. For the typical Dream Theater fan, especially those more in tune with the metal side of what we do, it was always going to be tough to digest. But at the same time we had faith in our audience as being open-minded."

"It was a rock opera, and when I listen to it I still hear all of the elements of Dream Theater music," pipes up singer James LaBrie. "In a world of soundbites, we elected to push everything to the maximum. Some people simply chose not to get it, and that was fine, too."

Online reports suggest that *The Astonishing* sold as little as 164,000 copies in the US; fewer than the band's previous two records, *A Dramatic Turn Of Events* and *Dream Theater*.

"I'll take your word on that," Petrucci responds good-naturedly. "But I will say that, of course, record sales overall have dwindled."

"Had you told us that 20 years ago we'd have gone: 'Whaaat? Holy shit, hang on a second!'" LaBrie laughs. "But now it's par for the course."

"Back in the 1990s, to get onto the Billboard Top Ten — a list we've been on many times — you had to sell in the region of a million copies in the first week, now it's like 36,000," Petrucci adds. "Things are completely different."

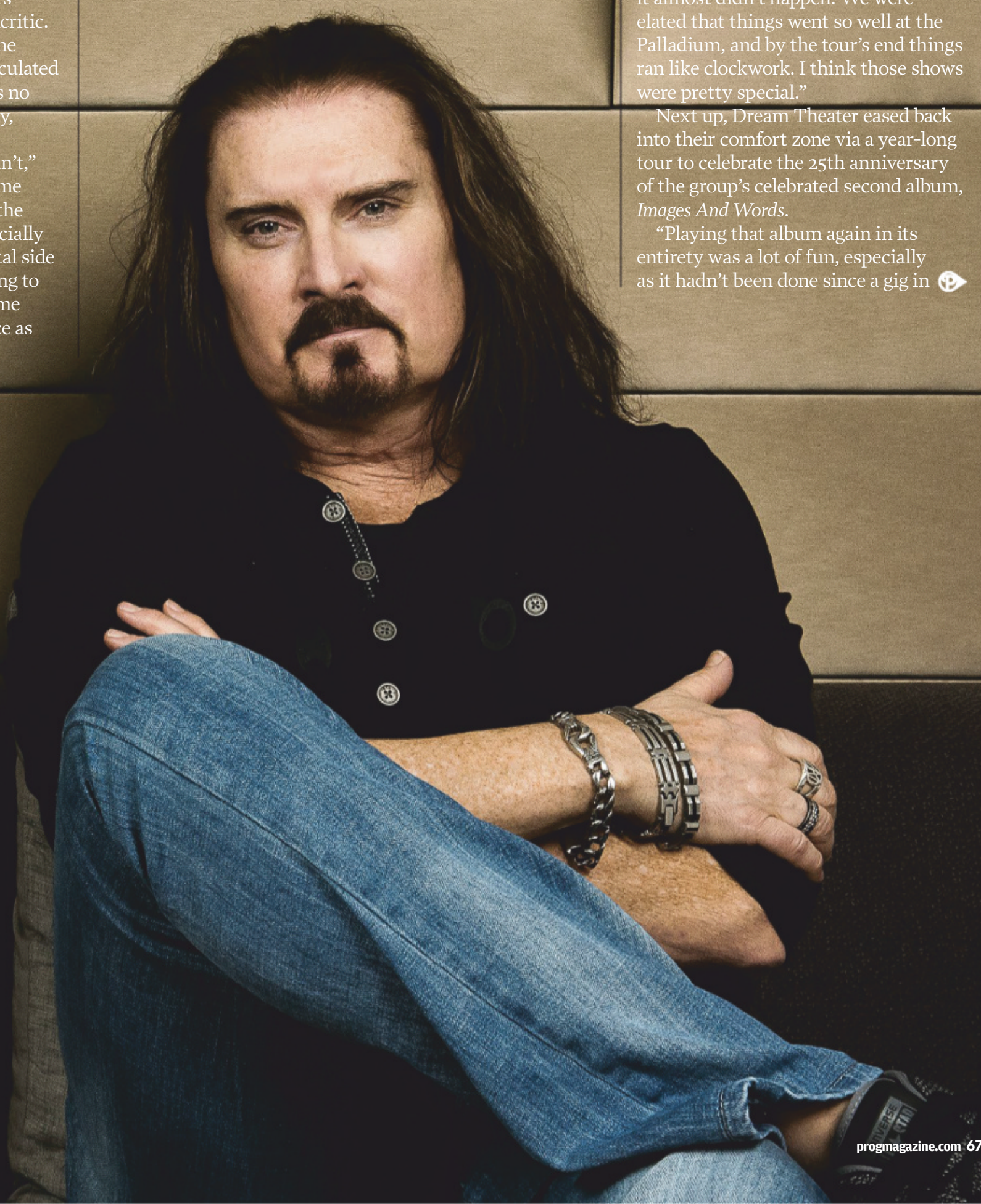
To promote the album Dream Theater played around 100 shows throughout 2016 in relatively intimate halls by their usual standards, using theatrical props to re-tell *The Astonishing* in what Petrucci had termed a "sci-fi-meets-*Game Of Thrones* but almost medieval" manner. This would prove a bigger undertaking than they had anticipated.

"Were there nights when we realised we had bitten off more than we could chew?" LaBrie muses, before erupting with laughter. "Oh yeah. Had you seen us backstage at the first show at the London Palladium you'd know the answer to that question. We were so nervous."

"It had taken a year to get the animation together, and then the effects had to be timed with the music," Petrucci reveals. "In rehearsal, getting those things synced, well... it almost didn't happen. We were elated that things went so well at the Palladium, and by the tour's end things ran like clockwork. I think those shows were pretty special."

Next up, Dream Theater eased back into their comfort zone via a year-long tour to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the group's celebrated second album, *Images And Words*.

"Playing that album again in its entirety was a lot of fun, especially as it hadn't been done since a gig in



John Petrucci (left) and James LaBrie: an astonishing duo.

Germany back in 2007, but it was great to relive that same tour [for *I&W*] again 25 years later," LaBrie states.

"The most frustrating thing about that tour was the time constraints," Petrucci smiles. "In between the *Images And Words* songs and the encore of *A Change Of Seasons* [which lasts for 23 minutes], James would tell stories of those days. They were fun to hear but it was a lot to squeeze into one night. Eventually we had some popcorn made and threw it at him to hurry him up!"

Following the sprawling excess of *The Astonishing*, the birth of Dream Theater's 14th studio album could not have been any simpler. *Distance Over Time* was written very succinctly, in less than a month, as the bandmembers — completed by keyboard player Jordan Rudess, bassist John Myung and drummer Mike Mangini — lived, worked, cohabited, drank wine and enjoyed barbecues together in idyllic surroundings.

"I must thank my wife for the idea," Petrucci reveals. "The last tour had been a long one and she suggested we go away together, reconnect and re-bond. Either that or she was trying to get rid of me. But it was a great suggestion."

Dream Theater headed to a place called the Yonderbarn in Upstate New York, not too far from Woodstock.

"It couldn't have been more perfect," Petrucci enthuses. "It was a five-acre property with a farmhouse where we all stayed. What we were not looking for was a recording studio: all we needed was a place to write."

Nevertheless, when the band arrived they found the premises had a barn suitable for recording, but no equipment that would allow them to do so. They were so in love with the place that bringing in the hardware to lay down their new music was, in the words of Petrucci, "a complete no-brainer".

"It was an unbelievable setting with large windows and natural light, overlooking a forest full of deer and badgers," he elaborates. "We'd booked the place for eight weeks, after which we'd move out and record the drums in Long Island and maybe do the guitars in my basement, but having written the record in just three weeks it became obvious — why would we leave?"

At just under 57 minutes long, excluding its bonus track of *Viper King*, *Distance Over Time* is the first Dream Theater studio album since *Images And Words* with a playing time under one hour. It's also only their third to feature no songs of longer than 10 minutes. It's sleek, super-powerful and fat-free. Had they felt under pressure to deliver something a little less demanding than *The Astonishing*?

"We were not really that conscious of that, but everyone was on the same



MARK MARYANOVICH

"We knew that we wanted to keep the writing concise but keep things raw and organic, also to emphasise the fun side of the band with some jamming."

John Petrucci



The Yonderbarn in Upstate New York: "an unbelievable setting".

MARK MARYANOVICH



Dream Theater, L-R: John Myung, Jordan Rudess, James LaBrie, John Petrucci, Mike Mangini.



What's your beef? James LaBrie flips out.

MARK MARYANOVICH



John Myung enjoys his cabin fever.

MARK MARYANOVICH



Jordan Rudess with Mike Mangini (right).

MARK MARYANOVICH

page," Petrucci considers. "We knew that we wanted to keep the writing concise but keep things raw and organic, also to emphasise the fun side of the band with some jamming."

With *Distance Over Time* set to be Dream Theater's debut for their new home of InsideOut Music, LaBrie adds that the band felt conscious of beginning a new chapter in their history.

"That was conducive to how we felt entering the studio," the singer enthuses. "We were stoked by what we'd written and the label felt the same way. Those feelings really lent themselves to making a heavier, more stripped-down album."

Since the departure of co-founding drummer Mike Portnoy in 2010, Petrucci has been a sole producer of Dream Theater's records, a duty that the pair had previously shared. This has attracted its share of criticism from certain fans, some of them expressing the view that Portnoy's successor, Mike Mangini, just isn't audible enough. *Distance Over Time* sees this problem being addressed.

"Oh, I'm very much aware of the topics of discussion that revolve around the Dream Theater universe," Petrucci acknowledges with a semi-smirk. "Whether it's the sound of the snare, or that the albums have been over-compressed, or maybe you can't hear the bass. I was done with all of that. What I wanted to do as a producer was remove any of those distractions.

"To me that's exactly what they are," he elaborates. "With the first few Dream Theater records nobody was concerned about those issues. I don't want them to be talking points anymore, only the excitement of how it used to be with those early records."

Are some people a little too picky? "Yeah," Petrucci fires back instantly. "But that's the nature of our fanbase. It's a double-edged sword — who else is going to appreciate this kind of music except somebody that's discerning? But that brings a big contingent of technologically minded audiophiles who listen to music in a different way."

LaBrie is in firm agreement. "I can still remember being a fan, cranking and appreciating an album, and that euphoria that can get lost when people dissect every little nuance in an

"The Astonishing was a rock opera, and when I listen to it I still hear all of the elements of Dream Theater music."

James LaBrie



audio sense. To me, it misses the whole point. It's kinda stupid."

In another first for the band, *Distance...* introduces Mike Mangini, who contributed the quirky *Room 137*, as a composer for the band. With its life-questioning themes (*'What's the message?/Am I running out of time?'*), it's an interesting song.

"Mike had this whole story about how the number 137 is a prime repetitive number in the universe, like Pi or something," Petrucci explains. "It's behind everything in physics. This philosopher guy Wolfgang Pauli drove himself crazy trying to figure it out. And he died in hospital in Room 137.

"So Mike sent us these massive emails of research about Wolfgang

Expect to see these two gents out on the road this year.

Pauli for when somebody else wrote the lyrics," he continues. "But later he had a try at writing them himself and they were really good."

Elsewhere, LaBrie supplied a track entitled *At Wit's End*, which might even be considered the first progressive rock song of the #MeToo movement.

"I hadn't thought of it like that, but now you mention it is about women being mistreated, disrespected and taken advantage of in a sexual sense," nods the singer. "I had read an article which revealed the high percentage of couples that break up after the female is raped. More often than not the relationship doesn't last because the woman believes that the man will no longer be able to look at her in the same way. And as much as the man tries to convince her that it's okay to carry on, she never quite believes him. So the rape ruins the lives of two people."

The album closes with its longest track. Penned by Petrucci and inspired by Carl Sagan's 1994 book of the same name, *Pale Blue Dot* is an eight-minute piece that pleads for responsibility towards the planet. *'Adrift in space we're on our own/Who's out there/ To save us from ourselves?'* wonders the ecologically aware guitarist in the song's final line.

"The story behind that song is quite serendipitous," explains Petrucci. "My father was a big fan of Carl Sagan and there was a weird series of events. My daughter graduated from New York University and at that ceremony they gave honorary degrees to the scientists and astrophysicists of the Voyager Mission [of 1977]. It inspired me to dig into that whole thing, also the Golden Record [a time capsule that contains sounds and images selected to portray the diversity of life and culture on Earth].

"A while later, my daughter and I happened to see a TV documentary on Voyagers 1 and 2, so the subject just kept on coming back to me," he continues. "The title of the book and the song stems from a photograph taken of the Earth from space, and how our planet is a nothing but a little tiny speck. Everything that has ever happened on it in human history — all of the things we consider so important such as wars, relationships and bloodspills — are of negligible consequence in the grand scheme of things."

For LaBrie, having portrayed multiple characters on *The Astonishing*, *Distance Over Time* represented a far easier day at the office.

"I really wanted to keep this album clean voice-driven," he agrees. "There were a couple of moments where I considered going raspy and seeking a Chris Cornell-type approach, but I decided against that."

Some of the tracks (*Untethered Angel* and *Room 137*, for instance) even have heavily treated vocals, which is another first for Dream Theater.

"That's all down to Ben Grosse, our mixing engineer," Petrucci enthuses. "He did a phenomenal job. Normally I would be present at that process, but Ben was in LA and we had just spent four months in the studio because that's the way he likes to work, so I left everything in his hands."

Five years ago, would you have been able to do that?

"No, I absolutely could not," John affirms. "It was a bit of letting go, and I'm so happy that I did. Fresh ears can be a valuable thing and Ben did some amazing things. He even cut guitar parts out altogether. The mix of a song would come back with a message saying, 'You're not going to like this, there's no guitar in verse two.' But what he'd done was really, really cool."

After 14 albums, that can only be a good thing.

"It'll definitely be another of those topics of discussion," LaBrie laughs. "That's something you can bet on."

The build-up towards the unveiling of *Distance Over Time* began with an online treasure hunt that allowed a search for clues and ultimately the discovery of the album title.

"It was all about trying to engage with the fans, and I liked the idea," Petrucci explains. "We're funny to one another, but as a band we're kind of boring on a social media."

The pair hoot with laughter at the reminder that when the first YouTube teaser clip was posted one wag wrote: "[It's just] 36 seconds [long and already] better than *The Astonishing*."

"Another said: 'It's only 36 seconds long and I know that I'm not going to buy this album!'" Petrucci adds. "You've got to love that stuff."

As previously mentioned, this album sees the band leap from Roadrunner, with whom they re-signed two albums ago in 2012, onto Sony Music's prog subsidiary InsideOut. What happened?

"Our contract expired," Petrucci shrugs. "Roadrunner treated us incredibly well, and creatively speaking we did some of the best things of our career on that label, but the deal was up and we could either renew again or go elsewhere."

There was a certain inevitability about where they might end up.

"Thomas [Waber, head honcho of InsideOut] has been lurking for quite a while," laughs Petrucci. "He made us an offer we couldn't refuse."

"We did examine other options but first and foremost Thomas is a fan," LaBrie insists. "He gets who we are and knows where we want to go."

In March 2019 Dream Theater begin a tour that combines songs from *Distance Over Time* with a 20th anniversary commemoration of their conceptual masterpiece *Metropolis Pt 2: Scenes From A Memory*.

"It's unlikely that we'll play the full-length *Scenes From A Memory* and also *Distance Over Time* in its entirety because that would lead to some very disgruntled fans," LaBrie predicts, "but discussions about the show's breakdown are not too far away."

Neither are Dream Theater entirely certain of when they might make indoor appearances in Europe, where they have been confirmed for a string of festivals including Download on June 16.

"It's a good question and right now I haven't got an answer," Petrucci smiles. "But there's one thing I do know for sure — it'll happen."

Distance Over Time is out February 22 via InsideOut. See www.dreamtheater.net for more information.

"WORKING WITH DREAM THEATER CHANGED EVERYTHING FOR ME"

The man who mixed *Distance Over Time*...



When Ben Grosse, the Californian whose resume includes the likes of Marilyn Manson, Disturbed and the Red Hot Chili Peppers, received an offer to mix *Distance Over Time*, he didn't hesitate.

"I became a fan of Dream Theater when they first cracked the universe back in the 1990s, but then they drifted off my radar," he admits. "When John Petrucci reached out to me I knew there would never be another chance of working with musicians of their calibre."

The guitarist and producer was very trusting of Grosse, an unusual development as until now Petrucci has been a very hands-on guy.

"Yeah," Grosse agrees. "I think it helped that when I sent John the first song, it was pretty much what he had been hearing in his head."

Having listened to *The Astonishing* ("though only to get an overall feel", he stresses) Grosse knew that this time Dream Theater sought a sound that was radically different.

"That's why the band hired me," he comments. "They wanted to make a more current-sounding heavy rock record that was based in progressive rock."

Looking in from the outside, was there anything that Grosse had felt should change?

"John had mentioned the fans' comments about the drums being louder and there were some other issues, but it was a very easy record to make. The record company had felt that James' vocals had never been captured properly, which is why I tried some new ideas, but anything could have been vetoed by the band. Thankfully, they were very happy with most of what I put forward.

"The record came out extremely well, but working with Dream Theater changed everything for me," he laughs. "My entire world used to be in 4/4 time, but their songs are in sixes, fives and there's even one that's in 13s! They're crazy!" **DML**

The Golden Light

A tragic event almost spelled the end for **Swallow The Sun**, but they channelled their grief through the music, and it made them stronger as a result. From classic prog-worship to taking risks, *Prog* gets to grips with their mission.

Words: Isere Lloyd-Davis
Images: Jussi Ratilainen

Swallow The Sun: no strangers to the dark.

"The past few years have been rough: we weren't even sure if this album would ever come out."

Swallow The Sun's singer Mikko Kotamäki is ruminating on the band's new, seventh album, *When A Shadow Is Forced Into The Light*. The Finns are no strangers to dark subject matter, consistently exploring themes of sadness and isolation while channelling beauty in darkness through their blackened prog. But on *When A Shadow Is Forced Into The Light*, a tragic event took centre stage.

"Juha [Raivio, the band's guitarist] lost his longtime girlfriend and for a little while we thought that it might be the end for the band because he was in such a bad way," explains Kotamäki. "He didn't play on any of the tours after [2015 album] *Songs From The North I, II & III*."

Tragically, Raivio's partner, Aleah Stanbridge, passed away from cancer in 2016. The South African singer-songwriter was also involved with the band: her vocals feature on a number of Swallow The Sun songs, and she also created the cover art for *Songs From The North I, II & III*.

Though devastated, Raivio channelled his grief through *When A Shadow Is Forced Into The Light*, and also through their preface to the album, a two-track EP that features the tragically powerful 14-minute song *Lumina Aurea*. This epic lament of painful shrieks and haunting chants features Einar Selvik from Wardruna and Marco I. Benevento from The Foreshadowing.

"*Lumina Aurea* is dark shit," says Kotamäki. "It was very difficult to record it, and at times, almost too much to handle. I haven't listened to it since we recorded it, and we won't ever play it live."

The haunting single is a foreshadowing of the new album's deep-rooted sadness as Raivio has confirmed: "Every word and note I wrote for Aleah."

The accompanying artwork for *Lumina Aurea* and *When A Shadow Is Forced Into The Light* were both commissioned by Raivio as an ode to Stanbridge, and were created by Latvian artist Liga Klavina and French artist Fursy Teyssier. The cover for *Lumina Aurea*

"You know how music is nowadays: people just release one song at a time and put it on Spotify and YouTube. We wanted to do the total opposite of this and that was the main idea behind releasing the three albums at once."

depicts a darkened silhouette draped in a rippled white cloth on a small boat. Their finger dips in the murky waters as the boat moves along, leaving a trail along the water. The image on *When The Shadow…* is of a horned skeletal figure facing forwards and standing on a heap of tree roots. Both are indicative of the grief that lurks within.

Musically, since their last album *Songs From The North I, II & III*, Swallow The Sun have been skilfully developing their sound into proggier territories. A triple album, *Songs From The North* was their most audacious and impressive musical feat yet. But really, their proggier direction shouldn't come as a surprise.

"Rush and Marillion are two of Juha's favourite bands," explains Kotamäki. "He has always had a progressive background. Prog is the music that we used to listen to when we were kids. Now that we are getting older, we're losing our hair and listening to Genesis again!

"It was Juha's idea to make *Songs From The North I, II & III*," Kotamäki continues. "He always knew that he wanted to write a triple album. But you know how music is nowadays: people just release one song at a time and put it on Spotify and YouTube. We wanted to do the total opposite of this.

"It was pretty intense. It took months!" remembers Kotamäki. "I couldn't record all of the vocals at once so I did it over two or three days a week for four or five hours. Century Media are a very good label. There is no pressure on us from them. When we wanted to do *Songs From The North* they thought we were crazy but they said, 'Just let them do it.' I think that making music shouldn't be too serious: it also needs to be fun."

Songs From The North… featured three discs of different musical styles: the first disc is a catchy medley of clear vocals and melodic riffs, while the second is a soothing acoustic album and the third is an atmospheric blast of funeral doom heaviness. On *When A Shadow Is Forced Into The Light*, their aim was to blend these sounds together.





Above: the artwork for *When A Shadow Is Forced Into The Light* (left) and *Lumina Aurea*.

As Kotamäki explains: "With *Songs From The North I, II & III*, we wanted to show different sides of our music. When you listen to *When A Shadow Is Forced Into The Light*, you will find that our basic sound is all three albums of *Songs From The North I, II & III* mixed together. I guess I can say that we have finally learned how to play! [laughs]"

When A Shadow… was recorded and engineered over six months by Raivio, singer and keys player Jaani Peuhu and Jens Bogren at Fascination Street Studios. The contrast of the string quartet with Kotamäki's screaming vocals, Juuso Raatikainen's crashing drums and Raivio's melodic riffs demonstrates each song's unique versatility.

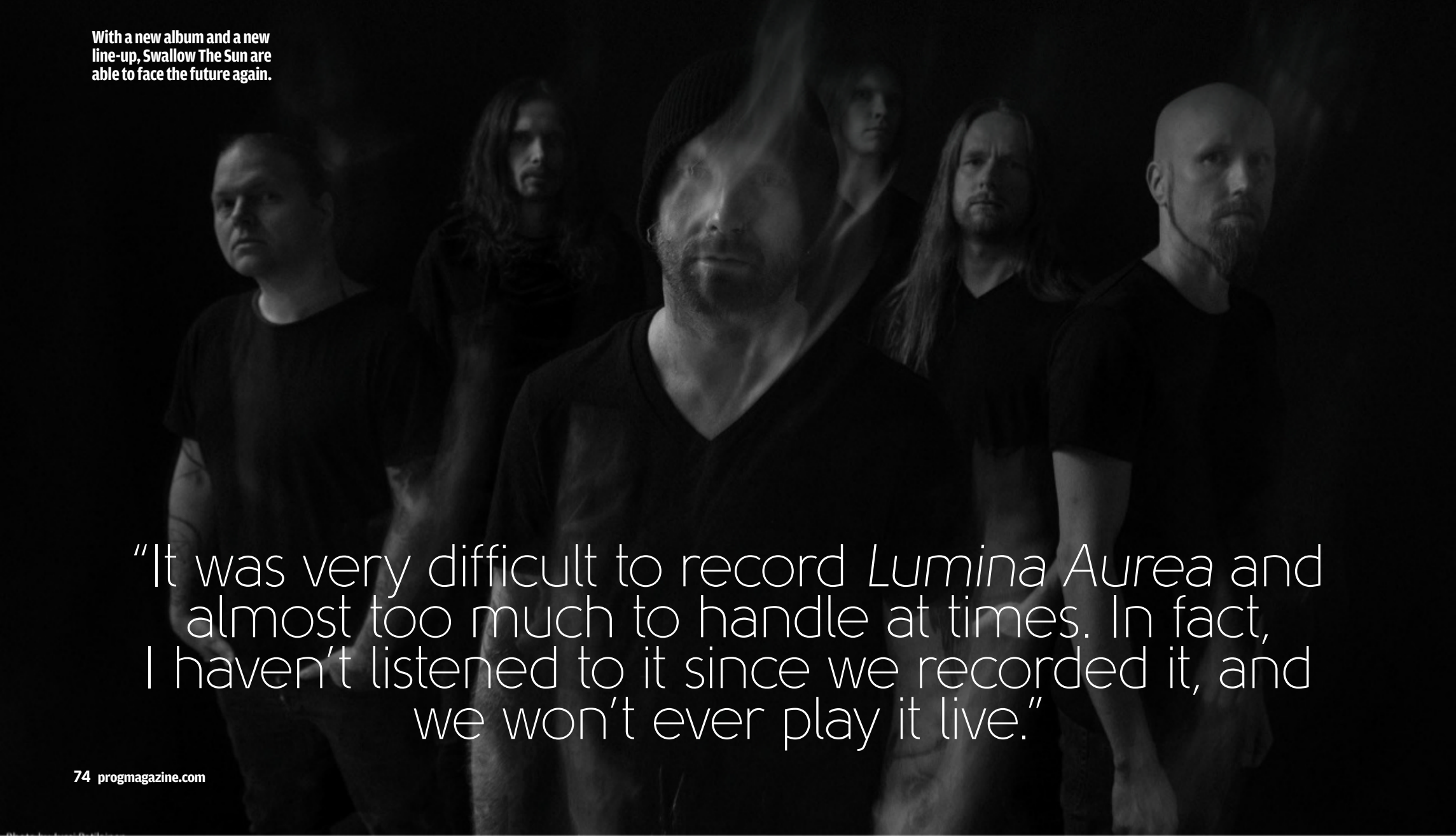
On this album, the band are also showcasing a new line-up. Drummer Kai Hahto left in 2015 to join Nightwish, keyboardist Aleksi Munter left in 2016, and longtime guitarist Markus Jämsen left in 2018.

"Our line-up has been pretty stable until now and this is the first time in many years that we've been through such a change," Kotamäki explains. "Our ex-keys player got tired of the music business and wanted to do something different with his life, and I respect that. Also our original guitar player started to have hearing problems so it was wise to quit the band in order to not risk losing his hearing.

"The new guys aren't really new," he says of guitarist Juho Räihä, keys player Jaani Peuhu and drummer Juuso Raatikainen. "They are old friends – we've known them for 10 or 15 years so asking them to join the band seemed like an easy decision. It's important to get on with the people you're making music with. You become a family. You can't play with assholes!"

As Swallow The Sun's musical achievements keep coming and they continue upwards and onwards, the Finnish band that were once just a shadow in the progressive catalogue have now truly come into the light.

Lumina Aurea and When A Shadow Is Forced Into The Light are out now via Century Media.



With a new album and a new line-up, Swallow The Sun are able to face the future again.

"It was very difficult to record *Lumina Aurea* and almost too much to handle at times. In fact, I haven't listened to it since we recorded it, and we won't ever play it live."

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The Road They Walked Before

Greenslade's 70s heyday might have been short-lived, but with their back catalogue now getting the reissue treatment, *Prog* discovers the story behind this "thinking man's band", from their controversial choice to disregard guitars, to unlikely tour-mates, and just what the future might hold...

Words: Mike Barnes

"After all this time, we'll be an overnight success!"
Dave Greenslade

Greenslade in 1973, L-R: Dave Greenslade, Tony Reeves, Andrew McCulloch, Dave Lawson.

“I’ll tell you what is really staggering – it’s 47 years since the first Greenslade album and now they are all being re-released across the world,” says Dave Greenslade. “After all this time, we’ll be an overnight success!”

Greenslade were only around for a relatively short time, from autumn 1972 until their last gig at Barbarella’s, Birmingham in December 1975. The group recorded for a major label, Warner Brothers, and *Spyglass Guest* (1974) reached No. 34 in the UK album charts.

That album has been remastered and re-released on Cherry Red/Esoteric, along with the group’s 1973 debut, *Greenslade*, and *Bedside Manners Are Extra*, which was originally released later that same year, while 1975’s *Time And Tide* is out February 22. If the group have been overlooked a little in prog history, these double disc sets – including *Sounds Of The Seventies* and *BBC In Concert* sessions and a DVD comprising promo videos and *Old Grey Whistle Test* footage – should help right that imbalance.

“I haven’t listened to the music in a long time so I came back to it really fresh, and though I say it myself, I’m very proud of these compositions,” says Greenslade. “I’m lucky to have had a chance to form a band with those guys. We made a great combination. And it was a most unusual band at the time – no guitar and two keyboard players.”

Greenslade had played keyboards in Colosseum and, when they broke up in 1971, he was left with a number of unrecorded pieces, so looked to form a new band. Firstly he recruited Colosseum bass guitarist Tony Reeves, who got in touch with keyboard player and vocalist Dave Lawson, who had been in Samurai and Web. He in turn contacted drummer Andy McCulloch, who’d played in Fields and King Crimson. One can hear some similarities in the music of

ALAN MESSER/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

Greenslade, particularly their debut album, and Colosseum's side-long *Valentyne Suite*, which was largely written by the keyboard player, but overall it's quite different in feel. So had Greenslade any plans as to the sort of music he was going to make in his new group?

"It wasn't a conscious thing, it was just a development," he replies. "I never thought, 'Come on, lads, let's form a prog rock band!' It never crossed my mind. So very quickly the four of us got together and started rehearsing and writing — I was writing a lot of stuff. We had great fun, and we got signed up to management."

The fact that Greenslade had no guitarist and two keyboard players gave them a certain hip cachet at the time, but to some, such a line-up appeared to be ill-advised.

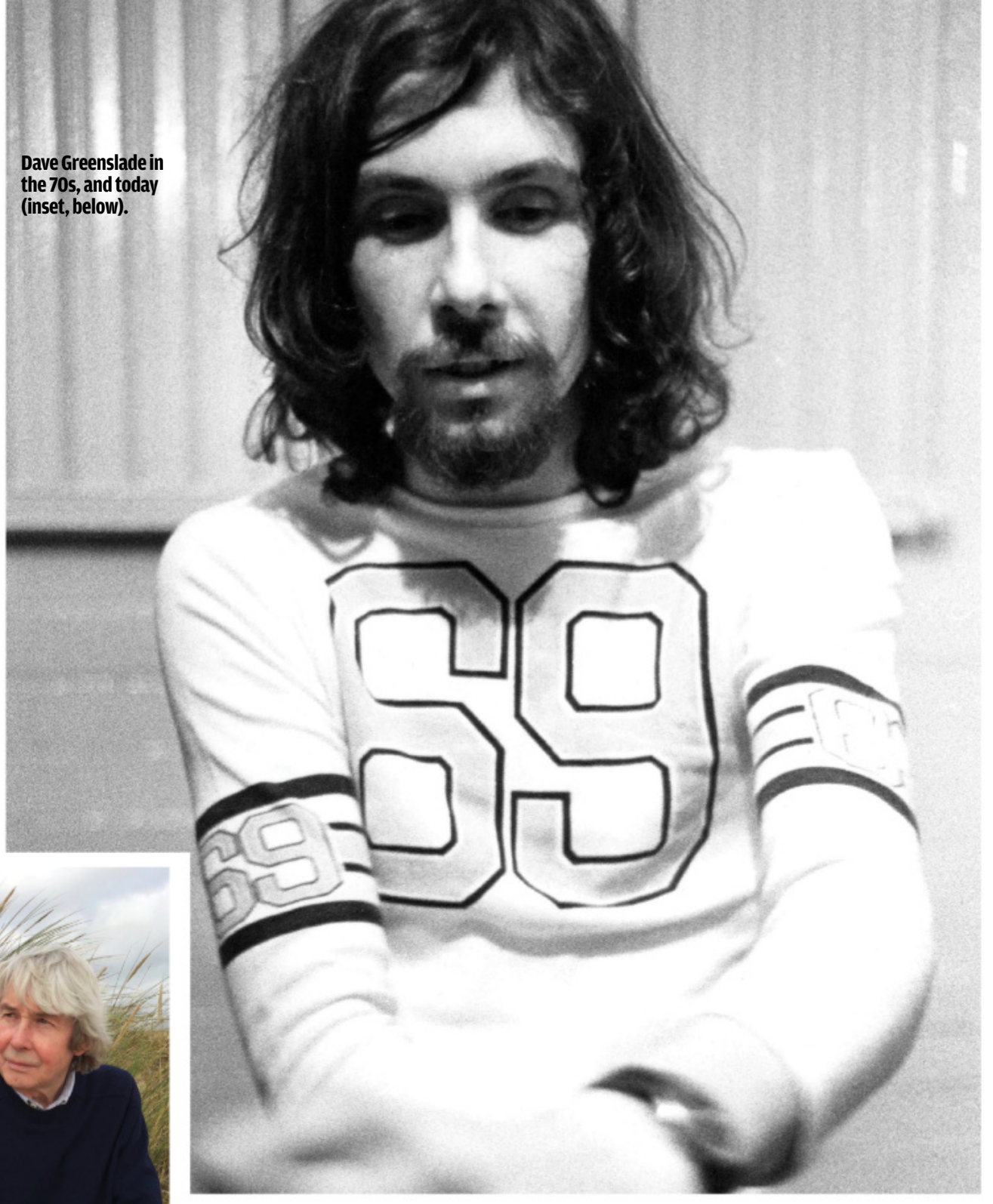
"When I told my chums and musical colleagues that I was going to form a band without a guitar — I didn't have anything against guitars I just had this idea in my head of two keyboard players using an array of instruments — everyone said, 'It'll never work, Dave.' Well, they were wrong."

Clem Clempson, formerly of Colosseum and then in Humble Pie, did play guitar on two tracks on *Spyglass Guest*, but apart from that it was all keyboards. Dave Lawson remembers how, from the outset, their choice of instrumentation contributed to the group's particular sound and approach.

"We didn't give the guitars a thought at the time," says Lawson. "We just jammed with two keyboards and it seemed to work. With a guitar you've got a weapon in your hand, you wind it up and it's very powerful. It's extremely dynamic whereas an electronic keyboard isn't, really. You can wind clavinets up because they've got pick-ups in them, and you've got synthesisers which are powerful, but not in the same way as a guitar.

"It was a mixed bag because I was bringing some Samurai and Web things to the party and Dave had the music that he'd been writing when he was in Colosseum. Bar some numbers that Dave had written in their entirety, he would have chord sequences and I'd come up with a melody line and lyrics, and we'd knock it into shape from there."

Greenslade feels that *Bedside Manners Are Extra* is perhaps his favourite of the band's albums, but agrees that their self-titled debut — "Virgin Greenslade", as he puts it — has a particular freshness about it. "There's a very interesting selection of material on the first album; I've never really heard any other band play like that at all," he says. But although some of the music is rhythmically and melodically complex, from the outset the group's considerable technical ability always served the material, as demonstrated on the twists and turns of the instrumental *An English Western*. And although McCulloch isn't mentioned as often as his more famous peers, his speed, deftness and impeccable timing made him one of the most gifted rock drummers of his generation.



Dave Greenslade in the 70s, and today (inset, below).



"Well, Dave Lawson was, and still is, a fabulous player, and it's a question of having an affinity with the guys you are working with," Greenslade says. "And musically, we just slotted in like a jigsaw puzzle with the right pieces.

"Although we didn't look like one, we were actually a live band," he continues. "We enjoyed playing live more than being in the studio. We would rehearse the material, do a perfectly good recording and then we went on the road, and in six months... wow! We'd developed those pieces again, the result of which is heard on some of these new releases."

But was it a problem that the group didn't have an onstage frontman?

"That's the thing, we did have someone out at the front," Greenslade replies. "The most unlikely person — the bass player, Tony Reeves. And he was more than a bass player: if you listen to his lines they were almost like front line guitar work, and we let him have his head in that direction, because he was very good at it.

"Each of us were playing at least three keyboards. It must have been a nightmare for the road crew — six keyboards in a band — and they weren't small and portable in those days — bloody great Hammonds and Mellotrons. I played the Hammond quite a bit, and a Fender Rhodes. Then I bought an RMI, an American electric piano and an ARP synth. Dave had a lovely ARP, and we wrote for all these voices."



Spyglass Guest reached No. 34 in the UK charts.

"It was a kind of thinking man's band," says Lawson. "We used to get quite a large following of gear heads, because synthesis was in its infancy and I was slightly unusual because I chose an ARP. After the gig all these guys would be queuing up for autographs in loon pants and tie-dye t-shirts, with not a mini-skirted fan among them, except perhaps a Scotsman."

But when the band strayed away from this core audience, enthusiasm was not guaranteed. Lawson recalls one time when they appeared live on a TV programme.

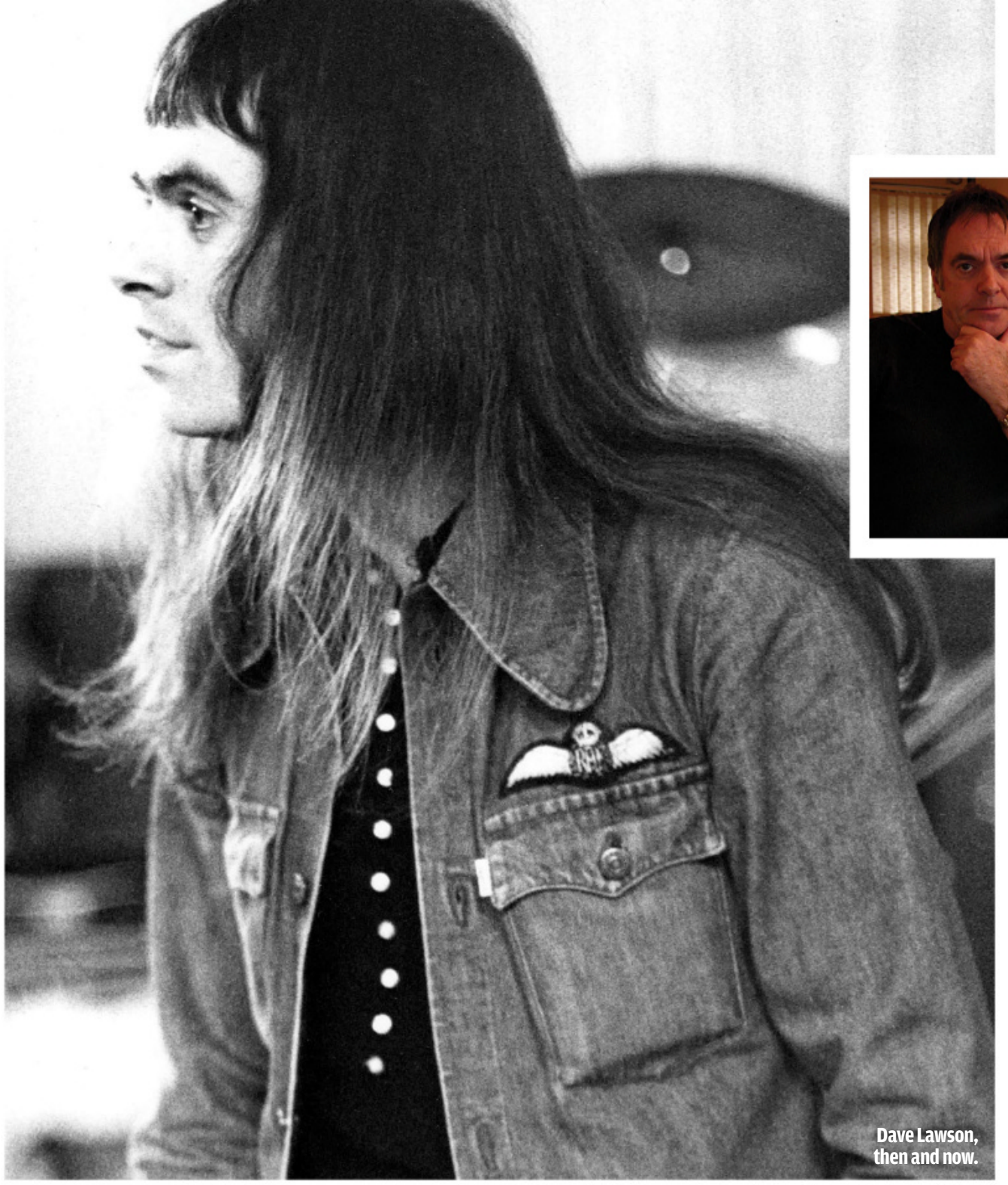
"The audience, mainly teenage girls, had to be bribed with T-shirts and all sorts of things to even clap, because Slade were on the bill as well. So it was quite confusing."

Although Lawson reckons that Greenslade were, image-wise, "a bit of a low-profile band", by 1975, Bambi, the wife of music critic Robin Denselow, made clothes for them. Lawson wore a fetching number with diamanté trim, McCulloch had lived a while in Japan and dressed with a Japanese theme,

Greenslade's eponymous debut, aka 'Virgin Greenslade'.



ALL IMAGES ON THIS SPREAD: PRESS/GREENSLADE/CHERRY RED



Dave Lawson, then and now.

while incumbent bass player Martin Briley was kitted out in a skeleton suit. "Dave had a polka dot thing — he could have doubled in Billy Smart's circus. It was the closest we got to Genesis," Lawson quips.

And on another occasion, their keyboards attracted some unwanted attention from a particular type of gear head, for in a typically odd 70s billing, Greenslade toured in the States with Kraftwerk.

"In those days the sounds were made rather than just pressing a button," Lawson explains. "On an ARP Odyssey, if you can imagine a surface with loads of little faders on it, all those faders are 'in tune', if you like, so you are in tune when you play the thing. When I got onstage, one of Kraftwerk's crew — or Kraftwerk — had pulled every single fader down to zero, so the solo must have been the weirdest thing because I was trying to tune it at the same time as play. I mentioned it to our roadie, an ex-marine we called Lurch — huge, about six foot seven. Lurch wanted to have a word with Wolfgang [Flür], and Kraftwerk barricaded themselves in the dressing room. Our reviews were great and Kraftwerk's weren't very special, put it that way, so we were asked to leave the tour."

1973's *Bedside Manners Are Extra*, Dave Greenslade's favourite of the band's releases.



On *Spyglass Guest* it might have seemed that the two Daves were going their separate ways as they recorded some of their compositions in isolation, although they would both play on them live. But this was partly out of necessity as album deadlines were always looming and any leisure time away from playing live would likely involve writing new material.

"I'd have my Fender Rhodes suitcase at home and a 7ips Revox tape recorder," Lawson explains. "When I got to *Doldrums*, I recorded it and thought, well, there's not a lot wrong with this recording. I wasn't going to do it again in the studio. It wasn't a cop out — I'd got it where I wanted it."

"It would be nice to do something now, but the practicalities of it all... it's a possibility."
Dave Lawson



After they released *Time And Tide* in 1975, the life of the band was cut rather cruelly short. They were with a management company who also looked after artistes like Rod Stewart, and things weren't working out.

"We were always treated by the management as something else because they didn't understand our music anyway," Lawson recalls. "It sounds arrogant but they didn't have a clue or the faith to carry it forward. When I took the decision to leave the band, the van was on its last legs, we didn't have a car to take the band around in, the infrastructure was crumbling and I couldn't see that we had a future."

Greenslade is loath to go into too much detail, but he notes that the two parties were bound together by a contract and so the only other option would have been to buy themselves out, which would have been beyond their means.



1975's *Time And Tide* album will be re-released on February 22.

He was approached by the producers of the BBC TV series *Gangsters*, which ran for three years in the 70s and he has continued writing soundtrack music, alongside an intermittent solo recording career which began in 1979 with *The Pentateuch Of The Cosmogony*, a kind of multimedia concept album with illustrations by fantasy artist Patrick Woodroffe. While still in Greenslade, Lawson had been approached to do session work, initially for Stackridge's album *Mr Mick*. He become "the synth guy you go to" in film music. He scored the famous cantina scene in *Star Wars* and has worked on a number of other high-profile films like *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* and *The Dark Crystal*, and the BBC TV series *The Blue Planet*.

Greenslade and Lawson are both musically active and clearly have a great respect for each other. A version of Greenslade reformed in 2000 and made an album, *Large Afternoon*, but in the opinion of the man who gave the group its name, it didn't have the magic of the original line-up. So is there any chance of more from the group, in some shape or form, live or on record?

"I wish the four of us now could go and do it all again, quite frankly," says Greenslade. There are health issues that mitigate against them playing live, but Lawson reveals that he has some material left over from the 70s and that Greenslade played him some demos of material from the *Pentateuch...* era that could be worked on.

"It would be nice to do something, but the practicalities of it all... it's a possibility," says Lawson after a pause. "It hasn't been shelved for definite. The material's certainly there."

The Greenslade expanded and remastered editions are available from Cherry Red/Esoteric. See www.cherryred.co.uk/artists/greenslade for more information.

Reality Bites

Martian kids, exploding rocket scientists and, er, fleas: welcome to the weirdly wonderful world of **The Claypool Lennon Delirium**.

Words: Natasha Scharf **Images:** Jay Blakesberg

Kernel: the central or most important part of something, a homophone for colonel, and Sean Lennon's nickname for his creative co-conspirator, Les Claypool.

"He has that colonel vibe; he's the captain of the ship. He runs the desk on our sessions, he engineers the sessions, he's kind of at the front of the ship. And he calls me 'Shiner' because it's one syllable apart from Sean!" laughs Lennon from his snow-swept studio in upstate New York. When he speaks of Primus' head honcho, it's with great respect, awe and a touch of disbelief that he's working with a musician who he's admired for many years.

"I'd never really played in a band where someone was a legend on their instrument," he says. "Les is on a short list of very respected bass players and I was surprised that he really wanted to start a band with me, so I did a lot of scales to get my chops up because I wanted to make sure I could hang musically with him."

When *Prog* catches up with bespectacled multi-instrumentalist, he's taking a break from working on a new solo album and some "exciting" top secret projects. Despite being so busy, he seems genuinely happy to finally be able to chat about The Claypool Lennon Delirium's second full-length album, *South Of Reality*. The surprise project came about in 2015, shortly after Lennon's The Ghost Of A Saber Tooth Tiger opened for Primus. The duo's colourful chemistry led to the release of their psychedelic debut *Monolith Of Phobos* the following year. A covers EP, *Lime And Limpid Green*, was released in 2017, just a few months ahead of Primus' conceptual *The Desaturating Seven*, and hinted at some of their inspiration with renditions of *The Court Of The Crimson King* and *Astronomy Domine*. By the time they regrouped for *South Of Reality*, both Lennon and Claypool were brimming with ideas.



Les Claypool and Sean Lennon: delighting in their Delirium.

Where their debut was inspired by the soundtrack to The Monkees' *Head*, album number two is a hypnotic blend of prog, psych and *Sgt. Pepper's...* punctuated by Claypool's complex funk-driven basslines. The pair share vocal duties and instrumentation, with Lennon further enhancing vintage elements via a Mellotron simulator and Coral electric sitar. The album's nine satirical tracks were written and recorded over the space of two months at Claypool's Rancho Relaxo studio in California, and are as much a journey into their eclectic musical influences as a thumb through the stranger sections of the *National Enquirer*. *Cricket Chronicles Revisited* is the thematic follow-up to *Monolith...*'s two-part psychedelic explosion *The Cricket And The Genie* that explored the modern trend of over-medicating adults and children, while the lead track *Blood And Rockets* focuses on the strange life of occult rocket engineer Jack Parsons.

"I wanted to write a song about him and that was maybe one of the first ones I wrote for the album," says Lennon. "He wound up helping us get to the moon but he was also part of the Ordo Templi Orientis [a religious organisation made famous by occultist Aleister Crowley]. It's, like, this really weird story because Parsons ends up blowing himself up in an alchemical experiment. The end bit is in 5/8, which I thought was funny because a pentagram has five points. It cuts to the section when, in my mind, he's crossing the threshold from this reality to another dimension."

Parsons isn't the only person who gets the CLD treatment. There are whispers of American-German writer Charles Bukowski in *Easily Charmed By Fools*, and *Boriska* explores the odd story of Russian child prodigy Boris Kipriyanovich who claimed he was a Martian in a former life.

"That song came to me while I was listening to [Canadian proggers] Klaatu," Lennon reveals. "There's a kind of goofy drama that Klaatu had; it was overly serious in a kind of comedic way and that's what I was trying to put forward. I've been listening to lost prog projects that I don't know so well and film score stuff just to get the imagination flowing. Les had me tune into Todd Rundgren's band, Utopia, which was fun. It's a big universe and I'm glad *Prog* magazine is able to exist in a world that doesn't support weird things so much.

"The soundtrack I really like right now is Jóhann Jóhannsson's score of [psychedelic horror film] *Mandy*. It's a fun movie; it opens with *Starless* and I love King Crimson so much. When the movie opened with that, I was

"It's a big universe and I'm glad *Prog* magazine is able to exist in a world that doesn't support weird things so much."

sold. I love Ennio Morricone as well, there's a song he did called *Deep Down* from *Danger: Diabolik*, which is incredible. It's got everything; fuzz guitars, rock'n'roll, Wah pedals, little breakdowns, and it also has beautiful string scoring from that period of Italian composing. I basically like the Italian stuff from the 60s and early 70s. I feel that was the perfect mix of classical training, jazz and rock'n'roll."

Lennon's passion for movie scores coupled with Claypool's unfettered approach to music making really enhances the album's far-out sounds. In keeping with the wacky themes is the philosophical finale, *Like Fleas*, which compares the human race to parasites on the back of a dog. It's this tongue-in-cheek track that also inspired the quirky cover art.

"The point of any story, it has to transcend the subject or there's no point in pounding it," he says. "The world is so weird and we're trying to find a way to express that weirdness. Everything seems a bit upside down, that's why the title is *South Of Reality*, it feels like we're in an alternate dimension or something like that. Everything looks the same but it's operating slightly differently."

The only son of former Beatle John and Yoko Ono, Lennon has worked with an eclectic mix of artists from Marianne Faithfull and Lana Del Rey to The Flaming Lips and Lady Gaga. He's been a member of the Plastic Ono Band and has turned his hand to acting, but it's clear that "The Delirium" (as he calls it) pushes previously undiscovered creative buttons.

"I've never really had the advantage of being in the same band for more than one album," he laughs, "but I'd like to do more records with the Kernel. *South Of Reality* is a good indication that this band is thriving and we'll probably do even better music in the future. It doesn't seem like we've exhausted our chemistry at all, in fact, it seems like we've still got a lot to do. We often fantasise about what a third record would be like."

As the snow outside Lennon's studio melts, the conversation shifts to warmer climes and touring. The band welcomed 2019 with a live show in San Francisco and recently announced a North American tour for April. As much as Lennon says he'd "love to" play some shows in his father's home country, it's not been possible so far.

"I wish we could come to England but it really has to make sense in every way including financially. We've got a crew and we've got a tight ship to run so it has to work. That part of the rock'n'roll ocean has to be navigable by us," he adds with a chuckle.

Despite four years of creativity, it feels like The Claypool Lennon Delirium are only just getting started and *Prog* gets the feeling the pair are steering their psychedelic ship towards a very vibrant future.

South Of Reality is out Feb 22 via ATO. See www.theclaypoollennondelirium.com.





Sean was bouldered over at the chance to work with Les.

"The world is so weird and we're trying to find a way to express that weirdness."

Ghost Reveries: What's happening with **The Ghost Of A Saber Tooth Tiger**?

In 2008, Sean Lennon and his girlfriend Charlotte Kemp Muhl premiered their avant-psych project, The Ghost Of A Saber Tooth Tiger. The pair released a handful of EPs and two full-length recordings, the most recent being 2014's *Midnight Sun*, via their Chimera Music collective. They even played a low-key London show at Dingwalls. However, their musical partnership was frequently compared to Lennon's parents and now, five years later, the musician admits that pressure took its toll on the project.

"We've sort of taken a hiatus, I would say. We do have probably an album's worth of material ready to try but..." he hesitates awkwardly, "my relationship with Charlotte is actually slightly more important to me than the band. It was like, we had to choose which we would preserve or protect and it seemed like it was either the relationship or the band so we kind of chose each other."

In the meantime, Kemp Muhl is letting her hair down with theatrical glam rockers Uni while Lennon concentrates on CLD with her full approval. ("Charlotte loves Les, she's a big Les Claypool fan!")



He admits, "We seem to get on a lot better now that we don't demand all things from each other. I think there's this problem in modern relationships where we're expected to be all things to each other at all times, so we felt like we have to go our separate ways artistically. We still interact but we keep a respectful distance so we don't get on each other's nerves!" **NRS**

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With a remastered edition of **Be-Bop Deluxe**'s 1976 album, *Sunburst Finish*, recently released, *Prog* revisits their world. Guitar maestro, producer and Prog award winner **Bill Nelson** takes us on a journey through prog and punk, breaking rules and blazing guitars…

Words: Johnny Sharp

If ever two genres of music have been set up in diametric opposition, it's prog and punk. We've all heard the myths about newly converted punk fans burning their gatefold sleeves and cutting up their flares, and long ago concluded that history didn't happen in black and white.

But even if there were a few desperately trend-conscious music-lovers who hid any lingering passion for prog, Year Zero's fashion police didn't outlaw everyone. There was a small but significant strand of artists it was still okay for both proggers and punks to like, and prominent among them were Be-Bop Deluxe.

By the beginning of 1976, this curious quartet, led by guitar virtuoso Bill Nelson, had perfected a trademark blend of styles, combining the instrumental prowess and unorthodox, boundary-stretching approach to rock songwriting that prog had promoted, with a camp, glam-flecked love of rock'n'roll's dumb bluster, while also displaying a keen sense of theatre and performance art.

On the recently released deluxe reissue of their most successful album, *Sunburst Finish*, Be-Bop Deluxe still sound like an uncategorisable, uncontainable melange of influences. And when *Prog* catches up with Nelson at his North Yorkshire base, he claims to have not just pre-empted punk, but actually predicted it, and "half-jokingly", advocated it.

"Before punk happened I wrote a letter to *NME* [published in the December 6, 1975 issue] signing it 'Yours with a bullet, Christian Spink, For the New Music Liberation Front'," he says.

The letter condemned all previous music as "bland and banal", proposed that the word "rock" should not be applied to the new music "unleashed" after the letter's publication, and warned the industry: "The real alternative is upon you, the new age you longed for is here, but it will destroy you and all that you stand for."

The missive was penned during London sessions for *Sunburst Finish*, reflecting where Nelson's mind was at during that pivotal period in rock… sorry, music history.

He laughs at the memory. "I didn't think for one minute that they would print it in the centre of the letters page in heavy black type with a big square block around it, but there you go…"

In truth, when the "real alternative" did announce itself in the shape of punk, Nelson would be underwhelmed: "When I heard the Sex Pistols I felt it was still quite conservative: just amped up Chuck Berry with a snarling vocal on top. I was more excited by the post-punk stuff when it got more experimental."

In early 1976, though, Nelson still retained certain principles very much in tune with the prog scene his band were widely considered maverick members of. For instance, when the label insisted that he come up with a single to help sell the new album, Nelson describes his attitude as "dismissive".

"I didn't see us as a singles band. It's well documented that *Ships In The Night* is my least favourite song on the album, because with other songs, there was some burning desire behind it, but this was a very calculated, easy riff, I put a hook here and… fortunately it worked."

Despite telling, self-lacerating lyrics such as *'Without love… selling ourselves down the river', Ships In The Night* ended up with a No 23 hit and Be-Bop Deluxe found themselves performing on *Top Of The Pops*.

"It was surreal — we never thought of ourselves being that kind of band," says Nelson. "*Whistle Test* was more our territory…"

Yet for all Nelson's misgivings, *Ships In The Night* is anything but a blot on their back catalogue. The cod-reggae chorus (slowed down from the faster demo that appears on the new reissue package) may have a touch of 10cc about it, but the track is still shot through with the kind of idiosyncrasies (the abrasively squelchy guitar and keyboard decorations, non-linear structure, sax and organ solos and unlikely patchwork of styles) that characterise all Be-Bop Deluxe's best work.

Another aspect of the band's sound that wasn't about to change regardless of prevailing trends was the prominence of Bill Nelson's extraordinary guitar playing.

Sunburst Finish was in fact the third of a trilogy of guitar-related album titles, with the reference obvious in 1974's *Axe Victim*, before 1975's *Futurama* was named after a brand of budget 1950s electric guitars.

From the start of *Sunburst Finish*, Nelson's nimble fingers make a major impact. Opening track *Fair Exchange* features several dazzling pirouettes across the fretboard, before *Heavenly Homes and Blazing Apostles* are punctuated in similarly exhilarating style.

But the track that Nelson has always been proudest of in terms of his guitar performance is *Crying To The Sky*, and it's here that a distinctly progressive approach to technology helped out significantly.



***Sunburst Finish*: don't be fooled by the cover, this is no 70s trad rock fare.**

Let's hope that's not the spark igniting the lighter fuel, lads…



PRESS/BE-BOP DELUXE

"We liked confounding people's expectations. We were playing in working men's clubs and pubs in the north, and we liked the controversy that kind of image caused."

Amid dissatisfaction with the polished Roy Thomas Baker production of 1975 album *Futurama*, Nelson asked EMI to be able to produce *Sunburst Finish* himself, but by way of a compromise they paired him up with an engineer who they felt was ready to make the step up: the future Public Image, Stone Roses and Radiohead producer John Leckie.

One trick he had up his sleeve would help bring *Crying To The Sky* in particular to life.

"On that track's vocal John created a reverse reverb effect that really made it float and gave it an ethereal vibe," says Nelson.

It's still one of Nelson's favourites, and when it was altered on the new stereo and surround sound mixes in the reissue package, Nelson wasn't overly impressed: "On the new mix, it's harder and more in your face – that's the problem with a lot of new mixes; they're clinical and sharper, but I prefer the warmth of the original."

Still, the original mix is also included in the deluxe package, so you can make your own judgement.

Wakefield-born Nelson came of age as a musician at a time when the possibilities had never seemed more bountiful. Having learned guitar as a disciple of Duane Eddy and Hank Marvin, he displayed such promise that his Dad paid "a fortune in those days" to buy him a Gibson ES-345, a guitar that became his trademark as he grew up to dabble in a variety of styles.

He covered Pink Floyd, Cream and Hendrix with his band Global Village, and was soon inspired by early Yes and King Crimson and "the idea that you could do stuff that was a bit more open-ended". Yet when he self-released a solo album, *Northern Dream*, in 1971, it was as a bearded, acoustic-wielding, long-haired singer-songwriter. John Peel championed him, and EMI came knocking... only to find a newly shaven, eyeliner-wearing Nelson fronting a new band flirting with glam rock.

"We liked confounding people's expectations," Nelson smiles. "We were playing in working men's clubs and pubs in the north, and we liked the controversy that kind of image caused."

Their love of confounding audiences would continue: later they would tour America, and were given support slots to macho rock acts such as Lynyrd Skynyrd and Ted Nugent. "I got the band in Italian three-piece suits and got their hair cut so we looked completely the opposite to the American rock scene, yet we could burn it up with the best of them if we wanted to."



PRESS/BE-BOP DELUXE

Bill Nelson: the guitar has always been at the heart of everything he does.

Right: *Axe Victim* and *Futurama*, the previous two guitar-based albums in the trilogy.

Below: Nelson with his Visionary award at the 2015 Prog Awards.



KEVIN NIXON

The intriguing mix of cultural signifiers is still evident for those chancing on *Sunburst Finish* in 2019. The sleeve, for one thing, looks arguably more suited to 70s trad rock acts, featuring naked model Nicky Howarth Dwek holding up a blazing guitar inside some sort of giant test tube.



But Nelson points out that it was a result of his Art School-cultivated interest in multi-media and the visual side of rock performance rather than any desire for a cheap promotional gimmick.

"I was always very interested in making it a full audio-visual experience," he says. "On the tour for the album, we had a large film projection screen in the centre of the stage, with clips of futuristic movies like *Metropolis*, then either side of that we had two slightly smaller screens that projected pulp science fiction magazine covers from the 50s. The whole thing was choreographed to work with each song, and the whole stage set was themed around the album."

That included the band emerging from the afore-mentioned giant tube, the one that encased them on the back sleeve of the album.

"The band got inside and it was lifted up into the gods, then we would emerge from this tube in dry ice, fire and smoke," Nelson recalls. And we, meanwhile, are bound to recall a well-known "rockumentary"...

"Yes, it's very *Spinal Tap*," he laughs. "Long before the film, of course. I thought at one point that they might have got the idea from us but I later heard that it was someone else."

One trick Tap didn't attempt, though, was the Hendrix-esque pyro stunt that Nelson planned as a climax to the aptly named *Blazing Apostles* as the show concluded. The plan was for a silhouetted Nelson to hold his guitar aloft in the manner of the model on the sleeve. But inevitably, logistics proved problematic...

"Yes, much to my embarrassment," he grins ruefully. "We got a cheap Chinese-made guitar that looked a little bit like my Gibson ES-345. Then we got a special effects team to cut a channel, line it with metal and put this thick wick soaked in flammable



fluid. Then they had a detonator in this channel with a wire running up the back of the guitar, with a switch on the head of the guitar. The plan was that I would hold it vertical, click the switch and ignite the flames, which would blow up around the back of the guitar.

"The idea was, we would be able to use it every night on the last number, because it was only the back of the guitar where the flames went and that had been plated with metal.

"It worked okay in rehearsals, and then we got to the first night of the tour, reached the end of the gig, flicked the switch... and it wouldn't ignite. So I ran into the wings where the roadies poured lighter fluid all over it, Hendrix-style, threw a match on it and it fully caught fire. So after that we had to find one these cheap Chinese guitars for every night on the tour. Destroyed a guitar every night. Still, the lighter fluid thing worked every night – only trouble was, we got banned from the Theatre Royal Drury Lane for breaching fire regulations."

"On the tour for the album, we had a large film projection screen in the centre of the stage, with clips of futuristic movies like *Metropolis*. Either side of that we had smaller screens that projected pulp science-fiction magazine covers from the 50s."

Try to follow that, Rotten, Strummer and co…

Such grand artistic gestures were only one of many ideas Nelson had in mind for Be-Bop Deluxe, many of which sound way ahead of their time, and more suited to this century, where technology might have been able to help bring them to life.

"I had so many ideas," he says. "One was for just me to sit on the shore of a lake with a guitar and to float speakers on the water, letting the sound drift in the breeze as I stood on the shore with surround sound. Or to play out on a boat, with a cabinet speaker on the sea shore, gradually getting swallowed up by the sea as the tide came in. Another idea was for us to play on a truck with the back doors open, racing down the motorway and recording with mics on the roof picking sound up as well as cars whizzing by."

Massively impractical of course, but so was holding a blazing guitar above your head every night. For Be-Bop Deluxe, musical and performance rules were there to be broken. Oh, for more like them today…

Not long after *Sunburst Finish*, Nelson began to explore new artistic horizons, and while his new band, Red Noise, explored a more angular, synth-influenced sound (key songtitle: *Don't Touch Me (I'm Electric)*), the post-BBD Nelson would produce bands such as The Skids and work with the likes of David Sylvian, Gary Numan and A Flock Of Seagulls, artists that had been among those punk converts that had still retained Nelson in high regard.

He has since moved towards a more ambient, instrumental style, but unfortunately Nelson's performances these days are relatively few and far between, as bouts of illness have caused intermittent problems with his hearing and eyesight. However, he did perform a one-off instrumental show, *Plectronica*, in Leeds in December, a 70th birthday celebration accompanied by an orchestra and featuring a guest appearance from avant-garde composer Harold Budd, a long-time friend. In keeping with Nelson's continued embrace of technology, it was live streamed to fans via his website.

"The guitar is still at the heart of everything I do," he says, but it certainly has never limited his horizons. "I'm bursting with new ideas for future releases. The muse continues to fill my life with ongoing possibilities."

Perhaps wisely, the lighter fluid and ignition switches are safely in storage now. But now the strict musical allegiances of the 70s have gradually been eroded to a yellowing, barely distinguishable line in the ground, we can celebrate Be-Bop Deluxe and Bill Nelson as a prog-inspired one-off – one that would ultimately show future generations the way towards transcending any musical boundaries put in their path.

Sunburst Finish expanded and remastered is out now via Esoteric/Cherry Red. See www.cherryred.co.uk and www.billnelson.com for more information.

PRESS/BE-BOP DELUXE

Test tube babies: an outtake from the shoot for the back cover of the album.

IT'S IN THE TREES...

Hexvessel's fourth album of avant-garde folk and pastoral psychedelia saw founder **Mat McNerney** pausing to really focus on their purpose. From synchronicity to symbolism, rituals to letting go of inhibitions, *Prog* takes a step into their enchanting world...

Words: Jonathan Selzer **Images:** Andy Ford

For anyone who's already encountered Hexvessel over the past seven years, it will come as no surprise that band founder Mat McNerney observed the recent winter solstice at Stonehenge. "I was with my wife [bandmember Marja Konttinen] and our son, and it's something we were doing actively as a family," he says, sitting in the rather more urban location of a cocktail bar in London. "I'm getting him engaged by it and excited by it, so it was more like a wholesome thing, like everything feels connected. So that's how it's been actually in the three years since he's been born, is trying to get more ritual into our lives. It's how we want to make albums, too, as a spiritual journey. So we've made the new one a ritual. We want to make sure we observe all these things and we're not just pagans by name. It's a way of life."

Having first cut his teeth in the more progressive outposts of the underground metal scene in the early 00s, McNerney found his true calling when he relocated from London to Finland, where the Celtic folklore related to him in his childhood found an echo in the forests surrounding Tampere. Gathering a collective of like-minded souls, his first outing under the Hexvessel banner, 2011's *Dawnbearer*, fused mysticism, bucolic folk and a distinct avant-garde sensibility that's since matured into more accessible but richer, more rapt songwriting and has found its apotheosis on new album *All Tree*. Here you'll find the wistful pastoralism that ran through both English and Finnish 70s psychedelia fertilised anew by the kind of conviction, scope and fearless, fully immersive world-building you don't achieve without some dedicated belief system driving you on. From the album's opening traditional Finnish song, *Blessing*, that you could imagine the villages of Summerisle chanting to herald a new dawn, through the frolicking and fiddle-strewn *Wilderness Spirit* to the mournful, Brecht-tinged *Liminal Night* that harks back to their debut and the aching beautiful wake of *Closing Circles* that provides a final act of heart-heavy liberation, *All Tree* can sail close to the wind in terms of outright hippiedom, but it's navigated by musicians with a finely calibrated internal compass.

A band bound to the cycles of nature and such a personal journey for its founder, Hexvessel albums tend to be spiritual marker points. After three albums exploring different aspects of the band, this was an opportunity for McNerney to both take stock and rediscover its true essence.

"I went out to the summer house, and I wrote this in the countryside," he explains. "I did it as a daily exercise, and with the countryside in mind and the influences around it, and that isolation, I was thinking a lot about what Hexvessel meant to me, and why I started this project in the first place. I'd been finding it really difficult to get inspired by anything in music up to that point, and I really thought that maybe I was just going to give it all up and retreat into a different way of living, that maybe I've had enough or I've done enough, achieved enough, and for me at this level that's as successful as things would get. But me and the band had been talking about the old songs, old poetry and old stories and me getting interested in my past, those Celtic tales, so it's from those that the inspiration came. I started thinking what it is about songwriting that I really appreciate, not just going into a studio and making a noise, but how a song can impact and change your life. I wanted to feed back into that eternal song, that eternal story and give back to that somehow."

Recording again with renowned producer Jaime Gomez Arellano, McNerney felt that the best way to avoid falling into repeated patterns was to terraform the studio into a space where something magical could arise.

"We talked about how we wanted to do the rituals at the beginning of the day, at the end of the day, and when someone arrives and when someone leaves. I asked him, 'Can we turn your studio into a temple, are you going to be weirded out by this?'" And it was really important that nobody joked around and everybody took it seriously.

"I really wanted this to be a magic, special thing that I read about in *England's Hidden Reverse [A Secret History Of The Esoteric Underground]* when you hear about Coil watching spirits come in and out of the studio while they're listening to mixes. And it really became that. We did those rituals and when we said goodbye and deconstructed the altar, we did a closing ritual. We went out and the spirits that were helping us make the album, we let them go into the fields, and this wind flew back through us. I'm almost going to cry just thinking about it. I got this real sense of gratitude and the spirits flew back, they were happy to be free, but they were also happy to have been a part of it, and I felt so happy that we had done this thing this way, and I was instantly crying. I turned around and everybody was crying as well, and no one had said a word. It's like that when you make something that everybody is spiritually invested in. You can call it what you want, it's spiritual and it's something magical, and I think that comes through on the record."

> All those old prog bands took things that people said, ‘Those can’t go together,’ but they did, and it works, and I like that. At the time it probably sent people nuts.

Mat McNerney: getting in touch with his roots.

As with Opeth and Katatonia, Hexvessel's journey from the metal scene their members were founded in to broader audiences more aligned with their psych, folk and progressive influences has been gradual, but it has become increasingly defining. For McNerney, the inspiration he took from prog wasn't just musical, but also a cue to let go of inhibitions.

"It's brave," he says, "all those old [prog] bands took things that people said, 'Those can't go together,' but they did, and it works, and I like that. At the time it probably sent people nuts, but now it's normal. You should not be afraid of being exposed if you're doing something honest; you're not doing something stylistically people can easily tune into without giving something of themselves to."

That connection took on a more personal resonance with the recording of the album. Having recruited a flute player for *All Tree*, it was only when Mat started researching him later that he found out his pedigree.



Hexvessel, L-R: Jesse Heikkinen, Kimmo Helén, Jukka Rämänen, Mat McNerney, Marja Konttinen, Antti Haapapuro.

"When I started doing the credits I wanted to look him up, I discovered he'd sung in Uriel, been in National Health and he was on the classic Egg albums. He's a UK prog legend, Mont Campbell he used to be called, and now he's called Dirk Campbell. *Arzachel* by Uriel is a prog gem, it's one of my favourite records.

"It's such synchronicity, but it happens with Hexvessel a lot, where these connections come together," he continues. "His parts on the record are really key, but just when he finished his flute playing, his daughter was killed in Syria defending the Kurdish rebels. *Changeling*, one of the songs he played on, was about going into the forest and disappearing, where you leave something of yourself behind and you become something else. It was sort of how I felt moving out to Finland, going into the forest and letting that become part of me, losing my old self and changing into something else. But when I thought about how she lived her life, how she'd been a rebel hippie for years, and then felt she had to get involved and do something, it became her story."

Symbolism is a thread throughout *All Tree*, not least in the cover art, depicting two hands joined together in front of an oak trunk, suggesting both that sense of connection and a protest that reflects Hexvessel's activism on behalf of nature conservation. As McNerney explains, there's also a more specific reference.



"The band and I had been talking about the old songs, old poetry and old stories, and I was getting interested in my past, those Celtic tales, so it's from those that the inspiration came."

"It's a symbol of poetry and storytelling in Finnish mythology called Kalevala. It's told in a meter rhyme that you're meant to hold hands like that and you rock backwards and forwards as you tell the Kalevala, and in the earliest forms, all Finnish poetry was sung. They would hold hands and each would sing these stanzas. It's poetry, but poetry is storytelling, is song, is connection. What is telling in the artwork is what we're telling in the songs. It's about what we have in common. That's the symbolism of the title; we're all part of nature, we're all connected and there's something we can fundamentally tune into, and it's that very early storytelling. I want to get to that source. I want to dig there in the same way that jazz musicians want to get down to the core."

All Tree is out February 15 via Secret Trees/ Century Media. See www.hexvessel.com for more.







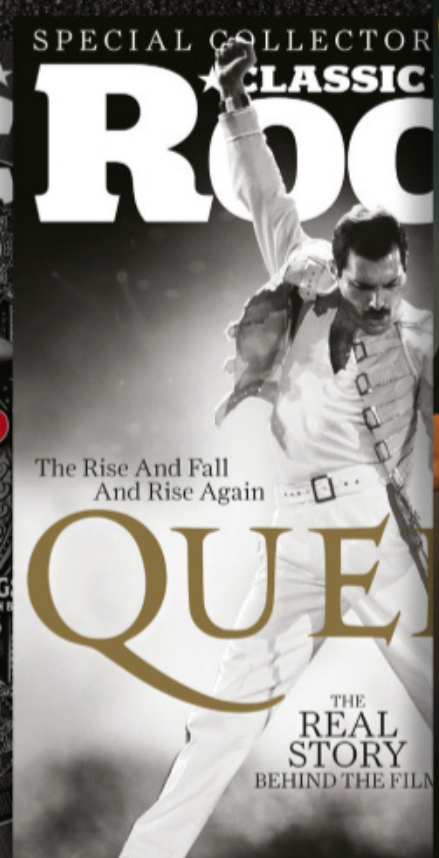


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THE PROG INTERVIEW

MICHAEL ROTHER

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 **Michael Rother**. The German multi-instrumentalist played in three of the key krautrock bands of the 70s, and continued to wow with his solo work, which is celebrated with a reissue box this month. The homebody and *Monty Python* enthusiast looks back over an extraordinary life in music…

Words: Rob Hughes

Michael Rother confesses to feeling a little nervous. There's so much going on at the moment, he says, with interviews stacking up across Europe to mark the release of *Solo*, a ravishing new box set that gathers his first four solo albums from the late 70s and early 80s, alongside soundtracks, remixes and live recordings. The German multi-instrumentalist isn't used to this kind of focused attention. Not that he's moaning. "I'm not going to complain about having my past follow me," he reasons, "because these days, as *Monty Python* said in the lion tamer sketch, 'It's a boon!'"



Rother's Solo box set is on sale February 22.

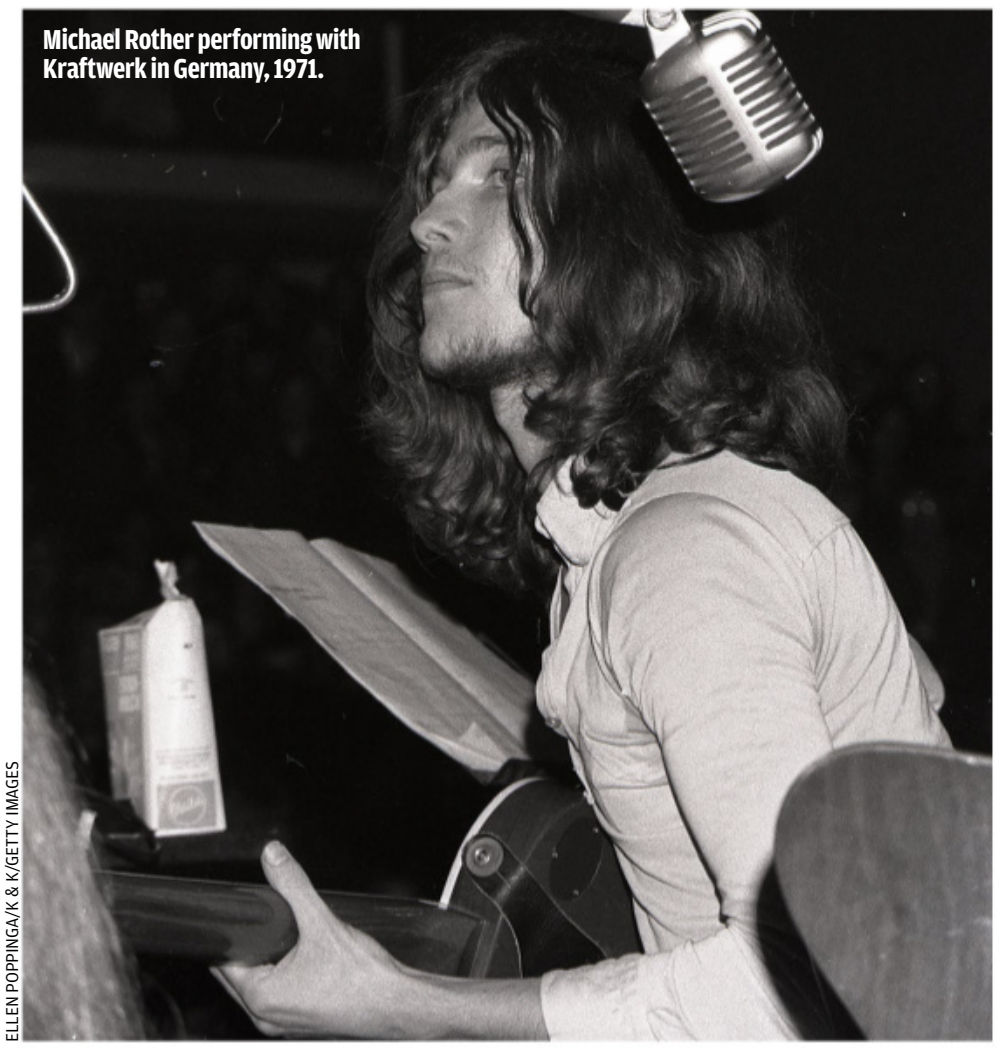
At 68, Rother has every right to be proud of his past. His signature guitar work – abstract, minimal and innovative – was a key feature of the exploratory new music that emerged from Germany in the early 70s. He passed through not one, but three essential bands from that period, beginning with Florian Schneider and drummer Klaus Dinger in an early iteration of Kraftwerk. After aborted studio sessions and a series of gigs, he and Dinger then splintered to form Neu!, who issued three peerless albums between 1972–'75, driven by motorik beats and Rother's fluid sense of harmonics and rhythm.

By *Neu! '75*, Rother was already working with Cluster's Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Dieter Moebius as Harmonia, a deeply intuitive collaboration that yielded a pair of experimental classics in *Musik Von Harmonia* and *Deluxe*. Brian Eno, who called them "the world's most important rock band", dropped by in 1976 to record a third, *Tracks & Traces*, though it didn't see the light of day for another 21 years. Rother embarked on a solo trajectory the following year, beginning with the sublime *Flammende Herzen*, which kicks off the new box set.

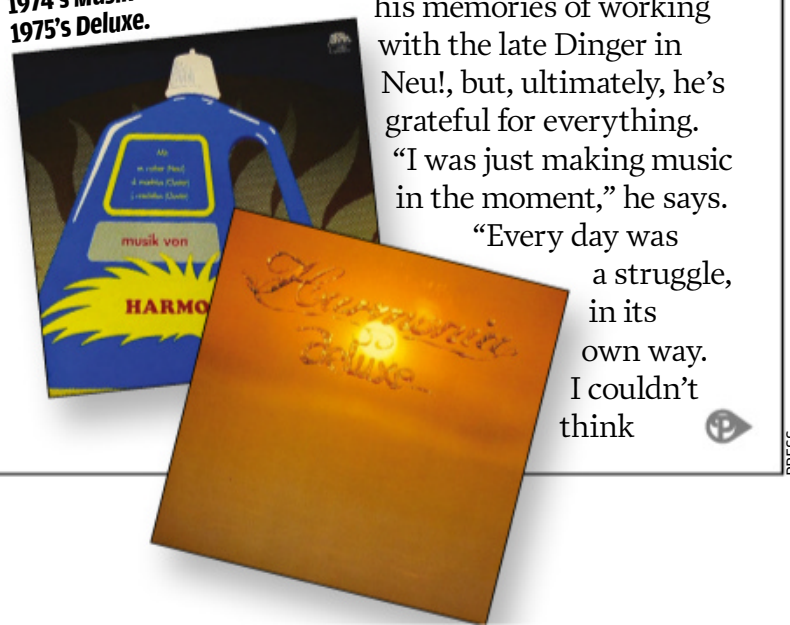
He still lives in the same house in Forst, in the rural enclave of Lower Saxony, where Harmonia rehearsed and recorded. "I'm sitting here in the kitchen right now," he tells *Prog*. "I can't ever imagine moving away from here. Some people think I'm a bit stupid, because whenever I want to go anywhere, it takes four or five hours. And there's no airport nearby. But the positive side is this beautiful landscape. Today is a sunny day, but usually in winter it's muddy, dark and grey. And dull, dull, dull. That's another *Monty Python* reference! I'm a huge fan."

> We never talked about making music. It's like not talking about love-making, you just *do* it. This was always my approach to making music. Of course you open your ears, too.

Indeed, Rother chuckles frequently in conversation, whether it's digging up old *Python* quotes, remembering his early days as a budding guitarist or just marvelling at how his career has turned out. There's a more bittersweet edge to his memories of working with the late Dinger in Neu!, but, ultimately, he's grateful for everything. "I was just making music in the moment," he says. "Every day was a struggle, in its own way. I couldn't think


Michael Rother performing with Kraftwerk in Germany, 1971.

ELLEN POPPINGA/K & K/GETTY IMAGES



The first two Harmonia albums, 1974's Musik Von Harmonia and 1975's Deluxe.

PRESS

Michael Rother looks on the bright side of life.

ahead. What future generations might think was totally beyond the horizon. Nobody asked me back then: 'Michael, do you think this music will be important in 40 years?'"

Has the *Solo* box set been in the works for a while?
It was certainly on my mind, and Grönland Records', ever since we released the Neu! box set and the Harmonia box set a few years ago. We started seriously working on it in 2017.

You started selling a lot of records when you first embarked on a solo career in 1977. Was it an optimistic time?
That was a surprise, to be honest. Harmonia album [1975's *Deluxe*] failed. Roedelius and Moebius gave up hope in '76. They said, "Ah no, Michael. This is not going to work, let's do something else." I was disappointed by the reception of Harmonia, but I didn't want to give up. I wanted to continue, but they didn't. So each of us recorded a solo album with Conny Plank. I made *Flammende Herzen* and again I was totally convinced about the music, but didn't know whether my own excitement would be shared by the audience. And suddenly, it worked! The label kept phoning to say how well it was selling and that they were pressing up more copies. This was a totally new experience for me.


Starting young: Neu! and friends.

PRESS

I'd been very happy to release the first Neu! album. [Co-producer] Conny Plank did a great job and it was a close shave, because we could have easily failed. But then suddenly people loved it. When I moved on to Harmonia I was equally convinced of the music, but nobody wanted to hear us back then, with the exception of David Bowie and Brian Eno. And maybe a few others that we didn't know about. I was just sitting here in Forst, working on the music with Roedelius and Moebius. It was totally exciting to be able to just create music all day long, for months. And years, actually. Then the second



Rother's first solo album, 1977's Flammende Herzen.

Given the sheer wonder of the music, it seems remarkable that Harmonia didn't find an audience back in the day...
People ignored us. That was the best we could hope for. Whenever we'd play live, they'd start talking. We had little audiences – sometimes 30 or 50. Once we even played to three people. It was a smart deal by the guy who ran the discotheque: "Oh, you can have the entrance money." And we'd driven 600km to get there!

As a child, you briefly lived in Wilmslow, Cheshire. What was life like for you here?
My father worked at the airport for Lufthansa. That was 1959 and I turned nine that year. My mother said it was the happiest time of her life. There was still that thing in the air – don't mention the war! – but people were so kind and polite to us. I had good friends in school, they took care of me because I didn't know English and had to learn it. I have very fond memories of the time, playing football in the snow and swimming in the River Bollin.

You then moved on to live in Karachi in Pakistan. Was that the scene of your first musical epiphany?
This is something I try to understand looking back, but I clearly remember being hypnotised by this music. All the scales were so different, but it had this feeling that it could go on forever – just repetition, repetition, repetition. The whole music just fascinated me. It's all guesswork, really, as to what influenced me and to what extent – my mother's classical music, the rock'n'roll that my brother played, the Pakistan influence. It's like a chemistry set. Then you add the British beat explosion: The Kinks, Beatles, Stones. Suddenly you have little Michael with an electric guitar, trying to be George Harrison.

Was that the ambition to begin with?
Oh, we were totally fans of George Harrison and The Beatles, Keith Richards also, and The Kinks. Then all the other


Michael Rother in 2016. The law and psychology's loss is music's gain.

FUTURE OWNS


I remember watching German television and seeing Hendrix. Everything changed from that moment.

great guitar heroes that arrived later in the 60s — Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix, who was this shining superstar. He *came* from the stars. I remember watching German television and seeing Hendrix. Everything changed from that moment.

When did you realise that music was going to be the driving force in your life?
I joined a band, we did concerts around Düsseldorf, playing at school dances. We were so happy just to copy our heroes. Then of course later we got more ambitious, but I think I really honestly never thought about making music my work, becoming a musician as a profession. It was all just passion, the love of music. I had some other ideas for a while. I thought I'd become a lawyer, then I started studying psychology. The whole world of psychology was fascinating for me. I even chose a psychiatric hospital when I did my time as a conscientious objector, because I refused to go into the military in '69. But at university I realised, "What am I doing here with these people?" I had visions of music while the professor was going on about something that was so different from my expectations. In all honesty, I was lucky to meet the right people at the right time. Suddenly I met Kraftwerk and then I was in the studio with Conny Plank as Neu!

1971 seems to have been an important year for you, starting off in Kraftwerk and playing on the same bill as Cluster at a show at Hamburg university...
That was a crazy concert. Kraftwerk were underground, but Cluster were even below that. Earlier in the evening we talked backstage and asked them what they wanted to do. The two guys said: "You start, then we'll come on second." So we rocked the place and people got so excited. When we told them that another band was going to play, they didn't want us to stop and started stomping. It was slightly frightening, people banging on the wood and everything else. When it became clear that it was now Cluster's time, 20 or 30 people came onto the stage and disconnected the speakers when they started playing. I was afraid there would be violence, that Cluster might get beaten up.

It's easy to forget just how abrasive that early Kraftwerk sound could be...
Oh yes. It was very different in the pre-*Autobahn* period. The albums weren't anywhere as strong as we were live. We really were primitive and very dynamic, it was just this music rushing forward and going crazy, which excited people. I have great memories of those live shows. Klaus Dinger was just sensational on the drums.

As Neu!, you and Klaus didn't get on together on a personal level, but you were so musically attuned. How did you reconcile the two?
Firstly, I never considered Klaus a friend. For me it was impossible. My girlfriend *hated* him. Everybody did. The women around Harmonia *hated* Klaus Dinger. He was so pushy and loud. It was very different in the studio when we worked together. It was just two people clicking. Klaus had these obvious qualities, which were very helpful with my ideas, and I think he felt the same about me. He knew that I was the guy who did the harmonic stuff and the melodies, and he could do the stuff that *I* couldn't. He was just crashing through the walls. He was so determined and played like nothing could stop him.

How did you resolve your differences?
The first fight I can remember with Klaus was during the recording of *Neu! '75*, when he tried to trick me. I was working with Harmonia then and Klaus and I had already talked about the concept for the Neu! album by the time he started playing with the two drummers, Thomas Dinger and Hans Lampe. He suggested that we do the album with the four of us. I wasn't interested in those two guys and told him I'd rather just record it with him. So we compromised — one side as a duo, the other side as the four of us. When we went into the studio, we started with the four-band stuff. After a few days, when we were about halfway through, I said to him: "Okay Klaus, now it's time to do the other concept." And he went: "What was that?" He was that kind of a person, very cheeky and pushy. I remember that we sat in silence in Conny's studio for hours — maybe four, five, six hours — because I was totally determined not to give in: this was the agreement, so this is what we'll do. And then, all of a sudden, Klaus said: "Okay, let's go on." Which is when we did tracks like *Isi and Seeland* and *Leb' Wohl*.

Did Conny Plank act as a mediator of sorts between you?
No, Conny would leave the studio. In those moments he knew he would just be in the way. It was something that Klaus and I had to struggle through by ourselves. Conny was great when we were working on the music. He compared his role as a producer to that of a midwife. That was the modest way Conny Plank saw himself.

Are we right in saying that Harmonia happened almost by accident? You wanted to bring other people in to broaden out the live Neu! sound...
Yes, that's how it happened. I was thinking of the track *Im Süden*, from the second Cluster album [*Cluster II,* 1972], when I decided to take my guitar and visit Roedelius and Moebius. United Artists, who released Neu! albums in the UK, wanted us to come over for a tour, but with just Klaus and I it couldn't work.

What was so appealing about being in Forst?
There was so much freedom, so much space. And it was cheap to live there, because we didn't have much money. In fact, the whole project could only work because I had some money from Neu! and the Kraftwerk concerts. It was


Rother, Julian Cope and Moebius in 2007.
PRESS



Neu! '75: the cause of Rother and Dinger's first fight.

such a thrilling time for me to work with Roedelius and Moebius. When I travelled to Forst with my guitar in Easter ’73, I jammed only with Roedelius, because Moebius was a bit more cautious. His qualities were at their best when he was spontaneous. Roedelius and I did the groundwork for the tracks, then Moebius added some blurps and beeps and whooshes. Playing with Klaus Dinger on drums was great, but it didn’t add any harmonic or melodic levels. With Roedelius playing electric piano with delays, it was fascinating. There was lots of repetition going on and these slowly shifting curves. When I connected my guitar to that, this was totally new music, different from Neu!. I fell in love with that combination, so six weeks later I moved to Forst and started Harmonia.





PRESS

Brian Eno with Harmonia in 1976.

Inset, left: *Tracks & Traces*, which was recorded in 1976 but not released until 1997.

Was it purely an intuitive thing or did you discuss the music you were trying to make?
We never talked about it. It’s like not talking about love-making, you just *do* it. This was always my approach to making music. Of course you open your ears, too. That’s how Harmonia played live, usually. Each song would start with one basic idea, then the others would listen, throw in ideas and keep reacting, taking the music forward step by step. The Harmonia times were wonderful on a musical level. That collaboration enabled me to develop new ideas in music, which I couldn’t have done without Roedelius and Moebius.

When Brian Eno came to visit, did he instantly slot into that mentality?
Brian had already been to a concert of ours in 1974, in Hamburg. He’d arrived in Bremen that day on a promo visit and, luckily, met the only German journalist who was interested in our music. There weren’t many at all, it was tough. The music magazines in Germany wrote about bands like the Bay City Rollers and Slade. But German music? “No, we don’t need that!” Brian was talking to this journalist about his love of Can, Kraftwerk, Cluster, Neu! and Harmonia. And he said, “Harmonia are playing tonight in Hamburg, which is only an hour away. Please take me there.” So we’re up there playing and there’s this guy dressed in black sitting in the first row, with two friends who were also dressed in black. Then we were introduced and Brian joined us on stage. He seemed to know everything about our music and we invited him to visit us, but it was two years until he called to say: “I’m on my way to record with David Bowie in Switzerland. Would it be OK if I came to see you?” That was in September 1976, after Harmonia had split. But we didn’t want to turn him down, so I remember we picked him up at the airport in Hanover. There was no real plan. It was just talking, going for walks, drinking tea, playing table tennis. We were playing around, sometimes only two of us, sometimes four. I remember Brian treating my guitar through his EMS synth. He’d brought along maybe three big blank Revox tapes, which we couldn’t afford because we were poor. Anyway, he left with the tapes, full of music, and said he’d be back soon and we’d continue. But it didn’t happen that way.

> What I really enjoy these days is playing live. Most of my concerts these days are a mixture of Neu!, Harmonia and solo stuff. I just feel free to go wherever I like.

You stopped playing live when you started your solo career in ’77, then didn’t resume again for over 20 years. Why was that?
As a solo artist in the 70s there were people approaching me, asking me to play at festivals. But the technology wasn’t there and I didn’t know any musicians that I wanted to play with. The idea of hiring some session musician and telling him exactly what to play wasn’t what interested me. Back then, I would’ve needed a band of at least eight musicians to play tracks like *Flammende Herzen* or *Sterntaler* or *Fontana Di Luna*. I have my own studio and bought some professional recording gear in ’79, so that’s where I spent all those years. I was just enjoying myself, recording and developing music. There were no boundaries when it came to being inspired. I was just, “OK, this melody is really interesting, so I’ll follow this for a while.” Then sometimes you turn left or right and end up in a completely different area, like a dog running around in the garden. In the late 90s technology was suddenly coming up with computer programmes and audio with pre-arranged material to combine with the things you play live, so I became interested in performing again.

Your last album was 2004’s *Remember*. Will there be a follow-up anytime soon?
That’s the difficult question. Maybe it’s understandable that after spending all those years in the studio, working on new recordings, I’m not that excited about the idea of spending another three, four or six months there, going crazy over small changes. You can spend endless time exploring all these sounds, especially with the technology available today. I did music for two films in the last few years [*Die Räuber* and *Houston*], which was a wonderful challenge. I really enjoyed doing that and all of it happened by chance, when the phone rang or emails came in, asking if I’d be interested. But what I really enjoy these days is playing live. Most of my concerts these days are a mixture of Neu!, Harmonia and solo stuff. There’s a handwriting or a style to what I do — a balance between harmonics, melody, rhythm and sound exploration. I just feel free to go wherever I like.

Solo is out Feb 22 via Grönland. See www.michaelrother.de for more information.

Edited by Jo Kendall
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New spins...

DREAM THEATER

It was big, it was bold, but was Dream Theater's last album *The Astonishing* a step too far for the progressive metal heroes? This fiery new work could bring them closer to the fans again...

Words: Rich Wilson **Illustration:** Stephen Kelly

Whatever Dream Theater release, the sole certainty is that there'll be a backlash from some of their more obstreperous fans. Indeed, there's a feeling that they simply can't win. Whether they attempt something outside their sizeable musical comfort zone or play to their progressive metal roots, there'll always be a queue of purists ready to sanctimoniously bash the band. As the lyrics to one of their more overlooked album tracks once accurately surmised, '*Everything is never enough.*'

Their last album — the rather optimistically monikered *The Astonishing* — was an admirable and well-intentioned concept album that did try to move away from an archetypical prog metal template. Yet for all the commendable execution, the end result had the wince-inducing vibe of "Dream Theater go Disney". Replete with lyrics that transparently summoned memories of *2112*, *Star Wars* and *Game Of Thrones*, for all the unhelpful online criticisms that the band had lost their soul, mojo and quality controller when founding drummer Mike Portnoy left in 2010, *The Astonishing* gave that argument an unintended validity. There's a sense, then, that *Distance Over Time* is one of their most pivotal releases that they've recorded in the last decade.

This album also needs to be placed into some perspective. It's Dream Theater's 14th in a 30-year recording history. When you consider that at similar points in their respective careers, Rush released *Roll The Bones* and Yes produced *Talk*, you could be forgiven for having low expectations. However, this recording is not the sound of a band in the maintenance phase of their career, coasting towards retirement and joyfully raking in the tour dollars at the expense of innovation and creativity. Instead, *Distance Over Time* has all the hallmarks of a band reborn, rediscovering their heritage and relishing making accomplished, ingenious music together.

Distance Over Time

INSIDEOUT



> **The hallmarks of a band reborn, rediscovering their heritage and making accomplished, ingenious music.**

Distance Over Time possesses a punchy heaviness, frequently harking back to 2003's *Train Of Thought* in terms of a metal prominence, but with a balance that was arguably missing from that record. Take for example the brittle opening riffs of *Fall Into The Light* that hint at Metallica, before the Tommy gun drumming of Mike Mangini propels the song into addictive verses and a triumphant chorus. Part-way through, the metal bombast is paused to a slower pace, with John Petrucci's mesmerising guitar work providing an opulent, mellow break before a pounding climax. *Room 137* is similarly pummelling, with filthy, grinding guitar riffs dominating the track and Jordan Rudess fighting for space to elbow in his keyboards. A Beatles-inspired vocal effect adds variety, before a wonderfully rowdy finale. It's followed by the scintillating *S2N*, which opens with a cutting John Myung bass riff. It then develops into an archetypal Dream Theater track, complete with ludicrously technical keyboards, as well as a guitar solo that provides a fresh and unattainable summit for the countless Petrucci wannabes. There's even space for a spot of amusement, with a barely audible, spoken "wow", during one of the staccato guitar breaks.

Throughout there is the undeniable feel of a band having fun, which in turn gives the album a distinctive, earthy soul that lacks some of the overly technical instrumentals that the band's critics frequently — sometimes accurately — cite as sounding robotic. Nowhere is that more apparent than in *Barstool Warrior*, which is one of the finer tracks that Dream Theater have recorded in the last 15 years. The opening minute comes over as Marillion's *Incommunicado* had Dream Theater had written it. The Petrucci solo is one of the most emotive of his career and the Rudess piano break is similarly beautiful. Lyrically, it's a tale of lonely drinkers, lamenting past decisions, fate and broken promises, before the characters escape the roadside neon bar to provide an upbeat ending. There's also a tenderness in *Out Of Reach*, an elegant love song which, with an uplifting orchestral section, gives the album poise and a welcome, embracing equilibrium.

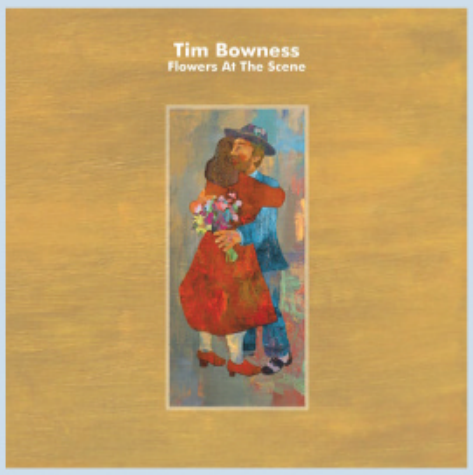
Granted, for all the musical dexterity and originality, there are flashes of déjà vu during the vocal melodies on *Untethered Angel* and *At Wit's End*, but Dream Theater simply shouldn't be creating such swaggering, inventive and fiery albums at this point in their career. *Distance Over Time* is probably the finest recording they've released in well over a decade and one which reaffirms them as genre leaders. *This* is the album that should have been called *The Astonishing*.


SCANNING...
SCANNING...
SCANNING...
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SCANNING...

TIM BOWNESS

Flowers At The Scene INSIDEOUT

Bunches of guest stars adorn accomplished album.



It was sometimes said of Bowie that half his genius was collaborating with the best muses and musicians. While we're not comparing Bowness to Bowie — he's not quite there yet — he's smartly pulled in a splendid cavalcade of cameos on his sixth solo album; one which, with Steven Wilson mixing, he cites as "a No-Man production". Certainly it revisits the warm ingenuity of that double act's dramatic offerings, but so did Bowness' recent-years trilogy, which culminated in 2017's blend of filigree and fiction, *Lost In The Ghost Light*.

> **A reset, a new chapter, bursting with energy.**

This however feels like a reset, a new chapter, and it bursts in with energy as fresh as that exhibited on the lusty opening of 2014's *Abandoned Dancehall Dreams*, any fatigue cast asunder. Someone's flowers are blooming again. Which isn't to say it's an album unfamiliar with world-weariness. Bowness' dyed-in-the-wool musical inclinations and that softly sighing, faintly frowning voice will never be detouring into chants of *'If you're happy and you know it clap your hands'*. Yet there's a track-by-track unpredictability at play here, with unexpected shadings and a bubbling undercurrent replacing any tendency to tread water. You can feel it from the kick-start one-two of *I Go Deeper* and *The Train That Pulled Away*: there's something in the air on this one. A 30-year career inevitably has peaks and valleys: this confident, diverse and thought-provoking album is unquestionably another peak.

While the voice — both literally and in terms of the record's directions and caprices — is very much Bowness', one must also eulogise those guest stars, who seem to have nudged him from his comfort zone. It's clearly a coup to get both former 10cc man Kevin Godley (vocals) and XTC exile Andy Partridge (guitar) performing on the gently sinister *What Lies Here*. David Longdon (Big Big Train) joins Dylan Howe on the precisely pretty *Borderline*, while Colin Edwin and Jim Matheos feature solidly. Arguably the most startling but entirely logical contributor (given both his and Bowness' penchant for uncompromising emotional shapes) is Peter Hammill, who brings guitar and vocals to the jagged *It's The World*, as well as backing vocals on the U2-meets-MGMT echoes of *Killing To Survive*. The former also sees Wilson layering in synths and programming. Overall the Bowness-Wilson sort-of reunion shores up the album's coherence and class. And those guest spots fill rather than drain the tank: this motors through its shades of sorrow and serenity with a proud purr.

No wonder everyone wants to smell these roses. Literate heart-aching art rock at its finest, *Flowers* will hoover up the bouquets.

CHRIS ROBERTS

A SWARM OF THE SUN

The Woods VERSION STUDIO

Unhurried but excellent post-rock from Swedish duo.



Now on their fourth album, Swedish post-rock duo A Swarm Of The Sun craft sprawling, cinematic songs in the vein of Japanese masters Mono. *The Woods* may only be three tracks long, but in true proggy fashion, it's only just shy of 40 minutes. Although they're certainly not averse to a crescendo or two, it's also the case that for a substantial part of tracks such as opener *Blackout* the instrumentation and feel is much more reminiscent of expansive ambient projects such as Nashville two-piece Hammock. It's only towards the end that the intensity ramps up and there's the now somewhat well-worn post-rock wig-out. The title track, *The Woods*, starts with a vocal-led section that's reminiscent of American psychedelic experimentalists The Secret Machines at their most understated, but it quickly morphs. As keyboards enter and build tension, the song becomes more widescreen, echoing the iconic John Murphy track *In The House, In A Heartbeat* from the *28 Days Later* score even before half-time drums and electric guitar enter. It's one of the best post-rock songs of the year, and worth picking up *The Woods* for on its own. **AL**

ASTRONOID

Astronoid BLOOD MUSIC

Boston USA fivesome fuse 'dream thrash' and progressive shoegaze for second LP.

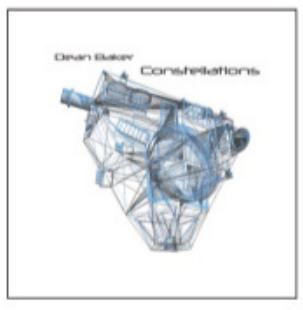


For such a dreamy, cut-against-the-grain album, *Astronoid* has an appealing sense of resolve. Following on from the five-piece's 'blackgaze' debut *Air*, this feels bigger and more assured despite its introverted qualities. It's commanding even at its haziest, most far-out moments, mixing galloping rhythms and guitars with shoegazey soundscapes. Devin Townsend is the obvious comparison, though fans of Anathema, Alcest and Meshuggah will also find much to enjoy in these swathes of softened steel. With the overcoming of self-doubt as its central theme, *Astronoid* is set across nine ambitious but compact vignettes. *I Dream In Lines* is a soaring blend of post-metal and post-rock, tied together with a melodic, emotional focus that aligns them closer to Townsend than earlier black metal influences of theirs such as Emperor. Not that this is an 'un-heavy' record; *Water* and *I Wish I Was There While The Sun Set* kick in with beefier, pummelling guitar punches, contrasting with singer Brett Boland's gauzy tones. The style doesn't vary a great deal from the pensive manner established at the start, but it's a sophisticated mix of wide-eyed escapism and brooding weight. **PG**

DEAN BAKER

Constellations AVALON

Long-awaited, Galahad keyboardist releases a superbly spacey solo debut.



He's made a key contribution to the music of Galahad over the past 20 years and has worked regularly with Twelfth Night as well as producing goth rock singer Anastasia Coburg. Now Dean Baker has an album under his own name. The catalyst, he says, was the death of his friend Ray Chiles, and the inheritance of a CD collection full of the keyboard-oriented music he loved. That might explain the strong touches of Jean-Michel Jarre, Vangelis and other synth soundscapists on *Constellations*, but Baker's own power as a composer and his prog-informed penchant for taking us on meandering musical journeys also shine through. The fizzing, swirling synth sound on *Impression No.8* may sound distinctly 70s, but the Oldfield-redolent melodies are irresistible. The beautifully atmospheric intro of *Le Chat Qui Peche* eventually leads into an addictive syncopated keyboard hook that loops around the beat mesmerisingly, en route to other galaxies. Although the bulk of the 10 tracks are instrumental, Anastasia Coburg's operatic tones on *Clouded Hills* are a welcome diversion, while adding to the cinematic feel rather than distracting from it. **JS**

JOSHUA BURNELL

The Road To Horn Fair MISTED VALLEY

Inventive fourth album by the hotly tipped young British folk rocker.



The source material here may be almost all trad, but if Joshua Burnell's dynamic, flamboyant approach seems to be taking some liberties with established forms, it acts as a reminder that so was folk rock when it appeared in the early 70s. Lest we forget, these tunes were all originally sung unaccompanied and it's instructive to compare these readings with some of the vintage versions. The then-drummerless Steeleye Span recorded a haunting *Cold Haily Windy Night* in 1971, but with drums, guitars, keyboards and harmony vocals this quicker version crackles with excitement, as does an updating of that group's 1973 recording of *Cam Ye O'er Frae France*. Another problem of allying folk to rock has been how to fit a backbeat to the songs without them sounding galumphing and foursquare. Burnell's style seems to be to refer more to the rhythms of the vocals, particularly on the dropped beats and turbulent time changes of *Berkshire Tragedy*. Only on occasion does this seem a little overwrought, but the band also breathe life into the time-honoured instrumental medley: repertoire staples *Drowsy Maggie and Rakish Paddy* are given powerful, full throttle arrangements full of stops, starts and power chords. **MB**

COSEY FANNI TUTTI

Tutti CONSPIRACY INTERNATIONAL

Throbbing Gristle icon's second solo album in 36 years.



Cosey and life partner Chris Carter's isolated Norfolk schoolhouse has been a hive of industry lately, the couple's creativity hurling up Carter Tutti Void, his retrospective boxset and solo album, her best-selling autobiography and now Tutti's first solo set since 1982's *Time To Tell*. Even if there are echoes of Cosey's earliest forays with Throbbing Gristle, she's continued to strike into that dense subterranean netherworld where shocks and twists lurk around every dark corner. The album started as a soundtrack to Cosey's *Harmonic Coumaction* audio-video installation at 2017's Hull City of Culture event. After some tweaking and re-recording, she emerged with the eight disparately compelling tracks that make up this "audio self-portrait", introduced by her own cornet blasting like a ghostly tugboat through the title tracks' sonic fog, continuing through the self-explanatory *Drone* and spiking *Heliy* with ethereal vocals. If rhythms are needed they morph as minimal techno pulses beneath the ongoing static crackles and metallic gauzes, yet by closing pair *En* and oddly-beautiful *Orenda* the album has become its own parallel dimensional entity, shuddering with spectral afterlife. **KN**

DUKE 72

The Mid Shires Herald BAD ELEPHANT

Big Hogg man's funky debut channels the golden age of the jam band.



Judging by the title and cover alone of this latest release from the ever-eclectic Bad Elephant, you'd be forgiven for assuming that it contains a type of sub-Tolkien whimsy for buyers of dream catchers and crystal unicorns. The clue is in the band's name, however: the spirit of 1972, specifically around the area of west London. *The Mid Shires Herald* is a rather excellent evocation of Ladbroke Grove's psychedelic jam rock scene, where harmony guitars and vocals are underpinned by proggy chord changes and parping horns, brought to us by Big Hogg man Justin Lumsden (with assorted bandmates/members of Trembling Bells). Think of groups like Man, Help Yourself and the Edgar Broughton Band, with a dash of early Queen. The album starts loose and spacey, but gradually gets tighter and funkier. *Rust And Stars* is a superb piece of strutting groove rock with folky female vocs hovering in the ether. *Backbone Of A Jellyfish* suggests some Beefheart-style strangeness, while the slinky *Oxblood And Rings* recalls both the Canterbury and West Coast sounds. Our pick is the crackling dub of *Out Of Reach*, a fine showcase for Duke 72's mellow but far from toothless vibe. **JB**

THE NEAL MORSE BAND

The Great Adventure RADIANT/METAL BLADE

A thrill-a-minute continuation of the adventures of John Bunyan.



"How do you follow an epic double concept album?" asked Mike Portnoy upon the announcement of the follow-up to 2016's *The Similitude Of A Dream*, before answering his own question: "Create another epic double album!" The band have been as good as the drummer's word, putting out an album that clocks in at somewhere north of 100 minutes, a 22-track, five-chapter beast of such monumental girth that it features not one, but *two* overtures.

> **A beast of such girth that it features *two* overtures.**

The Great Adventure continues the theme of *TSOAD* (which closed with the words *'Let the great adventure now begin...'*), retelling the adventure of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* via the medium of fearsomely well-drilled forays into prog, metal, jazz and classical music.

It all starts with *Overture* (the first one), with howling winds and harp cascades signifying the beginning of what is clearly going to be a journey of colossal magnitude. The track bursts into life with stuttering riffs and flurries of piano notes, rattling toms and glistening solos, and after two minutes they've squeezed more ideas into one song than some bands manage in a lifetime of hit making.

Time signatures clatter in and out with almost comic abandon, shifts in tempo are de rigueur, and while it might be tempting to assume *The Great Adventure* is an exercise in pure showboating, there's enough decent songwriting on show to ensure that the album is much more than a vivid display of manual dexterity. *The Dream Isn't Over* is relaxed and lovely, while *Hey Ho Let's Go* is a delightfully bouncy chunk of power pop that sounds like Jeff Lynne playing Kansas. *Welcome To The World* is similarly user-friendly, with demonic soloing dovetailing cleverly with a song that's otherwise almost angelic. The beginning of *A Momentary Change* has a melody that's the third cousin of the end of the *Apocalypse In 9/8* section of Genesis's *Supper's Ready*, but the similarity doesn't hang around for long before the song has sped up and is traversing a completely different plane.

Overture (the second one) begins in more gentle fashion than the first, with strings that could almost have been penned by Leonard Bernstein, before it all morphs into a jumble of jagged riffs and fleet-fingered soloing. The gleeful *Vanity Fair* picks up the power pop baton again, and *A Love That Never Dies* ends the journey with a smartphones-in-the-air power ballad so grandiose it feels like a Jim Steinman hit rewritten for *Rock Of Ages*.

This is extraordinary stuff indeed, full of brilliance, ambition and light.

FRASER LEWRY

SOEN

Lotus SILVER LINING MUSIC

Swedish supergroup settle into their own rhythm on album four.



With Soen's first two albums the Tool comparisons came thick and fast. Despite being something of a 'supergroup' formed by ex-Opeth drummer Martin Lopez and Willowtree vocalist Joel Ekelöf, 2012's *Cognitive* and 2014's *Tellurian* relied heavily on angular rhythms, pleasingly executed but just short of greatness. With the addition of keyboardist Lars Åhlund, 2017's *Lykaia* felt like the moment where everything fell into place. Though the Swedes were unhappy with the mastering — releasing *Lykaia Revisited* 18 months later — they melded modern, progressive time signatures with a huge warmth and expansiveness. Fourth album *Lotus* picks up where it left off, the band not just exploring their identity but embracing it head-on.

> **Contemporary prog music that exposes the human condition.**

From the outset, this album sounds *heavy*. In another line-up tweak, Canadian-born guitarist Cody Ford has replaced Avatarium's Marcus Jidell, and the difference is noticeable. *Covenant*'s stop-start rhythm will delight yet trip up headbangers, *Penance* really heats up around the halfway point, and *Rival*'s gigantic melodies are underpinned by a driving, metallic core. But there's also a huge amount of subtlety; *Lascivious* has a weighty riff that nods to *Deadwing*-era Porcupine Tree, but the interplay between guitar and keys evokes *Damnation*-era Opeth — something that repeats on the mellow title track. Their most vulnerable moment yet comes on *River*, Joel singing softly about a dark past and a difficult relationship, as the song slowly builds.

As for those Tool comparisons? They're still valid, but Karnivool, Katatonia and Anathema are also useful touchpoints. This is contemporary progressive music that exposes the human condition. While *Lykaia* was ostensibly a concept album about an ancient festival where boys turned into werewolves, its lyrics addressed loss and sadness, with motifs of rivers, time and ghosts resurfacing here.

Where Soen really hit the mark is second single *Martyrs*, which has a suitably strong video featuring the band in drag. Appearing to slam those who enforce religious dogma, it has a spiritual quality that'll make the hairs on the back of your arms stand up — especially thanks to Joel's breakout yowl, which makes you wish he'd let loose more often. If there's a criticism of *Lotus*, it's that it can feel too mid-paced.

Produced by David Castillo and Inaki Marconi, the engineer and stage technician for *Lykaia*, this is a record that sounds massive, clean and built for a live setting. As well as elevating Soen to the next level, it also bears an admirable message to stay true to yourself and treat others with kindness. It's a record full of darkness, but also full of heart.

ELEANOR GOODMAN

FAR CORNER

Risk CUNEIFORM

Ambitious tunes are centre-stage for US chamber rock ensemble.



With just three albums released in 15 years US chamber rock ensemble Far Corner haven't exactly been prolific, but quality, not quantity, is what really counts. While possessing some of the confrontational angst of Art Zoyd or Univers Zero, there's also an attractive melodicism in keyboardist Dan Maske's compositions that place Far Corner on the less-austere end of the RIO spectrum. *Myopia*'s fastidious attention to detail is typical here; gorgeously chunky-clunky Hammond organ rocks and tips over the obstacle course chords as it cuts between slashing cello and thundering drums. Though lasting only five minutes, the audacious scope and scale of the dense, inventive orchestration is utterly enthralling, leaving one barely time to catch a breath. William Kopecky's wilfully crunching bass brings to mind some of the force and agility of John Wetton's brutal low-end adventures within King Crimson. Indeed, the spirit and dark arts of that outfit are summoned to electrifying effect more than once. With a panache that wears its fluent blend of virtuosity and knotty complexity remarkably lightly, *Risk* manages the not-too-easy trick of being uncompromising *and* accessible. **SS**

SCOTT GILMORE

Two Roomed Motel CRAMMED DISCS

Yacht rock for robots on third album from electro maverick.



Listening to this album, we'd wager that Scott Gilmore is a man who spends a good deal of his (creative) life on his own. Bedroom eccentric may be pushing it, but there's that sense of something that's been lovingly assembled by someone working in a sonic and stylistic cocoon. That's not necessarily a bad thing – it's often where genius springs from – but *Two Roomed Motel* feels permanently lit by a fluorescent tube when a little daylight could have tempered the glare. Still, there's much to enjoy here if artificial intelligence is your thing – in fact, the early sound of pioneering techno label Warp is a definite reference on tracks such as *Cascade Occurence*, while the vibrant electro jazz of *A Veil Between* and *Rooms We've Made* suggests a homemade amalgam of Herbie Hancock and Toto. There's almost a hauntological aspect to this album, with the acid bleeps and fake piano of *Empty Aisles* like a Ghost Box track played on the type of keyboards you might find in an Argos catalogue circa 1986. But rather than evoke autumnal visions of schools TV, the title track is Boards Of Canada as Day-Glo suburban disco, a childhood headrush of Evo-Stik and Space Dust. **JB**

HEXVESSEL

All Tree SECRET TREES/CENTURY MEDIA

Finnish forest folk's widescreen fourth album.



Formed in 2009 by former black metal warrior Mat McNerney, Hexvessel are like nature-freak David Bellamies of 'wyrd' folk, easily pictured rummaging in soil and, with the obvious exception of Mat's singer-percussionist wife Marja, hollering joyously as they gorge their beards in dirt. Such is the (at times necessary) mischievous view of a band that like to quote Lord Byron and declare their music "the countryside singing from within me". They're up to their fourth album of widescreen forest folk, following 2011's *Dawnbearer*, 2012's *No Holier Temple* and 2016's *When We Are Death*, kicking off a bit Steeleye Span with a capella *Blessing* before soil-stirring outings *Son Of The Sky*, *Ancient Astronaut* and *Liminal Night*. Along the way they endeavour to invoke an arcane pagan spirit, enhanced by Antti Haapapuro's 'found forest' field recordings that include playing a dead tree branch with violin bow. Very earnest, like Dr Strangely Strange without the whimsical humour, yet hauntingly autumnal when bearded voices give way to sound paintings on *Visions of AOS* or rippling ballad *Otherworld Envoy*. A worthy effort, even if it's sometimes necessary to imagine someone sitting in a cowpat. **KN**

LAU

Midnight And Closedown REVEAL

The folk darlings push the envelope on their brilliant fifth album.



Since forming in 2005 this Scottish trio have earned love and acclaim in the folk community, winning Band Of The Year twice at the BBC Folk Awards. Each member's a real contender in their own field, and when they get together – latterly on 2015's superb *The Bell That Never Rang* – they cast their own fresh light onto their genre. Never more so than on their fifth album. With a title taken from a Seamus Heaney poem, *Midnight And Closedown* takes authentic folk and alloys it with a post-rock sensibility. Kris Dever's beautiful voice imparts mournful tales of desperation (*I Don't Want To Die Here*), the solace of music (*She Puts On Her Headphones*) and mental health. Martin Green's accordions imbue the music with texture and his keys and electronics push into new frontiers, from the woozy bass of *Toy Tigers* to the kinda-Mellotron of *Echolalia*, itself a warping, mesmerising thing that's part John Martyn, part Sigur Rós. Aidan O'Rourke's fiddles offer both articulate melody and rhythm, while producer John Parish (PJ Harvey) brings shape to the shifting, ambitious *Return To Portland* and the exotic *Riad*. This intelligent, truly progressive music proves again that Lau are the real deal. **GRM**

MAGNATAR

Parallel Words SELF-RELEASED

Classic English prog... from Florida!



The mandolin is not an instrument renowned for its lofty place in the pantheon of prog, but Magnatar might just be the torchbearers for this humble member of the lute family. *Parallel Worlds* is the debut album from the Floridian quintet led by mandolinist Glenn Smith. Their sound draws heavily on classic prog and it's not hard to discern the influence of Yes, particularly in Joey Costa's bass line during *New Galaxy*, wherein he does his best Chris Squire. But Magnatar isn't some tribute act rehashing old glories, and both the songwriting and production on *Parallel Worlds* are terrific. Guitarist Ryan Rivas is a star in the making, from his tasty lead work in *Fourth Passage* to his thrilling acoustic solo piece *A Walk In The Night*, that throws in some colourful flamenco flourishes. It's all instrumental, which may limit their potential for reaching beyond devoted prog audiences, but it's always highly accessible. There are big hooks in *She Flies* and *Night Changes* that pull the listener in, and despite the players' obviously finely-honed chops, they never sacrifice the songs for the sake of technical extravagance. An enormously impressive debut, and you'll never look at mandolins the same way again. **DW**

MAMMOTH WEED WIZARD BASTARD

Yn Ol I Annwn NEW HEAVY SOUNDS

Terrific third album of cosmic doom by Welsh wizards (bastards).



Mammoth Weed Wizard Bastard describe themselves as "three ape descendents and an astral seraphim". But *Yn Ol I Annwn* (Return To The Underworld) is so primordially heavy it also sounds like it could have been produced by a race of super-intelligent musical sauropods on some distant planet. In fact they come from Wrexham. But what differentiates MWWB from the generic doom sound are the extra colours of their synths, and bass guitarist Jessica Ball's reverby, sweet-toned vocals, which soar above the band's down-tuned guitars, emerging somewhere between Electric Wizard and Acid Mothers Temple. *Fata Morgana* introduces a folky feel with Ball's melodies winding around electric and acoustic guitar picking. Just as a glockenspiel tinkles out, a pretty tune is suddenly buried under several tons of toxic riffage. The musicians play with intensity, but also a subtle grasp of dynamics so that after six minutes of iron-booted lope, *Katyusha* achieves lift-off and synths spiral into the ether. The epic *Five Days In The Abyss* closes the album with ambient passages of mournful cello, heavenly chorales, car-crusher riffing and psychedelic wah-wah, fading out under waves of phasing. **MB**



ART ROCK

Chris Roberts samples the new releases on the prog/rock boundary.

In 2003 Paddy McAloon made one of the most unique, beautiful records Britain's ever produced. You might not normally link the classic songcraft and lyricism of Durham's deftest with prog, but this was something else; epic and eccentric. McAloon's health problems at the time meant that, almost blind, he couldn't write music as he'd like. Sleepless, he became fascinated by late-night radio call-ins and began cutting up taped voices, layering them across a primitive computerised score. This was then played by an actual orchestra, and the "script" honed. The sum was emotionally greater than its parts. Over sad, keening strings and radio interference a woman recites lines like *'the ghost of a chance'* on what became the 22-minute title track of *I Trawl The Megahertz* (Sony). It's now reissued under the **Prefab Sprout** band name, which feels right. If you have the capacity to feel anything whatsoever, this cathartic cult classic will burrow it out.



Feelings are also induced by the voice of A Girl Called Eddy, who soon releases her first album in 14 years. First comes her collaboration with Frenchman Mehdi Zannad (aka FUGU) as **The Last Detail**. Their eponymous debut (Elefant) evokes Dusty Springfield fronting the moment when classic pop embraced weird ideas: late 60s Bee Gees, Love. Featuring members of Tame Impala and Syd Matters, it whets the appetite nicely for Eddy's return.



Ed Harcourt's exquisite *Beyond The End* (Point Of Departure) sees the gifted singer-songwriter and Marianne Faithfull collaborator eschewing vocals to create pensive, wintry piano-based instrumentals which might score imaginary films. Also mining hauntology are **Dean Wareham vs Cheval Sombre**, whose self-titled alliance (Double Feature) has the Luna/Galaxie 500 legend and his favourite one-man-band covering Dylan and Lee Marvin (*Wand'rin' Star*) in what sounds like a woozy Tramadol haze.



US duo **Pavo Pavo** cite Bergman and Hockney as influences, and that incongruous contrast of dark and bright gels as they blend experimental and pop streams on seductive second album *Mystery Hour* (Bella Union). It's accessible but turbulent; smooth but histrionic. **Norma**'s *Female Jungle* (Shortcuts) is literate and passionate, the returning-from-long-hiatus Frenchwoman's voice and whatever-works styles warm in feel but often pointed in imagery (*Hysterical Wife*).





Mexican duo **Lorelle Meets The Obsolete**'s fifth album *De Facto* (Sonic Cathedral), their first wholly in Spanish, reins in the raw guitar edges (sometimes) to water the seeds of something more searching, while Brooklyn duo **Buke & Gase**, championed by The National and Laurie Anderson, display on *Scholars* (Brassland) that they can chug like Can and float like Talk Talk. Strange frequencies flourish.





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O.R.k.

Ramagehead KSCOPE

Crimson and P-Tree transcontinental supergroup going from strength to strength.



O.R.k. are one of those bands whose talents seem to far outstrip their fame. Their third album opens in furious fashion with *Kneel To Nothing* and *Signals Erased*, two monster tracks that find vocalist Lorenzo Esposito Fornasari wailing like Chris Cornell as the band rage away alongside him. The middle of the album eases back on the throttle, but Fornasari continues to dazzle as he hits some spectacularly big notes in *Beyond Sight*. *Down The Road* starts in a gentle, acoustic mood, bordering on the Canterbury sound with layered vocal harmonies, but then shifts direction with electronic influences. Drummer Pat Mastelotto, bassist Colin Edwin and guitarist Carmelo Pipitone form a versatile rhythm section, heavy when a song calls for it, but always articulate and imaginative in their playing. Two guest stars contribute – Serj Tankian lends his voice to the sweeping drama of *Black Blooms*, while Eleuteria Arena's mournful cello is particularly effective on *Some Other Rainbow Part 2*. Overall, it's a less dark and menacing listen than its two predecessors, but with a combination of powerful playing and creative song-writing, *Ramagehead* deserves to propel O.R.k. to prog's big leagues. **DW**

PYE CORNER AUDIO

Hollow Earth GHOST BOX

Master of haunted electronica journeys to the centre of your mind.



Prog has traditionally been afraid to dance, but it needn't be that way. Ever since the first big techno wave hit in the early 90s, artists such as The Orb, Future Sound Of London and Underworld have been just as interested in feeding the head as moving feet. Pye Corner Audio is the latest in a long line of electronic psychonauts intent on using their music to deep dive into the backbrain, with *Hollow Earth* presented as a subterranean concept album, a hypnotic descent into the planet's id. The PCA sound sits squarely in the haunted dancehall of the Ghost Box universe, full of gorgeous pulsating arpeggios and abstract tonal intrusions, memory-triggering and impressionistic. The title track is a shimmer of heavenly chords and rumbling bass stabs, its hypnotic melody like a flame fluttering in the darkness. *Mindshaft* revives the ghost of hard trance, but swathed in Tangs-style Teutonic grandeur. *Dancing Shadows* features an alien choir of synths and some great Rick Wright-esque arabesques, while *Buried Memories* locates the disco, only it's 10 miles underground in a quartz-lined cavern. This is cinematic progtronica, a perfect 'sense of wonder' soundtrack. **JB**

QUANTUM PIG

Songs Of Industry And Sunshine WHITE STAR

Nu-prog and punk collide, with a philosophical twist.

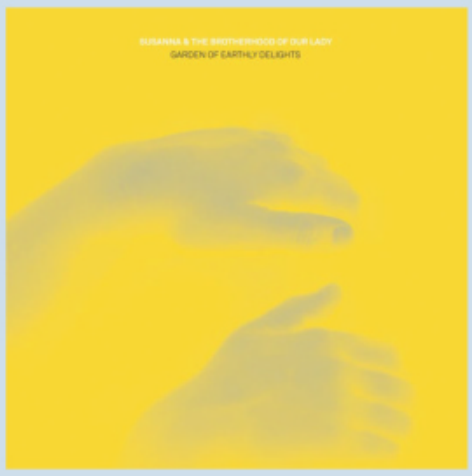


What's in a band name? The bizarrely named Quantum Pig are another signing to the burgeoning White Star label, which is co-helmed by Arena/It Bites/Lonely Robot/Frost* guitarist John Mitchell. Formed by multi-instrumentalist Ian Faragher and *We Do Things Differently* author Mark Stevenson, QP tout themselves as 'genre hopping', citing a diverse array of influences, amongst them bedfellows as unlikely as Queen, The Stranglers, Kraftwerk, Hüsker Dü and Carl Sagan. At first blush that may sound rather improbable and attention-seeking. However on delving into *Songs...*, QP's claims withstand scrutiny, both musically and lyrically. Tracks such as single *Citizen And State* and *Things* are intense three-minute romps, with the former displaying a gnarly punkish edge. By contrast *Statement Of Intent* is a slow-burning but satisfying opener reminiscent of Mitchell's own Lonely Robot work, while *Long Letter Home* is a 12-minute expansive and engaging slab of modern prog. QP save the best for last, though, with *Keep The Nation Warm* and the moving, minimalist *Dirty Old Engine*. *Songs...* is a cracking debut album; perhaps that band name does make a modicum of sense after all. **NS**

SUSANNA & THE BROTHERHOOD OF OUR LADY

Garden Of Earthly Delights SUSANNASONATA

A song cycle based on the strangest of all medieval art.



Susanna Wallumrød is well known for her decelerated and rather unlikely cover versions, from AC/DC's *It's A Long Way To The Top (If You Wanna Rock'n'Roll)*, to Joy Division's *Wilderness*, which she recorded for 2018's *Go Dig My Grave*. Her signature songwriting style is similarly pared down and *Garden Of Earthly Delights* delves into the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch. The 16th century Dutch artist employed an unprecedented lexicon of fantastical and grotesque imagery in depicting scenes ranging from the fecund paradise of Eden to the endlessly imaginative torments of hell.

> **Poise and understated power that can fill a room.**

It's a concept so prog that one can only imagine the extravagant way some bands would tackle it, but crucially, Bosch's visually astonishing style was allegorical and symbolic in a way that ordinary people could understand, and this is Susanna's inroad as she explores the still universal themes behind the images. She is accompanied by a small ensemble of backing vocals, guitar, electronics, synth and accordion.

Over her tolling piano chords on the title track she relates what she sees when peering into the titular garden, while the arrangement of *The Wayfarer* is as much about timbre as melody, a character journeying along dangerous roads through clouds of electronics and spectral backing vocals.

Although Susanna favours sparse and slow, she is a world away from the lisping 'girlie' intonations that some female singers use as a shorthand for emotion. Her voice always fully inhabits the songs with a poise and an understated power that can fill a room, and she sings with animation and freedom over the sampled exhalations, synthetic currents and Ida Løvli Hidle's deep accordion notes of *Ecstasy*, which ends with her sending an "amen" out through churchy space.

Death And The Miser finds an old man desperately clutching onto his wealth even as he is tricked by the duplicitous spectre of death, who enters his room promising *'Show me the money and I'll give you more time.'*

On the succinct and melodic *Ship Of Fools*, Susanna seems to harbour some sympathy for the self-absorbed passengers as the craft sails slowly to oblivion. They are all fools after all. Similarly on *River To Hell*, rather than lean too heavily on the subject matter, she utilises accordion to create an atmosphere between folk and cabaret, which chimes with Bosch's depiction of people bound up in solipsistic enjoyment, unaware of the horror that lies at their journey's end. The chilling *Gathering Of Birds* sees the assembling flocks as portents of a great flood, closing this brilliant and compelling collection on an ominous note.

MIKE BARNES

SWALLOW THE SUN

When A Shadow Is Forced Into The Light CENTURY MEDIA

Finland's prog doom kings serve up some widescreen sorrow.



Even by their laudably morose standards, *When A Shadow Is Forced Into The Light* paints Swallow The Sun as a band nobly bearing the weight of immense grief on their shoulders. Guitarist and principal songwriter Juha Raivio penned these songs in the midst of mourning his partner and creative muse Aleah Stanbridge, who sadly passed away in 2016 at the age of 39. While it would be daft to say that the Finns' seventh album is in any way darker, heavier or more acutely downbeat than its predecessors, the sound of genuine heartbreak and despondency is unmistakable throughout these 53 emotionally bombastic minutes.

> **Bravery, ingenuity and progressive spirit in action.**

Following the three-disc, 153-minute colossus of 2016's *Songs From The North* was never going to be easy, but Swallow The Sun have pulled it off with their customary dour nonchalance. For those craving the band's more brutal, slow-motion doom side, January's 14-minute stand-alone single *Lumina Aurea* took them into their most extreme, atmospheric and wilfully unsettling phase yet; a guest appearance from Wardruna's Einar Selvik bringing an otherworldly chill to a snail's pace orgy of furious despair. As seems logical, the album that follows is a much broader and more inclusive affair: a gently refined amalgam of STS' most accessible traits, bolstered by some of Raivio's finest songs to date and graced with a production job that brings every twinkling guitar motif and fizzing hi-hat to vital but visceral life.

The opening title track is simply dazzling: an uproarious, strings-drenched intro leading into an exquisite melodic parade, sung with effortless authority by the ever-underrated Mikko Kotamäki. Next, *The Crimson Crown* shimmers into being through ambient wastelands, before erupting into another mesmerising funeral march with gleaming hooks descending from stormy heavens. *Here On The Black Earth* is all stuttering riffs and woozy changes of pace, with Kotamäki crooning and growling at the impassive night sky. *Stone Wings* is the best of the lot: a feast of towering melodies, clangourous chords and spine-tingling elegance, it may be inextricably tethered to doom metal's somnambulant ethos, but fans of Opeth and Katatonia will recognise the bravery, ingenuity and progressive spirit in action here too.

Where *Songs Of The North* separated Raivio's repertoire into three distinct strains of misery, *When A Shadow...* lets everything hit the fan at once. Despite the real trauma that lies behind its ornate melodic façade, it's an album that delivers so powerfully and with such sincerity that its most lasting effect will be to lift the spirit, stir the soul and confirm that life goes on, hopefully with more glorious music like this to keep us sane.

DOM LAWSON

QUEENSRŸCHE

The Verdict CENTURY MEDIA

Their third post-Tate album is another triumph.



Geoff Tate was viewed as a talisman throughout the glory years of these progressive metal pioneers from Seattle – and to many, irreplaceable. The ease with which Queensrÿche have overturned such notions these past seven years speaks volumes not only of Tate's successor, former Crimson Glory man Todd La Torre, but of the group's combined talent pool. With co-founder Scott Rockenfield excluded due to "personal commitments", the third album of their new regime had faced an additional hurdle until La Torre, a drummer in his youth, stepped up for *The Verdict*. Though the results are perhaps not as overtly prog-friendly as 2015's *Condition Hüman*, their 15th album continues to put clear daylight between the risible *Dedicated To Chaos* (2011), continuing the restoration of their reputation as a band of grace and flair. La Torre's delivery still sounds like Tate, something that helped to smooth a potentially impossible transition, though slightly less so this time around. Applied to a set of songs examining the Syrian conflict (*Blood Of The Levant*) and persecution of the American Indian (*Bent*), the 'Rÿche are asking questions in a voice that once again resonates with authority and commitment. **DML**

RUSTIN MAN

Drift Code DOMINO

Former Talk Talk man finally follows up Beth Gibbons collab... 17 years later.



When ex-Talk Talk bassist Paul Webb hooked up with Portishead singer Beth Gibbons in 2002, the resulting Rustin Man album was a striking set of haunting, fractured, bucolic folk. Having someone of Gibbons' profile on board didn't do them any harm, of course. Webb claims to have been working on the follow-up ever since, in a remote Essex farmhouse. But with no Gibbons on board this time round, the 57-year-old has taken the mic himself for a mid-life vocal debut. The result is a notably scruffier, occasionally Tom Waits-y, collection of beautifully despondent laments. His singing style is redolent of Mark Hollis' world-weary tenor, tinged with Robert Wyatt's fragile emotive warble, but that only adds to the blissfully melodic sense of resignation and ghostly, elegiac feel. At times the three-legged rhythms on *Our Tomorrows* have a fair bit in common with Talk Talk's post-rock-pioneering later albums, but also sound ready to collapse, intoxicated, in a heap, as distant organ recalls Caravan after a big night. *'I'll just stay here getting stoned/ I've hardly got somewhere to go,'* he sings on the funereally paced *The World's In Town*. He can knock himself out round our gaff any time. **JS**

GÜNTER SCHICKERT

Nachfalter BUREAU B

What goes round comes around for German looping pioneer.



While guitarist Günter Schickert lacks the same profile as Manuel Göttsching and other stars of the krautrock and kosmische firmament, his 1974 debut album *Samtvogel* vibrates with a darkly obsessive quality that remains truly striking. Although the technology has become more refined and streamlined since he began his experiments with time, timbre and metre, the musical instincts animating that debut and its 1979 Sky label follow-up, *Überfällig*, are clearly present here. Recorded in the summer of 2018, there's a sweltering oppressiveness in *Nocturnus*, *Ceiling*, and *Wohin*. They glower and ring with heavy jarring harmonies, evoking claustrophobic, pulsating cityscapes honeycombed with a suffocating neon-saturated ambience. The paradox which artists using any loop-based system have to grapple with is how to utilise the freedom such equipment affords them while being locked inside a cyclical format. Schickert's route is to prodigiously solo over the contrapuntal grooves and beats assembled by producer Andreas Spechtl. It's a dependable approach that has crafted a record of brooding character and hallucinogenic atmosphere that bears repeated listens. **SS**

SEMANTIC SATURATION

Paradigms SELF-RELEASED

LP two from Canadian guitarist's collective, with Craig Blundell and Derek Sherinian.



After the dissolution of his band Nu.Clear.Dawn, guitarist Shant Hagopian convened Semantic Saturation as a revolving collective of musical collaborators. The group's first LP, *Solipsistic*, was critically acclaimed, and after a five-year break, *Paradigms* features a new line-up, including Craig Blundell and Kristoffer Gildenlöw. With *Mirrors Of Confusion* there are melodies and guitar lines that will appeal to Dream Theater fans. *Disturbance Within*, meanwhile, is more modern, using post-2000 trends in prog. Some bands heavily influenced by classic prog can sometimes let the mood lead to a kitschy music hall vibe. *Paradigms* does suffer a little bit from that 'carnival' sound on certain tracks, (*Carousel Of Death*) but that might be to some listeners' tastes. That said, *Paradigms* is at its best when there's a little kitsch involved. *Ulterior Harmony* has the same charm and playfulness as early 90s Steve Vai records. There's exceptional, tight guitar leads locked to the cyclic keyboard licks of ex-Dream Theater keys player Derek Sherinian, but it's when the track hits a straightforward riff-led groove with stop-start chord-work on the guitar that the song really shines. Less is more, as they say. **AL**

SWIFAN EOLH & THE MUDRA CHOIR

The Key APOLLON

Scandi-prog whopper features a posthumous space whisper from Gilli Smyth.



Robustly affirming prog's standing as keeper of the original hippie dream, this Norwegian outfit crucially offset their earnest woodlands ambience and complex Gentle Giant homaging with Gong-style cosmic wackiness, even deploying posthumous utterances from the late Gilli Smyth on *Blessing Be*. Singer-wordsmith-leader Rune Seip Bjørnflaten (aka Captain Cumulusnimbus) maintains, "The texts are expressions of a spiritually seeking attitude, finding inspiration in the esoteric traditions, addressing the labyrinths of the mind, still pointing out keys to freedom from the abyss of suffering." The music runs its affectionate gamut of prog tropes, reaching back to VdGG and Crimson before pole-vaulting forward to guzzle snow off mountains they were about to climb. There's operatic vocals, skin-tight ensemble riffing and jazz rock outbursts, notably the title track, chamber prog on *Spiders In The Old Cafe*, while *Earth Shakes Rattles'N'Rolls* mutates Big Joe Williams with wordless Magma-babble. When allowed to get going, the ensemble kick like a convoluted mule on *Wounded Dreamers* or float like a fluorescent butterfly on luminescent ballads including *Heart Of Sadness*. **KN**

TAU

TAU And The Drones Of Praise DRONES OF PRAISE

Superior ethno-prog from Irish visionary and chums.



Belfast-born Sean Mulrooney has been a key figure in Berlin's underground scene for a decade now, either as a producer or collaborator, linking up with such legends as Damo Suzuki and Michael Rother. He's also a highly gifted artist in his own right, as evinced by this second album recorded under the signage of TAU. In keeping with his M.O., there are plenty of helpers at hand to flesh out his vision of world music as an inclusive and endlessly malleable series of cultural exchanges, from The Pyramids' Idris Ackamoor and Tindersticks percussionist Earl Harvin to the LN Sisters, aka Indian classical types Lalitha and Nandini. Much of *TAU And The Drones Of Praise* finds parallels in the work of Goat, Vodun or Jah Wobble's Invaders Of The Heart, fusing infectious tribal rhythms to mystic jazz and psychedelic drones. *It's Already Written* is a prime example, as Mulrooney meditates on the governing power of DNA and the myth of the cosmic serpent. Berber grooves inform the outstanding *Tonatihuh*, as North African styles merge into ancient Mexicana, with rich backing vocals, pipes and sonorous acid guitar. Sure, there's so much going on, but Mulrooney avoids overload with some diligent arrangements. **RH**

MOTORPSYCHO

The Crucible RUNE GRAMMOFON

A three-song, 40-minute glide to the edge of the solar system.



Faced with the intimidating task of following 2017's epic double album *The Tower*, Motorpsycho return with just three tracks on their latest release, although that still amounts to 40 minutes of music. *The Crucible* is their second release with Tomas Järmyr behind the drum kit, joining founders Hans Magnus Ryan and Bent Sæther. The album was recorded at the venerable Monmow Valley Studios, Wales, where Black Sabbath crafted their odes to darkness in the 1970s. A fitting choice, as the opening *Psychotzar* kicks off with an Iommi-esque riff from Ryan that's loaded with doom. Sæther's bass rumbles away in the depths like a leviathan roused from slumber heading to the surface while Järmyr pummels at the drums, knocks on his cowbell and periodically unleashes a great wash on a gong.

> **However far out they venture they never lose sight of the song.**

Motorpsycho's use of vocal harmonies separate them from heavy metal's forefathers, while *Lux Aeterna* finds them leaning more towards their psychedelic side with Ryan singing about leaving our mortal flesh beneath the soil. The first section of the track is full of Mellotron melodies borne along gently with a trippy 60s vibe. Then it turns a corner and suddenly plunges down into an abyss of discordant chaos, where distorted Mellotrons collide with acerbic guitar riffs as the trip turns sour. Happily, the final chapter of the song sees it mellow out, as Ryan sings *'Take the pain away, there's nothing left for anyone to say,'* and it climaxes with a gorgeous wash of psychedelia.

Then it's time for the main event with the album's title track, a 20-minute acid rock/space rock odyssey that recalls the spirit of early Pink Floyd. Where *Psychotzar* and *Lux Aeterna* are credited solely to Sæther, it took both Ryan and Sæther to craft *The Crucible* itself. It's a kaleidoscope of a song, shifting between colours and tones as the mood takes it. It all begins with an urgent energy as Sæther and Järmyr set a breathless pace before it opens into a jazzy, psychedelic passage that's just the prelude to an expansive guitar solo. Yet however far out the trio venture, and at times it feels like they're gliding out towards the far edges of the solar system, they never lose sight of the song. Even when *The Crucible* disintegrates into a mass of disembodied effects or swirling Mellotrons, it's always another musical step forwards, not a freak-out — however glorious — merely for the sake of it. And when the main melody sweeps back in, the result is ecstatic.

Even in the shadow of *The Tower*, Motorpsycho continue to shine.

DAVID WEST

THE CLAYPOOL LENNON DELIRIUM

South Of Reality ATO

Psychedelic, slightly silly second LP from Primus man and rock blueblood.



It's not easy to have a sense of humour in rock music. Too jokey and people think your music is nothing but a disposable parody from a "joke band" not worth fully investing your time in. Too subtle and nobody will understand that not everything you do or say is a lofty philosophical pronouncement or sincere artistic statement.

> **Absurdist fun with solid psych-pop thrills.**

So when Sean Lennon and Les Claypool first joined forces in 2016 on CLD's debut album *The Monolith Of Phobos*, and presented us with zany psychedelic wig-outs called things like *There's No Underwear In Space*, we were tempted to think it was a one-off studio lark whose jokes would wear thin.

Not so, on the evidence of this follow-up, which retains similar elements of absurdist fun but also seems to work harder to blend self-indulgence with solid psych-pop thrills.

When your surname's Lennon you're on a fool's errand if you think you're going to avoid Beatles comparisons, and sensibly Sean and Les simply embrace the Fab heritage in their ranks with regular and deliberate Beatular touches.

Yet never do they seem forced, pretentious or deliberately trying to remind the listener of the frontman's high-born DNA. Instead they are imaginative, playful and above all, effective touches: the dum-dum bass and *Lovely Rita*-ish falsetto backing of *Ask Your Doctor*; the spiralling Harrisonian sitar figure that introduces *Cricket Chronicles Revisited* and the *Revolution 9*-style cacophony of gibberish that closes *Psyde Effects*. In fact, Lennon Snr himself could have written the stream of spoken word silliness within: *'Beanfeastery, inflamed teeth, pendulous scrotum party, inability to swallow cadillacs.'*

In terms of a musical CV, though, ex-Primus man Claypool has more to boast about. You can expect any band formed by a bass player to feature a four-string pretty prominently, and Claypool's grundling Rickenbacker is high in the mix throughout. That means it has to do a good share of the heavy lifting, but it's up to the task. His fantastic rumbling bass chords on opening track *Little Fishes* is the first really striking moment of the album, and then the title track is built around a winning downhill tumble of a low-end riff. Later, he echoes JJ Burnel's trademark grunt in funky, ebullient style on *Toady Man's Hour*.

These songs have more than just instrumental turns and skilled pastichery on their side, though. Songs such as *Blood And Rockets* and the eight-minute *Amethyst Realm* both benefit from strikingly pretty, melancholy-tinged chord patterns flowing through the freakpop fun. *South Of Reality* for sure, but close enough to home to keep you coming back.

JOHNNY SHARP

THE D PROJECT

Find Your Sun OZETA PRODUCTIONS

Classic prog for fans of Yes and Floyd.



Canadian proggers The D Project are back with their fifth album, *Find Your Sun*, another solid entry into their discography that, while self-assured, doesn't seek to reinvent the wheel. It's very much a classic prog affair, chiefly influenced by one band, Pink Floyd, though there's hints of Yes in the energetic bass work on *Life To Spare* and the multilayered vocal parts found throughout the record. Occasionally there's more substantial heaviness, for example the beefy chord work on *Find Your Sun, Part 2*, but on these tracks as elsewhere, the riffs are merely decent, where the solo breaks are the real show-stealers. The finest solo on the record is found on *The Sting*, and is the standout moment on the album. A righteous showcase in phrasing, for the first half you can hear the pick digging into the riffs before the pace picks up into some tasty Eric Johnson-style runs. While there's no shortage of soul, or musical ability in the band, it's also true that there's not a lot of innovation on display. That said, the band are candid about their influences and presentation, and *Find Your Sun* is very likely to delight golden age fans as a result. **AL**

STEPHAN THELEN

Fractal Guitar MOONJUNE

Sonar man's selection of eclectic guitarists.



Recorded in different locations between 2015 and 2018, the pointillistic game plan dominating here will be instantly familiar to fans of Thelen's Swiss-based group, Sonar. He describes this record as about having fun, inviting some of his pals along to help him celebrate the surprisingly diverse possibilities of various electric guitars pinging and twanging in 7/8 and other tension-building time signatures. The guests include Stick Men's Markus Reuter, Grammy-nominated experimentalist Henry Kaiser and honorary Sonar member, David Torn. Adding their rich textures and vibrant colours to the mechanistic patterns, underpinned by drummer Manuel Pasquinelli's hypnotically rock-solid beats, brings a joyous flush to the music. It feels oddly counter-intuitive that compositions that seem so tightly regimented should also be the springboard to such ebullient expression. However that conundrum and the way in which it's resolved is an essential part of what Thelan is about. Following swiftly from Sonar's flat-out brilliant studio release, *Vortex*, and their in-concert *Live At Moods*, a new solo album is like discovering an easter egg in the middle of your favourite video game. **SS**

YANN TIERSEN

All MUTE

Maturing French avant-garde minimalist effortlessly gets grandiose.



Since rising to international fame with the Cesar-winning music for the 2001 film *Amelie*, multi-instrumentalist Tiersen has stressed that he's not a soundtrack composer, but his music is often chosen by filmmakers. He sees himself more in the tradition of Glass and Nyman, but emphasises that classical, pop and other genres should know no frontiers "because life is like that". He's worked with everyone from Jane Birkin to Elizabeth Fraser, and his tenth studio album features guest vocalists such as Anna von Hausswolff. Yet it's a shimmering, atmospheric whole rather than distinct elements. It's a mood modulator, changing the space you're in to somewhere reflective and meditative. His first recording from his home studio on Ushant, a small island between Brittany and Cornwall, it's rich in references to light, dust, sea, snow, echoes and time. Often mournful, it however attains the sense of euphoria, his timing of surges, swells and switches exquisite. *Tempelhof* and *Usal Road* use field recordings from Berlin and California, the former unleashing a crashing-chords surprise coda. Birdsong seeps in throughout, and Tiersen finds paths for the obviously beautiful to acknowledge darkness. **CR**

TIM PRESLEY'S WHITE FENCE

I Have To Feed Larry's Hawk DRAG CITY

Wonderful left-turn from the Californian psychlord, via the Lake District.



Tim Presley has been leaning more towards collaborations of late. Last year saw the double whammy of *Joy*, recorded with longtime friend Ty Segall, and his second outing with Welsh singer-songwriter Cate Le Bon under their Drinks banner. All of which means that we haven't had a White Fence album for quite some time. *I Have To Feed Larry's Hawk* is, in fact, his first in five years. It marks something of a departure too, with Presley choosing to build these songs (written in the serene surroundings of the Lake District) around piano rather than his usual mode of expression, the guitar. This gives them a clarity and simplicity that suits the ruminative subject matter. Over a sparse music box motif, the allusive title track finds Presley dwelling on the impulse to feed addiction and ego. The pale psychedelia of *I Love You* feels like a whimsically sad outcrop of Arthur Lee's back catalogue, while the protagonist of *Phone* sounds as lost as he is forlorn. There are a few concessions to Presley's more familiar avant-skronk, but the real boon is a 16-minute suite of patterned synth loops – *Harm Reduction*, divided into two parts – that suggests Presley has located his inner Terry Riley. **RH**

WHEEL

Moving Backwards ODYSSEY MUSIC

Brilliant debut from modern Anglo-Finnish proggers.



It's rare to encounter a debut LP so fully formed as *Moving Backwards*, even in an era of cheap home demoing and recording. The record is slick and impactful, with heavy influence drawn from legendary US prog metal titans Tool, as well as atmospheric Australian prog rockers Karnivool. The opening track *Vultures* is angular and Karnivool-like, with a forceful and attention-grabbing chorus, but it's not until *Wheel* that the Anglo-Finnish four-piece fully flex their muscles. With interesting use of additional percussion and a fantastic, stabby main riff, the track manages an astonishing 10-minute length without dragging. The cry of *'When privacy becomes a product, to be traded for another product'* is probably the point at which it's most reminiscent of Tool, with more than a hint of *Hooker With A Penis* to both the lyrical content and James Lascelles' fiery vocal delivery. *Where The Pieces Lie* and *Up The Chain* are both highlights of the heaviest material, with shades of Porcupine Tree in the latter and even some post-rock atmospherics in the mix. A brilliant album exploring censorship and social dystopia; every moment is immaculately executed. **AL**

BERNHARD WÖSTHEINRICH

Elsewhere IAPETUS MEDIA

Contemporary Tangerine Dream-inspired krautrock.



Gather together everything you think you know about Berlin-based electronica and "sequencer journeys" and... don't throw it away. *Elsewhere* is very much, from soup to nuts, of the krautrock school, specifically the class taught by early-to-mid Tangerine Dream. It presses all the right buttons if you're into that scene. This is by no means a criticism: Wöstheinrich is a sound artist who loves his musical ancestors to the point of near-total immersion. He once collaborated with Conrad Schnitzler (and has also worked with Tim Bowness and Ash Ra Tempel's Harald Grosskopf), and his first album in 2000 (as half of Blast, with Markus Reuter) was an overt homage to *Zeit*. He later founded the trio Tabo Tago, also self-confessed Dream-catchers. Reuter produces this, wherein four lengthy hypnotic pulses (no analogue gear was used) try to mess with the fabric of time. Wöstheinrich's youth in the isolated North Rhine Westphalia area informs its themes of "home" and coming full circle. It's hard to judge this glistening, nagging-yet-narcotic music against that of its forefathers: it's a labour of love which rarely strains or huffs and puffs and is expertly gauged, with Teutonic efficiency. **CR**



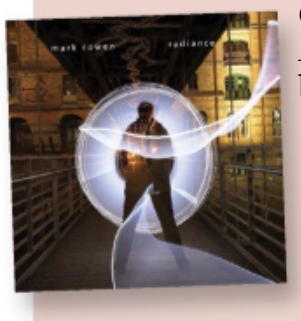
AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Grant Moon has a rummage down the back of the *Prog* sofa for the ones that nearly got away...

Regal Worm's Jarrod Gosling can do little wrong in these parts. *Variants* (Klove) is a companion piece to the 2017 debut from **Cobalt Chapel**, his folk-psych pairing with the sensational Cecilia Fage. In full tinkering mode, Gosling revisits that album and peels away the instrumentation, reimagining the material through electronic ambient layers. It's a liquid light show for the ears — woozy, mind-altering, soporific, pagan rite-scary in parts.



Mark Rowen played guitar in Breathing Space with Mostly Autumn's Olivia Sparnenn and Iain Jennings, and his self-released debut album *Radiance* takes you to that comforting, 80s netherworld prog does so well.



Catchy, retro power-rockers like *Feel Like Letting Go* and *Trick Of The Light* are brought home by Lisa Box's committed performance, and there are proggy twists aplenty on acoustic ballads and full-on 10-minute workouts. It may be a self-professed 'amateur' project, but Rowen and band offer much for fans of the Autumn, Touchstone and the like.

East and West meet once again on *IV*, the fourth, self-released album from Boston's **Esthema**. Exotic instrumentation and scales take us across Eastern Europe and into the Middle East, and the band's challenging, jazzy time signatures keep their globalista aesthetic well grounded. Theirs are languorous, meditative and courageous explorations that cross boundaries and stretch the imagination.



Last year **Damian Wilson and Adam Wakeman** embarked on an acoustic tour, and their self-released studio recording *Stripped* brings together 11 songs from the setlist. Highlights include their own *The Sun Will Dance In Its Twilight Hour*, Headspace's *Soldier* and Bowie's *Life On Mars*. It sounds exactly as you'd imagine: two committed artists paring things right back and letting their talents shine.



Leeds' **Envizible Orkestra** mark their 30th anniversary this year, and while *A Catharsis Of Science* (Maysonic) is screaming out for a better mastering job, it still demonstrates the heart and neo/fusion smarts that have kept them keepin' on all these years. The likes of 15-minuters *Constant And Everchanging* and *Live A Little Longer (Suite)* show them at full tilt, axes and keyboards tastefully blazing.



Finally, it's hard to overstate the sheer natural musical gift of vocalist, instrumentalist and composer **Jacob Collier**. A YouTube sensation deserving of the name, the 24-year-old has been championed by Quincy Jones, ears pricked up at his 2016 debut *In My Room*, but *Djesse Volume 1* (Hajanga) is on another level. Featuring Amsterdam's Metropole Orkest, vocal group Voces8 and Laura Mvula, it's a dizzying, modern mash-up of progressive jazz, classical, pop and funk, broaching everyone from Glass to Gershwin, Prince to Parliament, Jellyfish to Thundercat, with a bit of The Manhattan Transfer thrown in. Collier's prodigious understanding of vocal harmony is scary, and with three more volumes in the pipeline, 2019 could be a big year for him.



EDDIE JOBSON

1971 - 1979 The Band Years GLOBE MUSIC

Portrait of the artist as a young man.



If it's true that you can judge a person by the company they keep, then Eddie Jobson is somebody to reckon with. Replacing violinist Daryl Way and keyboardist Francis Monkman in Curved Air, Brian Eno in Roxy Music and both George Duke and Jean Luc Ponty in Frank Zappa's band not only takes a lot of talent but also quite a bit of nerve and self-belief. What makes it all the more remarkable is that these significant milestones were achieved when he was just 17, 18, and 20 years old respectively. Even if his talents were not so abundantly obvious, the sheer calibre of those he appears alongside on this two-disc set makes for an interesting and stylistically diverse journey.

"Techically sought-after, Jobson delivered it all."

In addition to that starry roster, Jobson digs into his personal archive to exhume three interesting rarities including an excerpt from his debut live performance aged 16, and a later Abbey Road demo session where a Satie-like melody receives sympathetic backing from drummer Simon Phillips.

Tracks such as *As The World Turns*, originally the B-side to 1997's non-album track, *This Is Tomorrow* by Bryan Ferry, highlight his skills as an arranger. A Ferry/Jobson co-write, it finds Robert Fripp striking a plangent note as featured soloist amid the melancholic tresses of Jobson's strings. Both opulent and redolent of the fading glory of a grand affair, the instrumental melodrama has Ferry alone at the centre, gazing pensively into the distance, forlorn and oblivious to the bittersweet cadenzas which swirl and gather about him. Over the top? Yes, but incredibly evocative and effective.

That technical facility kept Jobson busy and sought-after throughout the 1970s. If some switched-on Bach was needed, a jazzy arabesque required or a rhapsodic flurry on keyboard or violin deemed necessary, then Jobson delivered it all. Little wonder he was called in to contribute in-studio fixes for King Crimson's 1975 live album *USA*, though this is not represented here. Up until this point, Jobson's primary role had been as executant rather than executive. With U.K. he grasps more creative control, and the meld between Wetton's straight-ahead bombast with Jobson's Zappa-flavoured exposition is clearly important to him, with no less than 11 U.K. studio tracks spotlighted.

For a man who admits to 'control issues', the compromises of being in a band made a solo-orientated career inevitable, finding continued success scoring for TV and film throughout the 80s. More volumes plan to cover his development both as a solo artist and producer up to 2019, but this selection illustrates the blossoming of his precocious talent in all its pomp.

SID SMITH

COSMOGRAF

When Age Has Done Its Duty PLANE GROOVY

Long-awaited vinyl outing for an album that deserves every tweak it's received.



We've been here before. Big Big Train man Robin Armstrong aka Cosmograf first released *When Age Has Done Its Duty* – an album largely based on the story of his mother's family, blacksmiths in rural Shropshire – back in 2011. A year ago it was reissued on CD, some of it re-recorded, to permanently banish apparent blemishes present on the first release. Armstrong replaced some of the guitar, bass, and vocal parts, added a string section or two, then remixed and remastered the entire shebang. This revised version, finally deemed fit for audiophile consumption, is now available as a numbered, limited edition pressing from the ever-reliable Plane Groovy Records. Hell, by the time you read this it'll probably be selling for ludicrous, wallet-rinsing amounts on Discogs.

The advantage of this reissue, aside from the heavyweight vinyl, is to remind listeners of an album that deserved more attention than it received upon release. For *When Age Has Done Its Duty* is a lush, rather lovely affair that slowly winds its way from bucolic start to balmy climax. Brass bands and clock movements drift in and out, the sounds of the countryside filter through, and the whole record is imbued with a soft, rose-tinted glow that manages to perfectly reflect personal nostalgia without ever falling into the trap of ruddy-faced pining for a past that never was. *'Things were brighter in the 70s,'* sings Robin forlornly on *Bakelite Switch*, capturing the feeling of lost boyhood with some considerable degree of accuracy. '*Action Men and games,'* he adds. *'Racing cars with flames.'*

Unique to this reissue is the 'Electronic Remix' of the title track, shortened by several minutes, retitled *WAHDID*, and swaddled in gentle washes of machine-driven sound and rhythm. With the original's narration and gentle piano retained, it's almost Balearic in tone; a down-tempo climax to an album that charms and enchants in equal measure. The 2026 remix will be a monster. **FL**

ANTHONY PHILLIPS & ANDREW SKEET

Seventh Heaven ESOTERIC

Swift extended reissue for Classic FM-approved orchestral sketches.



Recent years have seen growing interest in the work of the man who left Genesis after *Trespass*. Mike Rutherford described his departure as a bigger wrench than that of Gabriel or Hackett, and while most fans would beg to differ, it underlines Phillips' importance to the band's nascent sound. His solo albums since then have struggled to match the whimsical promise of 1977's *The Geese And The Ghost*, but he's moved deeper into classical and soundtrack areas, settling into a niche in which he appears comfortable. *Seventh Heaven* is a collection of orchestral and symphonic pieces, numerous but short, which just six years after its initial release gets the full top-hat-and-tails remastered/repackaged treatment. Originally a double album, it now arrives as a four-disc clamshell box with bonus unreleased tracks plus a DVD Surround Sound mix.

Talking of Rutherford, perhaps the hot ticket here is the inclusion of *Take This Heart*, a 1973 recording of a hymn he and Phillips wrote. It's old school, in the sense that they went back to their alma mater Charterhouse and enlisted that establishment's Choral Society. And it really is a hymn, and thus possibly the least rock'n'roll thing you've ever heard.

In context, however, it fits. Andrew Skeet's illustrious career has taken in arranging for George Michael and Suede and he's been musical director for The Divine Comedy since 2004. He guides Phillips' compositions as they glide between benign beauty and the kind of thing you'd hear as the theme music to a 70s TV historical drama about an Irish family's love of their faithful horse. Ultimately, it feels like one small if effective element of what made Genesis great. It was the fusion of such dignified directions with the hurry and scurry of rock and jazz which sparked their innovations. This all feels slightly precious, as if you're required to be on your best behaviour, in church, with your grandparents watching. It's pretty, but hard to eulogise as much more. **CR**

THE RESIDENTS

Eskimo/The Commercial Album CHERRY RED

Double CD 'pREServed' versions of landmark albums offer short'n'sweet vs WTF?



Recorded in 1978, *Eskimo* is one of the Residents' earliest concept albums, a supposed examination of the life and culture of the people of the American Northwest. What you actually get is a series of bleak, windswept soundscapes punctuated by ersatz rituals consisting of uncanny incantations and grotesque chorales, particularly on *Arctic Hysteria* and *A Spirit Steals A Child*, which have few antecedents except perhaps Faust and early Zappa. The album reaches a more melodic conclusion on *The Festival Of Death*, with its shamanic drumming and tuned percussion. We all know that the Residents are a bunch of blokes who remain incognito and dress up funny, but their music on *Eskimo* is so resolutely out-there, that it's hard to imagine that it was actually composed, rehearsed and demoed, but this reissue includes over an hour of works-in-progress and live versions from the album. At times this feels more of a penance than a bonus. If you think of the pleasure of aurally bathing in the blissful vocal-only mixes from the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* box set, *Eskimo Acapella Suite* is its complete opposite, being 21 minutes of nightmarish treated vocals including a number of rather irksome silly voices, and others that sound like they have been pitch-shifted by a malfunctioning vocoder, which will be a severe test for all but the staunchest Residents fans.

The Commercial Album (1980) is a brilliant concept, comprising 40 one-minute tracks, each designed to be played three times to give a three-minute pop song. This drollery yielded a compelling mosaic of creaky, rinky-dink electronics like *Kraftwerk*, the curious faux-fairground music of *Japanese Watercolour* and song fragments like *Easter Woman* – which reappears on the second disc in live versions from 1986 and 2015, both of which are longer and differently arranged. Among the unreleased tracks is a version of *Give It To Someone Else* from a 1982 rehearsal that the group get through in a mere 53 seconds. **MB**

VARIOUS

I'm A Freak 2 Baby: A Further Journey Through The British Heavy Psych And Hard Rock Underground Scene 1968-73 GRAPEFRUIT

Superb second volume charting a counterculture in transition, steeped in prog.



"Suddenly everything was longer, louder, hairier and heavier," says this series' compiler and annotator David Wells, and so it was with the period 1968-73 when pop music, liberated from its three-minute straitjacket, became progressive, not always strictly in sound, but definitely in mindset.

This second three-disc collection provides another perfect summation of a period in flux with tracks by Edgar Broughton Band, The Deviants, Patto et al. Andromeda's *Let's All Watch The Sky Fall Down* is among many stand-outs; fronted by John Du Cann, formerly of mod band The Attack, the short-lived trio seek transcendence through beautiful noise. Taking The Yardbirds' *Happenings Ten Years Time Ago* as their blueprint, a frenzied guitar attack and choral voices drive its dark rhythms forward to create an uneasy end of the world ambience. Du Cann's also here on Atomic Rooster's *Death Walks Behind You*: the title track from their Top 20 album is harder edged, a Blakian nightmare of trippy effects and heavy organ. Their organist Vincent Crane had started in The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown, and their inner workings are captured here on a demo of *Fire!*. Minus the orchestral passage added later, it's otherwise fully formed, although it's Crane rather than Brown centre-stage: his bass pedals/organ creating a template for heavy rock to come.

Another foundation is put in place by Jeff Beck and his group's muscular revisit of The Yardbirds' *Shapes Of Things*, which he'd appeared on, of course – and with Rod Stewart on vocals and Ronnie Wood on bass it's also a forerunner to The Faces. Elsewhere, The Move's *Turkish Tram Conductor Blues* is an attractive amalgam of skronking sax, menacing riffs and a runaway beat; Love Sculpture's *Sabre Dance* is a playful meshing of Russian ballet and amphetamine-fuelled flying guitar solos; the Lemmy-voiced *Horse* (by Sam Gopal) is an edifying psych-rocker. **LW**

MICHAEL ROTHER

Solo GRÖNLAND

Former Neu! guitarist's vintage six-CD round-up, plus new/neu work.



As a teenage guitarist in late 60s Dusseldorf, Michael Rother was particularly influenced by Jimi Hendrix, but he also lived in a time when German youth were criticising the old order who had taken them into the war and still held important positions within society. So out went elements of traditional German culture with its unsavoury connotations, along with Anglo-American rock and jazz. His idea was to strip right down before building up a completely new music with a "European feeling about harmony and melody". After a brief spell in Kraftwerk, Rother explored these ideas more fully in Neu!, who forever metaphorically travelled towards a "vanishing point on the horizon", and in a more mantric, meditative way with Harmonia.

> **That characteristic pulse is always there.**

After Neu! split in 1975, that momentum continued through Rother's instrumental solo albums, but it was a smoother ride. On *Flammende Herzen* (1977) his preference is for repetitive drum grooves — played here by Can's Jaki Liebezeit — and a guitar style of pared down rhythm work and simple but deftly arranged melodic elements, with keyboards drifting through space before blossoming into 'chorus' melody lines. On *Feuerland* the bubbling synths, eerie slide guitar sighs and phased drumming are also reminiscent of Harmonia. The following year brought *Sterntaler*, a companion album, with simple guitar lines, lush synths and Liebezeit's functional 4/4 patterns combined with some slower, near-ambient sections.

Katzenmusik, from 1979, is leaner with a little more grip to it, and like all of Rother's music, it pivots around a few very effective chord changes in a way that is richly melodic, and also imbued with a feeling of yearning.

Big, primary-coloured synth lines loom large on *Fernwärme* from 1982. Rother employs his smooth sustain harmony guitar on the syncopated *Hohe Luft*, but it is mixed so high that it sounds a tad cloying and rather overbalances the track. By contrast, on *Fortuna*, his keyboard figures run along similar lines to Kraftwerk. The *Soundtracks* CD comprises two recent film scores, for *Die Raeuber* and *Houston* with typically propulsive material alongside brooding and dancing electronic lines. And although these moods may be stranger and more crepuscular, that characteristic pulse is always there.

Getting up-to-date, the irresistible momentum of *Groove 139*, recorded at London's Jazz Café in 2016 on the *Live & Remixes* disc, nods right back to 1971, to Neu!'s best known track, *Hallogallo*. And although one could say that the background scenery to Rother's ongoing journey has never changed dramatically, his aesthetic is so finely tuned that it would be rather disappointing if it had.

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VARIOUS ARTISTS

Kankyō Ongaku: Japanese Ambient, Environmental & New Age Music 1980 - 1990 LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

Exactly what it says on the box(set).



It all began with Erik Satie, apparently. A series of concerts held in mid-70s Tokyo celebrating the works of the French proto-minimalist composer had a profound effect on many of the city's artists and musicians. Also coinciding with the release of Eno's *Music For Airports*, it led to a "quiet boom" in what became known as kankyō ongaku, "environmental music", which ran with both Satie and Eno's ideas of music that – as the excellent sleevenotes to this first-of-its-kind comp puts it – "folded more easily into the contours of daily life."

While much of this music remains unknown in the West, it should come as no surprise that Japan took to this concept with alacrity – Eno was strongly influenced by US theoretician and composer John Cage, and Cage himself drew from Japanese Zen Buddhism. And, of course, Japan was where much of the new technology capable of producing these digi-ambient sounds came from.

By its very nature, it would be easy for *Kankyō Ongaku* to function as a pleasant, non-distracting background to other activities – indeed, that's what some of the tracks here were for designed for, as soundtracks to adverts, fashion runways, shops, and intriguingly, corporate buildings. But listen closely, and whole new sound worlds open up. *Still Space* by scene founder Satoshi Ashikawa is a beautiful miniature, warm flowering drones with notes like raindrops on petals, while Yoshio Ojima's *Glass Chattering* is perfectly titled, a Philip Glass-esque ripple in a mirror endlessly reflecting back on itself. There are premonitions and echoes throughout – the delayed guitar and dreamy organ of Interior's *Park* could be from an early 4AD album; the shimmering arpeggios of Toshifumi Hinata's *Chaconne* suggest John Carpenter in an ice palace; the exquisitely delicate glass piano of Yoshio Suzuki's *Meet Me In The Sheep Meadow* anticipates *Selected Ambient Works*-era Aphex Twin – but this is music with its own special identity and atmosphere, equally utilitarian and spiritual. **JB**

JOHN YOUNG

Significance SELF-RELEASE

Lifesigns man reissues 2002 solo album.



Either side of fronting Lifesigns, touring with Asia, writing with Jon Anderson and collaborating with John Wetton, John Young has always kept a toe dipped in progressive waters. But this collection of solo tunes from the early 2000s, reissued due to fan demand and crowdfunded within 24 hours, is an unashamedly MOR, pop rock affair.

Significance employs the kind of broad melodic strokes that saw Genesis conquer the globe as a trio in the 80s, and while some of the production betrays the songs' age and the instrumentation is more reminiscent of the 20th than 21st century, you just can't argue with tunes this strong. The rimshots and electric piano of the title track seem rooted in a more airbrushed, FM-friendly era, but the twinkling guitar patterns illuminate a soulful, pensive ballad. *When I Was Young* is pure soft-centred MOR, replete with keyboard wash, cooing synth punctuation and radio-friendly harmonies. Meanwhile, one of several descending chord sequences on *All Gone* makes for a nigh-on irresistible slice of love-lorn melancholia, with some midnight piano in the background that you'd like to have heard more than just three minutes of.

'Who are we to be so blind? Save the race, the humankind,' he sings on *Open Skies* above uneasy bubbles of techno and tangles of angsty guitar. That might indicate that, compared to Lifesigns' last album, 2017's *Cardington*, which took the topic of British aviation history as its chief subject matter, these songs tackle much more familiar subject matter. Man's inhumanity to man, intolerance and the destruction of the planet are recurring themes on a collection whose cover artwork now features a collage of 20th century images from Marilyn Monroe to Hitler to the Ethiopian famine.

'You've got to be strong for the weak to be of some significance,' he sings on the title track – hardly Pulitzer prize-winning, but sometimes such directness can cut through quicker than a thousand woolly concepts – particularly when accompanied by the calibre of songcraft that would succeed in any genre. **JS**

DAVID SYLVIAN

Brilliant Trees/Alchemy/Gone To Earth/ Secrets Of The Beehive UMC/VIRGIN EMI

Superlative retuning of Sylvian's first four.



One slight problem caused by the vinyl revolution is that reviewers are operating in advance of release and are often denied the pleasure of reviewing records from actual shiny plastic. That is the case here, with these long-awaited reissues of David Sylvian's first four albums, and while it would obviously have been wonderful to be immersed in the full vinyl experience, it's more than apparent from the digital audio that these classics have been remastered with the greatest of skill. In truth, even Sylvian's 1984 solo debut *Brilliant Trees* sounded stunning first time out; in many ways a logical next step from his work with Japan, it demonstrated the singer's desire to shoulder-barge boundaries and to get as far away from the common perception that he was, in essence, the thinking man's Simon Le Bon. Songs like *The Ink In The Well* and *Red Guitar* have benefited hugely from remastering, with their slightly sterile 80s production beefed up and made far warmer and tangibly present.

> **Otherwise stoic folk may cry hysterical tears of joy.**

The same trick works wonders on Sylvian's second record, the experimental and almost arrogantly uncommercial *Alchemy – An Index Of Possibilities*. An exercise in atmosphere and exploration, rather than anything remotely straightforward, it confused the hell out of Japan fans upon its release in 1985, but as its creator drifted more purposefully into art rock realms, it was precisely the defiant statement he needed to make. Towering finale *Steel Cathedrals* remains one of Sylvian's greatest pieces, with Robert Fripp's guitar and Holger Czukay's dictaphone (no, really) adding magic to the mesmerising squall. Widely regarded as his *real* second album, *Gone To Earth* had proper songs such as *Taking The Veil* and *Silver Moon*, but owed far more to *Alchemy*'s world of meandering textures than to *Brilliant Trees*' slick grooves. Now sounding fuller and brighter than ever before, the album's hazy second half is a particularly rich revelation.

Best of the lot, and arguably still the greatest thing Sylvian has ever produced, *Secrets Of The Beehive* was already flawless and sonically beautiful and hardly needed retouching. That said, the likes of *Orpheus* and *Mother And Child*, replete with Danny Thompson's unmistakable upright rumble, may now be even more likely to make otherwise stoic folk cry hysterical tears of joy. It seems possible that Sylvian clocked exactly how brilliant his fourth album was and felt he couldn't top it, veering off into further collaborations with Czukay and, in recent times, warped, wayward records like 2009's *Manafon*. But back in the 80s, he was a pop artist with a prog heart and *Secrets* was (and is) his masterpiece.
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JEAN-MICHEL JARRE WITH MATT BERRY

Planet Jarre: The Podcast ITUNES PODCASTS

Actor-musician-comedian Matt Berry toasts his synth idol.



In the early 1970s, Jean-Michel Jarre decided to sell his electric guitar and amp at a Paris flea market, enabling him to fund a trip to London to buy his first synthesiser. It was a powerful statement of intent as the young musician gave up the familiar and fashionable to pursue a journey into unexplored territory. For the millions of fans who bought 1976's *Oxygène*, Jean-Michel Jarre is to electronic music what Jimi Hendrix and Miles Davis are to rock and jazz. In this series of conversations with Matt Berry, JMJ reveals his formative influences, what drives his creative process and takes us up to his current *Planet Jarre* and *Équinoxe Infinity* projects. He challenged the idea that electronic music was soulless, doubly difficult in the punk era – "Punk said 'No Future.' *Oxygène* said 'Yes, Future?" The album, made in his home studio, was at first greeted with John Lennon's put-down, "French rock is like English wine." Matt Berry hits the right note as host, respectful but not cloying as he chimes in with his own memories of the 1998 Docklands gig. JMJ is an expressive and witty interviewee and all five episodes are an enlightening listen, even if electronic music isn't really your bag. **CE**

LET'S PUT IT TO MUSIC: 20 YEARS OF RUNE GRAMMOFON

Edited by Kim Hiorthøy & Rune Kristofferson RUNE GRAMMOFON

Celebrating the weird, wild and wonderful life of this Norwegian label.

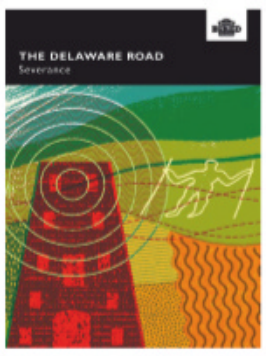


Rune Kristofferson's determination to bring new music into the world for the last two decades has been implacable – and against such challenging economic conditions, heroic. Containing a roster of impressive artists – from Supersilent to Shining to Arve Henriksen to Susanna – all of Rune Grammofon's releases have come housed in Kim Hiorthøy's artwork. His is a singular visual language that's as distinctive as Hipgnosis' 1970s surreal juxtapositions, or the brooding portraiture gracing ECM Records' output. It's often as provocative as the music, and that interplay between artist and imagery represents a design ethic that's indicative of the care that goes into every release. Presented in a handsomely appointed hardback, that comes with a limited edition three-track single, there's insightful context-setting forewords as well as appendices containing highly entertaining and often laugh-out-loud Best Of lists from Kristofferson, Hiorthøy (revealing his all-time favourite Pantone colour) and a high number of prog-friendly choices from players associated with the label. However, it's the images that truly captivate with their beguiling narrative of dream-logic jumpcuts, puzzles, and minimalist aesthetic that are a joy to unravel, decode and digest. **SS**

ALAN GUBBY

The Delaware Road BURIEDTREASURE.BANDCAMP.COM

Indie six-part comic series focusing on a mystery in the Brit electronica vaults.

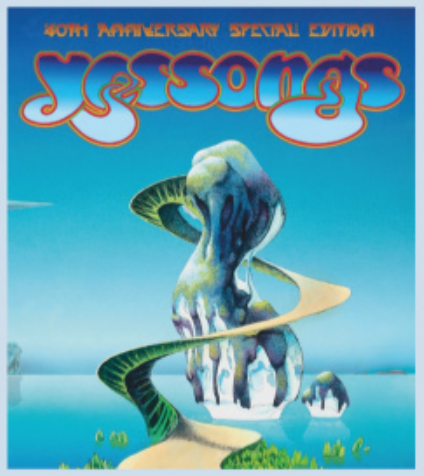


Now up to part four (*Severence*) of its six edition run, welcome to the fertile imagination of Buried Treasure label owner Alan Gubby and his tale of experimental Radiophonic Workshop-esque composers Iain and Cissy, who stumble across an abandoned WW2 studio and, after utilising the reels that they find, are dismissed by their employers, The Corporation. The era is mid-late 60s, the feeling esoteric and groovy. The look of each comic – DIY, A5-sized and just 20 pages long including its cardboard cover, designed variously by M Wayne Miller, Luke Insect and Nick Taylor – is as colourful and symbolic as the weird happenings inside. Rather than a panel-led format, Gubby's words read like a screenplay, setting scenes and presenting dialogue on the left-side page while full-page illustrations adorn the right. And absolutely fab they are too, in the unmistakeable cross-hatched Boho hand of Regal Worm and Cobalt Chapel man Jarrod Gosling. With 'additional prose' from David Yates we go from the WW2 discovery to occult gatherings, from Camden Roundhouse freakouts to establishment cover-ups. Original and intriguing stuff. **JK**

YES

Yessongs SCREENBOUND INTERNATIONAL

Classic Yes concert film – and its 40th anniversary special – lives again.



It's the, um, 43rd anniversary of the prog landmark concert film, which came out two years after the triple album of the same name. The movie captured the band at the Rainbow Theatre in December '72 on the *Close To The Edge* tour. More importantly, it captured them at their youthful peak, or at least one of their peaks: there's a valid argument that — contrary to traditional narratives — they got even stronger as they expansively traversed topographic oceans. For many fans though, this treasurable time capsule of the definitive line-up in action is the benchmark.

> **There's a simple pleasure in watching the five gel so happily.**

This edition is the gussied-up 40th anniversary Blu-ray version, with postcards designed by Roger Dean for the first 3,000 buyers. Director Peter Neal's detour into Steve Howe's solo sidebar *Beginnings*, which appeared therein having previously been thought lost, is still present. At heart, the show remains the same, and a moment in time is crystallised wherein Howe, Anderson, Wakeman, Squire and White catch fire. Given the labyrinthine splits, spin-offs and reunions in the decades since, there's a simple pleasure to be had in watching the five gel so happily and creatively. It documents a more innocent, idealistic time, where you can witness Yes being explosive without assuming that means someone's having a row. On a higher level, the music demonstrates why believers remain so loyal. When they were this inspired and elevated, the sounds attain a transcendent state.

As a *Prog* reader you'll already know that *I've Seen All Good People* and *And You And I* are extraordinary webs of rational and irrational musical impulses which magically coalesce into powerful and plangent pocket-size rock operas. *Close To The Edge* gets up and gets down, and *Roundabout* reels around, unaware this footage would be the go-to signifier for prog used by every BBC4 documentary in the next century. Rick Wakeman has a diverting dabble with a *Six Wives* medley, presumably so the others can consider ordering a curry. The encore of *Yours Is No Disgrace* and the *Würm* section of *Starship Trooper* (based on material Howe recycled from a previous band) conjure up both heft and hypnotism.

At just over 70 minutes *Yessongs* is, in relation to the world of Yesmusic, concise. It packs a lot in. There have always been moans about the film's sound quality, deemed weaker than the album's, but in 5.1 surround it's as clean as it's ever been. Not that you'd want it clinically pristine: Yes, as their star rose, were a unique beast; arty and fey but monsters of rhythm. A vast picture show.

CHRIS ROBERTS

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Take a bow

SPOCK'S BEARD/THE FLOWER KINGS

VENUE	Z7 KONZERTFABRIK, PRATTELN
DATE	05/12/2018

In 1993 progressive rock wasn't technically dead, but the outlook was decidedly bleak. Since then there's been an undeniable and significant revival, in which the InsideOut label has played a crucial part, serving as home to many key bands including Spock's Beard and The Flower Kings. Without them, the progressive scene would be indubitably poorer. It's also reasonable to conclude that many prog fans' bank balances would be considerably healthier!

Ostensibly this tour is designed to celebrate the label's 25th anniversary, but equally it serves as a European victory lap of sorts for two stalwart bands. With Spock's being treated as the senior partners, The Flower Kings are up first in the excellent Z7 venue on the outskirts of Basel. While Switzerland may not be an obvious prog stronghold, Basel borders both France and Germany and thus enjoys a significant catchment area. With a capacity of over 1,500, the Z7 isn't exactly rammed, but there's a respectable-sized crowd in this highly lauded venue on the continental European circuit.

Despite releasing a new album under the banner of Roine Stolt's The Flower King only a couple of weeks previously, the guitarist's latest incarnation of the Kings focus on material over 15 years old, delving as far back as 1996's *Retropolis* album for set highlight *There Is More To This World*, which combines a memorable tune with instrumental flash.

Wisely, Stolt delegates the majority of vocals this evening to long-time singer Hasse Fröberg, while newcomers keyboardist Zach Kamins and drummer Mirkko DeMaio both impress. Kamins looks like he's on night release from a major company's IT department, but plays with great enthusiasm and skill such that only the most sentimental Kings' fans would pine for the absent Tomas Bodin. And DeMaio's muscular drumming powers the band along apparently effortlessly. *Last Minute On Earth*, *The Truth Will Set You Free* and *Stardust We Are* round out a strong set.

While the Kings are well-drilled with plenty of recent road miles on the clock from November's South America and Mexico trek, Spock's are rougher round the edges. Unlike the Kings, Spock's Beard's set represents a much wider trawl of their back catalogue. They kick off their 75-minute set by racing through *To Breathe Another Day* from last year's *Noise Floor* album, before revisiting their excellent cover of George Harrison's *Beware Of Darkness*.

While there's little by way of showmanship from the Kings (bassist Jonas Reingold is comparatively subdued tonight), Spock's exude fun and bonhomie, with keyboardist Ryo Okumoto and guitarist Alan Morse as ebullient as ever. By contrast with The Flower Kings, for whom Roine Stolt has been ever-present, Spock's Beard have the unenviable record of losing two iconic frontmen in Neal Morse and Nick D'Virgilio. It was the departure of the former that firmly put the brakes on the band's ascent back in 2002.

The engaging Ted Leonard continues to do an admirable job fronting this third incarnation of the Beard, but the latest departure to befall the band was drummer Jimmy Keegan in 2016.



Hasse Fröberg takes the lead on the vocals.

> **"Ostensibly this tour is designed to celebrate the label's 25th anniversary, but equally it serves as a European victory lap of sorts for two stalwart bands."**

Following Keegan's resignation, long-time fans were encouraged by D'Virgilio drumming on *Noise Floor*. But that reunion hasn't extended to the live circuit, with D'Virgilio focusing on other endeavours, like Big Big Train. So, Mike Thorne, most recently of Saga, stepped in. He puts in a perfectly adequate performance, but lacks the showmanship and charisma of his predecessors.

Perhaps pressured by the limitations of sharing 150 minutes equally with The Flower Kings, Spock's Beard's full-speed-ahead set threatens to overpower at times. Indeed, the decibel monitor displayed prominently on one wall of the venue — we're in Switzerland after all — barely dips below 100 during their set. *She Is Everything*, from the underrated *Octane* album and complete with a sublime Alan Morse solo, and the mid-section of old favourite *Walking On The Wind* provide very welcome reductions in pace and comparative light relief. Overall, it's a good rather than great performance.

The evening concludes with both bands convening for a somewhat haphazard joint encore-cum-love-in. After brief snatches of *New York, New York* and *I Will Survive*, they focus on The Beatles' *Hey Jude*, which is appreciated perhaps more by the musicians themselves than the audience. Nonetheless, tonight is memorable mostly for the right reasons. Here's to the next 25 years for InsideOut, Spock's Beard and The Flower Kings.

NICK SHILTON



Ted Leonard: still doing a stellar job.

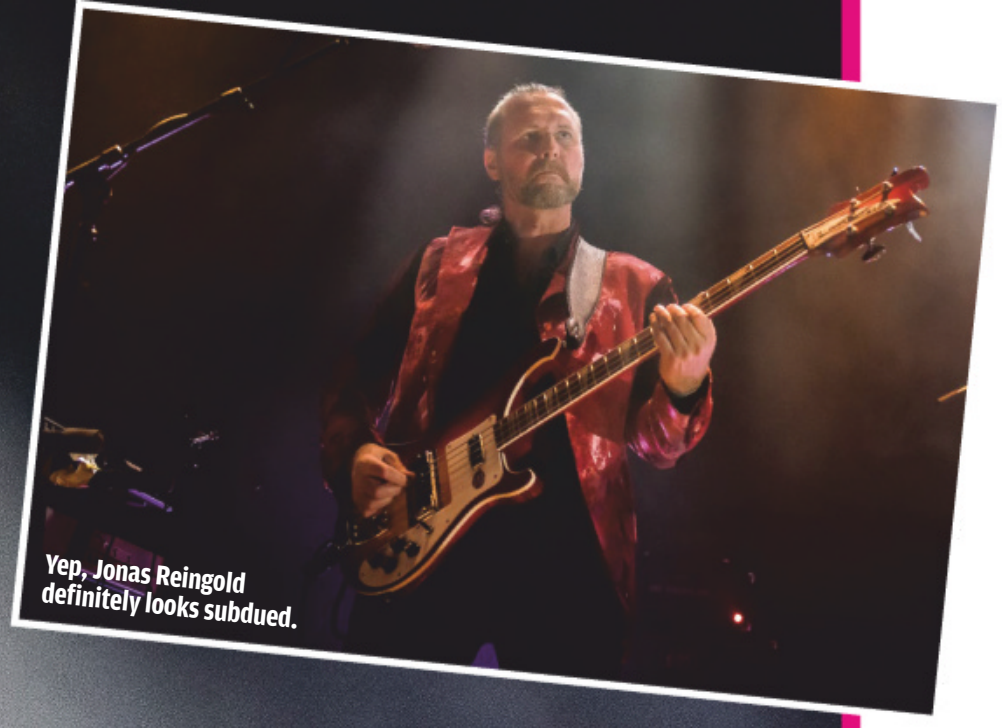
Alan Morse: ebullient... honest.



Dave Meros' shirt is almost as loud as Spock's Beard's set.



The ever-charismatic Ryo Okumoto.



Yep, Jonas Reingold definitely looks subdued.

Roine Stolt: this King has Flower power.

WILL IRELAND



Zach Kamins tries turning it off and on again...



Jonas, Hasse and Roine: well-drilled.

MASTODON FEATURING SCOTT KELLY

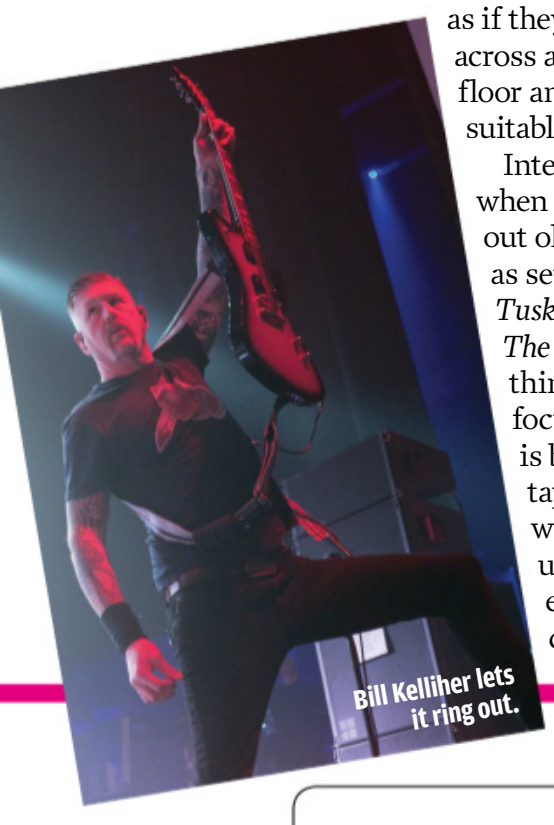
VENUE	OLYMPIA, DUBLIN	DATE	15/01/2019
SUPPORT	MUTOID MAN		

There's something about Mutoid Man. The brainchild of Cave In frontman Stephen Brodsky, at first they appear as no more than a mad metalcore band, but listening carefully to what they do here it's clear there are progressive, restless depths to their ambitions. Have no doubt that Mutoid Man are developing into a formidable experimental band.

Mastodon have nothing to prove. But is that becoming a problem for them? There's a definite whiff of this band now being in a comfort zone. Yes, they receive a rapturous reception, and clearly enjoy the whole ethos of being onstage. However, where once they were pushing out the boundaries of what we know as progressive metal, now Mastodon are stuck in a rut of their own construction. Some might mistake this for a groove, but the reality is that the band almost seem bored with what they've achieved so far, and consequently live energy levels have dropped slightly.

> **"Mastodon have nothing to prove. But is that starting to become a problem for them?"**

Naturally, the set features a smattering of tracks from the well-received *Emperor Of Sand* album, with the likes of *Scorpion Breath* and *Steambreather* standing as impressive musical works. But both Troy Sanders and Brent Hinds seem to have problems raising their game to give a full-on performance of this material. It's as if they are skating across a well-polished floor and unable to gain suitable traction.



Bill Kelliher lets it ring out.

Interestingly, it's when Mastodon bring out older songs such as set-openers *Iron Tusk* and *March Of The Fire Ants* that things come into focus. Maybe this is because the band tap into an era when they were unfettered by expectations and could unleash the creativity within while ignoring any doubts concerning where this would lead them.

If all of this sounds like Mastodon have sunk into the mire of mediocrity, then that's far from the case. By most standards, they're impressive. They can still summon an appropriate momentum. And you cannot argue with the high quality of *Crack The Skye* and *Megalodon*, which get a stirring reaction from an enthralled crowd. The rapport between fans and musos is abiding and won't be broken by any suggestion that the band are at something of a crossroads in their career. And when frequent collaborator Scott Kelly from Neurosis is part of the Mastodon performance, as happens tonight for the final seven songs, then he gives the music an extra edge, his dark vocal style cutting to the bone.

Sanders, Hinds and Bill Kelliher make for an imposing hirsute combination, firing off one another with the practised ease of those who have worked together for a long time. There's the occasional glance towards each other, almost as if each is just checking to satisfy themselves the other pair are still around, but for the most part they are all wrapped in their own worlds.

If all this sounds as if this reviewer is little confused, then that's because there is a sense of confusion about the gig and what it represents for this quality band.

The challenge now facing Mastodon is to take things to the next level. To do that, they have to break out of the artistic straitjacket in which they've inadvertently put themselves. It's a straitjacket many others would be delighted to wear, but this lot are still capable of so much more. The question for them now is: are they comfortable just being regarded as one of the *best* bands of this generation, or do they want to be hailed as one of the *defining* bands of the era? Tonight underlines that they offer genuine value, yet also why it's not enough.

MALCOLM DOME



BILLY COBHAM

VENUE	THE JAZZ CAFÉ, LONDON
DATE	05/12/2018

To survey the throng gathered at the Jazz Café tonight is to confirm Billy Cobham's status as one of the most revered musicians on the planet. Rubbing shoulders in front of the stage is a mixture of the young and the old and all points in between, couples on a date night and a heartening mix of hirsute proggers and crop-haired soul boys. But then, what else could it be for this celebrated jazz rock fusion drummer?

Now aged 74, Cobham drums with the attack and verve of a man half his age yet with the precision and rhythmic dexterity that comes with age. With a red bandana tied around his sweating head, Cobham cuts an inspiring figure as he navigates his way across his extended kit.

Yet all of this would count for naught were it not for the enthusiastic and heartfelt work of his band. The interlocking of Tim Landers' watertight and throbbing low end with Cobham's drumming – most notably on the biting pulse of *Stratus* – underpins much of tonight's set. Fareed Haque moves effortlessly from electric to acoustic guitars and back again, as he delivers clipped chords and outrageous runs. Scott Tibbs' keyboards frequently work in tandem with Haque's moves but the pair are just as keen and successful as when heading off in their own directions. Best of all is woodwind player Paul Hanson, who feeds his bassoon through a variety of pedals and electronic enhancements to


There is a face under all that hair! We knew it!


FALK-HAGEN BERNSHAUSEN

Thanks, but Brent doesn't need the reminder.

Troy Sanders: lost in his own world.

Brann Dailor, Troy Sanders and Bill Kelliher: three-quarters of a future legendary band?

create new sounds and approaches to well established material.

Indeed, the focus of tonight's performance is Cobham's 1974 album, *Crosswinds*, with a healthy portion of its 1973 predecessor, *Spectrum* thrown in for good measure. The groove achieved on *The Pleasant Pheasant* is simply colossal, with some heroic fretwork emanating from Haque's corner of the stage. But it's the actions to his left that really catch the attention with Hanson playing with a controlled sense of freedom that brings a whole new dimension to his instrument.

Elsewhere, Hanson and Cobham spark off of each other on a spirited reading of *Taurian Matador* as the drummer takes centre stage with a mastery of his kit. With an emphasis on the toms in front of him and a fondness for his splash cymbal, Cobham's soloing is riveting.

The meandering *Under The Baobab Tree* prompts a rush to the bar, but form is restored with the delicious *Red Baron* that draws appreciative whoops. Though the spotlight is on Cobham, this is a vivid, shining group affair.

JULIAN MARSZALEK

RICK WAKEMAN

VENUE	UNION CHAPEL, LONDON
DATE	20/12/2018

"We might misbehave a little bit," promises Rick Wakeman, coming onstage dressed in a Santa hat rather than his customary cape. With Christmas around the corner, there's tinsel draped over the beautiful Steinway that dominates the stage and while the balcony is closed tonight, the downstairs of the chapel is comfortably packed for a show that balances high art with Wakeman's often-bawdy humour.

Every song is introduced with another shaggy dog story, but everyone is in a jovial mood and even the creakiest of Wakeman's gags raise at least a chuckle from his fans. The set draws mainly from his most recent solo albums, *Piano Portraits* and *Piano Odyssey*, and the Union Chapel is the perfect venue for such refined fare with its gorgeous acoustics.

The stately *Liebesträume/After The Ball* is a mash-up of the composition by Franz Liszt with Wakeman's track from 1977. For *The Dance Of A Thousand Lights*, from *Return To The Centre Of The Earth*, the orchestral parts are provided by a backing track, leading Wakeman to quip that it's piano karaoke, but still full of energy and drama. *Jane Seymour*, from *The Six Wives Of Henry VIII*, was originally recorded on a church organ, but translates elegantly to the piano, full of brisk runs that suggest Bach's *Toccata And Fugue In D Minor*.

The first set concludes with two Beatles tracks filtered through the lens of classical composers, with *Help* arranged in the style of Saint-Saëns and *Eleanor Rigby* via Prokofiev. "McCartney never comes to hear me play, so I don't give a toss what I do to his music," he laughs, but they sound marvellous, particularly the strident, surging low notes in *Eleanor Rigby*, which can be felt rumbling through the chapel's wooden pews.

The second half begins with the gentle *Morning Has Broken*, which Wakeman originally recorded on a session for Cat Stevens, followed by the Dixieland swing of *Sweet Georgia Brown*, dedicated to Wakeman's jazz-loving father. *And You And I*, the set's only Yes tune, is quite transformed for solo piano, full of rousing swells of melody, and *Merlin The Magician* is a madcap delight with Wakeman's fingers dancing swiftly about the keys.

The main set climaxes with a wonderful performance of David Bowie's *Life On Mars*, before the evening concludes with *The Nursery Rhyme Concerto* as Wakeman interprets five traditional melodies through the styles of Mozart, Ravel, Rachmaninoff, Debussy and... Les Dawson; the last to hilarious effect on *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*. It makes a delightful end to a very merry evening.

DAVID WEST

Take a bow

IQ

VENUE	ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON
DATE	14/12/2018

If you'd just landed from Mars and were labouring under the delusion that prog – or neo-prog, which IQ have always denied being – was unremittingly earnest, po-faced stuff, tonight's encore may have thrown you. First, most of the band return to the stage wearing Santa Claus hats, with singer Peter Nicholls keeping a straight face and sighing that this is the only costume change the budget allows nowadays. "But where's Mike?" he continues. Then guitarist Mike Holmes wobbles and teeters on, a gigantic pair of white angel wings strapped to his back. Like a bespectacled Pygar from *Barbarella*, it's a bold look. It takes



"Look, I'll explain it one more time... Neil Durant isn't small, he's just far away."



Mike Holmes: fallen angel.



Dunno who that *Road Of Bones* guy is, but Peter is disobeying him.



Peter Nicholls plays a mean air-ukulele.

a few minutes and the help of two techs to get his guitar strap over his shoulders, but style is worth suffering for. We're just absorbing that as the band drive into *Out Of Nowhere*. That then segues into a full-throated, highly festive rendition of Abba's *Mamma Mia*, complete with re-enactments of the Swedish popsters' video. My my, how can we resist this? It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas.

Prior to this jollity, IQ have, over a two-hour show, reaffirmed themselves as one of the UK's leading practitioners of classic prog. The band have chafed at pat categorisation in the past, but now appear maturely at ease with their niche. At root influenced by Genesis and Yes, they've carved their own twists and spins on the form, embracing a harder rock edge at times – there is more juice here for guitar fans than for keyboard cats - but always aware of the big picture and how a song arcs itself through a dramatic narrative. The curve of the set as a whole is also astutely judged, ebbing and flowing to maximise the impact of their interwoven spells of forcefulness and serenity.

"At root influenced by Genesis and Yes, they've carved their own twists and spins on the form, embracing a harder rock edge at times but always aware of the big picture."

The bulk of tonight serves as a 25th anniversary celebration of 1993's *Ever* album, which saw Nicholls returning to the fold after a five-year sabbatical. This stands up strongly now, its balance of bombast and ballast solidly showcasing IQ's intelligence and strength. It was a key moment in their career, as the singer's temporary departure had led to them attempting fumbling forays into more obviously commercial, radio-friendly material. And, frankly, they were no threat to Abba.

Reunited with him, they reverted to the snaking and digressive lanes of light and shadow they do best. It's played in full (though not in order), punctuated by fan favourites such as *The Road Of Bones*, *Frequency* and *Failsafe*.

Nicholls is an appealing frontman, self-deprecating between songs, his theatrics of yore now toned down. In fact he's almost too humble, his lighthearted references to the band's age only serving to remind the audience that they too are prisoners to time's ravages. When performing, however, he succeeds in conveying melodrama through subtle movements and gestures rather than masks and props, and sings consummately. "Seasoned liars and false messiahs" are among his targets. Holmes interjects importantly with pretty Hackett-like solos and roaring, chunky riffs, most strikingly on *Fading Senses*, which is the night's highlight. *The Darkest Hour* works well as an opener, teasing out all the unit's abilities, and revealing echoes curiously prescient/reminiscent of Trevor Horn's production on Yes' *Fly From Here*.

There's the obligatory I-came-here-for-nostalgia-not-novelty mass trip to the bar when they play a new song, sadly, but it's good enough to lure people back swiftly, and there's a loud take-up when Nicholls asks who'll be coming to the new album's launch show in September. You'd be wise to join them. Just don't expect the angel wings and Santa hats next time.

CHRIS ROBERTS



CARSTEN WINDHORST



Peter prepares to beam aboard.

SOUTHERN EMPIRE

VENUE	THE JOINERS, SOUTHAMPTON
DATE	28/11/2018
SUPPORT	DAMANEK

Tonight's show prompts two immediate questions. Firstly, what possesses an Australian band to forsake summer in Adelaide for a dank Wednesday evening in a Southampton pub? Secondly, if this proves to be Southern Empire's sole UK trip, will the nation's prog fans regret their indolence?

The night before, a mere 40 or so watched this line-up in Swindon. The Joiners hosts only a handful more. However given keyboardist Sean Timms' recent heart attack, the fact that this tour has proceeded at all provides perspective. Timms isn't taking it easy either: he plays with both Damanek and Southern Empire, as do Southern Empire drummer Brody Green and guest saxophonist/flautist James Capatch.

First up are Damanek. The 'ek' element is absent, with German sax player Marek Arnold unavailable – hence Capatch depping for him – but leader Guy Manning and bassist Dan Mash are both present and correct, augmented by Luke Machin on guitar.

Damanek air a fairly balanced mix of tracks from 2017's debut *On Track* and recent successor *In Flight*. After a fairly low-key start with *Nanabohzo And The Rainbow*, *Ragusa* provides the inestimable Machin with a greater chance to shine, his lovely tone cutting through a mix that is at times too rhythm section heavy.

Instrumentally, Damanek's performances are strong but collectively they don't always gel. It's a solid set, but they are a more compelling proposition in the studio, where *In Flight* in particular benefits from subtle atmospherics which struggle to be audible on stage.

By contrast, it's the other way round with Southern Empire. The band's second album, *Civilisation*, has rightfully attracted considerable acclaim, but live they are an absolute revelation. From the outset their musicianship is off the charts, and they're frighteningly well drilled.

If Southern Empire are at all dispirited by tonight's turnout, they hide it well. Vocalist Danny Lopresto is a livewire and oozes charisma, sandwiched between guitarist Cam Blokland and bassist Jez Martin. For most guitarists, following Machin on stage would be unenviable, but Blokland isn't most guitarists. He's clearly a virtuoso, and Lopresto is no slouch as a guitarist either.

With a set built around *Civilisation*, *Cries For The Lonely* and *The Crossroads* are the highlights, with the latter rivalling Transatlantic's *All Of The Above* as one of this millennium's great 30-minute epics.

Given this impressive showing, Southern Empire merit both tonight's response and far larger audiences.

NICK SHILTON

Take a bow

RUNE GRAMMOFON 20TH ANNIVERSARY

VENUE	NASJONAL JAZZSCENE, OSLO
DATE	30/11 - 01/12/2018

In an intimate, theatre-style venue in Oslo, Rune Grammofon — probably the world's leading purveyor of jazz/prog/skronk rock — is celebrating its 20th anniversary with two nights of gigs showcasing both the breadth and talent of the label's current roster.

First up on Friday night is **Maja S.K. Ratkje**, one woman on a darkened stage producing a wild, untamed noise using just her voice and various electronic devices. The piece is entitled *Money Will Ruin Everything*, and builds from a scrabble of whispers and wordless crooning into a chaotic spell of occult glitchtronica, Ratkje flinging her arm at a theremin as though engaged in mortal combat. "Have mercy!" she growls before her set climaxes with the aid of plastic sheeting, a fan and a thumb piano.


Fire! are an acquired taste.


Motorpsycho: out-of-this-world space rock.


Maja Ratkje declares war on her theremin.

JULIA NAGLESTAD

Headliners **Motorpsycho** occupy the opposite end of the Rune Grammofon spectrum, but their sound is no less exploratory. Legends of the Norwegian rock scene, the band gradually ease into their set before a reverent home crowd through old classic *Un Chien D'Espace*, which moves from portent-filled Floydian thump to deep space breakdown to an astonishing crescendo of pounding, light-speed space rock.

The rest of the set is mostly drawn from 2017's superb *The Tower*, its combination of hard rock and cosmic proggery really coming alive on stage. The mellow Radiohead-isms of *A Pacific Sonata* connect in particular, while *In Every Dream Home* is the pick of the heavier material — a sudden, controlled drop from intense riffage to lush melody gets an ecstatic reaction.

Fire! open Saturday in confrontational mood: baritone saxophonist Mats Gustafsson's t-shirt reads "I Hate Musicians" and he spends his time physically wrestling with his instrument, wringing howls, shrieks and frantic note clusters out of its monstrous brass body. This display threatens to be a bit too avant-garde even for this crowd, but underpinned by clattering percussion and muscular bass riffs from 2018's *The Hands*, the set teeters between grindingly hypnotic and dynamically distressed.

Capping the celebration, **Hedvig Mollestad Trio** tear the place apart. Clad in a sparkly red dress and punching the air with glee, guitarist and singer Mollestad is a force of nature. She channels Hendrix, Iommi and McLaughlin all at once, yet plays with a fluidity that's all her own, switching seamlessly between riffs, shred and abstract note bends. The whole band are tremendous: *Arriving* teases and cajoles before delivering a gonzoid NWOBHM pay-off, *Bewitched, Dwarfed And Defeathered* has a riff you could knock a wall down to, and *First Thing To Pop Is The Eye* is like King Crimson on fire. It's an exhilarating end to a fabulous weekend of music.

JOE BANKS


Hedvig are tremendous.

"Hedvig Mollestad channels Hendrix, Iommi and McLaughlin all at once, yet plays with a fluidity that's all her own."

PHIL MILLER: A LIFE IN MUSIC

VENUE	THE VORTEX, LONDON
DATE	06/01/2018

"This song really shows Phil's gift for harmony and melody," says John Greaves, introducing his solo vocal and piano version of *God Song*, written by Phil with Robert Wyatt for Matching Mole's *Little Red Record*. This comment gets to the heart of Miller's musical legacy. The guitarist was an exciting, edgy soloist, but he was most fascinated by how melodies and chord sequences worked together.

This career-spanning tribute concert, hosted by writer Aymeric Leroy, is performed largely in chronological order, with a rotating cast, starting with bluesy tunes from Miller's days in Delivery. Jakko Jakszyk from King Crimson delivers another Miller/Wyatt song, *Calyx* from Hatfield And The North's self-titled debut, in an arrangement featuring Sarah Gail Brand on trombone. Another highlight is an expanded version of *Underdub* from that band's *The Rotters' Club*. The brass and wind section includes Theo Travis on flute, Simon Picard on sax and Jim Dvorak on trumpet, with Hatfield keys player Alex Maguire playing a flamboyant piano solo.

This composition typifies Miller's ability to produce intricate, complex, largely non-repetitive and yet memorable tunes, which he'd compose by singing the top line melody while playing the guitar; it's an idea he got from Richard Sinclair, who told him that you've got to sing what you play for it to mean something. Another Hatfield song, *Aigrette*, featuring French guitarist Patrice Meyer, is played as part of *The Hat Medley*, along with *Lything And Gracing*, a live staple of both Hatfield and Matching Mole. Miller developed this signature style with National Health, and on *Nowadays A Silhouette* John Etheridge plays some dazzling lead guitar.

The second set focuses more on material from Miller's long-running group In Cahoots, with the rhythm section of drummer Mark Fletcher and bass guitarist Fred Baker. Towards the end of his life, Miller (who died in 2017) was working on re-arranging some compositions for brass and wind, and we are treated to never-before-heard versions of *Truly Yours* and *Green And Purple*.

There's a lot of love for the work of such a luminous and sadly missed talent, and the full ensemble round things off with an exultant take on the twisting rifferama of *Nan True's Hole*.

MIKE BARNES

DEAD LETTER CIRCUS

VENUE	170 RUSSELL, MELBOURNE
DATE	21/12/2018
SUPPORT	CIRCLES, ALITHIA

The southern summer has arrived, the sunshine state's favourite sons Dead Letter Circus have a new album out and they are out on the road promoting it, with a bunch of dynamic supports in tow.

Avant-garde mayhem merchants AlithiA take to the stage tonight with a different bassist: Tibor Gede is overseas and replaced by Enlight's Sam Quinlan. They're also down a singer, with frontman John Rousvanis ill. Consequently, their set is slightly less chaotic than usual, however it is still extremely lively, they still create a swirling maelstrom of tribal-influenced sound, and it is still highly entertaining.

AlithiA's songs also stand up beautifully as instrumentals. So convincing they are without vocals that an uninitiated punter might think they are a purely instrumental act. They rise above adversity and put on a cracking 40-minute opening set.

Also requiring the services of a substitute bassist tonight, it's a new-look and new-sounding Circles. Gone is original frontman Perry Kakridas, replaced by the uber-talented Ben Rechter on lead vocals and second guitar, while AlithiA guitarist Nguyen Phambam steps in on bass and backing vocals for Drew Patton, who is becoming a father tonight. To the outside observer, the change is seamless, with Phambam handling the low-end groove and rumble nicely, and howling like a man possessed.

For several years Dead Letter Circus have used *You're the Voice*, the John Farnham classic, as their intro music. They have changed it up on this tour, using another Aussie standard, AC/DC's *Thunderstruck*, and it works just as effectively. The audience are fully riled by the time the band hit the stage, bringing an almighty version of the rolling, rumbling *The Armour You Own*, the opener from their new, self-titled album.

Four albums into their career, this is a band that project the vibe and image of true headliners. Their set is over 90 minutes, plus an encore of the monumental *Here We Divide*, and the near-capacity 170 Russell crowd respond with rapturous enthusiasm. Circles' Ben Rechter joins the band onstage for a stomping, frenetic version of *The Mile* late in the set, again pulling off someone else's difficult vocal parts with ease.

Frontman Kim Benzie is in passionate fettle, Luke Williams crushes his drums and the rest of the band lock in sweetly around them. They play with the road-hardened experience of wily veterans, but also with the enthusiasm of youth.

One of the key features of DLC is the power, drama, intensity and tension and release they achieve with guitars that aren't heavily overdriven. The openness created is what makes the grandiose nature of their sound possible, and that is in full effect tonight. They are an Aussie gem, to be treasured alongside the likes of Karnivool, Cog and Twelve Foot Ninja.

ROD WHITFIELD

NIGHTWISH

VENUE	THE SSE ARENA, WEMBLEY, LONDON
DATE	08/12/2018



Nightwish: mighty oaks.

WILL IRELAND

From small acorns mighty oak trees grow. In the summer of 2003, Nightwish made their live debut here in the UK. Four albums, two singers and a little over 15 years later, they can comfortably fill the biggest indoor venues this country has to offer. It's their second time as bill-toppers here, and arena-headlining status really suits this wonderful, multi-national six-piece, its well-earned benefits — a lush, pristine sound, state-of-the-art staging and pyro; lots and lots of pyro! — bringing to life the otherworldly vision of Tuomas Holopainen in the grandest fashion possible.

Holopainen is a man who has always dared to dream, and his ambitions are paying off handsomely. For more than two hours it's almost impossible to look away from the action during what singer Floor Jansen calls "A road trip down memory lane."

The show begins with a theatrical, pre-recorded voice requesting the audience should concentrate on "The excitement, mystery and spectacle of the music," also requesting: "Turn off that little glass demon, put it somewhere safe and tell it to shut up." However, of course the plea is studiously ignored, and a sea of phones welcomes Nightwish to the stage.

Troy Donockley deploys the uilleann pipes to tease us with an instrumental snippet of *Swanheart*, a beautiful piece from the *Oceanborn* album, before the full band run through a whopping five selections from the era fronted by Tarja Turunen. Of these, *Dark Chest Of Wonders* and *Wish I Had An Angel* are meat and potatoes for Jansen, a member of Nightwish for five years now, but the Dutch woman switches up a gear or two to accommodate the operatic feel of *Gethsemane* (also from *Oceanborn*), with almost ridiculous poise.

To her right, Holopainen stands imposingly at his bank of keys, radiating the casual, unflappable poise of some long-lost Finnish descendent of Rick Wakeman. Nightwish cannot be considered a progressive band in the strictest sense, but their sheer sense of purity and artistic non-conformity sets them apart from a multitude of gothic-symphonic-metalhead also-rans.

Four years ago at Wembley the band performed *The Greatest Show On Earth*, their five-suite, 24-minute epic that quite literally questioned how we arrived on this planet, in its entirety. Better still, Richard Dawkins, the evolutionary biologist and writer whose work the song had been inspired by, walked on to narrate its conclusion.

With insufficient time on this occasion Nightwish sign off with a slightly truncated rendition of that same grandiose masterpiece, before waving goodbye to the sound of *Ghost Love Score*, another gem from those distant Tarja-fronted days.

Retinas are left scorched and ears ringing with pleasure. If this isn't the greatest show on earth, then it isn't too far off the mark.

DAVE LING

"Holopainen is a man who has always dared to dream, and his ambitions are paying off handsomely."



Holopainen and Jansen: victorious.

Take a bow

SPRATLEYS JAPS

VENUE	GARAGE, LONDON
DATE	21/12/2018
SUPPORT	KNIFEWORLD, ZOFFF

Kicking off this commemoration of all thing Cardiacs-related, Zofff's set of instrumental psychedelia rolls like a multicoloured audio tsunami across a packed venue; space rock noises segue into ground-shaking sub-bass pummelling as Richard Gorbutt coaxes walls of sound from his vaguely intimidating twin towers of synth gear and effects. Mainman Bic Hayes and very special guest, his old sparring partner from Levitation, Terry Bickers toss out brain-bending ideas and otherworldly guitar textures. Leitmotifs get developed then discarded, with bass and drums selflessly holding things together. Conventional setlists be damned: this is a deeply powerful and sublime 45 minutes performed to lurid back-projections.

Kavus Torabi's genre-defying, outré octet Knifeworld rides the positive post-Zofff vibe with an impressive set that veers from the punky-funk of *I Am Lost* to the 60s psych-pop of *High/Aflame* with its audience participation vocal drone accompaniment. The three-piece wind section get a little lost in the mix, especially at the start, and the band maintain a dignified equilibrium during the final pairing of *Destroy The World We Love* and *Me To The Future Of You* when audience prattle threatens to drown out quiet vocal sections. Torabi is a guitar-wrangling, wild-eyed, manic totem of the challenging and bizarre, and overall it's a joyous demonstration of what's possible when bands embrace the unorthodox.

> **"Kavus Torabi is a guitar wrangling, wild-eyed, manic totem of the challenging and bizarre."**

Perhaps embodying the purest Cardiacs flavours and proclivities of the evening, a rare live outing for Tim Smith's Spratleys Japs (as the back-projection proudly proclaims) allows an almost full performance of their 1998 album *Pony*. Although frontwoman Jo Spratley is suffering from a throat infection and crowd noise is still a problem, the band don't disappoint. Spratley soldiers on, giving it absolutely her all — spinning around, clutching at her hair, attacking a small number of percussion bits and pieces next to her, and leading the audience in the spirited "Woos" of *Don't You Ail, Flash The Sea To Steam*.

The material takes many inscrutable diversions and sometimes, as with the relentless endings of *Oh* and closer *Cabinet*, can outstay its welcome, but the sheer love and joy that greets pretty much every note they play trumps everything.

Returning resplendent in radiant white for an encore of Cardiacs classics and joined by combinations of every band on the bill, it all gets very emotional — ex-Cardiacs guitarist and Lifesigns bassist Jon Poole energetically fronts *To Go Off And Things*, and Oceansize vocalist Mike Vennart leads an 11-piece band for *Dirty Boy*. Although frail now, Tim Smith, the reason why this evening is happening and why so much of this extraordinary music exists, watches from the crowd, hopefully accepting the weight and value of his legacy as the crowd chant his name.

GARY MACKENZIE

WILL IRELALAND


Zofff take us on a trip.


Knifeworld stay sharp.


Jo Spratley wins the battle against a throat infection and crowd prattle.

NIK TURNER'S BRAND NEW SPACE RITUAL

VENUE	ROBIN 2, BILSTON
DATE	06/01/2019

This year, Hawkwind celebrate half a century as a band. And it's good to see that Nik Turner, one of the band's original members, is still out there (in more ways than one...) in spritely form, even though he's turning 79 this year.

This is the latest incarnation of a band who began as Nik Turner's Space Ritual, then became Nik Turner's New Space Ritual and are now Nik Turner's Brand New Space Ritual (what next, Nik Turner's Newer Brand New Space Ritual?) and while it was once a home for Hawkwind alumni, now it is more of a band in its own right.

Only Turner has any connection with the mothership. And to a large extent, this is very much *his* show. He still has a sparkle about him, and such is his personality that it feels he can go off-script and venture into uncharted territory at any time. One of his strengths has always been his pursuit of the madness of the moment.

The rest of the band are more than decent, with guitarist Steve Jones displaying a feel for the music, and Ms Angel, though not Stacia, is an alluring dancer and singer. Turner has never been someone to stick rigidly to the way any song sounds on record, and occasionally he fluffs his lines on sax or flute. But so what? He has always treated the live performance as different to what goes on in the studio, and if this means there are some inevitably atonal passages, then that suits the spirit of the music.

Determined not to be seen as nothing more than a Hawkwind tribute band, the Brand New Space Ritual delve into their own material, in particular the well received *Otherworld* and *Space Gypsy* albums. However, most of the audience accept these incursions with politeness, as they await the arrival of the classics from Turner's time with Hawkwind.

The likes of *Watching The Grass Grow*, *Orgone Accumulator* and *Master Of The Universe* are all tackled with zeal. Turner seems to get lost in his own world as the unmistakable intonations of these classics rip through the ether. Clearly, he still has a strong affection for this era in his life.

The ongoing animosity between Turner and Dave Brock will certainly see the former frozen out of all official Hawkwind celebrations this year. This band serves as his own way of paying homage to the Hawkwind legacy.

MALCOLM DOME

JEFF WAYNE'S THE WAR OF THE WORLDS

VENUE	O2 ARENA, LONDON
DATE	15/12/2018

Jeff Wayne's *The War Of The Worlds* is living proof that nothing stays out of fashion forever. Despite selling millions of copies around the world in the years following its original release in 1978, the album was clogging up bargain bins up and down the nation by the late 80s, alongside similarly unsellable discs. Yet, like ELO before it, *The War Of The Worlds* has escaped history's cruel waste disposal unit and become a hot commercial property once more.

Some of it's good. The iconic, six-note motif that heralds the arrival of the Martians still has the power to thrill and give goosebumps. Liam Neeson (who's not physically present, but projected onto big screens either side of the stage) has enough natural gravitas to step into Richard Burton's shoes as the voice of The Journalist, even if some of his looks to camera are rather hammy. The enormous Martian robot that drops from the rafters to tower above the audience is genuinely spectacular. And Adam Garcia is a powerful presence as the artillery man, especially when nailing the high notes on *Brave New World*. But elsewhere the pickings are slim. Jason Donovan lacks Phil Lynott's crazed, fiery charisma as Parson Nathaniel, and Newton Faulkner in the lead role looks bored throughout, even during an unintentionally comical moment at the beginning of *Forever Autumn* when a mic fault means he sounds like Stephen Hawking singing underwater.

The literature promoting the show promises that it will "break through the fourth wall", but there's no real evidence of this, unless it's referring to the series of favourable audience tweets that are projected onto the backdrop during the interval, alongside factoids reminding those present of the original album's exulted status in pop history. There is a bridge that rises up and extends into the crowd, but it doesn't serve the plot in any way, as if the producers had discovered the prop lying backstage and decided to corral it into service.

Some members of the audience are clearly in deep. When the little steamer dodges the Martian death ray to reach the safety of the open sea, the moment is celebrated with small pockets of applause around the arena, in the manner of exchange students marking a successful EasyJet landing at Luton Airport. But otherwise it's a curiously uninvolving experience, somewhere in between a rock concert stymied by the need to adhere closely to a score – Jeff Wayne himself is conducting the orchestra – and a musical dwarfed by the cavernous venue. And for such a spectacular story, the end result is surprisingly subdued.

FRASER LEWRY

DAMIAN WILSON & ADAM WAKEMAN

VENUE	CHAPEL ARTS CENTRE, BATH
DATE	10/01/2019

This is not your typical prog gig, if there can ever be such a thing. Those who expect their musicians to be serious-minded and po-faced are advised to avoid the Wilson & Wakeman experience, because they don't believe in just studiously playing their songs. Oh no, these are boys who just want to have fun, and insist that anyone who comes along to watch has a fun time as well. In fact, they'll probably regard it as insult if you don't leave smiling.

To call them a double act is close to the mark. There's as much comedic value here as there is musical ability — and that's saying something. The pair play off each other as the dialogue flows like fine wine, with songs being used to break up the dialogue. There are even some mentions of *Prog* magazine from the stage, with amusing stories, especially about a glowing quote in the magazine concerning Headspace — hilariously from band member Wilson!

But going on about the banter is rather unfair, because that creates the impression they don't really treat the music side with any respect, and that's not true.

There's no getting away from the fact that here are two major talents. Tonight they play two sets; the first opens with *Bring Him Home* from the musical *Les Misérables*, which features Wilson's dominant vocals. Most of this part of the night has material from various parts of the duo's careers to date, both together and apart, before it concludes with *Life On Mars?*. This is not only a homage to David Bowie, but also to Wakeman's dad, Rick, who played on the original version. It is one of four songs here that come from the pair's new album, *Stripped*, with a couple in each of the sets.

For the second half of the show, W&W start off with Rick Wakeman's *Summer's End* from the *Tapestries* album. We get three more originals, including one final visit to *Stripped* for *Discipline*, before it all heads towards the finishing line with three covers. First up is Black Sabbath's *Iron Man*, reimagined with a jazz tempo by Wakeman — what would Ozzy make of that?! — and then Iron Maiden's prog metal masterwork *The Evil That Men Do*. After Wilson's *Homegrown*, it all ends with a version of *Feel Like Going Home* from country music hero Charlie Rich.

The Wilson & Wakeman experience is as much about the personalities as the songs. Some will embrace that, others will leave it. The choice is yours.

ROBIN ASKEW



A night of great talent and great humour.

PHIL BARKKER



Wakeman (left) and Wilson: one helluva double act.

> "There's as much comedic value here as there is musical ability - and that's saying something."

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Kingcrow's Diego Cafolla

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon**

Where's home?
Lake Bracciano. It's north of Rome, and, more importantly, just 20 minutes away from my recording studio.

Your first prog memory?
I remember my dad playing *Dark Side Of The Moon* in the house when I was six. I was fascinated by the music, and the language sounded so exotic to me.

The first prog record you bought?
The Construkction Of Light by King Crimson [2000]. I'd been relying on my dad's vinyl collection up until then.



First prog gig?
King Crimson, that same year, in Rome with my dad.

Any guilty pleasures in your music collection?
Bob Marley's *Exodus*. I don't feel guilty about it, really, but that's probably as far as I get from prog.

What would be your *Mastermind* specialist subject?
Wine. I'm passionate about wine.

Your biggest prog extravagance?
I flew from Rome to Frankfurt to see Rush on their R30 tour, that's probably the most I've spent.

Your favourite venue?
The Boerderij in Zoetermeer. The crew are very professional and friendly and the crowds are always good. We're always happy to play there.

Outside of prog, what else are you into?
Hiking in the mountains. I usually spend my vacations in the Italian Alps. Ideally I'd hike all day, get back and drink a good wine.

Who is your prog hero?
Roger Waters. He's probably the greatest songwriter in prog.

Are you a collector?
I try to collect wine, and fail. I have a large collection of empty bottles!

The last album you bought?
Moongarden's *Align Myself To The Universe*. They're a really good Italian band, and [band leader] Cristiano Roversi is a good friend of mine.

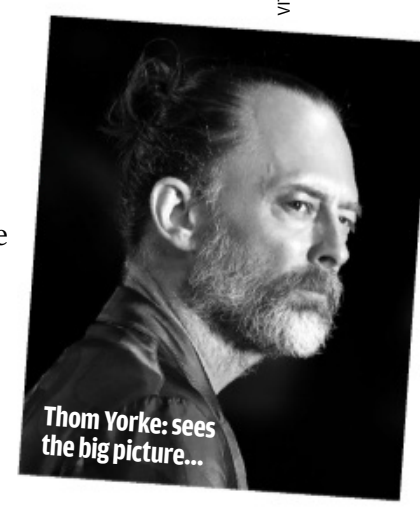
What was the last gig you went to?
Last summer I saw Roger Waters' Us And Them show at Circus Maximus in Rome. It was an incredible, spectacular show amid the Roman ruins.

Ever had a prog date?
[Laughs] No. I mean… it's prog!

Who do you call in the prog community for a good night out?
Fred Colombo from [French progressive metallers] Spheric Universe Experience. They're a great band and he's a good friend of mine.

What's the most important prog song for you?
The Great Gig In The Sky by Pink Floyd, or *La Villa Strangiato* by Rush. These are the two sides to the prog coin — one melodic, the other totally fucked up.

Which muso would you most like to work with?
Thom Yorke or Trent Reznor. Those guys see the big picture.


VITTORIO ZUNINO CELOTTO/GETTY IMAGES
Thom Yorke: sees the big picture...

Which prog album always gets you in a good mood?
Power Windows by Rush. It's very uplifting prog-synth pop.

Who's the best prog artist you've ever seen?
That Rush show in Frankfurt [R30] was just jaw-dropping. They played perfectly, and it was the most beautiful show.



Recommend us a good proggy read.
Musicophilia by Oliver Sacks. A neurologist writing about how our brain reacts to music. It's a really interesting read.



What's your favourite album cover?
I'm going to be predictable here — *The Dark Side Of The Moon*. Iconic, simple, immediately recognisable. A great cover.

What are you up to at the moment?
Kingcrow will be doing a headline tour of Europe in the spring to support [their current album from 2018] *The Persistence*, and I'm also writing the follow-up this year too.

The Persistence is out now via Sensory. See www.kingcrow.it for more information.


KEVIN NIXON
Roger Waters: songwriting legend.

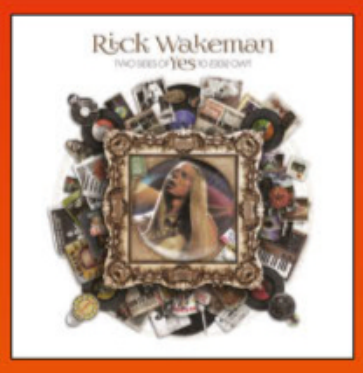
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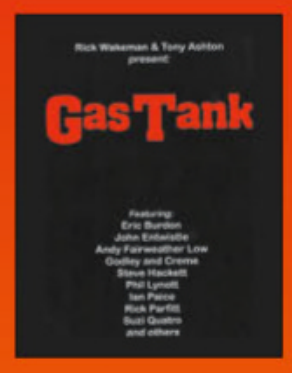
HST409CD



Time Machine

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Gas Tank

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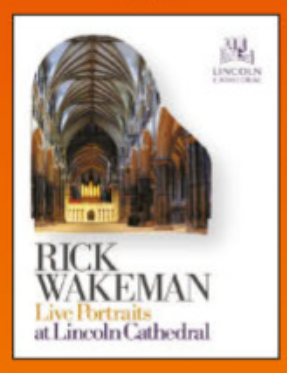
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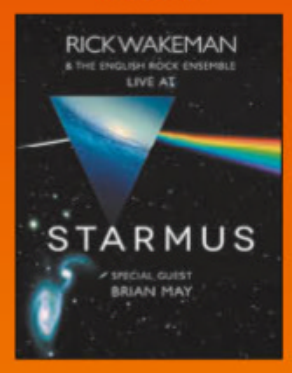
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