2018 PROG AWARDS

All the winners and more in our eight-page awards night review

PROG

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THE FUTURE OF

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20	18

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MARTIN BARRE
"I had to drag myself out of the mess of Tull."

HAKEN
"The reality is that it doesn't feel like we've achieved that much. Yet."

GEOFF DOWNES
"My first job was a stage version of *The Wombles*!"

+

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Phideaux
The Tangent
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The Pretty Things
Voivod

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AL MURRAY

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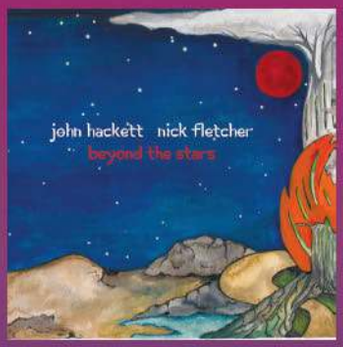


JOHN HACKETT/ NICK FLETCHER

'BEYOND THE STARS'
(NEW STUDIO ALBUM)

- Beyond the Stars sees John and Nick on an epic journey through time and place, from wistful reminiscing about happier times to a vision of a dystopian future. The songs take you on a rollercoaster ride showcasing Nick Fletcher's incredible virtuosity on the guitar alongside John's trademark flute.

Release Date 12th October 2018
EANTCD1072

DEL BROMHAM

"WHITE FEATHER"
(NEW STUDIO ALBUM)

- Esoteric Antenna is delighted to announce the release of White Feather, the wonderful new studio album by Del Bromham. Best known for being guitarist and principal song- writer for the classic rock band STRAY, White Feather sees Del explore a series of musical styles over 12 intensely personal songs, all with his inimitable approach.

Release Date 12th October 2018
ECLEC1073

TIM BLAKE

"BLAKE'S NEW JERUSALEM"
(VINYL)

- Newly re-mastered 180 GRAM VINYL LP edition of the classic 1978 ambient masterpiece Blake's New Jerusalem by Tim Blake. Cut at Abbey Road studios 180 gram vinyl LP reissue

Release Date 12th October 2018
ECLECLP2579

ANTHONY PHILLIPS

"FIELD DAY"
(2CD/1DVD DIGIPAK EDITION)

- Beautiful instrumental double album originally released in 2005.
- With this new edition, Anthony has revisited the recordings, re-mastering the original stereo mixes and has created a 5.1 Surround sound mix with engineer James Collins.

Release Date 26th October 2018
ECLEC32648

PROCOL HARUM

"LIVE IN CONCERT WITH THE EDMONTON ORCHESTRA"

(REMASTERED 180G VINYL EDITION PLUS BONUS SINGLE)

- Re- mastered 180 gram vinyl edition of the classic album Live in Concert with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra by Procol Harum.
- Cut at Abbey Road Studios and includes a bonus 7-inch single which is a facsimile of a rare 1972 French picture sleeve release with edits of 'Conquistador' and 'A Salty Dog'.

Release Date 26th October 2018
ECLECLP2650

(REMASTERED & EXPANDED EDITION)

- Re- mastered and expanded edition of the classic album Live in Concert with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra by Procol Harum, includes five bonus tracks (two previously unreleased), drawn from the B- side of a single and the rehearsal sessions for the concert.
- The release also includes an illustrated booklet featuring material from Gary Brooker's personal archive and an essay by Procol Harum authority Roland Clare.

Release Date 26th October 2018
ECLEC2650

GREENSLADE

"SPYGLASS GUEST" (REMASTERED & EXPANDED 2CD EDITION))

- Expanded 2 CD edition of the classic 1974 album, Spyglass Guest by GREENSLADE.
- Newly re-mastered from the original master tapes and featuring an illustrated booklet with many rare cuttings.
- Includes a bonus CD of previously unreleased recordings made for BBC Radio One's In Concert programme and Sounds of the Seventies in November 1974

Release Date 26th October 2018
PECLEC22647

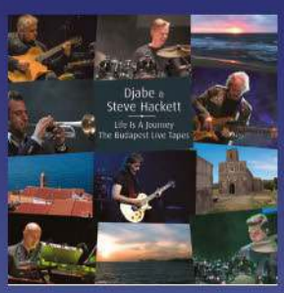
ALSO AVAILABLE - GREENSLADE "GREENSLADE" (REMASTERED & EXPANDED EDITION)
PECLEC22645

TANGERINE DREAM

'THE PINK YEARS ALBUMS 1970-1973'
(4CD REMASTERED CLAMSHELL BOX SET)

- 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 Ohr label in Germany between 1970 and 1973, known by fans as "The Pink Years" albums. Features "Electronic Meditation", "Alpha Centauri", "Zeit" and "Atem" packaged in replica card sleeves and also includes a poster.

Release Date 28th September 2018
EREACD41037

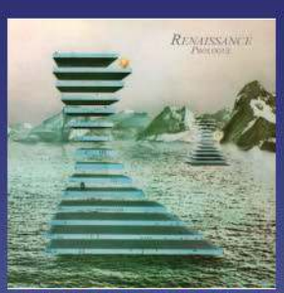


DJABE & STEVE HACKETT

'LIFE IS A JOURNEY: THE BUDAPEST LIVE TAPES'
(2CD/1DVD SET)

- "The Budapest Live Tapes" captures on two CDs and a DVD Djabe & Steve Hackett performing selections from that album on the concert stage for the first time, along with classic Genesis material such as 'Fly On A Windshield', 'Los Endos' and 'Firth of Fifth' and Steve Hackett material such as 'Please Don't Touch', 'The Steppes' and 'Last Train To Istanbul'. The DVD in this set also includes the bonus features "Life is a Journey" (screen film), 'Beams Over the Nulvi Mountains' (music video) and the short documentary "The Journey Continued in 2018".

Release Date 28th September 2018
EANTCD31071



RENAISSANCE

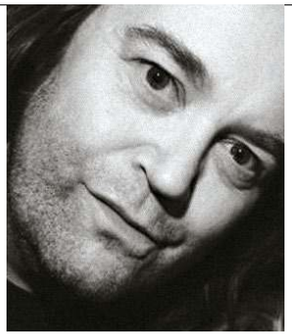
'PROLOGUE'
(REMASTERED & EXPANDED EDITION)

- Esoteric Recordings are pleased to announce the release of a newly re-mastered and expanded edition of the classic 1972 album by Renaissance, "Prologue". Re-mastered from the original Sovereign Records master tapes and adds the rare single version of 'Spare Some Love' as a bonus track (appearing on CD for the very first time). The booklet features a new essay and exclusive interviews with Annie Haslam and Terry Sullivan and fully restores the original album artwork.

Release Date 28th September 2018
ECLEC2644

MILES SKARIN

Ed's Letter



As usual, the Progressive Music Awards was one hell of a lot of fun. It's always great to see a mix of prog musicians, young and old, mingling, chatting, and sharing a drink and a joke. This year was no exception at a packed Underglobe in London. Al Murray proved himself to be a top host, his passion for the music evident, despite the odd good-natured jibe at some of the attendees – myself included! And, of course, the party ran long into the night for some. You can read all about what happened and hear from the winners on page 34!

Speaking of Mr. Murray, it's a delight to welcome him as one of the contributors to this issue as well. Al had the enviable task of going to Pompeii to see King Crimson play live recently, and to report back on it for us as part of our cover feature. And he did such a great job (including, fellow contributors note, getting his copy in two weeks early!) that we're hoping he'll be back for the odd bit of writing for *Prog* in the near future.

Sid Smith chatted with various members of the band as they celebrate their rich history and look ahead to next year's 50th anniversary. We also speak to a fine cross-section of the prog world, established and new, in this issue. I hope you enjoy all the features.

You can tell the year end is rapidly approaching simply by the amount of gigs there are. As usual, I had a terrific time at Summer's End, and the next two months look pretty packed solid as far as gigs go. Hopefully I'll bump into some of you along the way. Oh, and thanks for taking note of our request not to lambast us for your choices in the keyboard players issue! Admittedly we had one or two, but on the whole you got the point. Having done songs, albums and now keyboard players, I'd be interested in hearing what you'd like us to tackle next year.

I look forward to hearing from you...

Jerry Ewing - Editor

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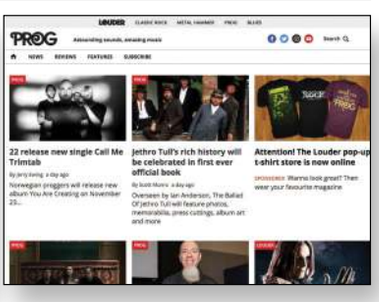

STEVE HACKETT

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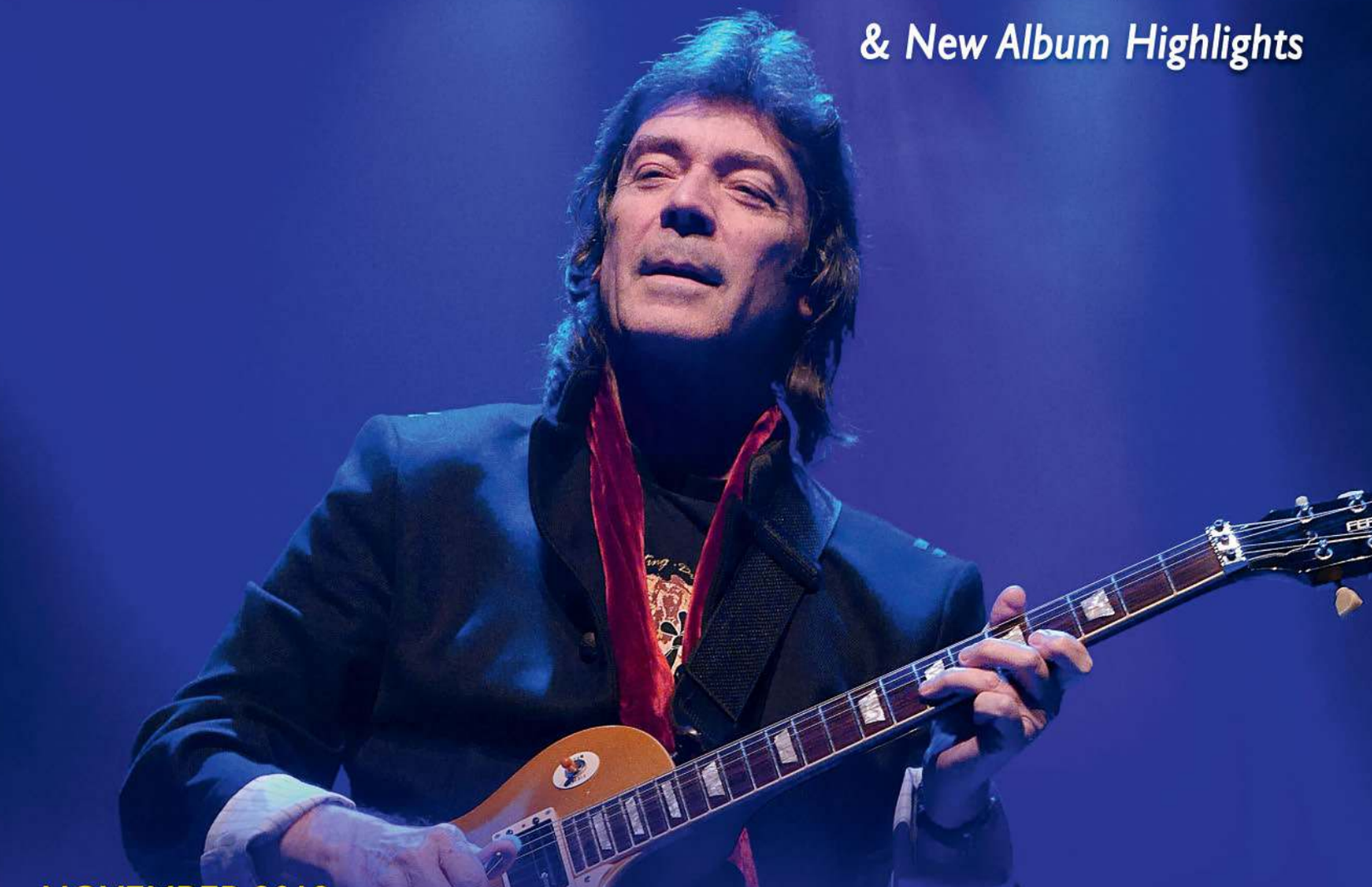

NOVEMBER 2019

Sat	02	Aylesbury Waterside	Sat	16	Reading Hexagon
Sun	03	Folkestone Leas Cliff Hall	Mon	18	Birmingham Symphony Hall
Tue	05	Sheffield City Hall	Tue	19	York Barbican
Wed	06	Cambridge Corn Exchange	Wed	20	Bath Forum
Fri	08	Leicester De Montfort Hall	Fri	22	Halifax Victoria Theatre
Sat	09	Cardiff St David's Hall	Sat	23	Gateshead The Sage
Mon	11	Liverpool Philharmonic	Mon	25	Edinburgh Usher Hall
Tue	12	Brighton Dome	Tue	26	Manchester Bridgewater Hall
Wed	13	Portsmouth Guildhall	Wed	27	Southend Cliffs Pavilion
Fri	15	Salisbury City Hall	Fri	29	London Hammersmith Eventim Apollo

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A CAUSE FOR DEBATE

I reckon you are going to get a lot of this, but I thought I needed to point out some omissions, a few glaring ones, from your '50 Greatest Keyboard Players' list [*Prog* 91].

Firstly, the list did not say prog keyboard players, though by default I suppose it should probably encompass this genre. However, back in the days when I started getting into 'serious' music, prog'(or progressive music) was anything that wasn't mainstream pop.

Okay, here are the missing in my opinion (and in no particular order)…

Steven Porcaro (Toto). His playing takes in rock, jazz and prog, I could also make a case for his co-keyboard player, David Paich.

Ken Hensley (Uriah Heep). Master of the Moog simplifier (listen to *Uriah Heep Live*).

Steve Winwood (Traffic). Again, his playing touches all styles, but if Traffic weren't prog…

Garth Hudson (The Band). Okay, I might have to give you this one as The Band weren't prog per se, but just listen the intro of *Chest Fever*: a masterful and influential player.

Roger Powell (Todd Rundgren/Utopia). How much more prog can 20-odd minutes of *The Ikon* be?

Tony Kaye (Yes) missing in action… why? *The Yes Album* is one of the greatest prog albums ever.

And last but not least, John Paul Jones (need I say which band?). A bass player by trade but a far better keys man than Geddy Lee (whom I love). *The Rain Song*, *Stairway…*, *No Quarter*, *All My Love*… need I go on?

You're probably snowed under with these opinions but I feel the urge to put the record straight on the missing.

Keep up the good work.

Paul Sale

Thank you Paul — but we should mention that the list was actually voted for by Prog readers, not the magazine! — Dep Ed.

NEW DISCOVERIES

I am a value guy. When assessing mags at renewal time, it's simple: do they provide value for the annual subscription cost?

***Prog* 91: did you agree with the readers' choices?**

Southern Empire: helping to keep modern prog moving.

Prog delivered in a few short paragraphs; anything else is gravy. Not only did *Prog* discover (for me anyway) Southern Empire, but they wrote a review that prompted me to check it out.

It's been a long time since I was utterly hooked by an album on the first play, much less delighted with every single track. *Civilisation* by Southern Empire is that rare surprise. By the end of the third track, my jaw dropped open.

I know nothing of the Aussie prog scene, have never heard of these musicians' former bands, and have never been Down Under. No matter. With three months to go in the year, *Civilisation* is in my top slot for 2018 Prog Album of the Year. It's 'bloody brilliant' as you Brits might say. I feel really good about the state of modern prog if we have bands this creative coming along to take us on a musical journey. Please check out this album and support this band if you love it — we proggers need to encourage young bands like this to continue to create and record such worthy additions to our musical libraries.

Switching gears, the concert noise level debate isn't just on dry land. This year's Cruise To The Edge had three headliners (Yes/Hackett/Marillion) which required a reserved seat and a blue or red badge for entry. Yet during Hackett's gig there were people standing behind our reserved seats, wearing the wrong badge, and talking throughout the performance. At one point, six members of one of the other bands came in, stood against the wall, and proceeded to disrespect Hackett and concertgoers by talking/laughing throughout the early Genesis numbers. I lost all interest in that band, based not upon their music, but their untimely conversation! There's a time for talking, a time for listening, and when it comes to concerts, never the twain shall meet!

TWEET TALK

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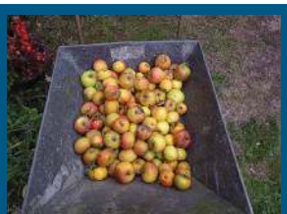
JUDY DYBLE
@judydyble
Anyone fancy an apple?



NICK BEGGS
@NickBeggs
Tonight, after a day of looking after my grandaughter, I am mostly drinking beer and looking at the sky through my binoculars.

RICK WAKEMAN
@GrumpyOldRick
I met loads of friends at Reading last night who I haven't seen for years. Fantastic memories. Thank you Hexagon too for supplying far and away the best piano on the tour that I've had so far.

LETTER

Great feature on Camel [*Prog* 90]. I never felt they got the recognition they deserved back in the day. It inspired me to dig out the *Rainbow's End* box set and have a good listen. I think Dave Williams was right though – they lacked a good singer (possible exception of Richard Sinclair) and I think it's an ongoing problem in prog: there are some great bands, old and new, who suffer in the vocalist department.

Still, you can't fault Andy Latimer's guitar playing – he reminds a bit of Mr Hackett, and for me, the first four albums are up there with the best. I saw both the *Moonmadness* and *Rain Dances* tours and they were fantastic live. And yes, I remember the astrocamel… I had the badge!

Alan Jones

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

Speaking of Cruise To The Edge, I hope they invite Southern Empire to cruise with them in 2020. Spending my life in the USA and Central America, I will never have any other chance to see this band live. Catching both sets by Lifesigns, Thank You Scientist and Southern Empire would be great value for the dollar – the rest of the cruise would be pure gravy!

Bill McAbee

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

In addition to *Prog* being an exemplary mag, introducing me to new sound enjoyment, it also increases my knowledge of culture and vocabulary.

Case in point, *Prog* 90. While reading The Musical Box review of Soft Machine's *Hidden Details*, I was stopped by two items: 'In situ' and 'Trigger's Broom'. Not knowing what either of them were, it drove me to do some research before I continued any further reading.

Ian Fortnam and *Prog* – thanks for expanding my knowledge.

Matt Payette

QUIET PLEASE!

Being a huge Yes fan, I eagerly unwrapped my CD and Blu-ray of Yes featuring ARW: *Live At The Apollo* as soon as they arrived last Friday and I couldn't wait to immerse myself in a couple of hours of classic Yes.

The first thing that hit me was the impeccable quality of the Blu-ray. The picture quality and audio were fantastic, the musicianship first rate and the band really look like they are having fun. Jon Anderson's voice is just astounding, and with Trevor Rabin and Lee Pomeroy backing him up, I think it has to be one of the strongest line-ups vocally that they have ever had.

So everything was in order for me to sit back and enjoy. Well, not quite! I started to notice that the crowd's cheering and applause was becoming intrusive and occurring more and more in places and in ways that were unnatural for a British audience. I don't understand the reasoning behind this, but more importantly, it's not an honest representation of that Yes concert which was in Britain. In my 45 years of attending gigs, it has been my experience in general that we don't have to whoop and holler in any musical space like they tend to do in the US for example, which leads me to wonder if the concert has been produced with the fact that the US is the largest market!

On a lesser note, but annoying to me, is that they have edited out Lee Pomeroy's bass solo on *The Fish*. I know Lee is a huge Chris Squire fan and I think the solo paid homage to Chris while showing what a great musician Lee is. It would have been an excellent way to show he is a part of the band, as would the inclusion of Louis Molino's drum solo/ intro to *Lift Me Up* if that too had been included!

I know these may seem like minor issues, and overall I think both the CD and Blu-ray are a fantastic record of a band that are still performing at the highest level. I just don't need a canned audience to make me realise the fact.

Nigel Ree

WILL IRELAND

Below: ARW at the 2016 Progressive Music Awards.

MIKE PORTNOY
@MikePortnoy
Life imitating art… or vice versa? Always nice to come back to the Colos-Saal in Aschaffenburg, Germany… one of the great prog clubs in Europe! But I have to stare at my mug hanging in the venue all night long from the stage! Hahaha

MATT COHEN
@MattCohenBass
Definitely a @MarillionOnline *Misplaced Childhood* morning. This album always reminds me of Penarth in the autumn. Perfect music memories. Have a good one xx #PenarthLife #Autumn #Music #Marillion #MisplacedChildhood #Perfect #MyChildhood

PROG

Future PLC 4th Floor, The Emerson Building, 4-8 Emerson Street, London SE1 9DU
Email prog@futurenet.com
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You can also find us on **facebook.com** under Prog

Editorial
Editor **Jerry Ewing**
Deputy Editor **Hannah May Kilroy**
Art Editor **Russell Fairbrother**
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Editor in Chief **Scott Rowley**

Contributors
Olivier Zoltar Badin (OZB), Joe Banks (JB), Mike Barnes (MB), Chris Cope (CC), Isere Lloyd-Davis (ILD), Daryl Easlea (DE), Briony Edwards (BE), Dave Everley (DEV), Ian Fortnam (IF), Pete Fowler (PF), Thea de Gallier (TDG), Polly Glass (PG), Eleanor Goodman (EG), Rob Hughes (RH), Stephen Humphries (SH), Will Ireland (WI), Emma Johnston (EJ), David Keevill (DK), Dom Lawson (DL), Fraser Lewry (FL), Dannii Lievers (DIL), Dave Ling (DML), Roger Lotring (RL), Alex Lynham (AL), Gary Mackenzie (GMZ), Rachel Mann (RM), Rhodri Marsden (RHM), Clay Marshall (CM), Julian Marszalek (JM), Giulia Mascheroni (GMA), Chris McGarel (CMG), Greg Moffitt (GMM), Grant Moon (GM), Ben Myers (BM), Kris Needs (KN), Kevin Nixon (KNI), Matt Parker (MP), Steve Pilkington (SP), Alison Reijman (AR), Chris Roberts (CR), Paul Sexton (PS), Johnny Sharp (JS), Nick Shilton (NS), Sid Smith (SS), Joseph Stannard (JSS), Rick Wakeman (RW), Phil Weller (POW), David West (DW), Philip Wilding (PW), Lois Wilson (LW), Rich Wilson (RW), Holly Wright (HW)

Cover images
DGM Ltd

Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**
clare.dove@futurenet.com
Group Advertising Director **Mark Wright**
mark.wright@futurenet.com
Advertising Manager **Kate Colgan**
kate.colgan@futurenet.com
Account Director **Anastasia Meldrum**
anastasia.meldrum@futurenet.com
Account Manager **Jason Harwood**
jason.harwood@futurenet.com

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International Licensing Director **Matt Ellis**
matt.ellis@futurenet.com

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INTRO

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

HACKETT SHEDS LIGHT ON HIS NEW ALBUM

Guitarist joins forces with an international line-up on new long-form recordings, and announces dates for his upcoming *Spectral Mornings* tour.

When Steve Hackett releases his next album, *At The Edge Of Light*, he hopes to ruffle a few feathers. The follow-up to 2017's *The Night Siren* comes from a similar mindset, while the former Genesis guitarist has re-embraced long-form composition and even tried a love song on the new collection, which arrives on 25 January via InsideOut.

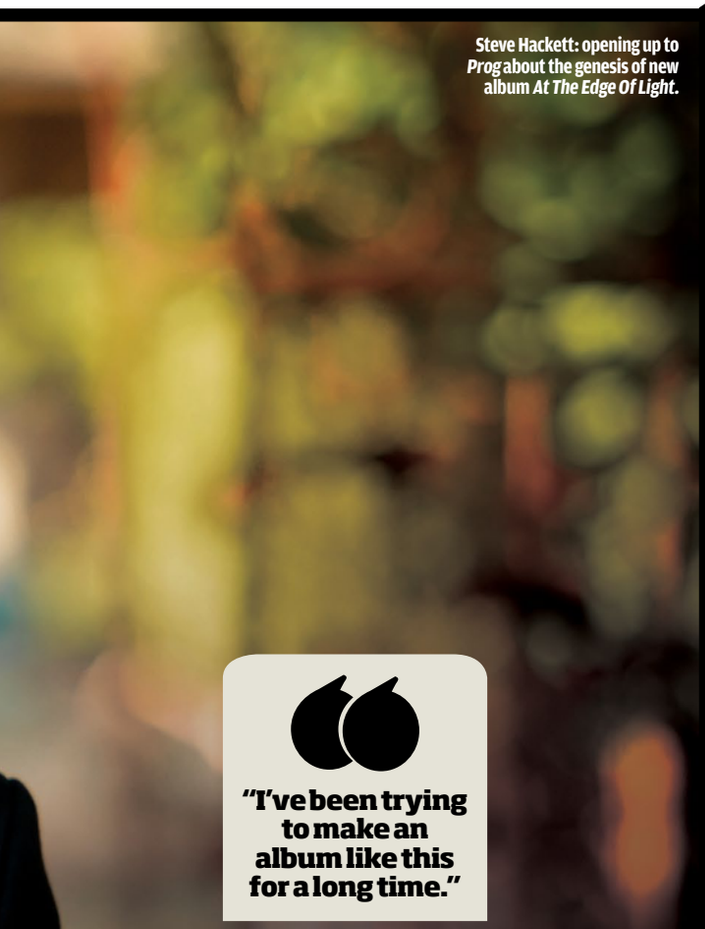
"In the face of right-wing politics and fierce nationalism, I've been wanting to do products that are as international as possible, with an international cast," Hackett tells *Prog*.

Along with Durga and Lorelei McBroom, Jonas Reingold, Nick D'Virgilio and others, his star cast also includes Azerbaijani tar player Malik Mansurov, "a man who can't tour the States. They won't give him a visa because mugham, the style of music he plays, is common to Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iraq and Iran. I want to make stuff that in some places is banned. I want to do things that aren't popular with politicians."

He states, "I have to speak emotionally about the album. I've been trying to make an album like this for a long time, where you combine different schools of approach. You've got the rock school, you've got the ethnic, if you can call it that, and you've got the orchestral."

He has chosen *Fallen Walls And Pedestals* as the opener because of its contrasts. "It's very proggy," he states. "You can hear a pin drop, then something that's very, very big. The best [part] of prog is arrangements. It's a big word but all it really means is that you chuck in a guitar, you decide to put some drums with it, [and] then you go on adding because it sounded good."

Those Golden Wings, the longest piece, is about his wife Jo. "Although we tend to write lyrics together, in this case it was something that was obviously *for* her," he says, adding that it opens with something akin to a Tchaikovsky ballet. "It's going to be some kind of flight. It's got a very



Steve Hackett: opening up to *Prog* about the genesis of new album *At The Edge Of Light*.

> **"I've been trying to make an album like this for a long time."**

TINA KORHONEN

romantic kind of thing but it goes into rock. It also goes into chorale. So, back to long-form for me. I'm not denying that any more — I'm up for that. It gives the instruments a chance to speak."

The last three tracks, entitled *Descent*, *Conflict* and *Peace*, were originally devised as another long-form construction. "But we decided to name them separately because people might prefer one bit rather than another," he says. "So you've got that sort of trilogy in there."

In presenting his own version of the melting-pot concept, Hackett reflects: "Protest songs are incredibly important. There hasn't been a finer song since [Bob Dylan's] *Blowin' In The Wind* just nailed it in a few short sentences. And the honesty of songs that were written at that time." He adds that he loves "songs about the vulnerability of the human condition," citing *Eleanor Rigby* as his favourite Beatles number.

After a long gestation period, was it an easy album to complete? "When recording I'm very serious; I don't really relax until it's done," he replies. "It's thrilling and daunting. You get to a point, hopefully, where you think, 'This might actually be better than last time.' I was having this conversation with [artist] Roger Dean and I asked him, 'What's your favourite painting?' He said, 'The one I'm currently working on.' I have exactly the same feelings."

Hackett plays two acoustic UK shows in December before touring Europe in April and May. He returns to the UK in November 2019 with shows celebrating Genesis' *Selling England By The Pound*, and his 1979 solo album *Spectral Mornings*.

For the full list of tour dates, visit www.hackettsongs.com. **MK**

This month, Intro was compiled by
Malcolm Dome
Jerry Ewing
Jo Kendall
Martin Kielty
Hannah May Kilroy
Dom Lawson
Rachel Mann
Rhodri Marsden
Natasha Scharf
Johnny Sharp
Rick Wakeman

ANDY MACKAY'S SACRED SOUNDS

Roxy Music founder teams up with former bandmate Phil Manzanera on his first studio recordings in a decade.

Andy Mackay, back with an album of post-rock psalms.

Andy Mackay is to release *3Psalms* on November 23. And the project has taken the Roxy Music sax and oboe player nearly 25 years to bring to fruition.

"In the mid-90s I began to work on an electronic studio project but had to put it on hold because of other commitments. I actually finished all the writing by 2000, and then Roxy Music started touring and that kept me busy until 2012. Once this was over, I got back to the album."

The four-track post-rock symphony was recorded at Dean St. Studios in London, a studio in Prague where the Czech National Philharmonic Orchestra were tracked, and at Phil Manzanera's home studio. The guitarist also plays on the album.

Mackay feels the psalms are an interesting subject for the project, which he also admits doesn't neatly fit into any particular genre. "I have used psalms 90, 130 and 150. Some people might be put off because of their religious connotation, but I feel everyone is intrigued by them because they have given us so many phrases which are part of everyday life."

Mackay premieres *3Psalms* on November 26 at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall, where he will play the entire album with a band, choir and string section. He will also perform a selection of Roxy Music material with Manzanera as his special guest.

"If all goes well, I hope to do more *3Psalms* shows, possibly in churches and cathedrals," he adds.

For more, visit www.facebook.com/andymackaysax. **MD**

MARILLION RETURN TO THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL

FEAR-less troupe team up with orchestral friends for 2019 tour as Hogarth celebrates 30 years as the band's frontman.

Marillion at the Royal Albert Hall in 2017.

Marillion have announced 13 UK shows with a difference next year. The dates, which commence at Liverpool Philharmonic on November 1, also see the Brits returning to the Royal Albert Hall for two nights with the In Praise Of Folly string quartet, Sam Morris on French horn and Emma Halnan on flute.

"We've added this wonderful six-piece to the band for this entire tour. They're brilliant players, good friends, and the chemistry we have together has already spoken for itself," says frontman Steve Hogarth. "I thought we'd never beat that night at RAH… but there's going to be two nights and two different RAH setlists this time, so let's see what we, and [what] our legendary fans, can do."

The shows will include material from the band's 14-album career with Hogarth, who's also celebrating his 30th anniversary with Marillion next year.

For the full list of dates, visit www.marillion.com. **NRS**

KEITH EMERSON'S MUSIC REWORKED

Classical conductor fulfils his Abbey Road album promise to the late keyboard star.

Keith Emerson (right) with Terje Mikkelsen.

Keith Emerson's best-loved material has been re-recorded with an orchestra for release on what would have been his 74th birthday. *Beyond The Stars* is out on November 2 via Simax Classics/Grappa. The recordings are led by *Three Fates Project* conductor Terje Mikkelsen and revisit works showcased at last year's tribute concert at Birmingham's Symphony Hall.

"When I was mastering the *Three Fates Project* at Abbey Road [in 2011], Keith said, 'I never recorded in Abbey Road,'" says Mikkelsen. "I told him we would take the best London orchestra we could find and record the music. It was at that Birmingham concert [A Musical Celebration Of Life] I realised I needed to keep my word to Keith and do this."

Prior to his death in 2016, Emerson had been working on a number of new arrangements so the conductor had plenty to choose from. He contacted the world-famous chamber orchestra, Academy Of St Martin In The Fields, who were so impressed by the quality of the material that they agreed to record the tracks that make up the vinyl's A-side.

"They were enthusiastic and so surprised by Keith Emerson's music — they found it so delicate and well-composed," he says. "When I first met Keith [around 2006], I realised how much he knew about classical music and I could have a really professional conversation with him, which is unusual with people from the rock'n'roll world. He wanted to be more of a composer but he never had the chance to be recognised as that."

Joining the Academy Of St Martin In The Fields are soloists Rachel Flowers, Three Fates collaborator Marc Bonilla, and Emerson's talented 13-year-old grandson Ethan who performs on *The Dreamer*. The B-side of *Beyond The Stars* features five pieces, including ELP's *Fanfare For The Common Man*, recorded by the Keith Emerson Band and the Munich Radio Orchestra, which didn't make it onto the 2012 symphonic album *Tarkus Concertante*.

"If the fans respond well to this, we would like to follow it up with more music. There's a lot that's been orchestrated that has never been given a classical treatment and I feel that doing this keeps Keith's music alive," says Mikkelsen. "I fully support *Prog* readers voting him the number one keyboard player of all time and my wish is to continue his legacy." **NRS**

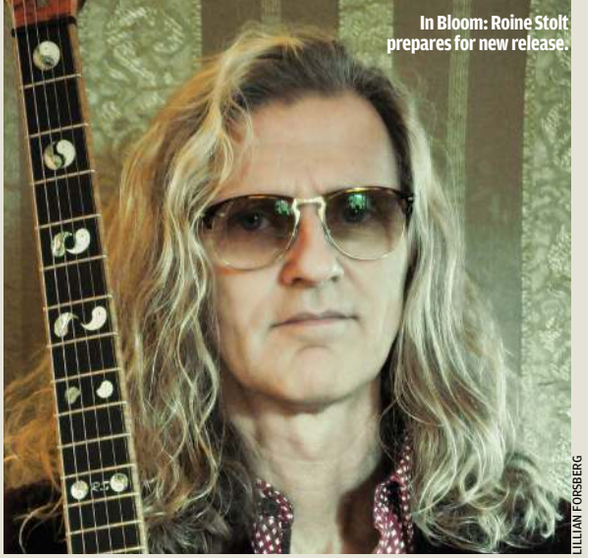
"Doing this keeps Keith's music alive and my wish is to continue his legacy."

For more, visit www.keithemerson.no.

INTRO extras

DBA: REMIXED

DBA (Downes Braide Association), featuring Geoff Downes and Chris Braide, are releasing a remix of their 2015 album *Suburban Ghosts* on November 30. The renamed *Suburban Ghosts 2018* contains material reworked by Braide and includes guest appearances from Dave Gregory (XTC/Tin Spirits) and Lee Pomeroy (It Bites/Headspace). The super-duo released their third album, *Skyscraper Souls*, last year.



In Bloom: Roine Stolt prepares for new release.

LILLIAN FORSBERG

ROINE STOLT'S GOLDEN MANIFESTO

Swedish guitarist teams up with Nad Sylvan and Jonas Reingold on new Flower Kings project.

Roine Stolt's The Flower King release *Manifesto Of An Alchemist* through InsideOut on November 23.

"I wanted this to have just my name on it," says Stolt. "But the label felt the band's name should also be represented. Is it a solo project? To some extent all of The Flower Kings' albums were based around me. This time, though, I've written everything and done all of the lead vocals as well. Soundwise, it's a wide palette of colours and represents all the music I love."

The album also features Stolt's former Flower Kings bandmates Michael Stolt, Hans Froberg and Jonas Reingold, alongside current The Sea Within bandmate Marco Minnemann. They're joined by Max Lorentz, Zach Kamins, Rob Townsend and Nad Sylvan.

The whole project was recorded in just five weeks. "I have never done an album so fast before. A lot of this was down to [label] InsideOut. I told them I had songs written for a new record and was expecting a release date for next spring or summer. But they suddenly put it in for the end of this year!"

The current band – Stolt (vocals/guitar), Froberg (guitar), Reingold (bass), Kamins (keyboard) and Mirko Dimaio (drums) – will join Spock's Beard for the InsideOut 25th-anniversary European tour this winter. The setlist will focus on early Flower Kings material and dates include London's Islington Assembly Hall on December 9 and Manchester's Club Academy the following day.

For full dates, visit www.facebook.com/TheFlowerKings. **MD**

O'LIST'S WILD FUTURE

Former The Nice guitarist announces new solo album and UK show.

Davy O'List is embracing his poppier side on upcoming album *The Future's Wild*, which is due out next spring.

"I proved that I still had my prog routes with [2015 album] *Second Thoughts* and it was time for me to progress and do something new and different," he says. "It's still prog but the genre is now more advanced than it used to be and it's more popular. Steven Wilson has described pop as The Beatles and Abba. He came from a heavy prog background and decided to make more commercial-sounding music and had a No.1 album. I hear that as pop prog."

Davy O'List goes pop!

The songs were written on his 2016-2017 tour and feature keyboards from his former Attack bandmate Bob Hodges. The Nice's Alan O'Duffy will help out with the final cut, and will also mix O'List's upcoming live set at HRH Prog in Wales in November. For the latest updates, visit www.davyolist.wordpress.com. **NRS**

25 YEARS INSIDE OUT music

HAKEN

VECTOR

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The band's much-anticipated fifth studio album. Mixed & Mastered by **Adam 'Nolly' Getgood** (Periphery, Devin Townsend Project)

"heart-stopping hails of metallic riff bullets, dizzying instrumental and rhythmic complexity, alongside an intriguing lyrical tale."
- **Prog Magazine**

Available as limited 2CD Mediabook (with instrumental versions), Gatefold 2LP + CD with etching, Standard Jewelcase CD & as digital download.

Catch Haken live in 2019
15.02.2019 – Manchester – Academy 3
16.02.2019 – Glasgow – St. Luke's
17.02.2019 – Bristol – The Fleece
16.03.2019 – London – Islington Assembly Hall

Also available:
'L-1VE' - the band's first ever live release on CD/DVD

ROINE STOLT'S

THE FLOWER KING

MANIFESTO OF AN ALCHEMIST

In Stores 23rd November 2018

Roine Stolt, known as the guitarist, singer, writer and at times band leader of the groups The Flower Kings, Transatlantic, Agents of Mercy, Kaipa DC, as well as from his work with prog icon Jon Anderson and the new super group The Sea Within, returns under the moniker Roine Stolt's The Flower King.

10 songs and almost 70 minutes of playing time celebrating the style Roine is most revered for: progressive rock, richly orchestrated with all the trademark elements from four decades of prog!

Featuring Marco Minnemann (drums), Michael Stolt (bass & vocals), Jonas Reingold (bass), Rob Townsend (sax), Max Lorentz (Hammond B3 & vocals), Zach Kamins (Moog & keys), and guest vocalists Hans Froberg and Nad Sylvan while Roine is taking care of the major share of vocals.

See the band on tour in December 2018 alongside Spock's Beard:
9th December – Islington Assembly Hall, London
10th December – Academy Club, Manchester

Available as Gatefold 2LP plus CD, Limited Edition digipak, & as digital download.

SONY MUSIC

Available from amazon.co.uk

www.insideoutmusic.com
INSIDE OUT music

NAO GET BACK TO THE GRIND

New noise and line-up for Edinburgh's post-rock soundscapers.

NAO: welcoming you to the *Grind Show* in November.

North Atlantic Oscillation return after a four-year hiatus with their fourth studio album *Grind Show*, out on November 16 via Vineland Music. It has been described as being a more immediate listen than their previous long-players — and also as quite the opposite, reckons NAO songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Sam Healy.

"I'd say it was more accessible, but there's some dissent on that. Some people who've heard it thought we'd gone in the opposite direction. Some have said it's very proggy, some not at all — just like they did about the last one. Polarising opinions as usual…"

In the gap between NAO records, Healy made a second album with his solo project Sand ("Sand is a more gentle, personal sound; NAO is more widescreen," he says), but most of the time has been spent painstakingly working in the studio, "struggling to make it sound like it does in my head. A couple of albums in, you'd imagine it'd slide out like a greased lemon, but it doesn't ever get easier.

"You think of a song in conceptual terms and you're aware of all the stuff that needs to be heard, but then flattening it into one stereo stream of sound is incredibly difficult."

No pain no gain, though, and the result, if *Prog*'s initial listens are anything to go by, is a captivating, atmospheric affair redolent at various points of everyone from Talk Talk and Radiohead to Tim Bowness or The Postal Service. It's one of those records where it's as much the atmosphere as the songs that pulls you in, which is what Healy clearly had in mind.

"Atmosphere is the whole point," he says. "It's why I devote so much time trying to sweep you away completely. I think the record is best listened to with headphones because I don't see the purpose of music as augmenting the real world, but to temporarily replace it completely."

Although NAO have been a three-piece at times in the past, only Healy played on the new album, assisted by producer/engineer Pete Meighan. So does this mean we're unlikely to see Healy and friends promoting this record live any time soon?

"We haven't toured since 2015 and there are no plans right now. But if we do play live, then like the album, I want it to be an immersive experience. This isn't background music — it's meant to take you over completely." **JS**

> **"This isn't background music - it's meant to take you over completely."**

For more, visit www.naoband.net.

INTRO extras

KAYAK UK DATES

Kayak return to the UK next year for two special shows. They will play at The Underworld in London on April 5 before heading to Chepstow for Winter's End Festival on April 7. It's the first time in 42 years that Ton Scherpenzeel's Dutch crew have performed on British soil. The dates are part of an extensive European tour that also includes shows in the Netherlands and Germany. Kayak made their studio comeback with *Seventeen* earlier in 2018.

Arena: remembering those we've lost.

LILLIAN FORSBERG

ARENA RELEASE FIRST EVER VIDEO

New single pays homage to loved ones who have been lost to illness.

British prog rockers Arena have just released their first ever promotional video for their new single *Poisoned*, which is taken from the band's most recent album *Double Vision*.

Poisoned, which came out on October 26 on Verglas Music, tackles the subject of losing loved ones to illness, specifically cancer. It was further inspired by the sad passing of Ian Baldwin, who had collaborated on several musical theatre projects with Arena founding member Clive Nolan.

"*Poisoned* was written at a particularly difficult time for me," explains Nolan. "While I was putting the songs together for the new Arena album, I was very aware that a good friend of mine was dying of cancer. There was something so raw, present and inescapable, it seemed obvious to me that this had to be written about.

"In the first week of January I told Ian that we were writing a song that reflected on him and others in similar situations, and he loved the idea. He said he really wanted to hear it and I told him that should be fine, because we hoped to have a version ready by early February. Sadly, he passed away before January was over."

Arena will be instigating a social media movement commemorating anyone they've lost who has been an important part of their lives. Fans can join in with the #arenapoisoned campaign by posting on social media with a picture and name of someone important in their life who has passed on, using the hashtag #arenapoisoned. These will be used in the forthcoming vinyl version of *Double Vision*.

For more, visit www.arenaband.co.uk. **JE**

GALAHAD KEY MAN MAPS A NEW SOUND

Dean Baker dabbles with krautrock on his first solo album.

Constellations showcases a very different side to keyboard player Dean Baker. The album, available to pre-order from November 5, was heavily influenced by a bequeathed CD collection and the musician's collection of vintage synths.

"People would often say to me that they thought certain Galahad songs had been inspired by Tangerine Dream or Kraftwerk but I didn't own any of the recordings," says Baker. "I've now got almost complete sets of albums by Jean-Michel Jarre and Vangelis and I got really inspired by them. I literally wrote 20 tracks in about six weeks!"

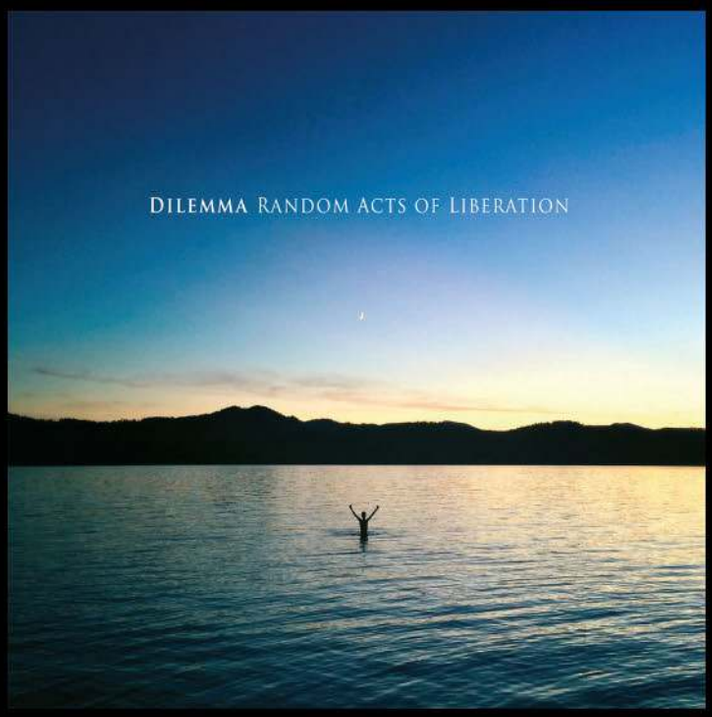
The 10 mostly instrumental songs that made the final cut include guest appearances from his bandmates Stu Nicholson and Lee Abraham, as well as Coburg vocalist Anastasia Coburg.

Galahad hope to announce their next studio album in 2019. For more information, and to pre-order *Constellations*, visit www.galahadonline.com. **NRS**

Dean Baker: Kraut rocking.

DILEMMA

RANDOM ACTS OF LIBERATION



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"Damn!! Yet another great new prog release. The new album by Dilemma is some very tasty 'modern Prog' ala new Spock's Beard, Frost*, Flying Colors, Steven Wilson & Haken. Awesome drumming by Collin Leijenaar and loving the melodic edge Dec Burke brings to the band! And as always an immaculate mix by Rich Mouser. One of the top 10 music albums of 2018 so far!"

MIKE PORTNOY
(Sons Of Apollo, Neal Morse Band, Flying Colors, ex-Dream Theater)

'I think this Dilemma album is first rate! The playing, but also the melodies and composition. If you like progressive rock you should definitely check this out!'

NEAL MORSE
(Neal Morse Band, Transatlantic, ex-Spock's Beard)

'Good guitar riffs, very special. The first song immediately gave me wings! The whole production and mix is great, very transparent.'

ARJEN LUCASSEN
(Ayreon, Star One, The Gentle Storm, Vengeance)

'This album covers lots of ground. But always within a strong pop framework. Strong playing, singing and songwriting. You're gonna love it!'

DAVE MEROS
(Spock's Beard)

'This album is brimming with an infectious energy, creative ideas and compelling soundscapes. Definitely a must for fans of modern prog.'

DAVE BAINBRIDGE
(producer/composer Iona, Strawbs, Lifesigns, Celestial Fire)

butler

Music On Vinyl

FAD GADGETS

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

AX-EDGE

Some readers may recall the legendary performance of *Frankenstein* by the Edgar Winter Group on *The Old Grey Whistle Test* in 1973, which featured a white-haired Edgar with a colossal keyboard hanging around his neck. Since then, many companies have tried to create a keytar that didn't attract ridicule, and this is the latest failed attempt. "Step into the spotlight" is the slogan, calling on keyboard players to step out of the shadows with this blade-shaped instrument with an optional leopard skin trim. Speaking as a keyboard player myself, I'd prefer to continue sitting in the shadows to avoid the jeering.

www.roland.com

KYZEN

We've featured a number of Bluetooth speakers in this column over the years, but we've never acknowledged the fact that pairing speakers with devices and switching between those devices is tedious, time-consuming and irritating. This neat idea allows five phones to connect simultaneously to the same speaker, cue music from any app, and leave it to the speaker to play those tracks round robin style. Essentially a Bluetooth jukebox. The makers describe it as a "must-have" accessory, but sadly it didn't make its Kickstarter target. Maybe they should try again.

www.bit.ly/ky-zen

OP-Z

This pocket-sized synth and sequencer is faintly reminiscent of the Casio VL-1, the tinny noise generator that provided the awesome sonic power for Trio's *Da Da Da*. But now we're firmly in the 21st century, and a device that's even smaller and thinner than the VL-1 ("So small we guarantee it will upset you," says the blurb) is capable of so much trickery that it feels like witchcraft. As Kraftwerk once sang, *'By pressing down a special key/It plays a little melody.'* And much else besides.

www.teenageengineering.com

RICK WAKEMAN'S CAPED CRUSADES

WHAT'S IN A BRAND?

In a group and strapped for cash? Rick's got some sponsorship ideas!

The closest I ever got to a sponsorship deal was way back in the 1990s when Kaliber was pretty much the only non-alcoholic beer on the market. They gave me a dozen bottles for every show on the proviso that I put their banner up somewhere, which I duly did. Unfortunately Kaliber wasn't really that well-known, unless you were teetotal, so all it did was confuse most of the audience who thought The English Rock Ensemble had been renamed Kaliber.

Unless you're a huge name, and preferably female, it's tough to get any form of sponsorship these days, so it set me thinking which companies would pair up the best with rock and prog bands. I thought Viagra would be a winner for the Stones, although they probably produce it naturally anyway. Yes certainly deserve sponsorship and I think Solvite wallpaper paste would be perfect to help the band, ahem, *bands* paper over the cracks.

> **"Solvite wallpaper paste would be perfect to help Yes paper over the cracks."**

There are countless acts that hair restoring lotions could sponsor. They could even sponsor bands that wear hairpieces so there are even more promotional opportunities. Let's just make up a totally fictitious band called The Wedge. Now, just think of the possibilities. A hair replacement company could supply them all with wigs and then halfway through a specially organised acoustic concert, they could whip off their toupées. The concert could be advertised as The Wedge Unrugged!

SlimFast or Slimming World could certainly sponsor a lot of "elderly" acts, myself included, but they would expect to see results... so that rules that out. Preparation H could have a field day with the incredible amount of drummers they could sponsor. Specsavers could pick and choose as there's hardly an old rocker in existence who can actually see the edge of the stage these days.

Divorce lawyers should certainly get involved with rock'n'roll sponsorship. They've had so much money from artists over the years that the music industry must have pretty much paid their wages and given them all the nice mansions that musicians have lost in their divorces!

In retrospect, I'm beginning to understand why there's so little sponsorship in prog. However, if anyone from Beck's Blue happens to read this, my UK tour still has another month to go!

KEVIN FEBRUARY

FREQUENCY DRIFT

Cinematic soundscapes meet captivating prog, with added harp.

THE PROG WORLD is full of artists and musicians striving to create movies for the mind, but few have mastered this distinctly niche art form quite like Frequency Drift. Led by Bayreuth-based multi-instrumentalist Andreas Hack and *Prog*-approved harpist Nerissa Schwarz, this amorphous ensemble have been quietly making wildly imaginative records for the last 10 years. When Hack formed the band back in 2007, he was primarily inspired by film soundtracks and the freewheeling spirit of prog.

"To me, *Close To The Edge* is still is one of the greatest pieces ever written in rock because it showed me that there are no boundaries," he says. "That was exactly what I needed for the way I wanted to write music for Frequency Drift. I think there are clear parallels between this kind of music and films or literature. We've taken inspiration from authors like Iain Banks, Haruki Murakami and Judith Hermann too, as we wanted to create music that essentially tells stories without using clichés."

According to Hack, Frequency Drift found their true direction on third album *Ghosts* in 2011. Since then, with Schwarz's genre-blurring harp skills a focal point, their music has become increasingly bold and experimental, peaking on the immersive, guitar-driven splurge of 2016's stunning *Last*. Since that album's release, Frequency Drift have undergone a major line-up reshuffle, with the latest of several former singers, Melanie Mau, replaced by newcomer Irini Alexia. Clearly a perfect fit, Alexia's identity is swiftly and firmly established on latest album *Letters To Maro*.

"We spent a lot of time and many auditions searching for a suitable singer to permanently fill the position," Schwarz recalls. "We found Irini via an online portal for musicians and she blew us away at our very first rehearsal. The way she empathised with our music and brought so much emotion to songs she had only known for a short time was stunning."

The first Frequency Drift singer to fully contribute toward the band's songwriting, Alexia penned the new album's lyrics. While not a straightforward concept album, *Letters...* is an album with plenty of themes.

"In short? It's about Japan, ghosts, city life, loneliness, insanity," states the singer. "I'd say the main theme of *Letters...* is showing up the emotional fallout of metropolitan life. There's isolation despite the permanent connectivity. Dull work in shiny buildings. There can be pain behind the happy profile pictures. So it's about 'keeping it real' and giving airtime to some of the issues a lot of people have. At the same time, we've had a bit of a play around with what is 'real' and what isn't. That's where the ghosts come in!"

Much less rock-related in execution than its predecessor, following the departure of guitarist Martin Schnella, *Letters...* showcases a change of focus, with the versatility of Schwarz's harp now front and centre.

"It was clear from the beginning that we wanted to replace the sound of the distorted guitar with other sounds, without losing its energy," says Hack, "so we used the harp a lot to get a punchy sound that's still different from the average guitar sound. We invested a lot of time, energy and money in the creation of our own sounds. The harp offers a lot of intriguing possibilities that haven't been explored yet."

Rejuvenated by their new recruit, Hack and Schwarz have grand plans for the evolution of Frequency Drift's live show. In an era where many are terrified of change, this band's open-minded ethos looks certain to be their greatest strength.

"Our frequent change of singers may seem to be part of some strange Dr Who-like concept, but I can tell you it wasn't!" Schwarz laughs. "I think the current line-up is the best and most fitting we've ever had and we hope to play more live shows next year. We've started using video projections and theatrical elements, so for the first time in our history we can bring the visual and storytelling side of our music to the stage." **DL**

"The main theme of *Letters To Maro* is showing up the emotional fallout of metropolitan life."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Irini Alexia *(vocals)*, **Andreas Hack** *(keyboard, guitar)*, **Nerissa Schwarz** *(harp, keyboard)*, **Wolfgang Ostermann** *(drums)*, **Michael Bauer** *(guitar)*, **Marco Geipel** *(bass)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Vivid cinematic rock boasting lush melodies, esoteric arrangements and lashings of atmosphere

CURRENT RELEASE

Letters To Maro is out now via Gentle Art Of Music

WEBSITE

www.frequencydrift.com

Frequency Drift, with new singer Irini Alexia (centre).

YOUR PROG CHEF: MATT COHEN, GHOST COMMUNITY

Ghost Chilli Chicken Curry

"Before and after every tour, it's always been a tradition to have a curry. It just suits the mood. Over the years and after much experimentation, I came up with this recipe. I really started to develop a love for cooking, listening to tunes, drinking good beer and having a kitchen full of people to chat, laugh, taste and laugh some more. The kitchen is the heart of the home and when it's filled with the people you love, the music you idolise and the food you adore, there's no better setting. It's the perfect recipe in every respect."

Ingredients (serves 2)

2 chicken fillets, chilli infused olive oil, 4 garlic cloves (finely chopped), 1 red onion (finely chopped), small piece of ginger (finely grated with skin removed), 3 Scotch bonnet chillies (finely chopped), lightly salted butter, 1 tbsp curry powder, 1 tsp cumin, 1 tsp turmeric, 1 tsp coriander, 1 tsp paprika, 1 tsp fennel, 1 can chopped tomatoes, 5 green finger chillies, salt and pepper, 1 tbsp crème fraîche.

Preparation

"Heat a sturdy non-stick pan to a high temperature and reduce the heat when you see the pan gently smoke. Add 1 tbsp olive oil and raise the heat a little. Gently cook the onions until brown then add the garlic and ginger. Stir for 1 minute. When everything is lightly browned, add the Scotch bonnet chillies and stir.

"After 2 minutes, move the cooked ingredients to a plate and raise the heat on the pan. Gently melt a knob of butter then add the raw chicken. Brown the meat for 4 minutes over a low to medium heat then gently sprinkle the mixed spices over the chicken. Stir again and cook for 2 minutes.

"Add a splash of olive oil to the pan, add the cooked onions, chillies, garlic and ginger, and stir for 1 minute. Turn the heat down as low as possible and add the chopped tomatoes. Stir into the meat until the tomatoes disintegrate then add the crème fraiche and the green finger chillies. Continue to stir and bring the mixture to a boil, before reducing the heat to a simmer for 20 minutes, stirring every 3-5 minutes.

"Your curry is now ready to serve with naan bread, rice or both.

"Like many of my chums, I believe that hot is good but the emphasis has to be on taste. If you're less enthusiastic about heat, replace the chillies with milder versions or omit the green finger chillies entirely." **NRS**

MY PROG HERO

Inspiring the wider music world...

Yes, seen rehearsing in 1971, inject some *drama* into Moby's [inset] record collection.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

MOBY

The electronic innovator is transported still by the sights, sounds and atmospheres of the sonic worlds of **Yes**.

"I grew up in Connecticut and my mom was a hippie and we listened to a lot of college radio and AOR together. I first heard Yes when *Roundabout* was their big single. In 1978, aged 13, I went to my first ever concert: Yes in Madison Square Garden. It was a school night and everything about it was so exciting, it made an indelible impression.

I was thrilled to see Rick Wakeman but I was most impressed with Steve Howe, a player so unique but always in service to the song. From the age of 10, I played guitar and my teacher only liked complicated music. We had a schism because I liked a lot of punk rock and he hated that but we both agreed on Steve Howe, and I learned to play *Roundabout* note-perfect. Later, I got really lucky; one of my friends, his father worked at CBS and had access to the Yes catalogue for free, which he gave to me.

What I like about Yes is their approach to atmosphere and melody. Neil Young records are great, but a document of a band in a room. Yes use the studio as an instrument to craft something bigger, to create a transcendent atmosphere. Aged 13, I could be in a suburban bedroom but transported somewhere else — and [Roger Dean's] artwork certainly helped.

In the 80s and 90s they dropped off the cultural radar. Then Vincent Gallo used *Heart Of The Sunrise* in his [1998] film *Buffalo '66*. I knew him, and talked to him about Yes; it made it okay for us closet fans to admit how much we loved them. At their best Yes created entire landscapes and worlds like no other. They've inspired me in that a lot of the music I've made has had the goal of achieving something similar.

Close To The Edge is my favourite album. I go back to it at least once a month, it has such flawless songs and recordings. Even if *And You And I* and *Close To The Edge* were the only tracks on the album it would still be in my top 10." **JK**

"My first gig was so exciting, it made an indelible impression."

Everything Was Beautiful, And Nothing Hurt is out now via Little Idiot. For the latest, visit Moby's official website: www.moby.com.

PROG IN BRIEF

Big Big Train's (right) *Merchants Of Light* gets the limited edition treatment this winter. The Cadogan Hall live album is released as a deluxe triple vinyl set with a 28-page booklet and insert with the band's history. You can pre-order from Burning Shed.

Four of **PFM**'s early releases will be reissued in a box set via Esoteric on November 30. *The Manticore Studio Albums 1973-1977* includes a poster plus repackaged versions of *Photos Of Ghosts, The World Became The World, Chocolate Kings* and *Jet Lag*.

HEKLA

Ghostly sounds from buzzy Berlin via the fjords of Iceland.

"I USED TO describe my music as minimal sci-fi but I think it's become bigger than that," muses the softly spoken Hekla Magnúsdóttir. "It can be really dark and heavy but also really bright and light."

The experimental Icelandic musician and vocalist is all about opposites. She swapped her cello for a theremin 10 years ago and more recently has exchanged the darkness of her native country for Berlin's vibrant underground music scene, where she frequently pops up on the live circuit.

"There's a limit of venues and people in Iceland, so it's a lot easier doing things here [in Berlin]," says Magnúsdóttir. "You're more connected to the outside world and I've been playing a lot more here. I really like to improvise live so my music has definitely evolved a lot since I moved."

Magnúsdóttir's evolution via the notoriously challenging electronic instrument began when she joined a local Icelandic surf band a few years ago. By her own admission, it wasn't a serious outlet, but she used the downtime to experiment and craft the unusual sound that's showcased on her haunting album *Á*.

"It's pronounced 'ow' and it's a letter that means many different things," she says of the title. "It can be a river, lake or a sheep, and you can use it if you put something on top of something else. I thought [the ambiguity] was very fitting."

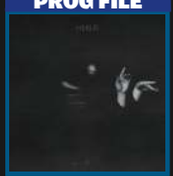
The 10-track album was written and recorded around her son's daycare — he's now two years old — and, like the volcano Hekla is named after, it's beautiful yet powerful and occasionally unsettling. Despite her classical training, Magnúsdóttir favours graphical notations over more traditional methods of scoring, preferring to illustrate the shapes she throws to create her unearthly sounds. Her son has even been known to join in too!

"He'll wave his arms around and have a lot of fun!" she says with a laugh. "But [the theremin] is a very different experience to the cello: there are no particular rules on how to play and there's a total freedom in how you approach it. I play through lots of effects pedals to try to take it to new places and I like to discover new sounds. You can do so many totally different things on it, and I just wanted to get these new sounds out that I found interesting."

Given the evocative nature of her music, it's not too surprising that film soundtracks are a big inspiration to Magnúsdóttir. When not listening to American theremin player Pamelia Stickney ("Her album *Thinking Out Loud* is one of the freakiest things I've heard," Magnúsdóttir admits), she's zoning in on spooky scores for *It Follows* and the 1992 remake of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. She also namechecks Tangerine Dream, John Carpenter and Goblin among her influences, and like her musical heroes, her sounds have also started to appear in movies. Earlier this year, she was honoured when director Bertrand Mandico used the song *Arms* in his dark fantasy *The Wild Boys*, and she says there are more indie collaborations on the horizon. We can't wait to see what she does next... **NRS**

"The theremin is a very different experience to the cello: there are no particular rules on how to play."

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Hekla Magnúsdóttir *(theremin/vocals)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Haunting, post-industrial soundscapes with ethereal vocals. Imagine Goblin reinterpreted by the Cocteau Twins

CURRENT RELEASE

Á is out now via Phantom Limb

WEBSITE

www.heklaheklahekla.com

Shadows And Light: Hekla's "unearthly" sounds are enchanting.

SIGGA ELLA

THE POP GROUP

Y

[RADAR RECORDS, 1979]

Any band calling themselves The Pop Group are either stating the bleedin' obvious or have a perverse sense of irony. In the instance of the Bristol five-piece it was a case of the latter.

They started in 1977, when the world was safety pinned to the supposed anarchy of punk. But what vocalist Mark Stewart et al were doing was truly anarchic because they refused to bend to any conformity.

Imagine what it might be like if Captain Beefheart became entangled in a John Zorn maze, and then add a quantity of acid to the resultant twisted percolation. Now you might have some clue as to where The Pop Group were going.

Y was released in 1979, and sounded like nothing else. There were those who dismissed it as a mess, but when you listen to what they were doing, it's actually astonishing and very forward-thinking. The band switched from a funk groove straight into a dissonant dub concourse, which flowed into a free form jazz consonant, and then through a psychedelic guitar motif from either John Waddington or Gareth Sager. It was outrageously challenging.

There's the feel of a jam session in progress. You get the impression that The Pop Group would never play a composition the same way twice, and that the album was actually a work in progress, rather than fully completed. But surely that should be the definition of art rock? No truly progressive band can ever believe an album is the ultimate representation of their music, but rather another step on a never-ending journey.

The record starts deceptively, as the funk motivated *Thief Of Fire* coerces you into believing this will be a rather straightforward process. It quickly mutates into something altogether more angular. Stewart's vocals are atonal and distorted, but in a way that's remarkably charismatic. And the music rolls on, with *Blood Money* and *Savage Sea* holding the attention, as the band weave a tapestry of ideas that shouldn't work, but are just breathtaking.

Don't Call Me Pain has a jazz rock underbelly on top of which a sonic insanity is built, and this continues through *The Boys From Brazil*, where the band mine Stockhausen and Suicide. *Don't Sell Your Dreams* ends it all bathed in echoing chords which waft achingly in the air. In some ways, the album concludes by leaving the listener glistening with a sweat brought on by a confusion as to whether this is a work of brilliance, or the product of warped minds. But that is what makes this so enticing.

Y is not a simple or easy album: at times it's almost as if The Pop Group want you to run away screaming. But regardless of its challenges, it's a towering avant-garde work that's stood the test of time.

MALCOLM DOME

ALL AROUND THE WORLD

Our far-out trip to far-flung prog

The more, the merrier! the expanding (and contracting) collective Teksti-TV 666.

TEKSTI-TV 666

These eclectic Finns have a passion for quirkiness and expanding line-ups, says guitarist **Johannes Leppänen**.

Forget everything you thought you knew about modern Finnish prog being dark and mysterious, because Teksti-TV 666 are an aural assault of krautrock, jazz, psych, shoegaze and American garage punk. The vibe on their first full-length studio album *Aidattu Tulevaisuus* is less doom and gloom and more feel-good anthems. Think Neu! covering The Ramones.

"It sounds pretty ridiculous but it works itself out," says guitarist and vocalist Johannes Leppänen. "We all like krautrock – stuff like Neu!, Can and Faust – and garage punk bands, so in general that's where the sound comes from. We have a bunch of other stuff going on as well but the idea was to bring together the repetitiveness of kraut with the sound of garage punk and see what happened. It's just so much fun."

The collective, whose name translates as Teletext 666, began as a trio before expanding and contracting to the current six-piece, with four guitarists, a bassist and drummer.

"The line-up changes because we always bring friends along when we play live. I think there were 12 people at the last show we played!" admits Leppänen, who joined shortly after seeing one of the band's early gigs. "I was a fan at first and I guess that's what happened to everybody who saw the band; they'd see us live and go, 'It's pretty fun' and they'd end up joining!"

With scores of energetic live shows and three EPs – named *1*, *2* and *3* – behind them, the Helsinki-based outfit are now concentrating on getting *Aidattu Tulevaisuus* out there. Just five tracks long, their debut studio album ricochets from the full-on opener *Turbo Mondeo*, with whispers of Joy Division, through to the repetitive 10-minute closer *Katko*; a track where slow-motion rhythms playfully grapple with a punchy beat.

"Lyrically, it's not too serious and there's definitely a satirical element," he reveals. "The title translates as fenced future. It comes from an article about how really rich people can buy super secure properties. It plays on the idea that when the shit goes down, they will be safe because they're rich enough to buy safety."

The madcap collective hope to release a single early next year. **NRS**

"The line-up changes because we always bring friends along."

For more, visit www.facebook.com/tekstitv666.

PROG IN BRIEF

Kings X have confirmed that they will release a new studio album in 2019. The US band are currently working on the long-awaited follow-up to 2008 album *XV*. An official biography is also due out in February.

Twelfth Night (left) are releasing a new version of *Sequences* to commemorate World War One's centenary. The track, which was first performed nearly 40 years ago, will be out Nov 11 with a percentage of sales donated to the Poppy Appeal. See www.twelfthnight.info.

THE PIPE BROTHERS PROJECT

Family duo move from blues to prog with new venture.

IF, IN MANY people's minds, Yorkshire has never been at the very forefront of prog, it still has a mighty heritage. Keith Emerson was born there, Rolo Tomassi emerged out of Sheffield in the noughties, and that's before you even mention Mostly Autumn, The Tangent and Guy Manning. With a mix of northern grit and prog virtuosity, Guisborough-based outfit The Pipe Brothers are joining those ranks.

When *Prog* catches up with younger brother and guitarist Andrew, what immediately becomes evident is how his youth — he's a mere 22 — belies the depth of his prog knowledge. "It's the usual story," he says in a rich North Yorks brogue. "Our dad is a huge prog rock fan and we raided his record collection. Jamie and I have always been huge prog rock fans."

The brothers initially formed a psych blues band, The Mentulls, in their teens, but with The Pipe Brothers they're really unleashing the prog beast.

"We've always rated a lot of instrumental music," Andrew explains, "and The Pipe Brothers happened because we wanted a project that's solely instrumental, where we just prog out."

So far the Project have released a number of singles, featuring Paul Burgess on drums and Steve Amadeo on bass. Andrew says of Burgess' drumming: "It's really inspiring, not least because I'm a big 10cc fan."

After their first single reached the Top 10 Amazon bestsellers chart, and the latest, *Sonic Journey*, topped the new releases chart, the Pipes have worked on the follow-up, which is due to drop imminently.

Musically, The Pipe Brothers aim, as Andrew puts it, "to take inspiration from the prog of the 70s while bringing in the sophistication of Neal Morse and Toto".

A key factor to the richness of their sound is Andrew's exceptional guitar virtuosity. "My biggest inspiration," Andrew says, "is Martin Barre. He inspired me to play the guitar."

There's a delight in his voice when he speaks of his respect for, and now friendship with, the legendary guitarist. "I met him at the side door of Tull gigs when I was a kid. I got his autograph," he laughs.

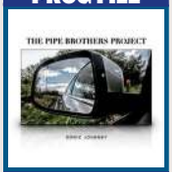
The two met again at numerous gigs and, after seeing Andrew perform, Barre asked him to join him and his band onstage the next time they were in York. "He's so full of energy. He's like a new guy since he left Tull. He's such a welcoming guy."

At the gig, at the Town Hall in Ripley, Andrew played *Locomotive Breath* with his hero. With a touch of awe, he says, "The amount of time I played that song in my bedroom as a kid, and then you're playing it onstage with the guy who wrote the riff."

The Pipes plan to run both The Mentulls and the Project side by side, but it will be interesting to see where the momentum builds in the long run.

"When we're writing music, we're careful not to be too pigeonholed — prog is a mix of folk, classical and blues," Andrew says. "What's really important to us as writers is to keep taking that music we love into the present-day. You have to respect the past, but put it in a modern context." **RM**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Andrew Pipe *(guitar, production),* **Jamie Pipe** *(keyboard, Hammond organ)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Andy Latimer cutting heads with Rod Argent over Toto's rhythm section

CURRENT RELEASE

Sonic Journey is out now via ProgBlues Music

WEBSITE

www.thepipebrothers project.com

"Our dad is a huge prog rock fan and we raided his record collection."

The Pipe Brothers, L-R: Andrew and Jamie Pipe.

ADAM KENNEDY

SIX DEGREES OF INNER TURBULENCE

A *Prog* writer argues that narrow minds could be damaging our broad scene.

There are certain people – and you've almost certainly encountered them – who believe that prog has no place on the world stage. Instead, they think the genre they profess to love must remain a backwater curio for the entertainment of a select few... mainly them.

There's the irritated fan wearing a band's early-era shirt, aghast that so many new faces are enjoying the show. The dismissive behaviour of a band who refuse to be interviewed by a magazine because acts people have *heard of* are in it. And the clenched fist of the weekend warrior who's not bloody listening to *them* again because they got on the radio. *They've* sold out!

Prog is sometimes seen as an elitist scene from the outside but that's a great reason why no one should see it like that from the inside. The word "elitist" doesn't apply to subgrenes and sub-movements – that is groups of bands who naturally sit together. There are some great fan-led small businesses that are dedicated to serving the prog underground – for example, Summer's End and The Merch Desk who have no desire to be Glastonbury or Amazon respectively. They're not elitist and neither is the fear of losing creative control if you (or the band you love) achieve mainstream success, and are pressured into becoming more about money and less about music. We all know it happens.

But why would any performing artist *want* to limit the size of the audience that experience their art? And why would a fan of someone's art not want others to enjoy that same connection?

There are two types of people to blame, and they're both suffering from preconceptions. The first is the person who comes in thinking they "know what prog is for", and have no intention of growing through their experiences. They also don't like the fact that others don't share their conviction. The second is the person who likes to think of prog as "theirs" because of how they discovered it or what it means to them personally. They have an introspective attitude to art, and in trying to enforce this straight-line, they send themselves round in circles.

Both pay the fundamental concept of progressive art a disservice. Achieving mainstream success is a way for people who've never been exposed to prog to find their way to it. Prog isn't a place to fear change – the clue is in its name – and if you think otherwise, you're wrong.

There's nothing wrong with finding your own niche and making it yours, but most of us would prefer prog to spread far and wide. And we'll do what we can to make that happen.

MARTIN KIELTY

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

HAVE A CIGAR

Saluting the scene's supporting crew

Leap Of Faith: band booker Gert van Engelenburg.

CHRIS MCANDREW

NORTHERN PROG FEST

Meet **Gert van Engelenburg**, part of a team bringing international progressive sounds to a small Dutch village.

Continuing the legacy of a much-loved event is a tough challenge, but it's one the organisers of the Northern Prog Festival found themselves facing five years ago. The intimate event, held at De Uthôf in the village of Siegerswoude, builds on the memories of Flamborough Head's ProgFarm Festival which ran between 1997 and 2011 in nearby Bakkeveen. And just like its predecessor, it's organised by a local band.

"ProgFarm was dearly missed by fans because it was the only prog event in the northern part of our country, so it seemed like a good idea to give them another opportunity to enjoy progressive rock," reveals Leap Day keyboard player and NPF band booker Gert van Engelenburg. "The format is pretty much the same, the only difference is the venue and the people involved."

Van Engelenburg grew up on a healthy diet of Genesis, Yes and King Crimson, and has brought his passion for live music to the festival. It's down to him and drummer Koen Roozen to decide who'll fill their compact four-band bill.

"Every year we face the same challenge: will we succeed in organising a financially healthy festival? Because the event is very small, we have a limited amount of money to spend. Of course, we want to have a great headliner and the search for an affordable one can be a real challenge, but I think we've managed to do this," he says. "Sometimes it's stressful, but it's also very rewarding. Every year, we make new friends and we get to enjoy the music that we all love so much. We're not trying to grow bigger and we try to keep the admission fee as low as possible. We just want to keep this festival going."

Despite its size, the team make sure there's an international flavour to the festival line-up with previous headliners including Galahad, Italy's Il Castello Di Atlante and Poland's Osada Vida. This November, it's Brits IO Earth's turn to take centre stage, but ask van Engelenburg what his dream line-up would be and there's no hesitation.

"Sometimes it's stressful, but it's also very rewarding."

"The perfect mix of styles for me would be The Flower Kings, Haken, Ozric Tentacles, Echolyn, and Leap Day, of course. Will it ever happen? Not a chance!" **NRS**

For more, visit the Facebook page: http://bit.ly/2OIrYyi.

PROG IN BRIEF

Tim Blake's (right) career is celebrated on a compilation out via Esoteric on Nov 30. *Lighthouse: An Anthology 1973-2012* collates solo material, unreleased tracks and work with Hawkwind and Gong on a remastered four-disc CD/DVD collection.

A fundraiser for North Devon Hospice has been set up in memory of **Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band**'s Sam Spoons who died in September. The hospice cared for the musician in his final days. Contribute at www.bit.ly/SamSpoons.

Anna von Hausswolff producer **Randall Dunn** releases his first solo album on Nov 9. *Beloved* is out via Figureight and explores the possibilities that early digital and analogue synthesisers offer. Read our review on page 102.

Atlas Empire release *The Stratosphere Beneath Our Feet* on Dec 7 via Bandcamp. The Glasgow band's debut blends prog, post-rock and shoegaze, and explores humanity's reliance on technology, and what happens when it fails.

25 YEARS INSIDE OUT

RIKARD SJÖBLOM'S GUNGFLY
FRIENDSHIP

In Stores 9th November 2018

The new album from the former Beardfish frontman, and current member of Big Big Train.

Expect incredible vocal range, intensely personal lyrics, Sjöblom's signature sense of complex-yet-catchy keyboard melodies, and a guitar work that spans the spectrum of folksy to downright face melting.

Available as CD Digipak (with 3 bonus tracks), Gatefold 2LP + CD, & as digital download.

THE TANGENT
PROXY

In Stores 16th November 2018

The tenth studio album from progressive rockers The Tangent, masterminded by Andy Tillison.

A riot of juxtaposing styles, presented in a direct manner, and despite being firmly rooted in the stylistic traits of the Progressive Rock Genre takes some unexpected turnoffs.

Features Tillison joined by Jonas Reingold (Steve Hackett Band), Theo Travis (Soft Machine), Luke Machine (Maschine), Steve Roberts (ex Magenta) & Goran Edman (Karmakanic).

Available as limited CD digipak, 180g vinyl + CD, & as digital download.

ANNEKE VAN GIERSBERGEN
WITH RESIDENTIE ORKEST THE HAGUE
SYMPHONIZED

In Stores 16th November 2018

In May 2018, **Anneke van Giersbergen** performed two career-spanning concerts with orchestral arrangements together with Residentie Orkest The Hague.

Featuring stunning versions of songs by VUUR, The Gentle Storm and The Gathering, as well as solo material.

Available as CD Digipak, Gatefold 2LP + CD & as digital audio download

Official Progressive Albums Chart

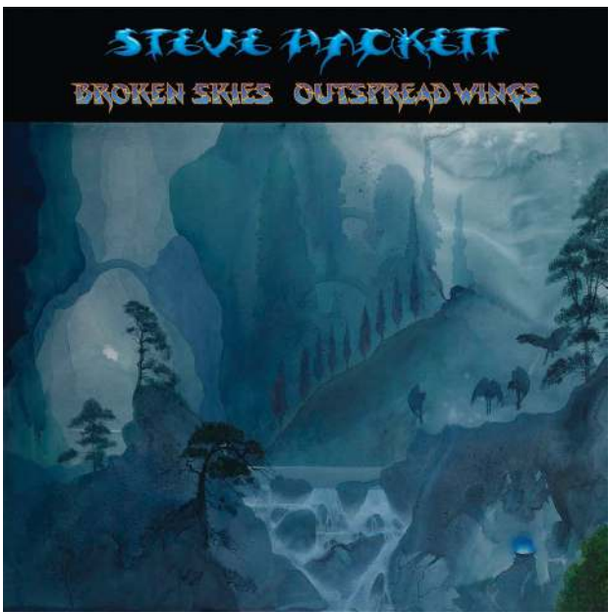
The prog top 30 albums

September 2018 Compiled by Official Charts Company

1	**SPIRITUALIZED**	And Nothing Hurt *BELLA UNION*
2	**JEAN MICHEL JARRE**	Planet Jarre *SONY MUSIC CG*
3	**HAWKWIND**	Road To Utopia *CHERRY RED*
4	**URIAH HEEP**	Living The Dream *FRONTIERS*
5	**TAME IMPALA**	Currents *FICTION*
6	**RIVERSIDE**	Wasteland *INSIDE OUT*
7	**MOGWAI**	Kin (OST) *ROCK ACTION*
8	**PINEAPPLE THIEF**	Dissolution *KSCOPE*
9	**VOIVOD**	The Wake/Post Society *CENTURY MEDIA*
10	**A PERFECT CIRCLE**	Eat The Elephant *BMG*
11	**ROXY MUSIC**	Roxy Music *VIRGIN*
12	**CRIPPLED BLACK PHOENIX**	Great Escape *SEASON OF MIST*
13	**CURVED AIR**	Second Album *CHERRY RED/ESOTERIC*
14	**MARILLION**	Misplaced Childhood *PARLOPHONE*
15	**JEFF LYNNE'S ELO**	Wembley Or Bust *RCA*
16	**ROGER WATERS**	Is This The Life We Really Want? *COLUMBIA*
17	**WOODEN SHJIPS**	V *THRILL JOCKEY*
18	**WIRE**	Pink Flag *PINK FLAG*
19	**KING GIZZARD & LIZARD WIZARD**	Gumboot Soup *HEAVENLY*
20	**RUSH**	A Farewell To Kings *UMC/VIRGIN*
21	**MOODY BLUES**	Days Of Future Passed – Live *EAGLE*
22	**ORB**	No Sounds Are Out Of Bounds *COOKING VINYL*
23	**JETHRO TULL**	Heavy Horses *RHINO*
24	**MARILLION**	All One Tonight – Live At The Royal *EAR MUSIC*
25	**FISH**	A Parley With Angels *7HZ PRODUCTIONS*
26	**MASTODON**	Emperor Of Sand *REPRISE*
27	**BLUE OCTOBER**	I Hope You're Happy *BRANDO*
28	**ELO**	Secret Messages *EPIC*
29	**BIG BIG TRAIN**	Merchants Of Light *ENGLISH ELECTRIC*
30	**MOODY BLUES**	Days Of Future Passed *DECCA*

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

WIN! STEVE HACKETT BROKEN SKIES BOX SET!



Steve Hackett released the collection *Broken Skies - Outspread Wings* (1984-2006) on 5 October via InsideOut, that includes six remastered albums, bonus tracks, live videos and more, and we have one set to give away.

The art book will include remastered versions of *Till We Have Faces, Guitar Noir, Darktown, Feedback 86, To Watch The Storms* and *Wild Orchids*, and bonus material.

The package will also include two DVDs featuring 5.1 mixes, live rarities, and the *Somewhere In South America* live set which was captured in Buenos Aires.

The cover features brand new artwork from Roger Dean and the collection will come with a 60-page book, complete with liner notes, rare photos, lyrics and more.

Hackett says: "I'm excited to announce the release of a special bumper retrospective box set. This will include six re-mastered albums, several 5.1 surround sound tracks including a new version of the GTR track *When The Heart Rules The Mind*, three previously unreleased live videos and the whole of the DVD *Somewhere In South America*.

"I'm incredibly proud of this collection which highlights a huge variety of styles and musical dreams in development over the course of more than 20 years."

You can order a copy here: www.stevehackett.lnk.to/WutheringNights

For your chance to win, submit your answer to the below question here: www.bit.do/progcomp

Who plays drums on 1984's *Till We Have Faces* album?

1) Gary O'Toole

2) Ian Mosley

3) Chester Thompson

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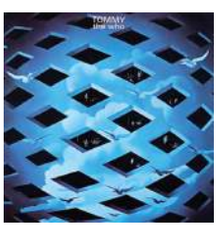
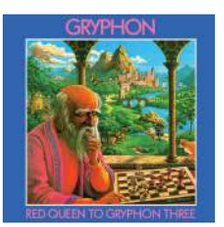
Now our turn...

The Editor	The Art Guy	The Lone Office Lady	Musician	The Writer	The Reader
Jerry Ewing	Russell Fairbrother	Hannah May Kilroy	Claudio Sanchez	Malcolm Dome	Samantha Downes
					
TC&I	**TWINSCAPES**	**BLACK PEAKS**	**THE WHO**	**SIGH**	**GRYPHON**
Great Aspirations EP BURNING SHED	**Vol 2: A Modern Approach To The Dancefloor** RARENOISE	**All That Divides** RISE/BMG	**Tommy** DECCA/MCA	**Heir To Despair** CANDLELIGHT/SPINEFARM	**Red Queen To Gryphon Three** TRANSATLANTIC

Valis Ablaze: building their own niche.

VALIS ABLAZE

Innovative five-piece breathe new life into the djent genre.

JUST WHEN YOU thought that the whole djent phenomenon was running out of steam, along comes a handful of new bands breathing virulent life into the genre. Chief among tech metal's new breed are Bristol/Manchester/Belfast quintet Valis Ablaze, whose powerfully melodic and uplifting take on the djent blueprint sets them firmly apart from the generic, growling herd. You might even say the band have pop sensibilities, particularly in light of their cover of Rag'n'Bone Man's now ubiquitous *Human*.

"Every two years we do an April Fool's joke," explains guitarist Ash Cook. "Last year we created a tour poster which was advertising an acoustic Meshuggah show with Karnivool, Vola, Skyharbor and us opening, at the SSE [Wembley] Arena on 19 February 2018. If you clicked on the ticket link, it took you to our cover of *Human*. I wasn't necessarily a big fan of the song, but the message behind it was something we could get behind. We turned our version around in about five days and it did okay, we got some radio play. But we didn't push it massively because he's on a rather large label and probably has lawyers!"

One-off endeavours aside, Valis Ablaze are a focused unit with a sound that manages to be subtly distinctive *and* endearingly familiar. First full-length album *Boundless* builds on the gleaming future metal of 2017's debut EP *Insularity*, weaving shimmering tech metal textures around an overtly prog-friendly conceptual core, as vocalist Phil Owen's emotive tenor explores the intricacies of the unconscious mind.

"Effectively, *Boundless* is a concept album about the sleep cycle and what happens to your mind while you're asleep," says Cook. "That journey was the basis for how the songs flow and morph into each other. There are recurring melodies and vocal lines. Certain songs share quite a few vocal passages, both melodies and lyrics. It all reflects the concept. But we did consider that it's a bit dangerous writing a concept album about sleep, because people could argue that it's so boring it made them nod off! Fortunately, we haven't faced that one so far."

One accusation that Valis Ablaze have indubitably received on numerous occasions already is that they are merely the next bunch of TesseracT clones clawing at the coattails of a receding scene. In truth, Cook and his comrades have a singular identity, the tropes and trimmings of djent providing them with a sonic bedrock, rather than informing the whole shebang. As a result, they sound more like heirs to their forebears' throne than plucky also-rans.

"I do appreciate that because we do get those comparisons, because of 'Milton Cleans' and djenty guitar tones and the clean vocals," the guitarist shrugs. "I won't pretend I'm not a fan of TesseracT myself, but they're just one of many influences. It's not a box to tick, like, 'We must have their guitar tone!' Whatever you listen to creeps in, but I'm also into synthwave at the moment and I think those textures bring something to the sound too. Ultimately, writing the album was all about challenging ourselves and each other."

With their meticulously conceived debut album receiving frothing plaudits, Valis Ablaze have high hopes for the future. Dedicated to straddling the divide between finessed, melodic artistry and thunderous, jaw-shattering heaviness, their next move is to see exactly how many people they can lure into this ultra-modern musical dreamworld.

"One of our favourite things is when you go to a show and you can bang your head *and* sing along at the same time," Cook grins. "We like to think that half of our set is rocking out, the other half is about smiling and singing, and that's something that's always in the back of our minds. We're not trying to write hits for the radio, but it's always good to see people moving around, isn't it?" **DL**

"Writing the album was all about challenging ourselves and each other."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Phil Owen *(vocals)*, **Ash Cook** *(guitar)*, **Tom Moore** *(guitar)*, **George Demner** *(bass)*, **Dayle Williams** *(drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE

A grandiose, elegant and pointedly melodic upgrade for post-millennial tech metal

CURRENT RELEASE

Boundless is out now via Long Branch

WEBSITE

www.facebook.com/valisablaze

EVERGREENS DO NOT SUFFER FROM ALZHEIMER'S.

Carol is no longer who she used to be.

She no longer recognises Nancy, her sister, or Jim, her husband. Most of the time it's as though she isn't aware of the things going on around her.

But when Nancy carefully puts headphones over Carol's ears and plays her most beloved song, her sister's eyes light up. She gently sways to the beat of the song, she even remembers the dance routine. She may nudge Jim's arm. Or tell him what a fun guy he is. For the duration of that song, she's back again. For 4:35, she's Carol.

th•mann
MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

My Record Collection

ALASTAIR REYNOLDS

Space might be deep, but so's the tune-pile of this award-winning hard sci-fi author. He'll travel to great lengths to find new sounds – well, Cardiff at least.

Words: Jo Kendall **Portrait:** Mike Evans

"I was totally obsessed with space and science fiction from a very young age – *Star Trek*, *Doctor Who*, Gerry Anderson. At six, I was given The London Philharmonic Orchestra's *Stereo Space Odyssey* by my parents; it had the theme to *2001* on it and some spacey compositions using synths that bounced from channel to channel with 'Spacial Stereo'. It was the first record I owned and definitely my first taste of prog.

We lived in Barry, Wales, and the house was full of music as my mother liked gospel and disco. I went to school in Pencoed and by my teens I was friends with a boy called Nigel. His older brother had a great record collection from the previous 10 years so Nigel had a historical knowledge of prog and punk. He would do me tapes and one of the first had *A Trick Of The Tail* on it. I liked **Genesis** from the radio hits but I didn't know anything about them. It's an accessible album and I always wanted to own the vinyl version as I'd sit round Nigel's drinking tea and looking at the sleeve notes. It's got the musical adventurousness of the Gabriel era – complicated structures, obscure references – but because Phil Collins had moved to the front there's a beginning of a commercial pop sensibility. The song I come back to is *Entangled*. The atmosphere it conjures is of winter evenings and a Victorian storybook feel.

Nigel did me a **King Crimson** compilation and almost at the same time my mother gave me *In The Court Of The Crimson King* and *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* for my 17th birthday. I went from never hearing Crimson to being fairly familiar with them in about a week. It took me a while to get my head around them. Some of *In The Court...* had Greg Lake and it had Mellotron on it, so it's a little like ELP and Genesis. Then you put *Larks' Tongues...* on and I remember the guitars crashing in, woah! *Exiles* is one of my favourites. That classic 70s KC stuff, there's a point where each album is one of my favourites.

Dave Brock looked like a wizard that had crawled out of a cave.

Another tape compilation started with *Yours Is No Disgrace*. I really liked it and when I had some pocket money I started buying **Yes** albums. I bought *Relayer* in 1983. It's stayed with me because it's slightly off the wall. I like that on *The Gates Of Delirium* you can really hear that Jon Anderson is from Accrington, Lancashire.

Hawklords' *25 Years On* was the first record I bought with a wage packet. One summer I did two weeks' work experience at a company that designed air conditioning systems. At the end of it they gave me an envelope with some pocket money in it, which was nice. There weren't many record shops of substance locally so if you wanted to buy an album you'd go to Cardiff for HMV or Virgin, which was quite an involved journey. This time I went to Smiths in Bridgend and saw that this came between *Quark, Strangeness and Charm* and *PXR5* so I thought I'd have that. I took it home and was blown away by it. It was heavy and concise – it got in, did what it needed to do then buggered off. **Hawkwind** were very different looking from the polite Genesis boys. Dave Brock looked with a wizard that had crawled out of a cave. I saw them a couple of times in the 80s with Nik Turner in Cardiff, they had a great punk energy and anti-establishment edge.

My interest in **Talking Heads** came via a lad in the sixth form who said, 'You like King Crimson don't you? You should listen to this.' He made me a tape of *Speaking In Tongues* and I played that incessantly that summer, I loved it. *Little Creatures* came out then too and I remember the quirkiness of it, the repetition of locking onto a beat and holding it. They were a cool band, making intelligent art rock, who wouldn't want to get into that?

I always liked **Kate Bush**. I remember, on my 12th birthday in 1978, being driven to see *Star Wars* in Swansea and Kate was on the radio with *Wuthering Heights*. I was completely infatuated with her from that point on. I've picked *The Dreaming* as if you already listened to Genesis or Peter Gabriel solo this is a very easy album to relate to, it fits effortlessly into that sort of scene. I bought it when I was at Newcastle Uni, studying Astronomy. It's still such a weird album compared to her earlier stuff.

I didn't know much about the **B-52s**, but I heard them in the mid 80s on the radio. They played *Songs For A Future Generation* by B-52s and I thought, 'Ooh, I like that,' and I bought this album when it came out. They're a weird juxtaposition of 50s stuff but they're forward-looking, inclusive and they used lots of interesting instrumentation, very synthy. What struck me is that they're upbeat and melancholic at the same time. I like that. They also have that sense of you catching them on that rising curve when the technical ability might not be there but they are compensating with ideas and ambition.

I used to be on social media, with the Twitter handle Aquila Rift. I talked about music and would exchange tweets with people in bands, it was really exciting. This band **Sound Of Ceres** put out an album called *Nostalgia For Infinity* which was named after a spaceship in one of my books. They very kindly sent me a copy, which I loved – they're a husband and wife from Colorado who do trippy dream pop, think of the Cocteau Twins being locked in a room full of Mellotrons for 1000 years with Jon Anderson lyrics. For the second album *The Twin* they asked if we could collaborate, and I would write a piece of fiction for the sleeve? It was too much fun to say no to. I thought, 'I'm doing something like Peter Gabriel!' The album was really good. If anyone enjoys analogue synths and the [record label] 4AD sound, they will get into it.

I was on a plane going to and from US and there was a great inflight entertainment system that could keep you occupied for ages. This is where I heard **War On Drugs**' *Lost In The Dream*. When I got off the plane I headed to a record shop to buy it. It's a phenomenal work of 10-minute long songs and widescreen psychedelic rock. It reminds me of listening to *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway*; a harrowing musical journey that sucks you in and you have to listen all the way through to the end where there's redemption. I'd never taken any notice of them before, but now they had found their voice and I had a catalogue to consume.

That's what I love about music. When I'm feeling a bit flat, at a creative low-ebb, it's probably because I haven't discovered any new music recently. That's when I have to go into town and look for something interesting. My whole mood just lifts once I've got some new music to discover, and if it's an act with two or more records, even better."

New novella Permafrost will be out March 2019. Find out more at www.alastairreynolds.com and www.approachingpavonis.blogspot.com.

CELESTRON
LOCUS
LA TERRE BLEUE DE NOS SOUVENIRS
ALASTAIR REYNOLDS
Relayer
THE TWIN
GENESIS
A Trick of the Tail

Q&A

DAVE OBERLÉ

Gryphon's singer/percussionist discusses the band's return to the progressive world…

Words: Malcolm Dome

Even in the eclectic, diverse era of the 1970s, Gryphon were unusual. Their medieval musical fascinations gave albums such as *Midnight Mushrumps* and *Red Queen To Gryphon Three* a unique artistic outlook. The band also made history by being the first to appear on BBC Radios 1, 2, 3 and 4 in the same week.

However, Gryphon split up in 1977, after releasing five albums. In 2009, original members Richard Harvey, Graeme Taylor, Dave Oberlé and Brian Gulland reunited. Subsequently, they performed spasmodic concerts to great acclaim. But in 2016, Harvey (an award-winning composer of music for films and TV) left the band. Undeterred, Gryphon brought in Graham Preskett, Andy Findon and Rory McFarlane (since replaced by Rob Levy) and have just released *Reinvention*, their first album in 41 years. As drummer Dave Oberlé explains, it's a new start for an old beast.

How tough was it to record a new album after so long?
It was definitely hard, which is why it took ages to get going. We'd been discussing doing an album for a while, but only started to take it seriously about 18 months ago. That's when the composers in the band began to write and collate ideas. Once we had that type of momentum, everything clicked into gear and the green light was pressed. Things went from there.

Did you try to maintain the style of your 70s albums?
We were very aware of the importance of remaining true to our roots. Gryphon were always pretty unique, and we never wanted to lose that spirit. However there was also an intention to make us relevant to what's happening in the modern era. Striking the balance between our 1970s sound and the need to be contemporary was vital.

"Striking the balance between our 70s sound and the need to be contemporary was vital."

You called the album *Reinvention*. Is that the way you view Gryphon in 2018?
It certainly is. After 41 years away, we didn't want to come back and sound like we belonged in the past. There was a need to reinvent Gryphon. It's different for our peers who kept going, because they had continuity. But we were coming back from the grave after a long absence. That's why the new album was crucial for us to establish ourselves. What I think we've done is make ourselves a lot proggier, but never forgot what had worked in the 1970s.

Do you regard the new members of the band as equal partners, or hired hands?
There's no hierarchy, and the new guys are very much a part of what we are doing. Everyone has an equal say in decisions. And most of the time we all agree on where things should be heading. Sometimes there are disagreements, but in that case we go with the majority. This is a democracy. And I have to say that I regard what we have now as the best line-up the band have ever had. I think that sense of everybody belonging is reflected in what you hear on the album.

What prompted you to reform in 2009 after such a lengthy absence?
Well, the prompting came from Jonathan Davie, who had been our bassist when we split up in 1997. So we all got together for three or four weeks' rehearsal just to do one gig, to see whether there was any interest in the band. But we did very little after that for several years. You see, we all had other stuff going on in our lives. In 2015, things finally became more crystallised and we've become a real band again.

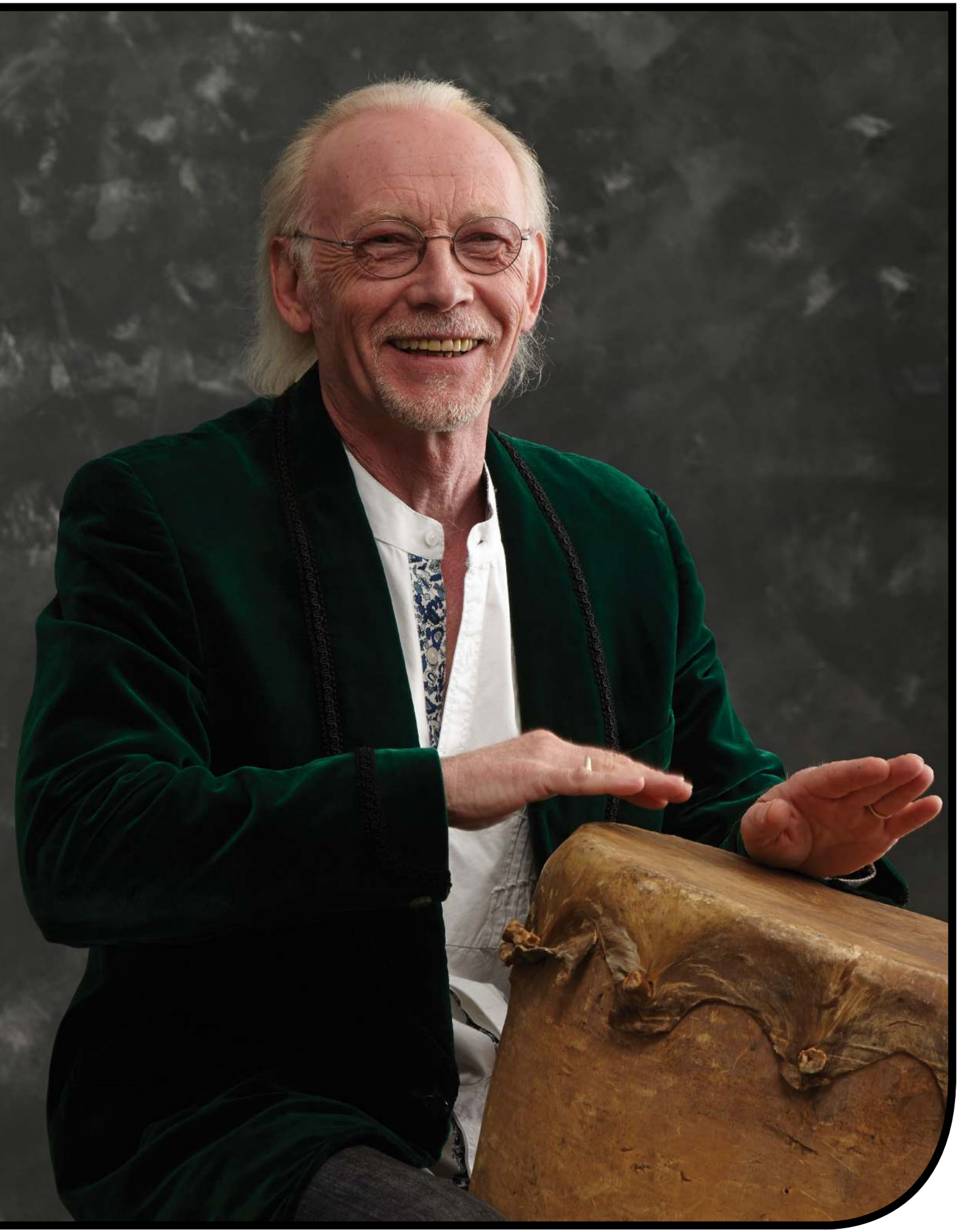
Do you regret splitting up in 1977?
Not at all. You see, in 1977 the whole punk thing came along and the music business changed. Unless you were a very well established band, survival was very difficult. We never had the level of success of, say, Yes or Genesis. Besides, we had switched labels to Harvest for the *Treason* album [1977], and what they pushed to do was to get a more commercial sound, but we were never that sort of band. We could never have hit singles. So, even if we hadn't decided to split up when we did, I believe Gryphon would have ended up back at square one, and the end was nigh anyway.

How much of a loss was it when Richard Harvey quit?
It was a massive blow. Any band losing their main instrumentalist would face a similarly huge problem. But we had to accept that Richard had other priorities. He does a lot of work with Hans Zimmer, one of the most famous composers in the world, as well as his own music. Besides, he also lives six months a year in Thailand, which made things difficult. But we were so lucky to find Andy Findon as his replacement. He is a brilliant musician in his own right.

Do you feel that you are appealing to a young audience as well as the original fans?
That's the great thing. We seem to have picked up a lot of male fans in the 15-24 year old bracket, which is very encouraging. Of course, we have the silver surfers, but these young fans have gotten into us through discovering our albums in their dad's record collection. That comes from vinyl being so popular again. We had one comment on our Facebook page which just said: "Best Dad Band ever!" I love it. These young people are helping to drive the sales of *Reinvention*. Honestly, it's outstripped anything we could have dreamt of doing. And we're looking forward to touring across the UK in 2019.

What would say was the high point for the band back in the 1970s?
That's easy. It was when we played Madison Square Garden in 1974 supporting Yes. We came back onstage to take a bow after our set had finished, and as I looked up, I could see this neon sign flashing around the venue which said 'New York Welcomes Gryphon.' At that point, I felt that we'd made it!

Reinvention is out now. See www.thegryphonpages.com for more information.



It's that time of the year again, when the great and good of progressive rock gather in London's Underglobe for a night of music, merriment and celebration. Here's our full report on the 2018 **Progressive Music Awards**...

Words: Malcolm Dome **Images:** Kevin Nixon and Will Ireland

The Night That Prog Came To Town

There always has to be one. And this year, the winner of the first through the door prize is Peter Hammill. He's a good three or four minutes ahead of the pack.

"I like being early," he smiles. "It means it's easy to get a drink!"

You cannot argue with that logic.

Soon The Underglobe is filled with folk from all areas of the progressive world. Some, like Pye Hastings of Caravan, are making their debut at the awards.

"Living up in Scotland as I did, it was hard for me to get down here," he admits. "But now I'm back in Canterbury, it's much easier. What's the big difference between where I was in Scotland and Canterbury? About 10 degrees! Seriously, I'm finding it so much warmer where I live now."

As always, the hour-long reception gives everyone the chance to mingle, to chat about what they've been up to in the year since the last awards, or to meet people for the first time. That's one of the huge positives of the Progressive Music Awards: it is a massive family gathering, with nobody displaying any rock star posing or egotism. The young and not so young just get on with one another, and are genuinely interested in what is going on across the prog spectrum.

After the sumptuous dinner, where most folk tend to get up and walk to other tables to chat with those they've just spotted, the real business of the evening begins with a two-song performance from Geoff Downes on keyboards and Inglorious vocalist Nathan James. This is a stunning tribute to the late John Wetton, a close and longtime friend of Downes and a mentor to James. They perform *Heat Of The Moment* and *The Smile Has Left Your Eyes*, with everyone in the room paying silent respect.

"That was beautiful," says an overwhelmed Vincent Cavanagh of Anathema. "Such an appropriate tribute."

Then, after a few minutes' grace for people to stock up on supplies at the bar, *Prog* editor Jerry Ewing — wearing a glowing black and gold jacket that inspires tonight's host Al Murray to comment, "He is a one man aftershow!" — arrives onstage to give an introductory speech. He highlights how the uncertain era in which we live might well make this a highly creative era for music, as well as paying homage to those who have passed away in the last year, including Ray Thomas of The Moody Blues and Colosseum's Jon Hiseman. And then we plunge into the awards themselves.

Murray is an inspired host. His vast experience as a stand-up comedian is put to great use, as he immediately takes the piss

Prog magazine editor Jerry Ewing.

PFM, who pick up the best International Band Award.

Richard Henshall (left) and Charlie Griffiths from Haken.

Roger Dean.

Catherine Anne Davies of The Anchoress.

Nick Beggs.

Jonathan Coe.

Trevor Horn.

David Hepworth.

"We do have some younger bands here tonight. Some musicians are *only* in their 50s!"
Al Murray

Tonight's host Al Murray.

Nathan James and Geoff Downes, who perform a moving tribute to John Wetton.

Steven Wilson picks up two awards tonight.

The lavish Underglobe, where the awards are hosted.

out of the current confusion over who owns the rights to the name 'Yes'. "Do we have the People's Republic Of Yes here tonight? Or is it the Democratic Republic Of Yes?" And everyone, including Steve Howe and Geoff Downes, take this ribbing in the right spirit. It helps that Murray clearly has a massive love for prog, a fact that radiates throughout the night. "Everybody else in my private school was into punk. So I rebelled and got into prog!" he says.

The age of many in the room is also commented upon. "There are a lot of dinosaurs here. One table over there is like Jurassic Park! Still, we do have some younger bands. Some musicians are *only* in their 50s!"

One of the genuinely younger bands in attendance tonight are the first winners, as Edinburgh's Midas Fall get the Limelight Award. Enslaved's Ivar Bjørnson then presents the Video Of The Year trophy, pointing out how much the winners, Orphaned Land for *Like Orpheus*, have stood up against bigotry and intolerance everywhere. In accepting the award, Kobi Farhi dedicates it to the band's fans and "to peace". A sentiment that is warmly received by all.

Its noticeable how enthusiastically every winner is applauded. Maybe that's got something to do with the way in which Murray uses a cricketing analogy and audience participation trick early on to encourage such an ongoing reception. Certainly, the good folk behind Space Rocks — Alexander Milas, James Isaacs and European Space Agency Senior Advisor Mark McCaughrean — are delighted when they are awarded Event Of The Year. Following on from this, it seems appropriate that *Eye In The Sky* from the Alan Parsons Project gets Reissue Of The Year. As Sally Woolfson, daughter of the late Eric Woolfson (who co-founded the band with Parsons) points out, *Eye In The Sky* is one of the songs that NASA play to astronauts.

The Anchoress won the Limelight Award in 2016. Tonight, she presents Big Big Train and artist Sarah Ewing with the award for Album Cover Of The Year, for *The Second Brightest Star*. And then it's over to Italy to find the International Band Of The Year, which goes to PFM. Mind you, as the band themselves suggest, as their original name — Premiata Forneria Marconi — translates to Award Winning Marconi Bakery, maybe they were always destined to win this one day!

Midas Fall.

Steven Wilson takes the opportunity when presented with the award for Album Of The Year — for *To The Bone* — to recount how he had appeared on BBC Breakfast TV when this was first released, and was asked to define progressive music. It was only later on, though, that he thought of the ideal answer, which is that if someone says they play progressive music, the chances are they probably don't. But if you create your own artistic universe, then you probably do. That should start a healthy debate! He's not even had time to get off the stage before he's called back on by presenter Trevor Horn to accept the UK Artist Of The Year award. Horn highlights how Wilson has taken a diverse array of styles and incorporated these into his sound. Wilson is also the only double winner of the night.

Jerry Ewing returns, with *that* jacket still intact, to present Claudia Brücken from Propaganda with the Outer Limits award, telling everyone that he first heard them in 1984 through the single *Dr. Mabuse*, and was so impressed that he stole his sister's seven-inch copy, which he still has. But at least he then bought every subsequent 12-inch single and album after that!

Pye Hastings.

Author and broadcaster David Hepworth points out to everyone how remarkable Gary Brooker's voice has been across the decades, as he presents the Procol Harum master with the Outstanding Contribution award. He compares Brooker's tone to Richard Burton and Sir Ian McKellen, in that "They make music out of drama," whereas Brooker "Makes drama out of music." Brooker himself gives away a trade secret by admitting it's all down to his microphone technique, before amusingly commenting that he was going to make notes for his acceptance speech. "But I couldn't decide whether to do these in 13/8 or 7/4!" He then quotes from a review of a 1967 Procol Harum gig, where the writer suggested the band will be around for a long time, and would make 'progressive music'. "That's the first occasion I'd heard the term 'progressive music.'" The unnamed reviewer was not wrong in that prophecy!

Roxy Music co-founder Andy Mackay reads from the advert the band put in *Melody Maker*

Steve Howe receiving the coveted Prog God award.

Andy Mackay presenting to Phil Manzanera.

Catherine Anne Davies presents the Album Cover award to Sarah Ewing and Big Big Train.

John Lees.

"I am out of my comfort zone here. I am just a singer/songwriter and am basically a humble person."

John Lees

in 1971 when they were looking for a guitarist. An enormous list of abilities were required, but they found the right man in Phil Manzanera, who gets the Chris Squire Virtuoso award this time. Despite getting his notes rather jumbled, Manzanera pays his own homage to John Wetton, who was Roxy Music's bassist, before leaving, "Because he had other fish to fry." He also wonders how many of those attributes mentioned in that Roxy ad he possessed.

David Longdon from Big Big Train gets his chance to give the Visionary award to John Lees of Barclay James Harvest, one of his heroes. Lees is a little nonplussed by it all, as he admitted earlier in the evening: "I am out of my comfort zone here. I am just a singer/songwriter and am basically a humble person." However, he rises to the occasion, as he mentions how the band played with a 45-piece orchestra in 1973, and then spent two years trying to recoup the money by doing university gigs. The price of innovation.

Lees gets a little lost trying to sidle off the stage, which prompts Murray to quip, "He may be a visionary, but he can't find the stairs!"

This year there are many landmark anniversaries in the music industry, as Cherry Red Records mark their 40th birthday, while InsideOut have reached the 25 year milestone and Kscope are a decade old. Top promoters Kilimanjaro have also made it to 10 years, and founder Stuart Galbraith and Alan Day are given the Industry VIP award by Steve Hackett, one of many major prog rock names that the company represent.

Author Jonathan Coe, an avowed Caravan fan, presents Pye Hastings from the band with the Lifetime Achievement award. He cleverly accentuates the humour in the Caravan album titles, and also reflects on the *Carry On* humour in the lyrics, something that is often overlooked. But Coe also remarks that Caravan might be unique among prog bands, in openly writing songs about love! Hastings himself had earlier mentioned this is the first occasion on which the band have ever won anything, and he uses his speech to tell everyone that "If I could do it all over again, I'd do it all over you!" (One for Caravan aficionados!)

At the end of the night, Hastings says he's had "a fantastic time here. I have met so many lovely people."

And so to the Prog God moment, the elevation of Steve Howe into the divine elite. The man inducting his one-time Yes bandmate is Bill Bruford. Murray introduces him as a man who has had a major influence on his own musical career (Murray is also a drummer). Bruford quickly remarks to the host, "You were nearly speechless there, weren't you?!"

Bruford handles the task of celebrating his old friend effortlessly, along the way highlighting with a keen sense of affection how fastidious Howe could be, to the point of once putting a notice on his dressing room door, saying 'Heavy footsteps are shaking my guitars,' and also how he was also an eccentric, not even realising what day it was, nor what band he might have been in at that particular time! This is all done in the best possible taste, although Bruford gets a little ahead of the game, having to be interrupted from calling Howe up to the stage, so that a video celebrating his distinguished career can be shown, flashing through the many years and multitude of achievements.

The newly anointed God keeps his speech short, presumably satisfied to let his remarkable track record talk for him, but does end on a poignant note by dedicating the award to his son Virgil, who tragically died a year ago.

And so the awards end just after midnight. All that remains is for the usual disembarkation to the traditional locale in Central London for enthusiastically progressive libating. Security concerns preclude mention of this hostelry's name!

As Al Murray says at the conclusion to the formal activities: "See you *tomorrow* for the next awards!" Erm, can we wait until 2019?

Progressive Music Awards 2018

It was a night where legends trod the stage, from the titans who laid the foundations of progressive rock to the modern-day luminaries blazing the trail into tomorrow. So we cornered the winners to pick their brains before they took home their coveted Prog Awards.

Words: David West **Images:** Kevin Nixon

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

Limelight

Sponsored by 10 years of Kscope

Midas Fall

Elizabeth Heaton: "We were totally chuffed to be nominated, we never thought we were actually going to win. But I think this is the first album we've done that we've ever been truly happy with."
Rowan Burn: "I think that's a lot to do with the fact that it was just me and you. We didn't have to accommodate anything else, we did this ourselves and we had complete freedom. We just burrowed away in rural Scotland and made this album from nothing in the backroom of a but and ben [two-room cottage] and a village hall. This is a bit overwhelming."

Video Of The Year

Sponsored by UMC

(Presented by Ivar Bjørnson)

Orphaned Land
Like Orpheus

Kobi Farhi: "It's a true story about metalheads in the Middle East, that people can be religious and like their culture, but they also like metal music. It's music, you cannot control it, it touches you, so it happens to orthodox Jews, it happens to Muslim orthodox girls. It happens to everyone and this is what's beautiful about music, it's universal. So that's the story [of this video], that they have to live that double life in the Middle East, that they go to this metal concert and they never meet each other. At the end of the clip, when they sit in that bus station, they don't realise that they are so much alike."

Event Of The Year

Space Rocks

Alexander Milas: "I really think that progressive music is not just progressive in the sense of how the music is written, but also in terms of how it perceives the world. So it felt like such a natural bedfellow for Space Rocks to work with *Prog* to promote this whole notion that we can celebrate space by celebrating the art that is inspired by it."
Mark McCaughrean: "It's about getting musicians, science fiction authors, creative people and scientists to talk about the common problems that we have, so there's entertainment, there's lots of that, but it's also about opening up new doorways for the audience."

Album Cover Of The Year

(presented by Catherine Anne Davies, The Anchoress)

Big Big Train/ Sarah Ewing

The Second Brightest Star

Greg Spawton: "The thing with progressive rock is that it's got a long tradition of artwork, of the artist working closely with the recording artist. So, I think about Roger Dean with Yes, and Paul Whitehead with Genesis, and I think in Sarah we have found our artist, the person who represents our music."

Sarah Ewing: "It's a lovely partnership and it works both ways. It's an absolute joy to work with them, they're a lot of fun and they make me feel very included and part of the team and that's beautiful. You're giving the fans the whole deal, not just the music but everything that surrounds it as well."

Catherine Anne Davies: "I really appreciate Sarah's artwork and the beauty of that. When they sent it through to me in the post, the first thing I thought was, 'Wow, that looks like a Cézanne!' You can really see the strong commitment to the artwork there in the product and that's something that resonates with me."

Reissue Of The Year

The Alan Parsons Project

Eye In The Sky

35th Anniversary

Sally Woolfson: "When I found all the audio cassettes in 2014 with dad's songwriting diaries, it was a revelation and very exciting. It gave me goosebumps and you could hear all the songs being written literally coming out of his head. To actually have found a vehicle to use it in the box set and showcase it was wonderful. It's a very loved album, but I think that we have a very loyal and strong fanbase and we got the message out on social media, and it's lovely that the fans chose to vote for us, so I'm thrilled."

International Band Of The Year

Sponsored by discovermusic.com

PFM

Patrick Djivas: "It's fantastic, but we have to say that everywhere we go, there is so much respect for us, maybe for what we represent because we come from the very beginning of prog music. It's amazing, and we are the kind of guys who just don't get used to it, so after all those years there's still a lot of emotion."

Franz Di Cioccio: "People love the way we mix different sorts of music and melodies, because they're Italian, Mediterranean, rock and some classical influences, and this makes us very different. This is our life: we're born to run, born to play."

"There wasn't a genre when we started. I just thought I liked playing something that would be different and that really was a progressive outlook in 1967 and it still is today."

Gary Brooker

Outstanding Contribution

(Presented by David Hepworth)

Gary Brooker, Procol Harum

Gary Brooker: "There wasn't a genre when we started and I've never really seen it. I just thought I liked playing something that would be different and that really was a progressive outlook in 1967 and it still is today. If you want to play something that no one has ever played before, that no one has ever written before, that to me is a progressive way of doing it. It's not regressive, it's not following fashion. It's different. That's the challenge! To do something that nobody has ever done before. That's the challenge every day, every album, every song."

David Hepworth: "He's one of the great British singers and he sings in a very particular British tone, really. He sings songs that are very literate and very literary and very sophisticated, but sings in a very direct, soulful way and I think that's quite a remarkable talent. He's one of those musicians whose music I've enjoyed more over the years. It's one of those things that drifted back into view via YouTube, because you have access to everything from the past. It's all there permanently, so certain things that you hear sound even better, and that was one of them."

Progressive Music Awards 2018

Outer Limits

(Presented by Jerry Ewing)

Claudia Brücken, Propaganda

Claudia Brücken: "I was really into bands like Frank Zappa and King Crimson, I loved Pink Floyd, and one of my favourite albums was *A Trick Of The Tail* by Genesis. *Entangled* was my favourite track ever. I just always loved a really great tune with a great voice, like really loving it when people break out of their boxes and play really freely. So, without knowing it, I guess I was always really into prog, but then I was always into punk as well. I've embraced all genres of music, so The Outer Limits, that really works for me perfectly."

Album Of The Year

Sponsored by CHERRY RED RECORDS

(Presented by Trevor Horn)

Steven Wilson
To The Bone

Steven Wilson: "Part of the contract I find you have as an artist between you and your audience is that you have to sometimes confront their expectations, not just give them what they want, because then you become an entertainer and that's not the same as being an artist. I was very pleasantly surprised how well *To The Bone* was accepted, particularly by the progressive rock audience, because it's not a typical progressive rock album. It has electronic music, it has pop music on it, it has ballads on it, and I think it's testament to how open-minded those people can be."

UK Artist Of The Year

Sponsored by 25 Years Inside Out

Steven Wilson

Steven Wilson: "I kind of approach music like an idiot. I'm very selfish and that idea, what is an artist, an artist is someone who is very selfish about what they do. They don't think about pleasing other people. You're not going to tell me that Picasso painted paintings to please other people – not that I'm comparing myself to Picasso, but that idea about being an artist is actually about being very selfish. Time and time again I find that the more selfish I am about the music, the more people see themselves reflected in the mirror."

Chris Squire Virtuoso Award

Sponsored by Giants of Rock

(Presented by Andy Mackay)

Phil Manzanera

Phil Manzanera: "I'm very surprised to be nominated for Virtuoso, because if anything I'm the virtuoso of primitive guitar playing, so maybe I've started up a new genre which is more about atmospheric guitars and soundscapes."
Andy Mackay: "You're a virtuoso of the effect, really, because actually you only need to play one note and I know it's you. It's a combination of what you do and how it's going, what it goes through."
Phil Manzanera: "And vice versa. If Andy plays one note, I know it's Andy. Something about the embrasure, the tone, so we're dealing in a different kind of virtuosity."

Visionary

(Presented by David Longdon)

John Lees, John Lees' Barclay James Harvest

John Lees: "It's fantastic. I don't see myself as a visionary. I associate with the songs from a writing point of view. I wouldn't say I listen to the albums. You spend so much time working on and doing the albums, they kind of get put to one side after you've done them. Revisiting them with new musicians, which I do now, is just a fantastic experience and somehow you lose the link, so it's like playing somebody else's stuff. We're in Athens next week playing with an orchestra, at the Herodion Theatre, which is an amphitheatre directly below the Acropolis."

David Longdon: "As John said [onstage], at that time they didn't call it progressive rock music, it was alternative music. Barclay James were definitely at the beginning of our genre, they are part of the foundations of the genre we know and love today. We're very proud to be prog. This music is very dear to us and we're very proud to work within the genre and we're proud to support it. It's about the music. That's why John is doing it now. It's doing something that you love and that's a good way to spend your life."

Lifetime Achievement

Sponsored by RHINO

(Presented by Jonathon Coe)

Pye Hastings, Caravan

Pye Hastings: "This is the first award we've ever won. Ever. Honestly, the first one and obviously the most precious. It's going to stay in my hands forever and ever. *Prog* magazine have helped us along the way, and it's been a fantastic journey. I love it, absolutely love it. You think, 'Jesus Christ, I'll keep going.' And I'll also keep going because I haven't written a song I'm really happy with yet. I want a song that everyone goes, 'That's fucking great, that's really wonderful.' I'll be happy when I get to that point. Until I get to that point I'll keep on, so hard luck everybody!"

Prog God

(Presented by Bill Bruford)

Steve Howe

Bill Bruford: "Steve brought a whole different bag of things to the band. He had a whole range of different sounds and in those days it was a case of trying to make your miserable little four-piece sound like an orchestra, so if you had a Mellotron or an organ or a sitar guitar then your band was going to take on these extra colours and extra tints to make you sound bigger and better than any other."

Steve Howe: "I liked things that were a little bit different. I liked everything that was normal but I could see a way we could change things just a little bit, bring the music together and throw in a few chords, rhythms, different dots. I didn't want to play just three chords. I thought maybe there were 30, and there were."

Bill Bruford: "Have you got a licence for those other 27 chords?"

Steve Howe: "No, I haven't. I've been doing them on the black market."

"I didn't want to play just three chords. I thought maybe there were 30, and there were."

Steve Howe

Industry VIP

(Presented by Steve Hackett)

Kilimanjaro Live

Stuart Galbraith: "We're a tiny sliver of the live industry, an independent company, but as an independent company we sell over two million tickets a year and every genre that we work in, including prog, is stronger than it's ever been. Live music still represents huge value for money. You can't steal the live experience. Back in the day you could pirate music or whatever, but you'll never be able to replicate the feeling of standing in a room and having a shared experience with 20, 50, 3,000 or 20,000 people. It's that raw emotion of experiencing it and going, 'I was there when...'"

Murray 95 Al

A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum...

When he presented the 2018 Prog Awards, **Al Murray** got to indulge his lifelong love of the genre. And earlier in the summer, he took a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Italy to witness **King Crimson** playing in the shadow of Mount Vesuvius in Pompeii. The comedian reports back from a bucket list concert...

Words: Al Murray **Images:** Tony Levin

"In Pompeii, a large percentage of the audience were young couples, and older men were with wives. My own sense and feel of our two audiences: a large proportion seeing Crimson for the first time, a larger proportion seeing this incarnation for the first time." **Robert Fripp**

Starting late as they do in Italy, the sun long since set, the amphitheatre in Pompeii is a stark and haunting place. Echoes abound and rebound, flying off into the night sky. Refurbished by Dave Gilmour so he could play it a couple of years back, it's nevertheless spartan, if you'll pardon the Greek rather than Roman allusion. The floor is gravel, the seating basic, the lighting minimal, and the wind whips through the venue. In the afternoon it shook the temporary awnings keeping the blazing sun off the band's equipment.

The juxtaposition of rock band and ancient Roman arena — though 'rock band' doesn't really convey what the stage looks like, with three sprawling drum kits downstage, Fripp's guitar cove stage left, mirrored by Mel Collins' screened-off sax pit — seems entirely fitting with this line-up's do-or-die musical ambition.

Around midnight in the amphitheatre, the crowd surge forward to sing *21st Century Schizoid Man*. Italians young and old, some Americans, sun-bleached Brits and whoever else is there, everyone sings the breaks with Jakko Jakszyk, exultant. He looks like he can't believe it. Nor can I, to be honest. There are the dreaded, devilsome camera phones everywhere, though God knows those people are missing out by worrying about filming what is a truly red-blooded moment in a gladiatorial arena — that phone will never capture how it feels, how it sounds as the stars sparkle and the light from the stage glows back on the crowd as the mighty Crim play the song from 49 years ago that started it all.

Pictures Of A City: King Crimson in Pompeii.

"As Robert Fripp has said, his approach for this sprawling version of Crimson is that all music is new when it is written, and this band address all of the music as though it's new."

Murray AI 95

Night fell long ago. The stars and moon have been alternately serenaded and battered by the melancholy and fury of this band's latest manifestation. As the audience disperse, spirits are incredibly high. A man behind me keeps saying, "50 years! 50 years!" and clutches my hand. People are high-fiving each other. Chris Porter, Crimson's front-of-house sound engineer who has to wrestle all this righteous racket into an orderly noise, is beaming when I tell him how great everything sounded. Truly it's a Roman triumph. The volcano is in the background, but mercifully it's King Crimson that erupt tonight.

"Last night King Crimson moved into the mainstream in Italy. Alternatively expressed, King Crimson moved out of the prog ghetto... But there's far more to King Crimson than this. KC is not only a band, clearly so, as there have been nine-ish incarnations. KC is a way of doing things, and its business aims must necessarily reflect its musical aims: a harmony of elements, in tune, in time and in timbre."
Robert Fripp

I don't know about that: to me it seemed to be more the stratosphere that was being bothered that night in Pompeii. As a fan — and I appreciate that what fans want often resembles the artist's idea of a shit sandwich — I'm not sure I like the idea of Crimson in the mainstream. Not in an "I preferred their early stuff" way; rather I like that when I'm at a show, we and me love this band and don't care what anyone thinks. But I also sympathise with Fripp's desire to move out of the prog ghetto. No one likes being pigeonholed, even if they arguably invented the genre they're boxed in.

I've found that describing Crimson as prog is not particularly helpful, given how the band have shed their skin and sound so many times, and while the current manifestation has its fair share of flutey and Mellotron-y moments, so much else is going on besides. Fripp has ventured that King Crimson itself is the genre, and perhaps that's the better way to get your head around it.

Pompeii — like Graceland — is somewhere I thought I'd get round to visiting but never quite manage. It would have to wait for retirement

Murray 95 AI

or, like Graceland, my kids to show an interest (my eldest daughter cried at The King's grave). So it would take a planetary alignment, a fold in space-time, a lottery win in Latin to get me to Pompeii. That, or King Crimson. When word reached me last year — and I'm aware that makes it sound like I got a telegram — that Crimson would be playing Pompeii, the diary was cleared, work turned down, *Starless* left on around the house for rest-of-family brainwashing purposes. Crimson have been a permanent musical presence in my life, sometimes front and centre, sometimes lurking in the background. I've often felt the band's music is something I have to be up to.

Red is the LP that the old houseshare I lived in would spin every Sunday night when we played Risk together, world domination played out to *One More Red Nightmare*, the vinyl crackling over the start of *Providence*. *Indiscipline* became beloved of the crew of sketch comedians I did my first Edinburgh Fringe with, shouting, "I wish you were here to see it!" When the band reformed in the mid-90s, at a time when anything faintly P-word was regarded as anathema, I dragged friends from both of those scenarios to see Crimson at the Albert Hall. I loved the new stuff, and was as thrilled when they played *Red* as *Frame By Frame*. And I've also lived through every King Crimson fan's inevitable Kanye moment: "You know where that's from, don't you?"

This latest iteration I've seen five times, and with a much bigger and ever-shifting catalogue of material, every show has been grippingly different. The first time I saw this Crim I took my eldest daughter, telling her I never thought I'd see them again so we better go quick while it lasted. That was in 2014, and the circus rolls on… And this year in Pompeii, downwind of Mount Vesuvius, in the crucible of sulphuric destruction, the city that offers us a vivid lava-clad snapshot of what the end of the world might be like, where better to see King Crimson continue to reinvent their repertoire?

"I am myself moved by what acts in and through this band; grateful to be around when Music whispers in our ears; gently noting that, on occasion, what is behind Music accompanies it." **Robert Fripp**

Model Men: Crimson put on a spectacular show.

DAVID SINGLETON

Repertoire. The repertoire is back. And as Robert Fripp has said, his approach for this sprawling version of Crimson is that all music is new when it is written, and this band address all of the music as though it's new — turning the more conventional approach of trying to make it sound like the record upside down. Almost half a century's worth of music too, some of it only now receiving attention and being heard out loud for the first time, but getting the same treatment as everything else, whichever era it might spring from, Crims Ancient And Modern, fed through the three-drummer, two-guitarist, sax, bass, keyboards mincer. The personnel, from every phase of the band's existence and a couple of new ones, add to the sense that Crimson are somehow a musical Möbius strip: you end up where you started. Rather like Jakko Jakszyk, who got into music because of a Crimson show he saw when he was a kid, that has led him to being in Crimson…

"When Fripp's pre-show voiceover says, 'Let's have a party!' that's what people are there to do."

Murray 95 AI

But you know all this — of course you do. So what was the show in Pompeii like? I'd stayed in Naples, a city that has the kind of traffic that favours the bold and the reckless: had it been up to me to drive, we would not have left the roundabout at the airport. Naples is a city that seems to be crumbling at one end and dazzling at the other, a metaphor in search of a subject. Its dark lanes offer real Neapolitan pizza and the opportunity of being knocked over by a moped you had no idea could possibly be there. The juxtaposition of shattered and shiny is unsettling. And everywhere you go, history looms: Vesuvius dominates the bay, lurking in the background.

Two Hands: Crimson get a roused recption.

Above: preparing for a legendary performance. Left: the adoring audience go wild.

We were fortunate to stay in the same hotel as the band. There's something strange about seeing Tony Levin glide by at the breakfast buffet. The band occupy a position of musical celebrity that doesn't seem to trouble anyone else at breakfast but me. Fripp likes to call Crimson's shows "hot dates" — none of the band seem to be on the walk of shame at breakfast after the previous night's show in Pompeii.

What would the set at tonight's show be? I had lunch with Jakko Jakszyk. "There's hours of material," he says, "and the setlist changes every night… you have to be on your toes."

"I walked onstage knowing that this band's position in the world has changed level."
Robert Fripp

So night has fallen, the queue opposite the exhibits of bodies frozen in time have stocked up on cold beers, when Fripp's pre-show voiceover says, "Let's have a party!" That's what people are there to do. However, the good-natured anticipation you might find in a concert hall feels like it has been displaced by a real sense of occasion. A soundscape clangs through the auditorium… the lights come down and through the archway at the back of the stage, the band, backlit by an aura of white light, cast their shadows and make their way down onto the stage.

The band present themselves as if performing a recital, even tuning up like an orchestra — this underlines the idea that this is a body of work we're there to hear. It just so happens that the orchestra that originated the body of work are going to play it. Naturally, at the start it's the three drummers that are the focus: they play as a trio, passing and shifting the beat and bar-line from side to side of the stage. Immediately the character of all three players is on display: Pat Mastelotto's bat-winged gong hinting at percussive fun and games to come; Jeremy Stacey, eyes down under the brim of his bowler hat, all intensity and whip-snap energy; Gavin Harrison's languid, all-the-time-in-the-world improbable grooving.

This gives way to *Neurotica* from *Beat*, torrid jazz ride cymbal and bass, before the band come in with chrome-shiny chords. This tune played by this band, rather than the Fripp/Belew/Levin/Bruford four-piece it came from, suddenly fits — you hear things you'll hear later somehow in *Pictures Of A City*, a tune from another time, another format. Then we get the newly melodied *Indiscipline*, which starts with the drummers throwing choked cymbal crashes back and forth, faster and faster, dazzling, immediate, giving way to Jakko's jazz-inflected melody, matched on his guitar. There's almost too much to take in at this point and so Crimson engage their repertoire time machine and fire us back to 1971 with *Cirkus* and *Bolero*, simmering in the Pompeiian heat, Bill Rieflin's keyboards summoning ghosts of Mellotrons past.

Fallen Angel and *Red* follow, a clutch of tunes from *Red* — we are in the band's heavy territory for a good 12 minutes, before *Epitaph*, the band's end-of-the-world lament, sung in a city long ago destroyed, in an arena for entertainments long since abandoned, from the band's long-distant founding past, played in its creative present… what else could you want?

Newer music, I suppose, and that's what we get: *Radical Action I* and *II* running into the knotty and powerful *Level Five*. To my right, across the aisle, a group of Italian lads in their 20s are on their feet and hollering during this tune — this is their era Crim. As *Level Five* comes to its crash-landing ending, the crowd are ecstatic — this music, difficult, strange music, has moved us too. *Islands* follows and the band take a break. I'm not sure who it is that needs to get their breath and compose themselves more, us or the band.

The second half of the concert follows a similar pattern, music from different eras building on itself. *Discipline*, new to this tour, spirals up to the heavens, rolling fives within fives, cosmic geometry; the music of the pentagons. And as the band play *Starless* and the only lighting effect comes into play, the stage soaked in red light instead of a theatre backdrop behind them, we see the players in blood-red silhouette, the amphitheatre stalls behind them, an image thrown into lurid volcanic 3D.

The show closes with *Schizoid Man*, and with Gavin Harrison and company reprising a theme from the opening drum trio, we, like the band, are back where we started, a musical Möbius strip, history in the background.

I wish you were here to see it.

Crimson Kings: the new-look band backstage.

The Hell Hounds Of Crim Trail

With **King Crimson** on their *Uncertain Times* tour, just how uncertain is the future for Robert Fripp's eight-piece powerhouse of prog?

Words: Sid Smith **Images:** Tony Levin

All of us have moments in our lives where we think to ourselves: "How the fuck did I get here?" In the late 1980s, King Crimson's Jakko Jakszyk was living in Los Angeles, an Englishman abroad at the behest of the publishing company who had signed him up as a songwriter and thought a bit of transatlantic cross-fertilisation would be a good idea. Somewhere in the midst of his sojourn in the City of Angels, at the invitation of a pal, Jakko found himself in Westlake Studios watching Quincy Jones capture the horn parts for songs that would end up on Michael Jackson's multiplatinum-selling album *Bad*.

However, things took an even unlikelier turn when Jackson himself entered the room. As the singer surveyed those within, his eyes alighted on the English visitor's footwear. "I like your shoes," Jacko told Jakko, going on to inquire what kind they were. Telling the most famous entertainer on the planet that they were called winkle-pickers and then having to explain to the giggly and bemused vocalist exactly what a winkle-picker was and how it derived its name surely counts as one of the most surreal, awkward conversations Jakszyk has ever had.

A far more straightforward exchange in LA came when Gavin Harrison rang from the UK, asking if Jakszyk wanted to join a backing group for Italian vocalist Alice, who was undertaking a tour of her native country in 1989.

"Gav said I should bring my driving licence because we were travelling separately to the Italian members of the group. He also said we were all going to share the driving. So when I got to Italy I had my driving licence and, from what I remember, no other fucker had brought theirs!" Jakszyk laughs.

Having ended up doing all the driving and being the last band member into the hotel as he parked up, Jakszyk recalls that the further south the tour went, the more disdain drivers had for anything resembling the Highway Code.

"I remember saying to the tour manager, 'Fucking hell, man, what is going on?' It didn't matter what colour the lights were, people just ignored them and did what the fuck they wanted. And he said, 'The trouble with you English is you treat the traffic lights like they are the law.' I said, 'They are the fucking law!' He said, 'No not in Italy. They are merely a piece of friendly advice.'"

Jakszyk and Harrison found themselves in Italy in 2018 as part of the eight-piece King Crimson alongside Mel Collins, Tony Levin, Pat Mastelotto, Jeremy Stacey, Bill Rieflin and Robert Fripp. Admittedly, this time around Jakszyk didn't have to worry about the driving. He had other things on his mind as the band prepared to enter the stage in Pompeii.

"One keyboard player couldn't pull off all the parts live without cheating, and Crimson isn't the kind of band that cheats."

Stacey 21 Sc

Of course, it's not only ancient history that resonates among the stones of this particular monument. For a music fan of a certain generation, it's impossible not to associate the location with Pink Floyd's celebrated 1971 appearance there. "What we do in life echoes in eternity," as a certain Maximus Decimus Meridius once memorably put it.

"Having walked down the stone tunnel, the 2000-year-old stone tunnel where presumably, if you'll excuse the melodrama of the allusion, gladiators would have walked before us, the hairs on my arm were on end," says Jakszyk with a note of incredulity.

"Walking down there, bathed in this weird blue light, and from there out into the open air with a full arena and then standing under a clear, moonlit sky on stage as a member of King Crimson with Vesuvius behind me... if that doesn't count as a 'How the fuck did I get here?' moment then I don't know what does."

If Jakszyk had to pinch himself at that point, he's not the only one. Crimson fans have been doing exactly that since Robert Fripp's reimagining of the group brought the radically different three-drummer configuration to life in 2014. Prior to that, even the most ardent fan couldn't have foreseen the circumstances in which King Crimson would take to the stage again.

Off the road since 2008, Fripp had once again become mired in an industry dispute, this time with Universal Music Group, the world's

Robert Fripp (far left) and his magnificent seven.

> "I regularly see myself referred to by some fans as the worst singer King Crimson has ever had. I understand that music is subjective and you may not like tone or phrasing, but when somebody writes something that's so preposterous, it's difficult to be offended by it."
>
> Jakszyk 19 K

largest record company. Not one to be cowed or intimidated by record company lawyers and accountants, when it came to his attention that they had infringed the band's copyright, he took them on. Though right might well have been on his side, the quasi-legal manoeuvring came with a price tag, of which a significant part was dragging his attention away from the act of making music.

In one of his increasingly rare interviews with the press in 2012, the possibility of making music again seemed very remote indeed, with Fripp concluding that his life as a professional in the industry was "an exercise in joyless futility". Yet if the history of King Crimson has taught us anything, it's that you underestimate the tenacity of the Dorset-born guitarist at your peril, as more than one label has found to its cost over the years. The other lesson Crimhistory teaches us is that even when Fripp says Crimson has "ceased to exist", as he did in 1974 following the recording of *Red*, he can change his mind.

For a while it seemed that the music of King Crimson might only be given voice through ad hoc gatherings of ex or current members as the band languished in different periods of hiatus. Between 2002-2005, Jakszyk fronted the 21st Century Schizoid Band, handling vocals and Fripp's guitar parts. He was joined by Crimson co-founders Ian Macdonald and Michael Giles, plus Mel Collins and Ian Wallace, who signed on with Crimson in the 70s, covering music from the 1969 debut through to 1974.

The Crimson itch was scratched once again in 2011 when Stick Men, featuring Tony Levin, Pat Mastelotto and Touch guitarist Markus Reuter joined forces with the Adrian Belew Power Trio, then consisting of bassist Julie Slick and drummer Tobias Ralph.

They became The Crimson ProjeKct, a name conferred upon them by Fripp himself after agreeing with Tony Levin that although 'Stick Men & The Adrian Belew Power Trio That Do A Set Of King Crimson Music' might be an accurate description of what they were performing, it didn't rate as a catchy band name. With songs from *Discipline* and *THRAK* appearing on their setlist, alongside each group's own original material, this was as close as you'd get to experiencing anything resembling King Crimson in concert.

Fripp's apparent out-of-the-blue announcement in 2013 that a new incarnation of King Crimson — fronted by three drummers and with a conspicuous absence of Adrian Belew — would be touring the following year created something of a conflict of interest for Levin and Mastelotto, and effectively left The Crimson ProjeKct's viability dead in the water.

Angry at what he perceived as the summary manner of his dismissal, Belew's ire appeared in interviews and social media, with Fripp responding in kind. Although the pair are now reconciled, the bad blood helped feed the tribal instincts of fans displeased that their favourite band had the temerity to move on without first asking their permission.

In the pre-internet age, when a group opted for a shift in direction or personnel, those disgruntled about such matters had the option of moaning about it to their mates or, if they were *really* peeved, they might pen a letter to the editor of the *Melody Maker* or the *NME*. Nowadays, the digital democracy enables fans to broadcast their praise and plaudits, grievances and bile, through the blunderbuss of the world wide web.

Despite his long tenure in the group, Adrian Belew was regularly on the receiving end of abuse questioning his abilities, and his right to

even be on the stage with Crimson, something he immortalised on *ProzaKc Blues* from 2000's *The ConstruKction Of Light*. These days it's Jakszyk who comes in for a knocking from those unhappy at his role in the new KC.

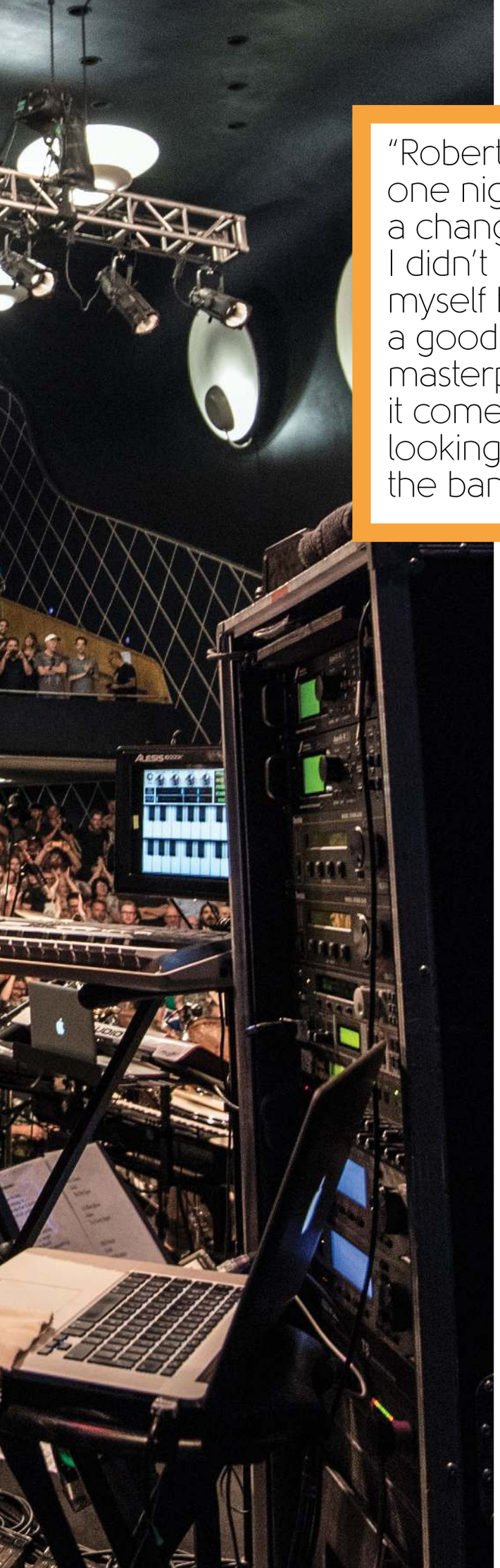
"Yes, there's a handful of the militant wing of the Adrian Belew Fan Club who have got it in for me, regardless of who I may, or may not, be," Jakszyk says. "I regularly see myself referred to by some of them as the worst singer King Crimson has ever had. I understand that music is subjective and you may not like tone or phrasing, but when somebody writes something that's so preposterous, it's difficult to be offended by it."

One criticism that does rankle is the accusation that this version of Crimson is backward-looking and somehow less experimental when compared to its predecessors. People with long memories will note that when Crimson returned to live work in 2008, apart from unveiling Gavin Harrison as a member, no new material was forthcoming. Instead, they opted for a celebratory 'these you have loved' show with some extra percussive spice and seasoning. However, since the three-drummer-fronted ensemble, not only have there been freshly composed songs, but Crimson gigs have resounded to material previously unplayed for over 40 years. Several excursions into the Belew era help to confirm that this band offer the most extensive presentation of all the elements of King Crimson to date.

"In general terms, this is a very popular version of the group playing to bigger crowds and in larger venues than before, and I guess that's because we're encompassing the whole repertoire," Jakszyk says. "We don't neglect any era and the fact is that we can do it and it all sounds incredibly different, and yet somehow

> "I look down from the stage and I see these young women singing along and they know the words better than I do!"
>
> Jakszyk 19 K

Fripp faces his fans – a more diverse group than at any point in the band's history.



> "Robert said to me one night that he felt a change in the band. I didn't perceive it myself but Robert has a good overview and masterplan when it comes to looking at the band."
>
> Harrison

there's a genuine glue and thread that connects it all together."

Ticket receipts and a string of sellout shows would seem to bear out Jakszyk's argument – this line-up is attracting greater numbers than ever before. But there's something else happening at KC gigs: those turning out aren't merely confined to the homogenous Prog-with-a-capital-P fan. Younger people are increasingly prevalent and, whisper it softly, larger numbers of women are attending, traditionally a demographic that's been in short supply when the group come to town. It's a definite change that Jakszyk has noticed since 2014.

"I was in the car with my son last week and he said his two most favourite bands ever are Everything Everything and The Beatles," he says. "That's quite a spread, and what I take from that is that in more general terms, there seems to be a lack of tribalism among young people today.

"You've got these young fans who are getting Crimson on some level, regardless of whether we're cool or not, and they're going to the gigs. I look down from the stage and I see these young women singing along and they know the words better than I do! It feels like a weird regeneration thing, which is partly to do with the nature of this version of the band."

Jeremy Stacey, who joined Crimson in March 2016 when Bill Rieflin vacated the drum and keyboard chair for a year-long sabbatical, agrees that there's something in the fabric of this configuration that makes Crimson a must-have ticket.

"I think it's so fantastic for the audience that suddenly, after all these years, they're able to go and hear material that's not been played live before," he says. "It's not the same as it was because there are three drummers and new arrangements, but there's enough of the original stuff suggested for people who want to hear an element of the record, but it's moved forward, as music should."

Stacey's background in jazz and rock is long and deep, having played with artists as diverse as Noel Gallagher, Chris Squire, Mark Wingfield, The Waterboys, Ryan Adams and Steve Hackett. The newest member of the group, at 55 years old Stacey is also the youngest. He regards himself as very fortunate to have had such a varied career over the years, and a level of work that demands he keeps kits ready for use on both sides of the Atlantic. However, out of all the artists he's worked and recorded with, he admits that King Crimson are at another level.

"It's the most different thing I've done. Well, it's kind of obvious when you consider there are three drummers, but it's the fact that I play keyboards, which I hadn't done for a while. I'd played on records but I hadn't played them live in a band since the early 90s, and I hadn't practised or played much piano during that period because I was mainly drumming."

Crimson weren't particularly on his radar, he says. "I remember hearing *Frame By Frame* back in the 80s and really liking it. I'd heard some of *Red* and *Larks' Tongues In Aspic*, and of course *In The Court Of The Crimson King*, but I only knew bits and pieces really, so I had to start from scratch."

Working with Gavin Harrison and getting to grips with the tightly knit drum arrangements was one thing, but Stacey had to get the keyboard parts under his fingertips as well. Initially he thought he'd be coming in for one tour as a sideman, a situation he was used to. What surprised him, though, was becoming a full member of the band and retaining that position even after Rieflin returned.

"Bill's only playing keyboards now but that's fantastic because a lot of the keyboard parts that were on the original records are now being played fully. One keyboard player couldn't pull off all the parts live without cheating, and Crimson isn't the kind of band that cheats," Stacey notes with approval.

In concert, Stacey has a brief piano solo spot that provides an aural break from the rigorously arranged material, and it's something he approaches with real enthusiasm.

"It's completely improvised," he reveals. "I don't practise anything beforehand. I close my eyes and start and see what happens. I feel that's an element of what Crimson is about. I could obviously do something more harmonic and

Holding Court: Robert Fripp gets the band fired up.

> "This band is unfolding right before you in real time. I can't say where we'll be in six months or what we'll be doing. I really don't know."
>
> Harrison

prearranged but when it comes to those cadenza moments, I'm improvising every night."

A recent performance of *Suitable Grounds For The Blues* in Essen, available as a free download from the band's website, finds Stacey pitching atonal runs and scattering spiky notes into the air in a manner that unconsciously evokes Keith Tippett's work with Crimson on *In The Wake Of Poseidon* and *Lizard* especially. As the uneven metre of Crimson's mangled take on the blues unrolls, Stacey maintains the barrage. Adding a dissonant freshness, the spontaneity lights a spark to one of the newer pieces the band play.

"It's sort of terrifying but also lots of fun," says Stacey, before adding: "That's if it works. Sometimes it doesn't, but that's the whole point. If you improvise, you don't always know if it will necessarily work — you're taking a risk to put yourself out there and seeing if something magical can happen."

It's a magic that often extends to the group improvisation found in *The Letters* and *Easy Money*, where the band feel like they're slipping the leash off the necessarily strict timekeeping that comes from such highly regulated and complex ensemble arrangements.

Fripp has long maintained that while a studio album was akin to a love letter, Crimson in concert was a hot date. With five records already documenting the band's considerable abilities on stage, and a sixth — *Meltdown: Live In Mexico City 2017*, a three-CD/one Blu-ray set — scheduled, Crimson are positively promiscuous when it comes to putting out live albums.

Wherever Crimheads gather, a recurring question is: "It's been 15 years since their last studio album. When will they make another one?" In talking to the group, the answer would appear to be: not any time soon. Aside from the costs of getting eight musicians into a room at the same time, the model where a band would tour in support of a new release in order to sell and promote their latest platter has largely disappeared. We live in a different time and Crimson have embraced it.

Jakszyk concedes that in theory it would be possible to utilise the live recordings as a kind of backing track and undertake some strategic overdubs. After all, 1974's *Starless And Bible Black* did exactly this and yielded the definitive version of *Fracture*, a classic that Crimson have recently revisited for the first time in over four decades. However, within the ranks of the band, there's no discernible enthusiasm for such an undertaking. This begs the question as to what the future might hold for the group...

When in Rome, there was talk between some of the band members that somehow things had moved into a different gear. Jakszyk says he had a sense of it, as did their agent, that Crimson might be achieving a potential that had hitherto eluded them. "Robert said to me one night that he felt a change in the band," says Gavin Harrison. "I didn't perceive it myself, but Robert has a good overview and masterplan when it comes to looking at the band."

With over three and a half hours of new and reimagined pieces at their disposal, Harrison is pleased with the evolution of the band, though he admits to the occasional disappointment that in the course of a performance the octet will only ever scratch the surface of their repertoire.

"It can be frustrating but I know Robert spends a lot of time planning each setlist. We could do two entire evening performances of completely different material but that wouldn't necessarily make either night a great

night if you only came to one of them. That would only work if you bought tickets for both shows. Of course, Frank Zappa used to do virtually a different show every night. He had so much material that he could do that. I saw him twice at Wembley and I think there was only one song the same on both nights.

"You should always play the set you feel flows the best and that's what Robert does. He can see and perceive things that, on the surface, others might not. He senses these shifts that others might not. In my eyes, it's his band. He's steering the ship and he decides when we're going to work and where we're going to work."

There are plans for the band's 50th anniversary, though for now these have yet to be revealed. What we do know is that the uncertainty surrounding the UK decision to leave the European Union has scuppered plans for an extensive tour in Europe. Nevertheless, the anniversary year is sure to be special, with a documentary planned by filmmaker Toby Amies, along with another in the series of the large, multi-disc box sets that have enabled King Crimson to become one of the most scrupulously documented groups this side of the Grateful Dead already planned. And yes, you can bet there'll be another live album coming along, as each tour brings with it a new addition to the setlist.

The band are conspicuously happy and not for nothing is Fripp, who once lurked in the shadows on stage, playing boldly in the light these days, standing alongside his colleagues at the end of the long set to take the applause.

As for how long King Crimson will go on for is probably a question only one person can answer — and he isn't saying. Harrison suggests that people should give up speculating on what may happen and concentrate instead on being in the here and now.

> "King Crimson is not a rock'n'roll band where we get drunk and start punching each other. Yet."
>
> Harrison 1

"This band is unfolding right before you in real time. I can't say where we'll be in six months or what we'll be doing. I really don't know. Robert's plans tend to be more the type of audience he thinks we should be reaching and the areas we should play, more than, 'I think we should play the songs like this.' That's left to the individual, to play the way you think is correct for the song at that time.

"The band's sound is the sum of all the personalities and the chemistry. For better or worse. If you change one member, the band will sound different. The way the personalities click together, or not in some cases, is the sound of the band. Some bands have lots of bad vibes and arguments and animosity and that will produce a certain type of sound or songwriting or album. Surviving each other is usually the hardest part of any band.

"King Crimson is not a rock'n'roll band where we get drunk and start punching each other. Yet."

King Crimson are currently on tour in the UK. See www.dgmlive.com for details.

The drumming triumvirate, L-R: Gavin Harrison, Jeremy Stacey, Pat Mastelotto.

Suitable Grounds For Brexit Blues?

What lies ahead for Crim once the UK leaves the EU?

As King Crimson approach their 50th anniversary in 2019, the uncertainty surrounding the UK's departure from the European Union has had an impact on the group's plans to tour Europe. Fripp noted in his online diary in June: "Currently there is no foreseeable exit arrangement for the UK, no clear plans for migrant workers, eg the Brothers Crim and their pals, whether work visas will be necessary for anyone other than our American members.

"The technicalities and bureaucracy of arranging visa for all eight members of The Beast plus c. 12 support team persons, in each different country, is impracticable; this without even dealing with the withholding tax for each jurisdiction. Compliance with EU tax and individual arrangements for each country is already close to unworkable for small organisations. KC/DGM is a good example of the margin between too small/sufficiently large, to be proportionately overloaded with stuff. I wonder how many of those good persons that plan and implement a seemingly endless proliferation of forms have gone out into the world and directed a small company."

The answer from some observers was that bands used to tour before the UK joined the EU and so it'll be easy to do so again. Prior to joining the EU, a detailed carnet – a list of every single item of equipment – had to be compiled and was usually scrupulously checked at borders, requiring trucks to pull over and wait for inspection. Any discrepancies between the carnet and the actual contents would require a new carnet to be written and authorised, adding time and extra costs to the process.

This is in fact what happens when bands visit non-EU countries such as Switzerland and Norway, a process that is sometimes subject to delays and additional costs. Touring the EU at present requires only one carnet, with vans driving from one country to another without any border checks. Will this continue after Brexit? Nobody knows.

"Two years on from the referendum and with the clock ticking inexorably towards the UK's departure in a few months, the British government and its cabinet even at this late stage can't even agree what the terms of our departure should be. They don't know what the fuck is going on. How can they expect bands and their management to know?" one music industry veteran insider told *Prog*.

"In the absence of any clarity on what arrangements will be in place for bands, or indeed for any kind of goods transiting through the EU, makes forward planning virtually impossible. With tours and all the minutiae that goes with them having to be planned and costed generally up to a year in advance, simply trusting that everything will be okay after 29 March next year is simply not an option." **SS**

A coma patient, a sinister doctor and another musical left turn: **Haken**'s new concept album sees the band cement their place at the forefront of the UK's prog scene. A decade into their career, the band look back over 10 years of life on the road and in the studio.

Words: Jerry Ewing **Image:** Marco Castellani & Renèe Liszhaki

THE DOCTOR WILL SEE YOU NOW...

Haken, L-R: Conner Green, Richard Henshall, Ross Jennings, Charlie Griffiths, Raymond Hearne, Diego Tejeida.

"Every guitar player who plays this genre of music owes a huge debt to John Petrucci. The way he plays is so inspiring, and his mentality, promoting practising."
Charlie Griffiths

"I found two of those at home recently. I was fishing around trying to find something and found two copies of that early demo. Pristine. Which I promptly spilled a cup of tea all over…"

Haken guitarist Charlie Griffiths chuckles at the memory. Griffiths, along with drummer Raymond Hearne, is sat in an office at Sony Records, the major label that bought Haken's record label InsideOut in 2015. We're here to talk about *Vector*, the British proggers' fifth album, but we're also here to chat about the last decade, in which the London-based sextet (keyboard player Diego Tejeida is still resident in his native Mexico) have risen to become major players in the new prog scene.

Prog has just mentioned that we'd unearthed our copy of the band's 2008 six-track demo *Enter The 5th Dimension* when Griffiths offers his own revelation. It's fitting because that demo, made up of songs the band recorded in two sessions between 2007 and 2008, represents an integral part of the Haken story. Fast forward to early 2009: *Prog* mag is in its infancy and we're hunting for unsigned bands to go on the cover CD. A phone call is put in to prog-friendly promoter Jon 'Twang' Patrick, then at the helm of the House Of Progression at Kingston's now defunct Peel venue. If anyone can help set us on the right track, we're thinking, it'll be Twang. And sure enough, that's exactly what he does.

Haken's 2008 demo, Enter The 5th Dimension.

Haken made it onto the CD for the second issue of *Prog* with *Black Seed*, thanks to Twang's patronage and the fact that we were blown away by the demo. Today, songs like *Blind*, *Sleeping Thoughts Wake* and *Snow*, the three epics from the demo, might be consigned to Haken's history, but they contained the kind of vision and imaginative scope that really set the band out as one to keep an eye on, and had all the trademarks of the Haken sound.

The next time our paths crossed was about a year later. Ken Golden, the owner of the US prog label The Laser's Edge, had heard the *Prog* CD, and, duly impressed, signed the band. Haken in turn delivered *Aquarius*, their mermaid-themed debut album, and suddenly there really was a hot new name on the UK prog scene. They came into our Marylebone offices for one of their first ever photo shoots, later descending on the old *Prog* local for an interview conducted with yours truly. It may have been a more innocent, hirsute and naive time, but the signs were already there that this band had sufficient mettle to get themselves noticed.

This writer recalls Haken's first ever appearance at Summer's End festival later that same year. They opened on the Saturday, an unknown quantity barely registering with the crowd, half of whom hadn't even bothered to take their places when Haken kicked off with *The Point Of No Return*. A few bars later, the hall was teeming with attendees,

WILL IRELAND

fascinated by whoever was making this gloriously complex progressive noise. Little wonder festival organiser Huw Lloyd-Jones wrote in *Ten Years Of The Summer's End Progressive Rock Festival*, "...amazingly if we had them back they'd be headliners now...".

He's not wrong. Few bands have had the kind of impact on the prog scene in recent times as Haken. Although the music industry operates in a very different way these days, you'd probably have to go back to the 80s, when Marillion spearheaded the new prog movement, to find a band who have had a similar impact. Of course, there's no *Top Of The Pops* these days, or commercial radio prepared to play anything remotely interesting, so the mainstream media remain as ignorant as ever. Still, it's been a pretty good decade for Haken, all things considered.

"It seems like we really just haven't stopped working," says Griffiths. "It's kind of gone by in a bit of a blur. *Aquarius* and *Visions* were released within a year of each other, and I remember we toured as much as we could. But when *The Mountain* dropped, that's when it seemed like doors opened. We were a lot busier, people talking about us a lot more.

"I think you kind of plan to achieve that sort of thing," he continues. "You wouldn't do it if you didn't believe in it. It's a bit like buying a lottery ticket."

"We used to talk about world domination in the early days," laughs Hearne. "But the reality is that it doesn't feel like we've achieved that much. Yet."

"We just enjoy writing and making music as friends," says Griffiths thoughtfully. "Once it's out there, it's out there, and I guess you don't really know what it's doing. That said, every tour we've done has been bigger. But to us it doesn't seem like a meteoric rise. Unless the meteor is a giant one we're pushing up a hill. *The Mountain* was all about that, the idea of Sisyphus pushing the boulder up a mountain. It's slow, steady progress and that's still our mentality. We're getting there, but we're not in a rush. But I guess we have been fortuitous. It's all been about who we've met. From Twang giving us gigs at The Peel, getting on the *Prog* magazine CD, and that led to Ken at Laser's Edge..."

"It doesn't seem like a meteoric rise. Unless the meteor is a giant one we're pushing up a hill. *The Mountain* was all about that, the idea of Sisyphus pushing the boulder up a mountain. It's slow, steady progress and that's still our mentality." Charlie Griffiths

Haken. Not home as much these days...

There certainly seems to be a steely determination that's gone hand in hand with making the music.

"Certainly," agrees Hearne. "Even back when we were making the demo. The music back then was all over the place, but there was still this idea that we shared a common goal."

The size of gigs the band play has increased considerably from the days of Summer's End and The Peel. In London, Haken have progressed through the ranks to headlining Islington Assembly Hall, which places them in the company of Sons Of Apollo and The Pineapple Thief. They've played Cruise To The Edge, and Mike Portnoy took on most of the Haken line-up as Shattered Fortress for a world tour performing his *Twelve-Step Suite* and a handful of select Dream Theater songs. That's some patronage.

"I think the biggest show we've done is probably Hellfest," Griffiths says, recalling the band's 2015 appearance at France's impressive open-air rock festival.

"In terms of crowd size I'm not so sure," Hearne interjects. "If it's not that then it might be India last year, or even Mexico."

What do they prefer: the festivals or the indoor shows?

'They're both different," says the guitarist. "I think I prefer the more intimate shows. There's just something about them. Then again, I'm not sure you ever get over the sound a huge crowd makes. That roar. It's a nice feeling, knowing they want to see you."

And what of the Portnoy connection?

"I've been a Dream Theater fan since 1992 and I've discovered a lot of music through him, with bands that have supported them and stuff," says Griffiths. "He's a big music fan and he's always talking about new bands, so it was a great feeling to have him give us a pat on the head."

"I thought it was amazing," adds Hearne, who of course wasn't needed as a drummer in Shattered Fortress. "It gave me a chance to see them play live, which I don't normally get. I'm normally looking at the back of Ross' [Jennings, singer] head."

Griffiths says: "It all came about when he emailed us asking us to play his Progressive Nation cruise back in 2014. We kept in touch and he kept on talking about us in the press and eventually we got to play Dream Theater songs with him. For me that really was a dream come true. Every guitar player who plays this genre of music owes a huge debt to John Petrucci. The way he plays is so inspiring, and his mentality, promoting practising. It's hugely important."

This new-found confidence is writ large over *Vector*. At just over 45 minutes, it's the shortest Haken album to date, but before those of you who place importance on song length over how good the song actually is start panicking, there's plenty of complex prog metal and a concept of depth to get your teeth into. The likes of *The Good Doctor* and *Puzzle Box* pack a hefty metallic punch, the 12-minute *Veil* is Haken at their exploratory best, and the laid-back, jazzy vibes of *Host* might not sound out of place on BBC Radio Two.

But prog fans can be a sensitive, contrary bunch: one only has to look at the furore that greeted Steven Wilson's *To The Bone*, largely before most people had heard a note. Internet chat about *Vector* being the heaviest thing Haken have done is definitely wide of the mark. We're still talking prog metal here, not heavy metal.

"That's why I don't like promoting a record," sighs Griffiths. "I'd rather people just heard it and decide for themselves."

"I don't think there's any point on the record where it's heavier than we've ever done before. Maybe just a bit more consistency," muses Hearne.

"You can say it's intense," says Griffiths.

There was, of course, no point in repeating the 80s-infused prog homage that was *Affinity*.

Griffiths: "With *Affinity*, the first song written was *1985*, which kind of set the tone for the whole album. And we thought, 'Well, there's plenty of bands who pay homage to 70s prog, but what about the 80s? Because that's when most of us grew up."

Hearne: "I think after *Affinity*, one or two people said they wanted to make a heavier record."

Griffiths: "I don't really recall anyone saying that, but I do remember the early demos being very precise in terms of drum and guitar sound, and I think it evolved from that."

Hearne: "I think the more metal aspect of our sound we find a bit more exciting to play live."

Conceptually, *Vector* centres around a patient in a catatonic state, but whose mind still appears to be active. There's a sinister doctor who shows a curious interest in the patient (*The Good Doctor*), but a lot is left up to the listener to figure out for themselves. Interesting stuff. Who comes up with the concepts?

"Me," nods Griffiths. "Well, at least the last couple. We had some music written — that's how we always start. And once I've got an idea of how the music will sound, then I start thinking of where we go. This was our fifth album, the Roman numeral for five is V, so the album title will start with a V. You need to start somewhere, and that's a fun thing to think about. This time last year, we had no idea what this album was going to sound like, and that's the fun part, creating this piece of art from nothing. And I wrote these short stories, a science fiction kind of thing, and it gives the music more direction. Like if you take *A Kind Of Magic* by Queen, you wouldn't relate it to the movie *Highlander*. But if you listen to it, the songs tell the story of the film."

From a pristine production sound, courtesy of Adam 'Nolly' Getgood, to the finest vocal performance yet from Ross Jennings, to some of the most impactful music Haken (guitarist Richard Henshall and bassist Conner Green make up the rest of the line-up) have ever created, *Vector* looks set to carry the band on even further. It will undoubtedly please their younger fans, but equally, if given the chance, it should find favour with the older prog crowd too.

It has, all in, been a pretty impressive first decade for the band.

"I'm happy with it, yes," muses Griffiths.

Has life changed much in the past 10 years?

"Not really," smiles Hearne. "I'm just not at home as much."

Vector is out now via InsideOut. See www.hakenmusic.com for more.

MANIFESTO OF AN ANARCHIST

Techno and Earth, Wind & Fire. Brexit opponent and multiculturalism proponent. **The Tangent** and their leader **Andy Tillison** cover plenty of bases…

Words: Nick Shilton **Images:** Casey Orr

Keyboardist Andy Tillison has never ploughed a mainstream prog furrow. Since the band's 2002 birth, The Tangent's course has seldom run smooth. Last year the band released *The Slow Rust Of Forgotten Machinery*, Tillison swiftly following that with his Kalman Filter collaboration *Exo-Oceans* with The Fierce & The Dead's Matt Stevens. With the release of new Tangent album *Proxy* this month, Tillison has become highly prolific again and appears to have well and truly recaptured his mojo.

"It depends on whether people like *Proxy* or not," Tillison responds candidly. "The speed at which you turn something around isn't indicative of quality. But I was enthused by how the last album turned out."

Following the release of *Slow Rust…*, The Tangent and Jonas Reingold's Karmakanic merged with a plan to hit the road as Tangekanic. But the tour was almost stillborn. Tangent saxophonist Theo Travis was unavailable, Karmakanic vocalist Göran Edman couldn't attend rehearsals and Tangent keyboardist Marie-Eve de Gaultier pulled out on the tour's eve. Having planned to split the keyboard parts between them, her withdrawal gave Tillison a massive logistical challenge.

"It was a nightmare as there was no time to get anyone else in," he remembers. "Suddenly I had to play it all if we were going to sound remotely like the band we were purporting to be."

Briefly Tillison considered cancelling the tour. "Five minutes later we realised the implications. We'd travelled from all over and booked hotels, vans, crossings, flights and made visa applications. So we thought, 'Hell's bells, let's just do it.'"

> "Some of our albums are great and some are crap and I wish I'd never made them. I never thought *Not As Good As The Book* was one of our finest moments musically – the book was good and the album title was right! But it's some people's favourite Tangent album."

Victory was snatched from the jaws of defeat and the tour was salvaged, as documented on this year's wryly titled live CD *Hotel Cantaffordit*.

"I wasn't happy with my own performance and thought the early gigs were pretty dreadful," Tillison admits. "But the audience were still enjoying it, and by the time we got to Zoetermeer we were really cooking. Then at the Summer's End festival we were at a peak and in America it got even better."

With the band enjoying both playing and each other's company, the seeds were sown for *Proxy*, which features all the musicians who toured as Tangekanic, plus Travis.

"This last line-up of the band did a lot of laughing, talking about life, music and politics – it was a great way to see the world with some good friends. I thought how nice it would be if this line-up made an album."

So is The Tangent in its rudest health ever? "I don't spend a lot of time listening to anything we've done before. Once I've finished an album I usually leave it," Tillison answers. "I think some of our albums are great and some are crap and I wish I'd never made them. I never thought *Not As Good As The Book* was one of our finest moments musically – the book was good and the album title was right! But it's some people's favourite Tangent album."

Tillison's musical background is diverse. "I have always loved progressive rock but punk was tremendously exciting. I loved Blondie, Talking Heads, Television and Joy Division. Because

Andy Tillison: creating prog with a punk rock attitude.

I was 17 in 1977, I'm a peculiar generation. I was being called a boring old fart in 1977. I actually saw Yes and the Sex Pistols in the same year. Prog was the soundtrack of my schooldays, and the post-punk era became the soundtrack of my youth. If I'm asked to choose between the two, it's a hard choice. Besides, any punk band worth its salt started to progress from day two."

Tillison's current musical tastes remain wonderfully diverse, with his recent non-prog listening including 1990s techno and dance music, jazz fusion, German electronica, assorted pop music and disco funk in particular. "*September* by Earth, Wind & Fire has been played more in my house over the last 10 years than any other record. The missus and I like to dance to it!"

While traces of disco funk may be tricky to detect on *Proxy*, the album has some explicit techno passages, in particular on *The Adulthood Lie*. "One of the defining parts of progressive rock was the exploration of the synthesiser," Tillison explains. "At the same time, our sisters and brothers in soul and disco were also using synthesisers, albeit for different things."

Tillison remains interested in synthesisers well beyond the progressive sphere and namechecks The KLF, The Orb, The Future Sound Of London, DJ Sammy and Skrillex. "Skrillex is probably one of the most important synthesiser players in the world at the moment, doing things with the synthesiser that make you go, 'Wow!'"

That said, he's also mindful of the need to play to the prog gallery with The Tangent's new album, citing its title track as "the most retro song on the record. It's got a lot of early-70s Canterbury references. I like to advance our music, but I didn't want to make the whole album techno. People who buy our records are into prog rock so I wanted to give them something they like and then present them with something else and see what they think."

Tillison relishes challenging his audience. "My enjoyment of progressive rock in the past was never the result of people giving me something easy," he reasons. "The landmarks in my enjoyment of music have always been things that were hard, where you thought, 'What the fuck is this?!' when you first heard it. You have to give them time – which is the biggest problem of living in 2018."

Warming to the theme of living in 2018, Tillison's forthright views extend well beyond music. On the subject of the UK's forthcoming exit from the European Union, he's a strident Remainer.

"Brexit is terrible. It's the wrong decision. Referenda aren't a good idea – we pay people to make decisions and we used to have a system where we would find people who we believed were capable of running life for us. But I will approach whatever future is coming our way with as much optimism as I can."

Hitting The Right Notes: Tillison's new album *Proxy* is classic prog with some more challenging left-field influences.

On *The Slow Rust...*, Tillison protested against Brexit on *A Few Steps Down The Wrong Road*. "The protest song has almost become a laughable cliché, but how many Brexit songs were there? But far from getting an argument going, it was largely ignored," he sighs.

> "People who buy our records are into prog rock so I wanted to give them something they like and then present them with something else and see what they think."

Tillison understands that some listeners may not want any politics in their music but he defends his right to include them. "The carefree life we have lived in a peaceful Europe since the 40s is too good to not spare a song on. So we did a song about that and a lot of people said politics doesn't belong in prog."

To counter the point, Tillison references King Crimson: "'*Innocents raped with napalm fire, 21st century schizoid man*': the very first prog album, ground zero, the first track is a political protest song! Anyone who tells me that prog and politics don't belong together has either missed the beginning of prog or never realised what it was about."

On *Proxy* he celebrates the wonderful sight of the sky in the morning on sublime instrumental *The Melting Andalusian Skies*, albeit inspired by having travelled through France and Spain without having his passport inspected since Dover. However, referring to himself as a "raving leftie anarchist", Tillison doesn't give any major institution an easy ride.

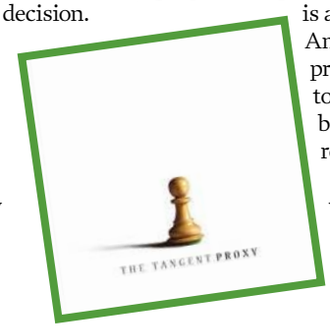
"I'm no fan of the European Union, or the General Synod, the Vatican, the White House or Whitehall," he reveals. "I'm not a great fan of authority!"

In his youth he was a fan of anarchist bands Chumbawamba, Crass and Discharge. "They were big influences on how I live. The EU is not something I would have gone to war to protect, but the attack was really about so many wanting 'our country to be just for us'. I don't see it that way – we've benefitted culturally for centuries from immigration. And prog rock has always been about bringing together different musical styles and cultures from all over the world."

Approaching his seventh decade, retirement isn't on Tillison's agenda. "I can't give up because I like doing this too much. Every year since 1977 I have made prog rock music. But because I was never part of the mainstream explosion of prog rock, it's been a struggle."

However, he's entirely comfortable with his situation. "I'm not trying to become famous. In the late 1970s and early 1980s I thought I'd have a career as a rock star. But since the 1990s that's not been in my head. I've lived a life without much money," he laughs, "but I seem to have enjoyed my life a lot more than many people with a great deal of money!"

Proxy is out on November 16 via InsideOut. See www.thetangent.org for more information.



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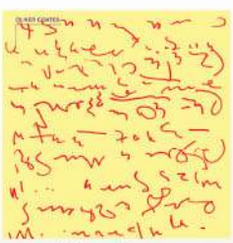

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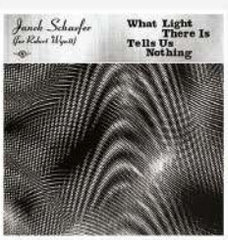

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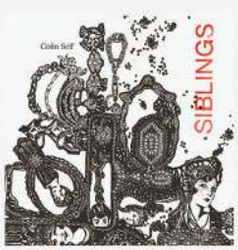

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Dreaming Light

iamthemorning's latest creative endeavour is a visual work of art created in the depths of remote Norway. **Marjana Semkina** brings *Prog* into their world...

Words: Polly Glass **Images:** Miles Skarin

"It's a tiny, chaotic fairy garden, bookworm place!" Marjana Semkina giggles by way of introduction to her 21st-floor, paper-walled pocket of St Petersburg. Here, under the glow of fairy lights, she lives surrounded by books and dreamcatchers, with paper cranes hanging from the window. And dead flowers. Lots of dead flowers.

"I plan to put them into empty wine bottles," she explains, "we do a lot of drinking wine here in Russia because if you don't drink, you can't survive in this country."

"When there is a girl and a guy working in the same project, everyone by default assumes that the girl is there as a pretty book cover or something, and the guy's the one doing all the hard work. That is not true."

iamthemorning pictured in Giske, where *Ocean Sounds* was recorded.

Perhaps this is why she gets out as much as possible, travelling abroad as often as money, time and visa restrictions will allow. Recently she applied for special dispensation to move to the UK, with letters of endorsement from record label Kscope and *Prog* editor Jerry Ewing. The process hasn't been plain sailing. Our initial interview was rescheduled after she was waylaid with visa office headaches and paperwork. She juggles all of this alongside a day job in IT and, of course, iamthemorning, the band she co-founded with virtuosic classical pianist Gleb Kolyadin. It's all rather at odds with the gauzy, waif-like character people expect her to be.

"People will often tell me that I make an impression of a delicate flower," she says in clear, accented tones, "someone that doesn't really have to work a lot, just a pretty girl in a pretty dress that is just… *there*. And this makes me so frustrated, because when there is a girl and a guy working in the same project, everyone by default assumes that the girl is there as a pretty book cover or something, and the guy's the one doing all the hard work. That is not true."

Semkina is not the woman you might have imagined. Or at least, not if your impression stems from her icily sweet voice and image that rivals John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* (the term 'Pre-Raphaelite' has probably now been used to describe her as frequently as actual Pre-Raphaelite art). In conversation she's likeably kooky but fiercely sharp and engaged. Her voice often breaks into a high half-laugh-half-gasp, contradicting her steely no-bullshit streak — much as the tattoos and dreadlocks offset her porcelain Kate Bush-cum-Tori Amos quality.

Still, it's these kinds of conflicting qualities that make iamthemorning so alluring. Since they formed in 2010, their music has been called progressive rock, chamber prog and 'baroque'n'roll' among other things: merging heightened emotions, angelic ethereality and Russian classicism into one contemporary prog package. In 2016 all these tropes reached something of a peak on second album *Lighthouse*, an emotionally heavy but lush concept record about a character dealing with mental health issues, inspired by the stories of Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf. It won them a Prog Award for Best Album in 2016, which has also helped the aforementioned visa application process.

Today we're convening over Skype to talk about iamthemorning's new studio film, *Ocean Sounds*. Comprising live performances of tracks from their first three records, it was shot and recorded over five days at the Ocean Sound studio in Giske, a remote, starkly beautiful island town near Ålesund in Sunnmøre, the southernmost traditional district of Norway. The genesis of the idea first emerged years ago, when Semkina stumbled across the studio online.

"This is when I made the decision!" she says. "I had no idea what we were gonna do there, but I just knew for sure that I would love to take my band to record in this studio. And of course because the location is so beautiful and the setting is just perfect, I knew that we would have to do the visual stuff. So when we decided we had space in our schedule to do the live DVD — and I wanted to capture the sound of the live band we had at that point — it was very easy to decide to do it here, because I'd always had this place in my mind."

Convincing their label wasn't so easy. Norway is expensive, Giske is hard to access and they had 10 people to fly from Russia, Belgium, Iceland, England and France.

"Of course labels and management are supposed to think about things that musicians don't always consider, so I was like, 'I wanna do that and screw you!' This is basically how we make decisions in iamthemorning. It took time to negotiate, but I think everyone is happy with how it turned out."

Their band and crew were flown in, and Semkina, Kolyadin and their driver travelled for three days from St Petersburg.

"We drove all the way through Finland, on a ferry to Sweden, and then through Sweden, through Norway and all the way to Ålesund," she reminisces, adding rather wistfully: "It was a great adventure actually, it felt like a proper road trip. The scenery that we saw during these three days was totally worth the long drive. Norway and Sweden are both just so stunning and this type of northern nature is so close to us, and so close to the music, that it was very inspiring and uplifting."

Centred on their live setlist (and touring band) from the last year or two, the aim with *Ocean Sounds* was to capture a positive time in the band's lifespan. Cinematic shots between songs show soft exchanges in Russian, with bare rocks and inky sea outside, as the sun sets around the studio, which has a glass roof.

"This was kind of a retreat for all of us," Semkina says, "to just enjoy each other's company and play music together while also enjoying this fantastic setting, and it was especially easy to enjoy all the time because the windows are so huge. So while we were recording and performing I was just looking at the sea, thinking that this is probably one of the happiest places I've ever been to. I'm always happiest when I get to do what I'm supposed to do as a musician, not some admin or crowdfunding or talking to management, all that crap that modern musicians *have* to do. But performing music that I wrote, and also being next to the sea…

"A lot of the music and songs I've written are influenced by water and the sea," she adds. "*Lighthouse* starts with the sea and finishes with the sea. The girl is kind of drowning herself, so it's not exactly the happiest… Our first album also starts with the sea and has the sea on the cover, and *Lighthouse* has the sea on the cover. We've got this very strong connection with water and the sea: it just makes me feel like anything is possible." She pauses, then laughs: "I don't know why…"

It was a major change from their regular workspaces back home in St Petersburg.

"We drove all the way through Finland, on a ferry to Sweden, and then through Sweden, through Norway and all the way to Ålesund. It was a great adventure: it felt like a proper road trip."

iamthemorning, L-R: Gleb Kolyadin, Marjana Semkina.

Meeting the locals in Giske...

Semkina's 30-square-metre, 21st-floor apartment on the outskirts of the city has the bonus of overlooking woodland, but keeps her confined to a small iPad-based recording set-up. She speaks frankly about the difficulties of being an artist in Russia: a place that, she tells us, for all its rich musical heritage, looks down on full-time musicians.

"Because I have a day job, people sometimes take me seriously," she explains. "But Gleb has a different story. He's a classically trained musician, he only does that, so he barely manages to make ends meet. When they ask him, 'What do you do?' and he goes, 'I'm a musician,' they go, 'Oh, do you have a *real* job?' This is the attitude that we've got. In Russia we have this saying that something is 'made in your lap', like you're sitting on a bench in a park and you write a poem, in a tiny notebook, in your lap. It means you're doing something in the conditions that are not supposed to help you."

She's acutely self-aware as we talk, laughing rather darkly at how "depressing" this article risks becoming.

"But from a creative point of view, maybe staying in Russia is more productive, because you know how artists are supposed to be depressed to be creative?" she suggests wryly. "We never really had any support in Russia in terms of promotion. I was the one talking to the venues, I was the one printing posters and sometimes even putting them out on the street and printing tickets and selling them. So it's always been very much DIY."

Semkina's experience of her homeland has long been fraught. Raised in an impoverished household in Kazan, she learned English at a "school full of rich kids" — her parents' decision, specifically because of its reputation for teaching the language. She was bullied from the beginning, coming to class in "shabby, cheap" clothes that her mother had bought from garage sales. Music quickly became a source of escape, even if her tastes further separated her from her peers.

"I knew *The Wall* by heart by the age of five," she recalls. "My parents thought it would be an appropriate bedtime cartoon because it had multiplication in it! I kind of just memorised everything phonetically and sang along to it. I don't think it was entirely healthy, but at least I always have an excuse now to tell my parents why I became a musician... So when I came to school I was already a fan of Pink Floyd and The Beatles and all that, and I was so eager to share it with other kids! But that wasn't welcome at all."

As a "miserable" 14-year-old she discovered Anathema, with the likes of Porcupine Tree and Oceansize following in quick succession. After university in Moscow, she and Kolyadin formed iamthemorning, gaining initial traction, essentially, for being different. Their early audiences consisted mostly of Russian teenagers, and her voice brightens considerably as we talk about them.

"Our audience in Russia is still mostly cute teenage girls in flowery dresses and guys in Haken shirts," she grins. "They all dye their hair in different colours and bring presents to us and write touching messages and fold paper cranes, the same as I do for the concerts."

As frontwoman and the predominant English speaker in the band, Semkina is iamthemorning's chief mouthpiece. It's resulted in a loyal fanbase — from the married couples who met at their gigs to those whom Semkina, a troubled soul herself, has talked out of self-harm or suicidal thoughts.

"That happens regularly," she says. "It's not easy emotionally for myself because I'm not quite stable too. But then they message me [to say] I help them, and it's very rewarding. There are a lot of troubled people out there, just as I used to be, and still am, and music still helps me, and I'm really happy to be that kind of help for them. This is very important."

It's a lot to place on one, not-quite-stable person. Do you and Gleb socialise much outside of music?

"I'm... a bit of a hermit, to be honest," she says. "Gleb and I are very close but it's not really necessary to be talking much when you are already close people. I think this is a very high-quality friendship."

Going forward, there's a fourth album in the works, one track of which appears in acoustic form on *Ocean Sounds*. As Semkina tells us, she has drawn inspiration from Victorian art and 19th-century English history. Accounts of freak shows, prostitutes and wax models of dissected women have fuelled her writing, and she's also working on a song that follows 14th-century Italian work *The Decameron*, "Which is definitely not a Victorian period, but it's still a morbidly beautiful story about the corrupted nature of people..."

She stops for a second. She seems suddenly more childlike when talking about new music, as if forgetting her life struggles and demons.

"So yeah," she continues, "a lot of fascinating themes for the songs, but I'm still thinking about how to shape it up into a beautiful concept to present to people..."

Ocean Sounds is available now via Kscope. See www.facebook.com/iamthemorningpage for more.

The Pretty Things

Fifty years ago, they arguably created the first rock opera concept album – but they never got the glory. What went wrong? We find out the story behind that album, and ask: **how prog are The Pretty Things?**

Words: Michael Hann

"We thought we were making something special. It was to give you an experience, so you move from cradle to grave with somebody's life, which they give you in opera all the time," says Phil May, who, after 55 years, is still the singer in The Pretty Things, a band that was never quite as big as they should have been. "In some ways, that added bitterness to the pill when it was ignored."

The album May is discussing is their fourth, *S.F. Sorrow*, which turns 50 in December — a suitably bells-and-whistles box set has already been released. It's one of the most extraordinary British albums of the late 1960s, and one utterly beset by disaster. It was the first rock opera, yet its thunder was stolen by The Who's *Tommy*; it was one of the crowning glories of English psychedelia, but it was released right after *The White Album*, just as trends started moving away from teapots-in-the-sky daydreaming to something more earthy; it was a crucial step between psychedelia and prog, but its failure put the band on their heels, just as King Crimson and Yes were starting to establish their reputations.

> **"What we were trying to do was definitely push the envelope, which prog bands then continued to do. – *Dick Taylor***

"What we were trying to do was definitely push the envelope," says May's partner in absurdity, guitarist Dick Taylor, "which prog bands then continued to do."

"What we were attempting was attempted again by different bands later for whatever their reasons were," May says. "We started to try to do something different. We tried to change the landscape, and a lot of prog bands came along with totally that intention. They didn't want to be just rock bands."

Fittingly, *S.F. Sorrow*'s roots were in failure. The Pretty Things' contract with Fontana had expired after the *Emotions* album had been released in April 1967. That record had been both a commercial flop and an artistic failure. After making their name playing feral, unhinged R&B, The Pretty Things turned to flowery pop for *Emotions*, with producer Steve Rowland commissioning *Sunday Night At The Palladium*-style brass and strings from them to go on top. Freed from their contract, though, they could leave that behind.

Above: 1968's *S.F. Sorrow*.

"When we finished with Fontana, we could do what the fuck we wanted, which was to go in and do demos," Taylor says. "That gap after leaving Fontana gave us the time to do what we wanted, and that's what got the attention of [EMI in-house producer] Norman Smith."

Smith, who produced the first two Pink Floyd albums, was EMI's champion of the underground, and he persuaded the label to sign The Pretty Things. "They certainly didn't pay a fortune for us," May says. "What they gave us for a signing-on fee was wiped out in debt anyway. And they made us pay for the printing of the story of *S.F. Sorrow*, and that was another 700 quid. So we were already out of budget and in debt by the time we started making *S.F. Sorrow*."

The story May refers to was a printed sheet that came with the album, telling the life story of Sebastian F Sorrow, the album's protagonist. There's no need to get bogged down with that here because, as with most rock operas, the story is incomprehensible anyway.

The band had decided they didn't want to make a conventional album of 14 unrelated songs. "We wanted to make a piece of music that hung together, so it was one piece of music made up of different elements," May says. "I was writing the story as

JORGEN ANGEL /REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Wally Waller (left) and Phil May in Copenhagen, 1968.

GEMS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

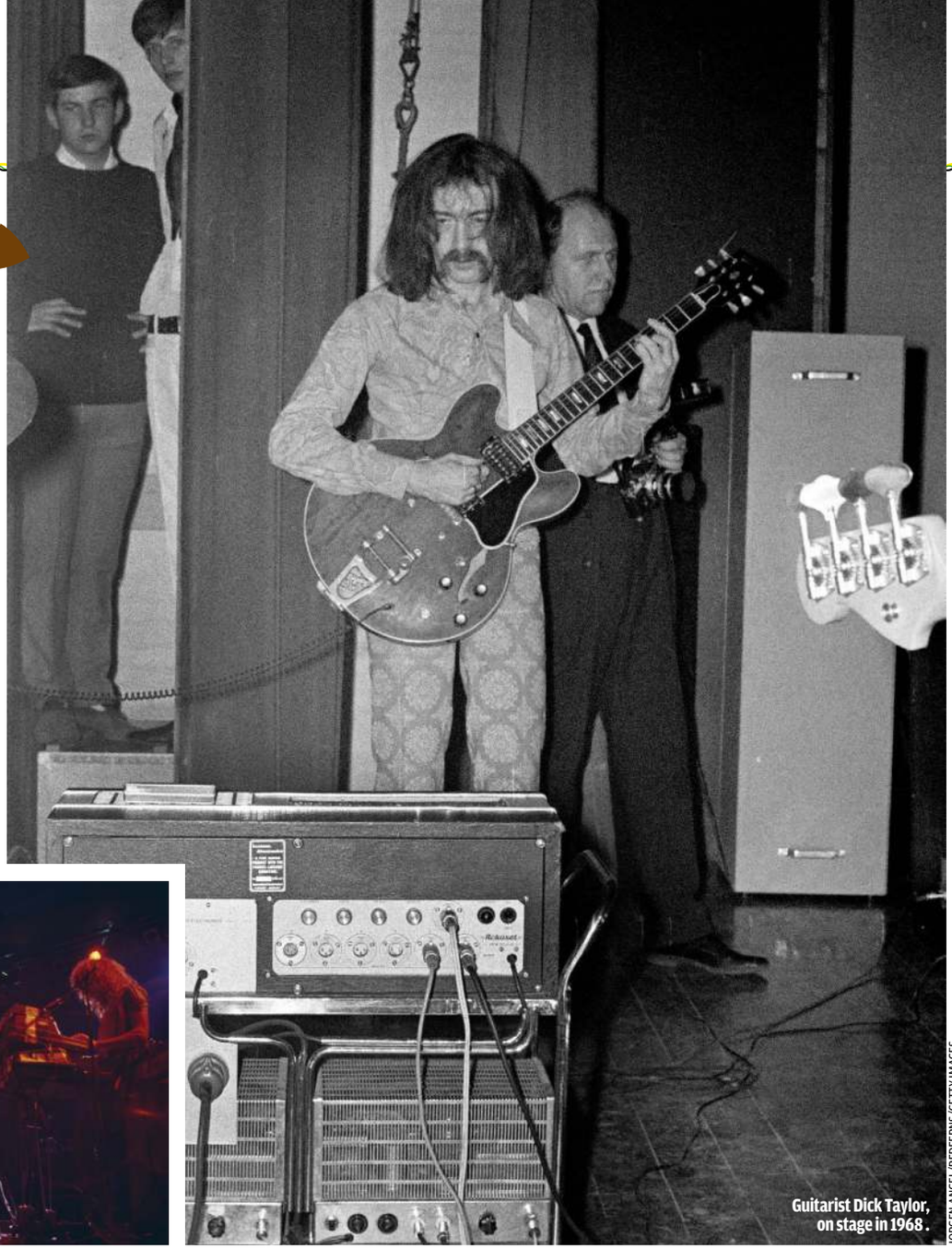
The Pretty Things in 1969, L-R: Dick Taylor, Jon Povey, Wally Waller, Phil May, John 'Twink' Alder (seated in front).

the songs were written. And the story wasn't complete when recording began. The music drove the story and the story drove the music, when it was necessary. When there was a gap in the narrative and a character was created – Baron Saturday – that drove the need for *Baron Saturday Meets S.F. Sorrow*. It really did evolve on the studio floor."

The group recorded *S.F. Sorrow* out of hours at Abbey Road, using downtime – which meant they had months to work, getting every element just so. They used unusual instrumentation ("The Tibetan drum set the tone for *Death*," May says, a remark so redolent of high psychedelia it sounds like a joke); they raided EMI's stores for things to make music with: Mellotrons, Ringo Starr's drum kit. When nothing in existence created the required sound, they invented it themselves. "My father and I made the little twangly instrument, kind of like a dulcimer, which is on *Death* and a couple other things," Taylor says.

The Pretties onstage in the 1970s.

ANDREW PUTLER/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



Guitarist Dick Taylor, on stage in 1968 .

JORGEN ANGEL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

All the while, Smith was cajoling them, encouraging them. "It had to be improvisatory," Taylor says, "and what was great about Norman was that he would take what might have been a small idea and turn it into something solid."

Gradually, the EMI engineers – whom Taylor and May call "the boffins" – got onside, too: "They really got caught up in this pushing of the technological envelope," May says. "There was a fantastic sense that we were doing something at all levels. Still, The Pretty Things' unconventional working practises caused occasional problems.

"At Norman's funeral [in 2008], one of the boffins came up to me and asked if I'd heard that one of his colleagues had nearly got divorced over *S.F. Sorrow*," May says. "He was a nine-to-five bloke and he started coming home at one or two in the morning because he was working on *S.F. Sorrow* and his wife was convinced he was having an affair."

> **"EMI were our parents and they'd given the baby away with absolutely no control or say in what happens. We were sold out."**
> **– *Phil May***

As might be expected, The Pretty Things embraced the times. They dressed the part, though May remembers the beads and bells having an unexpected side effect on keyboard player Jon Povey.

"You could hear him coming down the road for his rehearsals about 10 minutes beforehand, because all his bells made such a fucking racket."

And Taylor remembers that in 1969, when the band made an unlikely appearance in the Norman Wisdom comedy *What's Good For The Goose*, "Povey's girlfriend made all these clothes for us. Jesus, they were awful. They were such crap. But all the people in the film really liked them. So we did quite a good trade swapping them out."

Below: 1967's *Emotions*.

Though Taylor was more sceptical, May embraced LSD enthusiastically. "Acid changed my life," he says. "I saw things in a completely different way. The actual visual experience of being on a trip was stimulating. I found I could control what was going on, to a certain point. I would turn taps on and blood would come out. You'd wash your face and you've got blood all over it, but you know you haven't. And to know you could go back to the bar upstairs and sit there and talk to somebody and you weren't covered in blood, but you'd experience it as if you were. Or you'd watch somebody's head changing shape as you were talking to them.

"It was like a sharpening of the imagination for me. I don't think *S.F.*

Frontman Phil May in 1998.

BRIGITTE ENGL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Sorrow would have been impossible without it, but there's a lot of acid in it, in the imagery."

By September 1968, recording was finished. Across 13 tracks, The Pretty Things had created something remarkable: a life story told in astounding music, which ebbed and flowed, and could be pastoral (*The Journey*) or fearsome (*Old Man Going*). The world's first rock opera was complete.

In December 1968 it came out and... nothing. The band didn't feel confident enough about recreating it live to go out and play it. There was one show at the Middle Earth club in London where they decided to mime to a playback of the record. Legend holds it was a disaster because everyone involved, including the sound engineer responsible for playing the tracks, was tripping, but Taylor disputes that.

"I certainly didn't take acid!" he says. "There were technical hiccups because you couldn't press a button on the computer. You had to stick the needle on the album. If only we'd just decided to buckle down and play it."

Worse yet, EMI offered no support. "It was a kick in the balls when we got very little attention from EMI," May says. "It's one thing to let us make the bloody thing, but then to give us little quarter-inch adverts saying, 'The new album by The Pretty Things', nothing about the story, nothing about the narrative. That's why when *Tommy* came out, everybody was so keen, because it was presented so well that everyone knew what it was: it was a rock opera. Ours, from six months earlier, was just a Pretty Things record."

Below, from top: *Parachute* (1970), *Get The Picture?* (1965), *Freeway Madness* (1973).

EMI didn't even release the record in the US, so the band's manager, Steve O'Rourke, had to tour American labels, touting it round, only to discover no one wanted it because it had been promised elsewhere by EMI. "This was behind the scenes, but Berry Gordy had apparently said to EMI, 'If you want to keep Tamla Motown stuff coming through you, we want *S.F. Sorrow*,'" May says. "So in the end Steve was wasting his time. Although we didn't know it, we were going to be given as a present to Tamla Motown."

Motown released it on its new rock subsidiary, Rare Earth — several months after *Tommy* came out in the States. "We got slaughtered," May says. "Daltrey and Townshend had been saying to me, 'For fuck's sake, what are you doing? You've got to come out in America! We're coming out in a few weeks!' They were quite concerned, whatever Pete's said since, that it would have been wrong for *Tommy* to come out before us in America. And they were right. EMI were our parents and they'd given the baby away with absolutely no control or say in what happens. We were sold out."

Taylor left The Pretty Things in the aftermath of *S.F. Sorrow* — "I had made a record I was really proud of and happy with; maybe it was time to go on to other stuff" — rejoining in 1978. May soldiered on, making another fascinating proto-prog song suite, *Parachute*, in 1970, before reconfiguring The Pretty Things as a hard rock band. Now, with *S.F. Sorrow* rehabilitated as one of the great British albums of the late 1960s, both May and Taylor have set aside their disappointments.

"I have to regard it as a success, because it was an artistic success," Taylor says.

"It's the most important Pretty Things record, for me anyway," May adds.

"For me, too," confirms Taylor.

Oh, you Pretty Things. The greatest group who ever managed to shrug off greatness.

S.F. Sorrow 50th Anniversary Edition is out now via Madfish. The Pretty Things play their final electric show at Indigo at the O2 in London on December 13, with special guests including David Gilmour and Van Morrison.

YOUR SHOUT!

From hard-driving R&B to the world's first rock opera. Surely we have to ask the question: how prog are The Pretty Things?

"Like many, they started with the R&B/blues sound – which they went back to later – but albums such as *S.F. Sorrow* and *Parachute* are definitely in the progosphere."
Titus Jennings

"Yep, only *S.F. Sorrow* and *Parachute*. Although I love their AOR albums *Savage Eye* and *Silk Torpedo*, they are definitely NOT prog. So on balance I would not call them a prog band."
Solent Area Prog

"Never heard of them."
Captain Beanhead

"*S.F. Sorrow* is a unique body of musical brilliance!"
Jackie Elvey

"*Parachute* is still a favourite. Proto-prog I'd say."
Greg McVeigh

"They definitely have a place in the history of the genre, for being part of the psych scene in the mid-1960s and recording one the very first concept albums, *S.F. Sorrow*."
Paul Quinton

"*S.F. Sorrow* counts as it's one of the first rock operas, so I would think 'yes' as to prog. Even Jimmy Page reckons they changed music, so that could be seen as progressive rock."
Steve Harrison

"Nope – damn good rock band though."
Laurie Laughland

"*S.F. Sorrow* is a faultless piece of classic prog."
Phil White

"Great use of the Mellotron on *S.F. Sorrow* ensures maximum progginess."
Andy Barbara Dent

"Their take on writing contributed to a new perspective on writing. *Parachute* is probably the most recognised."
Jeramy Stanton Essary

"Saw them at HRH Prog with no previous knowledge of them. Wasn't keen."
Áine Ní Tómas

"Love *S.F. Sorrow* and *Parachute*! In my opinion, these guys never got the recognition they deserved, being overshadowed by *Sgt. Pepper's...* which was recorded at the same time."
Clare Shorthouse Fowler

"Brilliant band. *S.F. Sorrow* is one of the all-time great albums. *Defecting Grey* is one of the Top 5 best singles of all time. *Parachute* and *Silk Torpedo* are well worth 40 minutes of anyone's time."
Ian Holt

"*S.F. Sorrow* is very prog. One of the first concept albums. Should've been bigger. Not sure why it wasn't. Great album."
Ken Forrest

"*In The Square/The Letter/Rain*, *Defecting Grey* and *The Sun* are what I tend to call pop portmanteaus in the vein of Moody Blues albums. Prog pop but not prog rock."
Nicholas John Payne

"First ever concept album."
Jeff Green

ROAD STORIES

Stepping ever further out from the shadow of Jethro Tull, **Martin Barre** talks to *Prog* about the challenges and rewards of starting over from scratch, avoiding complexity for the sake of it, and why his life is more musically satisfying than ever before.

Words: David West **Photos:** Elayne Barre

"It developed like slow cooking," says Martin Barre about his solo career. After more than 40 years playing guitar in Jethro Tull, Barre has steadily established his own distinct musical identity with the Martin Barre Band, who return with Barre's seventh album as leader on *Roads Less Travelled*.

Since the dissolution of Jethro Tull six years ago, the solo side of Barre's career has taken on a new importance now that it's his bread and butter.

"I had music in me that wasn't coming out in Jethro Tull," Barre says. "I needed an outlet, but they were purely for fun. There was no need for them to have a worldwide release or tour behind them, although I was very much behind them.

"For me, the benchmark was Jethro Tull, so when I was writing music and the odd song, in my mind it had to match up to that high level."

The early solo records arrived in fits and starts – there was a seven-year gap between *The Meeting* and *Stage Left* – but since *Away With Words* in 2013, Barre has stayed impressively productive, releasing *Order Of Play* in 2014 and *Back To Steel* the following year, all leading up to the new record. However, it's been a battle.

"Jethro Tull finished and I had to drag myself out of the mess that was left and to really start from absolute zero," explains Barre. "That was where it was difficult to stay focused, to know what I wanted to do and to be strong-minded, but it slowly, slowly gathered impetus and strength and now it's wonderful. We've got great gigs everywhere, I'm really happy with the new CD and *Back To Steel* gave me a good foothold in my songwriting as well. We played a lot of that album live and it worked really well, so I am really on a springboard at the moment."

"Jethro Tull finished and I had to drag myself out of the mess that was left and to really start from absolute zero."

Songs From The Wood: guitar great Martin Barre.

As a writer, Barre says he's not someone who can grab half an hour in a hotel room to whip up a tune while on tour. Instead, he needs a situation without interruptions or intrusions, so he settles down to compose in his home studio.

"Every morning I go into my studio and write," he says. "It's so much fun, but I need that environment. I want no distractions, I want a pot of coffee within arm's reach and I just want to be in control of the situation.

"When I'm writing, it's a very concentrated process," he explains. "Every day I'm getting ideas formulated, revisiting them and hopefully fine-tuning them. I love writing, so in some ways I could make more albums than I do and would enjoy it. *Back To Steel* was almost three years ago and I can't believe it's that long. In my mind it feels like a year because things happen so quickly around the Martin Barre Band."

Starting his career from scratch in a post-Tull world, Barre had to prove that he could be a draw without the brand behind him. "I think it's the same for anybody in a big band who goes out on their own. People are slightly sceptical and cynical about what you'd be like away from the main event and probably think, 'Well, is he just going to go out with a bunch of his mates and play twelve-bar blues and get drunk?'" he says. "They're not going to take it for granted that you're going to fill a theatre full of people.

"You've got to work for that audience and because Jethro Tull had the logo, it had such a catchment within the name, I really had to start from zero on every front."

However, he believes that the challenge revitalised him as a songwriter and player. "I was lethargic, very frustrated musically," he says. "Suddenly the floor opened up underneath me and I had to come up with something. I had to say, 'What are you going to do? Are you going to sink or are you going to swim?' And I wanted to swim very badly so it gave me that strength, and the end product has made me a much happier and, I hope, a much more musical person."

The last thing he wants is to be a Tull clone or to rely on that cache of music to attract people to the Martin Barre Band. "I don't play *Aqualung* onstage because it's a cheap way of getting the audience on your side," he explains. "I want to win them over with music where they go, 'Wow, I wouldn't think he'd play that one.' I just want it to be on my terms. I think I know what works really well for an audience because I've been doing it for

Barre is back with new album *Roads Less Travelled*.

nearly 50 years, but I want the Martin Barre Band to be its own thing. We play some Tull music, but we do a lot of other things as well because I have the freedom to play what I want."

The core of the band contains Dan Crisp on vocals and guitar, Alan Thomson on bass, and Darby Todd behind the drums, although Barre jokingly notes that they've gone through their share of drummers on the way to finding Todd. In quieter moments, he's been known to compile lists of how many bass players passed through the ranks of Jethro Tull, how many divorces there were among the members and so on.

"But the biggest number was always how many drummers Jethro Tull had. I guess it's a shit gig!" he says. "We've had some great drummers, but it's finding the right person."

And he's very happy with his line-up now. "I'm lucky with Dan, we're very much an entity musically. Alan is just an incredible musician and Darby Todd is a great drummer. Obviously I'm going to say that, and the other thing that's obvious is he's the best drummer we've had. All that to-ing and fro-ing through things that have worked and haven't quite worked, I think we've ended up with exactly what we want and need. Somebody quoted that a band is as good as the drummer and it's so true. I knew that 40, 50 years ago and it's still true."

What Barre doesn't want is just a backing band, noting that Ian Anderson once said he didn't know who was around him onstage in Tull at one point. "I want them to share what we've got," he says about Crisp, Thomson and Todd. "Everything. I'm talking about the music, the CDs, giving them space within the music, that we all have an important job to do, and I want them to be a big, big part of it. I want them to be really happy with the music."

And where possible, he wants to expand the live line-up, bringing in singers Alex Hart and Becca Langsford, both of whom can he heard on *Roads Less Travelled*.

"Alex and Becca do some of the live shows with us anyway and have done for the last two, three years," he says. "I want them to be a bigger part of the band. I've always admired Derek Trucks. I read an interview where they said, 'Why do you go out with a 12-piece band? It's crazy, so expensive.' He said, 'Success has enabled me to spend more money on my music and that's where I want to spend it. If I had more money, I'd have a 15-piece band.' I thought that was wonderful, that's exactly what I want to do. I'd love a Hammond player. I want the girls there all the time because it's part of the music and every CD I do they've become a more important part of it."

As much as the Martin Barre Band tends to fall under the prog umbrella, that is perhaps more the result of the guitarist's background with Tull than a reflection of the direction and sound he is pursuing now. He describes his earlier output as "too complex for complexity's sake". Instead, what he wants is "my music to sound simple, like it's a song. Verse, chorus, solo, instrumental middle eight, chorus, verse, chorus, out. Accessible. I want the music in there to be the best it can possibly be, so if there is anything complex or demanding, it's inside of it and if people want to access that, they can listen to it a few times and hear hopefully more and more things that are going on. But they need to be supportive of the end result rather than in-your-face complex time signatures and crazy playing. Everybody has done it and we're all guilty of doing it for selfish reasons. You think, 'I can do this so I'm going to do it.'"

> "I don't play *Aqualung* onstage because it's a cheap way of getting the audience on your side. I want to win them over with music where they go, 'Wow, I wouldn't think he'd play that one.'"

His goal, rather than pulling off the flashiest guitar licks possible, is to leave his audience with a smile on their faces. "One day I want people to say, 'I really like your songs,' because that to me as a guitar player would be a big compliment. My guitar playing is my comfort zone, I can do it with my eyes shut. How good or bad I am, I don't care. I'm never going to be in the top 20 best guitar players in the world, or in the UK, or even in Devon probably, but I don't care. I've never really looked to be that sort of guitarist. I like to be respected, I hope I've got a decent standard of guitar playing. I work hard at being better every day I play, but my songs are my outlet. All my musicality goes into the music and the songwriting and that's where I'm looking for people's reaction."

2019 will see Barre out on the road to perform *50 Years Of Jethro Tull* alongside his fellow alumni Clive Bunker and Jonathan Noyce, but he's very keen to make sure they're not sold as something they're not. "There is no Jethro Tull and there won't be," he says. "I won't point a finger, but I've had a couple of occasions where they've tried to bill it as Jethro Tull. No, I want people to know exactly what it is. It's me, Clive Bunker, Jonathan Noyce, with the Martin Barre Band and surprise guests, some of which I've got lined up. It's an evening of the history of Jethro Tull, the music that I think is important."

Barre says he feels powerfully motivated to keep the Tull brand alive, even if the band itself is no more. "It's made me what I am or what I'm not. It's why I'm 71 and still playing music because Jethro Tull enabled me to do it and fans respect the name Jethro Tull. The music is really important to them. I have 100 per cent respect for it and this is my way of showing it. People say, 'Oh, you should play more Tull,' or 'You should play more of your own music.' Leave me alone! I just want to have fun. If I can put together a night of music that people are going to love and the quality is going to be really high, that's all I want."

Choosing the setlist and revisiting his back catalogue has brought its share of surprises. "Some things you go, 'Wow, what was that? How did I play that?' It's quite exciting, it's like listening to another guitar player and figuring out how they did it, what they were thinking about when they did it. 'Oh yeah! That's what I was doing. You weirdo!' It's a mixture of familiarity and discovery. At first I was a bit reticent about the whole process but as I've looked at albums and as I examine all the songs, they come alive again. It's going to be fun. There's nothing in there that's going to be hard work. We're going to laugh a lot and we're going to play a lot. It's my 'thank you' for 50 years of enabling me to be a musician."

Roads Less Travelled is available now via Cleopatra Records. Visit www.martinbarre.com for more information.

END GAME

Over 10 years since *Doomsday Afternoon*, **Phideaux** finally completes his dystopian trilogy with new album *Infernal*.

Words: Nick Shilton

Three's Company: Phideaux Xavier is completing his trilogy.

American musician Phideaux Xavier was highly prolific between 2003 and 2011, releasing no fewer than eight albums under his name. But since then, little had been heard from him. Frustratingly for aficionados, his dystopian trilogy remained incomplete, with 2006's *The Great Leap* and 2007's *Doomsday Afternoon* succeeded by two unrelated albums, 2009's *Number Seven* and 2011's *Snowtorch*.

But his fans can now celebrate following the release of double album *Infernal*, which concludes the trilogy. So, why the lengthy *Infernal* gestation period?

"The seven years weren't spent drinking Mai Tais in Malibu! I thought I was making beer; instead it turned out to be cognac," laughs Xavier, speaking from his Los Angeles home. He then explains more prosaically that his day job (directing *General Hospital*, America's second longest running soap opera) demanded his time for a period.

Additionally, after writing *Infernal* and recording its basic tracks in 2012, preparation for a 2013 concert in Quebec resulted in changing arrangements and considerable re-evaluation of those basic tracks. Also, Xavier's guitarist, producer and engineer Gabriel Moffat needed to focus on other work to fund his kids' college educations.

Ultimately while *Infernal*'s release is far later than originally intended, the additional time served Phideaux well. "It allowed me to step back and look at the album through different lenses," he says. But also following the success of *Doomsday Afternoon*, there was high expectation for *Infernal*.

"There's a sense that if I spent seven years making this, it had better be good!" he says.

Although *The Great Leap* and *Doomsday Afternoon* were promoted as parts one and two of a trilogy, the albums weren't structured from the outset in intricate detail as a trilogy. "It was a joke, because what is more pretentious than a trilogy? The first two albums were created at the same time. I had something very conceptual with the second album but was sure I had more to write."

Number Seven and *Snowtorch* served as an interregnum from the trilogy. "I needed to let the trilogy sit for a while," he reflects. "But it did backfire. *Doomsday Afternoon* has been my most successful album commercially and probably artistically too, so all anyone wanted to know was when was the next part."

Infernal's sheer volume of material added to the complexity of completing the trilogy. "One final nail in the coffin was to make it a double album," he says. "We all know that double albums are like Waterloo for Napoleon. It's like everyone dies upon their double album. But I thought it would be great to make it a double to serve the shorter pieces of *The Great Leap* while having the ability to stretch out and be more free-form for the *Doomsday Afternoon* component."

Above: 2006's *The Great Leap*.

As such, and with a 10-piece core band dispersed across LA, New Mexico, Oregon, Chicago and New York plus various guests, *Infernal* represents a huge undertaking and builds conceptually upon *The Great Leap* and *Doomsday Afternoon*.

"The first two albums were written together. A lot of songs had dystopian, speculative near future concerns. Like what would happen if genetic engineering did this and global warming did that, or if religious fanatics got hold of the handles of society?"

While *The Great Leap* is a series of short stories that take place in the same world, *Doomsday...* sees those stories intersect.

"I wasn't sure there is necessarily a happy ending to these types of stories. But perhaps there's an undercurrent that the game can start over with new characters replacing the old ones."

"*Infernal* takes characters and impressionistic elements from those two albums and tries to bring them full circle," he says. In doing so, he wondered how to reach a happy ending.

"I wasn't sure there is necessarily a happy ending to these types of stories. But perhaps there's an undercurrent that the game can start over with new characters replacing the old ones. I chose to provide two endings. There's the ending in *Eternal* and then there's *Endgame — An End*, which hits the reset button."

Above: second part of the trilogy, 2007's *Doomsday Afternoon*.

Infernal is intriguing thematically, with many lyrics chiming with elements of modern America. *Doomsday...* was released when the Bernie Madoff financial scandal hit the press. "There's this whole undercurrent in *Doomsday Afternoon* about the wealthy stealing from the people."

Xavier maintains a strong interest in current and historic world affairs and *Infernal* appears unintentionally prescient. "In 2012, when I wrote 97% of the lyrics for *Infernal*, who could have known what would be happening in modern America or indeed in the UK, or in Europe with the far right?

Xavier examines modern America in his new album *Infernal*.

"There's a sense that if I spent seven years making this, it had better be good!"

"But I've always found Maoist China, Stalinist Russia, Germany in World War 2 and the Kims of North Korea fascinating. Those stories informed the album, as well as the fiction of Margaret Atwood or Orwell's *1984*."

Some of *Infernal*'s lyrics could be seen as an allegory for modern America. "Modern America didn't happen on election night of 2016; it was building for a while," Xavier says. "The album was mixed and ready to go in 2016, before minute details were changed. I wish I could say this is a commentary on the current position in America, but that would be fibbing. Because what is happening in my nation is so dysfunctional means *Infernal* is very relevant. It would be great if my album was a complete fantasy."

Infernal's striking front cover (based on Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden Of Earthly Delights*) is a 2013 painting by vocalist Molly Ruttan, featuring a bird whose plumage bears a striking resemblance to a certain president's coiffure. "It's a bitter irony that I put out an album in 2018 that's about authoritarianism with an orange bird on the cover," he sighs.

Below: new album *Infernal*.

Defining Xavier's multi-faceted sound is challenging, but it helps to hear his influences.

"It has all of the heart and mystery of what he did with Genesis, but it's shorter songs, quirky and has his unusual humour," Xavier enthuses about the first Peter Gabriel solo album before referencing David Bowie's *Low*, *"Heroes"* and *Lodger* albums.

Having grown up on Genesis, Renaissance and Tull, in college Xavier listened to The Cure, Siouxsie And The Banshees, Bowie and Magazine. "I've always liked oddball music."

Musically Xavier covers plenty of bases as an artist himself. "Originally I was trying to be a quirky art rock practitioner. Then I realised I could do anything I wanted because I wasn't signed to a record label. That's when I started to explore progressive rock which I loved when I was a kid. But I also love psychedelia — I love Syd Barrett's Pink Floyd as much as I like David Gilmour's."

Xavier regards himself more as a writer than a virtuoso musician. "As a kid I didn't eat, sleep, breathe practising my instrument. I liked to play guitar and was curious about piano. I was really into Peter Gabriel, Ian Anderson and Alice Cooper. I wanted to be the person who came up with the ideas and made grandiose visionary albums, but never practised my instruments much."

On graduating from college Xavier bought recording equipment intending to engineer his own recordings and save the cost of studio time. "But I was terrible at those skills," he admits. "I enjoy writing music and love making albums, but I'm terrible at the technical elements of it."

With a lucrative job directing soap operas, Xavier eventually had the financial wherewithal to invest in other people's expertise. "I wasn't going to make my mark by being a pretty boy or making commercial music." Concluding that fitting into the music industry would hinder him and might deter him from making music, Xavier decided to make albums, release them and not concern himself with their commercial success.

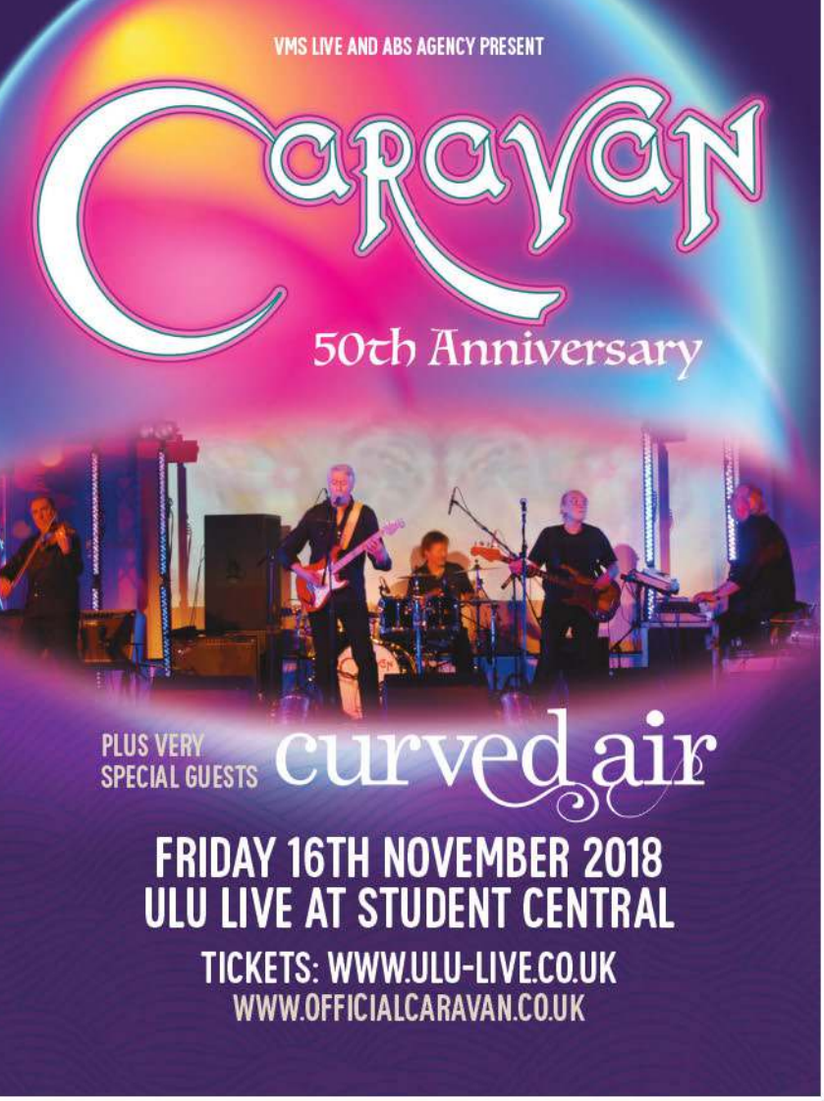
"That has freed me to be as creative as I want. The internet has allowed me to have some people listen to my music." However he doesn't however aspire to widespread recognition. "I'm pretty independent and fairly lazy when it comes to promoting myself."

As such, Xavier's albums are labours of love, time and money, as he creates music principally to please himself and his collaborators. If there's an audience for it, all the better. "*Infernal* is music from 2012/13 and I've gone in a lot of other directions since."

Indeed he reveals that he has been working on six other albums over the last seven years, which are 85-90% finished. But in the immediate future, his focus is on *Infernal*.

"I hesitate to be a grabby, look-at-me person: I prefer to be the mysterious figure in the corner," he says. "I'm not doing this music to become rich and probably spend more on it than I earn; I make it because I love it. But I feel very strongly about this album, so I would like people to hear it and give me a listen if they haven't before."

Infernal is out now via Bloodfish. See www.bloodfish.com for more information.



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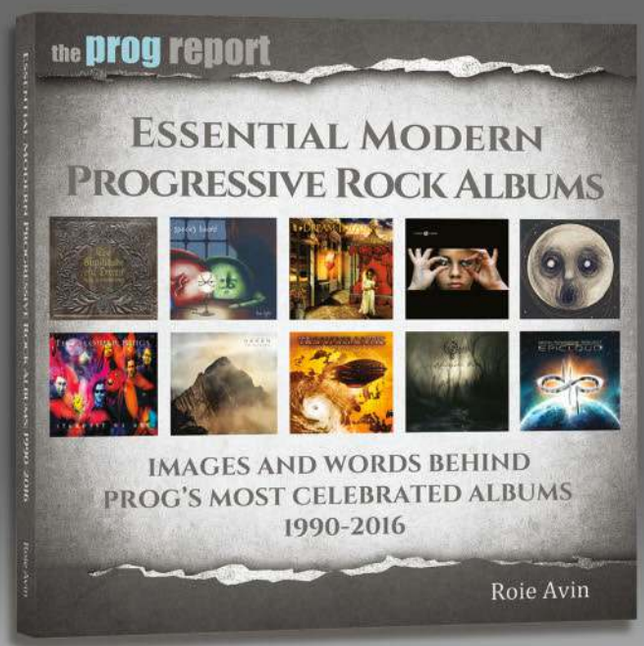

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The Big Finish

Thumpermonkey's new album has been gestating for 10 years, and it's well worth the wait. From Scott Walker to Kurt Vonnegut, **Michael Woodman** and **Rael Jones** discuss the inspirations behind, and making of, *Make Me Young, Etc.*

Words: Dom Lawson **Images:** Ashley Jones

Progressive music teaches us to expect the unexpected. Quite what everyone is going to make of the new Thumpermonkey album is another matter entirely, though. If you thought you knew the band, perhaps based on the juddering, amorphous skronk of 2012's *Sleep Furiously* album or its boisterous follow-up EP *Electricity*, then prepare to have your preconceptions obliterated.

Their new record, *Make Me Young, Etc*, is that rare beast: an album that very nearly defies any sort of earnest, journalistic description. Volubly progressive on every level and yet curiously timeless, gently psychedelic and at times densely orchestrated in the manner of some highfalutin prog rock opera, it's both one of 2018's most distinctive creations *and* a major curveball for interested observers anticipating the Londoners' next step.

In many ways, the new Thumpermonkey album feels like a bold leap into an unknowable future, not least because it also happens to be a concept album about a giant asteroid destroying the Earth. But as vocalist/guitarist Michael Woodman and keyboard maestro Rael Jones explain to *Prog*, *Make Me Young, Etc* has been incrementally gestating for the best part of 10 years.

> "It must seem like a really bizarre transition, but it's just something that aggregated over an extremely long period of time."
> **Michael Woodman**

"We've had two of the songs, the opening track *Veldt* and *Make Me Young, Etc* itself, for a decade in their original form," says Jones. "I remember I first heard *Veldt* all those years ago and Woody's original demo was not that far from how the final thing turned out. It really was a very good demo. And I cried when I heard it, genuinely. I thought it was astonishing."

"Ha! And Rael hates all music," Woodman interjects with a wry chuckle. "So that really is quite an achievement!"

"Honestly, I loved it so much, I was scared to listen to it again for quite some time," the keyboardist recalls. "I cried again, listening to it a second time, so I was very emotionally attached to making this music and getting everything absolutely right. We talked about making this album and how it would probably be a concept thing. So it's always been there in the background. We discussed making it in 2011 and 2012, I think. But we then said, 'Let's do *Sleep Furiously* and make a slightly more punk rock, 'play it live in the studio'-type album…'"

"Although it turns out that we don't really have that punk ethic," deadpans Woodman. "The records just turn out the way they're meant to turn out, really."

It would be disingenuous to suggest that there's no red line connecting the music on *Make Me Young, Etc* with its noisier, more rock-based predecessors, but there's still something genuinely shocking about new songs like the doom-laden, melodramatic *Figstorm* and the restrained, twinkling menace of *Deckchair For Your Ghost*. This is a side to Thumpermonkey that may have been lurking in the background all along, but its blossoming is a wonder to behold, albeit an occasionally jarring one.

"It must seem like a really bizarre transition, but it's just something that aggregated over an extremely long period of time," Woodman notes. "If you look at the timelines, they're all quite confused. We basically presented the album to Sel Balamir from Amplifier, who's releasing the album on his Rockosmos label, and he loved it. But his experience of seeing us was watching a curtailed, 20-minute set when we were the closest we'd ever get to a punk attitude because we were a bit grumpy and just blasting out the fastest, rockiest

Monkey Business: Michael Woodman (front) and the band.

numbers! [Laughs] So that was his route into Thumpermonkey, saying, 'Oh, okay, I want to start a rock label!' Then we present him with this ridiculous, 45-minute prog, asteroid-destroying-the Earth concept album."

It shouldn't really come as a surprise to Thumpermonkey fans that *Make Me Young, Etc* is smothered in lush orchestration: the classically trained Rael Jones' daylight hours are spent writing and arranging soundtracks for what he calls "period dramas and that kind of stuff". There's a definite widescreen rush to the new album's twin peaks of sumptuousness: the opening *Veldt* and the rambling, 10-minute title track. The former is particularly stunning, with its disquieting surges of microtonal strings and off-kilter, sludgy riffs, all inspired by one of the avant-garde's most iconic figures.

"With *Veldt*, it was specifically an attempt to steal what Scott Walker was doing in about 1995," Woodman grins. "He'd have something pretty happening and then he'd have this horrible, atonal cluster of notes going [makes screeching noise] *eeeeuuurrgghh* over the top of it. Then I thought, 'Wouldn't it be nice to have some big riffs on that?' but it took so long to actually create the album that Scott Walker had made his *Soused* album with Sunn O))), which is all him making strange, keening synth noises over enormous doomy riffs, while singing about nose holes caked in black cocaine, or whatever it is he sings about! It's a really weird mixture when you think about all those things together."

Although thankfully bereft of references to drug-soiled snot, *Make Me Young, Etc*'s title track does give Scott Walker a run for his money in the bewildering stakes. A sprawling, intricate and intimate mini-symphony that could hardly be further away from the juddering poly-riffs of *Sleep Furiously* tunes like *Wheezyboy*, it's a grand crescendo befitting of its core thematic thrust: if you knew that the end of the world was coming, how would you live your life?

"The title of the song is actually the last line in Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast Of Champions*," Woodman explains. "It's a line where Kilgore Trout, the made-up sci-fi author that's always appearing in Kurt Vonnegut novels, meets Kurt when he steps into the book at the end and says, 'I'm really sorry, but actually you're not real!' He says, 'All of these awful things that I've been putting you through in this entire series of books, I just made it all up... sorry about that!' It's *really* harrowing, because the end of the book is about this character, who's realised that he's fictional, begging Kurt Vonnegut to make him young so he can start over again. So there was a resonance that just seemed to fit into this whole idea of knowing that the entire human race is going to be destroyed alongside you."

For Thumpermonkey, the main problem with making an album as ambitious and seemingly extravagant as *Make Me Young, Etc* was the sheer cost and scale of the whole audacious enterprise. Fortunately, it seems that Woodman and Jones are men with huge reserves of patience and a shared resourceful streak: the road to finishing this project has plainly been a tricky and obstacle-strewn one, but the goal at the end never lost its allure for those involved.

> **"I was very emotionally attached to making this music and getting everything absolutely right."**
> **Rael Jones**

"It has been frustrating at times, but we were very committed to releasing it properly," says Woodman. "There have been some great things that have happened. It's really exciting that *Prog*, in particular, have been so kind to us and have really trumpeted what we do. There have been some frustrations about getting our music listened to and exposed, I suppose. The last year and a half has been an elaborate and complex series of laminated itineraries for how this was all going to be done, so that we could get as many people listening to it as possible, with the limited resources that are available to a weird band like us."

Now that it's finished and about to be released, do you feel a huge sense of relief?

"Now it's like, 'Thank god!' It's like doing the biggest poo in the world," Woodman laughs. "It was about being finally able, to some extent, to forget how frustrating it had all been in the past. But we did it to ourselves to some extent because we wanted to do it right."

Despite the new songs' inherent complexity, Thumpermonkey have already begun to perform them live and are cautiously optimistic that 2019 will bring a splurge of opportunities to take this extraordinary music to as many stages as possible. Beyond that, the making of this album seems to have a profound, positive effect on the men that pieced it so meticulously but gradually together. Thanks to the power of mind-bending music, even the end of the world doesn't seem so bad.

"I have ongoing issues with anxiety and depression, and the music is sometimes a great thing to make me feel more comfortable about myself," Woodman muses. "There's a line at the end of the song *Make Me Young, Etc* that says, *'Take this useless sadness and throw it away,'* and it's almost a mantra, an attempt to try to force myself into a state of positivity by making these bold statements about leaving that part of myself behind. So it's a very introspective album, but that's just from my perspective!"

"It's that common realisation of 'Why am I holding on to this sadness?'" Jones concludes. "That's why there's that repeated line, *'Take this useless sadness and throw it away.'* It's what I imagine the whole human race is thinking or chanting at the exact point the tidal wave comes after the asteroid hits... I think there's something beautiful about that."

Make Me Young, Etc is available now via Rockosmos. See www.thumpermonkey.com for more information.

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A Round Of Applause

After Danish proggers **VOLA** released their celebrated debut record *Inmazes* in 2016, the task of following it up was always going to be tricky. Has *Applause Of A Distant Crowd* swatted away that second album syndrome? *Prog* finds out.

Words: Chris Cope **Images:** Simon Læssøe

VOLA guitarist and vocalist Asger Mygind misses something. Right now it's not the nostalgic haze of childhood, though, or a lost friendship. Instead, he misses living a life where you don't have social media catapulting notifications at you all day, and where there's no subconscious desire to check your mobile phone when you've got a few minutes to spare.

"For me there's a feeling of sometimes just being lost in social media and not being able to find a way back to my own thoughtfulness," he says down the phone from a library in Copenhagen. "Sometimes I miss the days where you can just sit on a chair and look out the window and not have this urge to check my phone.

"Now we allow ourselves to get interrupted all the time, because we feel there is so much entertainment out there, and it's really hard not to indulge in all that. I have this fear that it might affect my creativity in the long run, if I lose this thoughtfulness that you can get outside of social media."

Judging by his band's new album *Applause Of A Distant Crowd*, Mygind has nothing to worry about. The Copenhagen quartet's record is a compelling, vivacious and, yes, very creative and very thoughtful follow-up to their impressive 2016 debut *Inmazes*, and it's one that sees the proggers evolve their sound with ease.

> "There's a feeling of sometimes just being lost in social media and not being able to find a way back to my own thoughtfulness."
> **Asger Mygind**

The title of the album – which was recorded in Copenhagen in 2017, with much of the work done at Mygind's home studio – is a nod to social media and how many people try to present themselves in a positive light to 'friends' they may never see in real life, and it's a theme throughout the record.

Social networking and its apparent negative effect on society has quickly become a hot topic, one that is becoming very relatable to billions of screen junkies across the world.

'Watch me now, I'm vanishing in the light,' Mygind's voice swirls in the dreamy title track. *'I've photographed my latest meal, in black and white, I kept my faith in videos of cats in shoes.'*

"It's sort of the context that most of the songs are placed in," Mygind says. "They are inspired by observations about how our relationships have changed since social media became a big part of our everyday lives.

"It's a feeling of being close online but being distant in the real world, if you can call anything the real world. It's also about how you can reach people who are very far away. We can make music and get feedback from a girl living in Brazil or South Africa, a connection to a distant crowd, and that image is a part of some of the lyrics."

It's ironic that the more positive side of social media has no doubt played a part in getting VOLA get to where they are today: one of modern prog's most prodigious talents.

The band — completed by keyboard player Martin Werner, bassist Nicolai Mogensen and drummer Adam Janzi — started their journey back in 2006 when Mygind and some friends killed time by jamming out songs by their heroes in his parents' basement. Back then it was luminaries such as Dream Theater, Opeth and Porcupine Tree that sparked VOLA's imagination, although trip hoppers Massive Attack also inspired them.

Demos, EPs and some line-up changes followed before *Inmazes* put the Danes truly on the prog map. Its cover, based on a drawing by artist Anders Thrane, showing a man's head dissected into black and white lines, was joined by a sound that was just as memorable, with the metallic attack of Meshuggah married with the melodic majesty of Haken or Karnivool.

But this time around, things are a little different. One of the lead singles, *Ghosts*, shines a bright light on VOLA's more gentle side, with a floaty keyboard motif allied with soaring vocals. It was largely well-received, but one worried YouTube user wrote that it "feels too generic pop", while a fan on Facebook lobbed over that dreaded hand grenade of critique: they thought it sounded a little too "Coldplay".

But VOLA don't care. It's part of the plan — a quest to reinvigorate their sound. Doing the same thing twice doesn't fit into their way of thinking.

"If we had made an *Inmazes* number two, it would have been a competition between those two albums. I think it would have failed because for the style we used on *Inmazes*, I don't think we could better it, really," Mygind reflects.

"It was that style taken to 800 per cent. It felt necessary to do something different this time and I feel like we're searching a bit more on this album, to figure out what makes sense for us.

"I think it's more experimentation really than *Inmazes*. That felt more like a comfort zone, which I guess was a product of the EP that came before that — *Monsters* — which went into this more djent-ish sound. Now we're experimenting a bit more again on this album. Maybe on the next album we'll be a bit more defined.

"You find a certain sound and you write some songs around the sound, and then you get tired of being there and you move to another place, and during that trip you always make new music, right? I feel like this album is that we're at this place now, just trying to figure out what we like doing the most at this point in time."

While VOLA say *Inmazes* was inspired by angular overlords Meshuggah, *Applause Of A Distant Crowd* sees them revert back to older influences like Porcupine Tree and Oceansize to mould something more balanced while still keeping some of the djent-speckled punches and groove.

"It felt more fun to go back to some of those bands," Mygind says. "But I hadn't actually been listening that much to music prior to this album. I was listening more to podcasts and watching shows like *Black Mirror*. I think that has maybe been a bigger influence than listening to music."

While the spectacle of prog acts like Dream Theater were part of Mygind's upbringing, don't expect the same level of musical flourishes with VOLA. The nuts and bolts of songwriting are key, although they do have their moments. *Alien Shivers*, for instance, launches with an artillery fire of distorted riffs snaking around the guitar neck.

"I think we've written a good song if it also sounds good on an acoustic guitar, stripped down," Mygind says. "If that's possible, then we've succeeded. I still enjoy those small technical details, though. I think they add a layer to the listening experience, makes these small nuances unfold when you listen multiple times, which I enjoy a lot as a listener. And there also has to be a level of entertainment playing the songs — it has to be fun. I think having some technicality in there makes it more fun."

"It's technical with a purpose," adds drummer Janzi, who lives in Sweden and has to fly to Denmark for his VOLA work. "As long as it gives something to the song, then it's just fun. A few songs require something more technical and others don't. In the end, it's about what the song needs."

The smoother sound of *Applause Of A Distant Crowd* may appeal more to rock fans than djent devotees, with Mygind crediting less gain on the guitars and a more natural drum sound as two ways in which things may be more palatable to the everyday listener.

"I think many people will give it a chance and maybe will end up enjoying it a lot, if they just allow themselves to dive into the album," he says. "I could see it opening some new doors for us."

Inmazes had already opened up huge doors for VOLA — the band toured with Katatonia and played festivals like Bloodstock and UK Tech-Fest — but with the new record in tow, it feels like the modern-day proggers are on the cusp of something bigger and better.

"For us it's just about moving forward and doing it 100 per cent," Mygind says. "I have no hesitations about where I want to bring this band. I want to go as far as we can, I want to make this my way of living and I want to write better songs than I do now."

Applause Of A Distant Crowd is out now via Mascot. See www.volaband.com.

VOLA, clockwise from top left: Asger Mygind, Adam Janzi, Martin Werner, Nicolai Mogensen.

"It's technical with a purpose. As long as it gives something to the song, then it's just fun."

Adam Janzi

Filthy Princess Records is pleased to announce the release of the deluxe edition of ***Tales of Torment*** - the critically acclaimed album from Los Angeles based progressive rock/metal band, **The Longing**, now featuring additional unreleased bonus tracks.

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infernal

the new album.

Voivod, L-R: Dominique 'Rock' Laroche, Denis 'Snake' Bélanger, Daniel 'Chewy' Mongrain, Michel 'Away' Langevin.

Perpetual Change

As **Voivod** celebrate their 35th birthday and release their 14th album, *Prog* meets the Canadian progressive metal legends to look back over their career.

Words: Chris McGarel
Portraits: Wayne Archibald

Over the past 10 years, Voivod have been undergoing a renaissance. Or, to be more precise, another renaissance. Constant change is nothing new for the shapeshifting Quebec entity that have been reinventing themselves perennially, adapting to obstacles and mutating depending on deviations in their environmental conditions. But this time it's different. This time, a wider world is taking notice.

Put it down to tenacious longevity, battling numerous personnel changes and personal tragedy while weathering the storms of transient trends. Maybe it's last year's reissue campaign of deluxe editions of the seminal first four albums. Being championed by no less a figure in the mainstream rock world than Dave Grohl can't have hurt, either. Perhaps it's the sheer love of making music, of tireless touring, travelling and getting their unique style of sci-fi-inspired prog thrash in front of as many people as possible.

It's all of the above and more.

Three years in the making, new album *The Wake* is their best and most progressive since the creative zenith of the late 80s and early 90s. It has been receiving near-universal acclaim. Now, on their 35th anniversary, the time feels ripe for another rebirth and a reappraisal of the career of one of the leading architects of progressive metal.

"I hope so," admits Michel 'Away' Langevin, Voivod's drummer and only constant member. "The last time we had reviews like this were around *Nothingface*, *Angel Rat* and *The Outer Limits*, so it's quite a thrill. I think it's going to open the doors for us to play more festivals and also we'll probably be able to open for bigger bands which is always cool."

Below: Voivod performing at The Metro in Chicago, 1986.

MEDIAPUNCH INC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

In 1990 they were opening for Rush, whose legendary producer Terry Brown oversaw 1991's *Angel Rat*. The support acts on the US tour for *Nothingface* were Soundgarden and Faith No More. Seemingly predestined to remain the ultimate underground band, Voivod have been dipping in and out of the record-buying public's radar for 35 years, though a group called the Iron Gang follow them with conviction. Voivod have inspired hordes of musicians and are held in near-reverential stature far out of proportion of their modest sales figures.

Langevin reveals that although the tide may be turning in their favour,

"We do have mixed crowds. Yesterday in the front row we had a kid, he was 12 years old. Beside him was a lady who was 78 years old!"

"it's not something that we think about that much.

"We've been underground for so many years," he confesses, "that we are resigned to do the touring we do and have the sales that we have."

One week after *The Wake*'s release and in the midst of a European jaunt, Langevin is able to gauge reactions first-hand on a nightly basis. "It's being received wonderfully," he beams. "We're pretty excited because it's always a bit of a stress, how people are going to react. We worked on it for three years so we're very happy with how the reviews are and also how the people into Voivod are reacting to

it. It's absolutely great! It's hard for us to take a step back and judge the work and the art. We were hoping people would notice the amount of work we put into it. All the reviews are talking about that and all the people we meet at the shows are too. It paid off. We're super-excited!"

Last year the band were presented with a gong in the Visionary category at the Prog Awards. What did that mean to them?

"Most people think about Voivod as a metal band," Langevin says. "To get an award from the prog world meant a lot to me because prog rock was so huge in Quebec in the 70s — it was in our blood when we started. Even obscure krautrock: Faust, Can, Amon Düül II. I met Peter Hammill [at the awards], which was quite amazing. I would say that Van der Graaf is still my favourite band of all time. He was talking to me in French, which is great." Langevin laughs: "I also met Carl Palmer and Steve Hackett so I was like a fanboy!"

If Voivod are riding a wave at the moment, they've earned it the hard way. After navigating choppy waters in the 90s when two of the four founder members left, they reconfigured as a three-piece until they broke up in 2001.

Newly adrift ex-Metallica bassist Jason Newsted joined in 2002, giving them street cred and turning the spotlight on them briefly, exposing them to a younger, more mainstream metal crowd. Then, in 2005, tragedy struck. Leading light, main writer and visionary guitarist Denis 'Piggy' D'Amour died at 45 after being diagnosed with colon cancer.

A unique and groundbreaking musician, Piggy's loss created a chasm that seemed almost unbridgeable. He had formed the band when looking for partners in crime to fuse his inspirations, from prog to punk, metal to classical.

"He went to school studying violin and had a bit of a hard time with the

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

school, being told not to play like that, play like this, so eventually decided to drop out and try his luck playing music," explains Langevin.

"He couldn't find anybody. He even moved to Toronto at one point to try to find people but couldn't, then came back up north to Quebec where we lived. He found me first, and then we found Blacky [Jean-Yves Thériault, bass] and then Snake [Denis Bélanger, vocals].

"We were 17, he was 21 and we thought he was pretty old," he laughs, "but he was our mentor. He had a huge vinyl collection and got us into a lot of different types of music. We were mainly into metal and punk and the commercial side of prog rock — Supertramp and Pink Floyd. He was heavily into Gentle Giant and stuff like that. He really was our teacher."

D'Amour's approach to composition was so esoteric that his instantly recognisable signature guitar voicings have their own name: 'Piggy chords'. It would take an enormous talent (and not a little of that hitherto elusive luck) to fill the void left by D'Amour's passing. They found it in fellow Québécois, Daniel 'Chewy' Mongrain from tech metal band Martyr.

Mongrain is a long-time admirer of the band, capable of recreating D'Amour's parts not only with feel and accuracy but with sensitivity to

Above: Voivod's 1986 *Rrröööaaarrr*-era line-up, with Piggy (second from left).

Left: Jason Newsted, formerly of Metallica, onstage with Voivod at Ozzfest in 2003.

Below: Langevin picks up the Visionary award for Voivod at the 2017 Prog Awards.

the legacy. He has been embraced by the Iron Gang. Mongrain is a music theorist with a degree in Jazz Interpretation from the University of Montreal, so as a composer he can continue the sonic experiments that form this music's DNA.

From 2013's *Target Earth*, it was evident that Voivod were no tribute act to themselves but would keep forging ahead, inventing new concoctions like a mad professor in a prog lab. Travelling forward in time to 2018 via 2016's *Post Society* EP, the writing evolves, building in confidence and having the courage of its convictions. Taking chances. Always moving.

One aspect of that progressive mentality is the influence of 20th-century classical music on several of the new songs on *The Wake*. *Always Moving*, *Sonic Mycelium* and *The End Of Dormancy* are clearly inspired by Stravinsky's *The Rite Of Spring* and Holst's *Mars, The Bringer Of War*.

"It's very cinematographic," says Langevin. "Piggy introduced us to modern composers. Some of it was pulled from soundtracks like *The Shining*. Penderecki. Bartók was my favourite. Shostakovich. He included

"The last time we had reviews like this were around *Nothingface*, *Angel Rat* and *The Outer Limits*, so it's quite a thrill."

a lot of that in the music. I think Chewy is trying to keep that essence intact. He decided to invite a string quartet and wrote a piece for them and directed them in the studio. It fits."

Chewy has brought with him bassist Dominique 'Rocky' Laroche. Friends since their teens, their paths crossed before, unbeknown to them, at a Voivod gig of all places. Langevin says, "Rocky's first show was Voivod, like Chewy. They didn't know each other but they were both at the same show. It was the first show for *Nothingface*."

The bassist is also an ex-student of music and brings jazz chops to the table, something the veteran punk and metal drummer has had to accommodate in his own playing.

"Rocky and Chewy have a sort of fusion style with a lot of question and answer between the bass and guitar. I have to play around that. It's cool for me," he says. "With the new formation it's almost like jazz metal. I think it's probably the direction we're going to head for in terms of intricacy. It's going to be quite a challenge to push it forward but we'll try to do so."

Langevin is clearly excited about the future. With young blood on board there are new opportunities for experimentation and progress. Technology has opened a door into a new writing and recording process.

"We've been touring a lot the last couple of years and we found a way to write music in the bus and backstage on a computer, so that helped a lot. Now that we've found a way of working we might be able to release more albums more quickly."

The future holds several new projects which are in the incubation stages. The next batch of reissues from *Nothingface* to *The Outer Limits* is being plotted. A long-mooted documentary film is edging closer to production. Canadian filmmaker Sam Dunn, who directed *Rush: Beyond the Lighted Stage* and *Iron Maiden: Flight 666*, is at the helm.

Below: the band's new album *The Wake*.

Langevin is planning two more books of his artwork: a follow-up to 2009's *Worlds Away* and a collection of drawings. "In every city I try to draw," he says, "to represent my impression of the city at the end of the night after the show. My next book is going to be the art I did on the road since we reformed in 2008. It's a lot of drawings!"

Langevin's figure of the Voivod adorns the record sleeves in the style of Iron Maiden's Eddie. This vampiric tech-warlord travels the galaxies, encountering dystopian societies and ravaged worlds in the midst of post-apocalyptic environmental decay. This may sound familiar to fans of Magma, who created a mythos around an exodus from a dying Earth to colonise the planet Kobaïa. "Christian Vander is a huge influence," Langevin says. "Not only his drumming, but his concept and logo."

Art is a passion Langevin has harboured since the mid-70s. It provides a creative outlet away from the band while adding an extra dimension to their albums. "I will always draw," he asserts. "I know we're going to be recording music forever. In terms of touring, it might slow down eventually, but I will always have my art to rely on. It's a great life. I don't take it for granted.

"Whenever I'm not touring or recording I do a lot of art for other bands or tattoo designs or book covers, which is great because when I was a kid, my first inspiration were the sci-fi books at the library. I would copy the covers."

As Voivod celebrate their 35th year, they in turn are influencing a new generation. "We have mixed crowds," says Langevin. "Yesterday in the front row we had a kid, he was 12 years old. Beside him was a lady who was 78 years old! Snake asked them their age. The crowd cheered. It was very cool!"

Of course, there are always the diehards who have been there since the early thrash days and supported the band through myriad stylistic and line-up changes. You don't get to be one of the most revered cult bands in the world without earning and inspiring that kind of loyalty.

"People into Voivod are really into Voivod," says Langevin. "They have to express it. It's such a great feeling for us. I actually can't stop playing around the planet and seeing my friends over and over and new people. It really keeps me going and it's one of the reasons why I keep playing music. It's the travels. The travels are amazing."

Always moving.

Keep watching the skies. You'll see perpetual change.

The Wake is out now via Century Media. See www.voivod.net for more information.

IN ASCENDANCE

Black Peaks are all about making forward-thinking, modern, heavy prog that evokes plenty of emotion. Second album *All That Divides* keeps those fires burning...

Words: Luke Morton **Image:** Ben Gibson

Drawing from the same well that contains Tool and Gojira, Black Peaks' earth-shattering brand of progressive metal deals in crushing riffs, mammoth hooks and spacious post-metal passages — they're like a more polished Mastodon. Hailing from the sunny beaches of Brighton, the experimental four-piece have just released *All That Divides*, the follow-up to 2016's genre-bending debut *Statues*, a record that takes their forward-thinking heaviness into broader realms.

"When we come together and play music it's never this conscious decision of, 'Let's go and write a 10 minute song', or 'Let's be weird for the sake of it.' We make music that feels right to us and good to play," guitarist Joe Gosney tells *Prog*. "We're not the type of band to be technical for the sake of it or heavy for the sake of being heavy: everything has to serve a purpose and evoke an emotion in all of us to be a Black Peaks song."

Speaking to us from his home in Brighton following a surfing holiday in Cornwall, Gosney is still riding that chilled post-break vibe before the touring kicks into gear once again, and he's happy to discuss all facets of music inside and outside of Black Peaks.

Growing up on a steady diet of Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd and Black Sabbath, Gosney soon fell into the weirder end of the spectrum with bands like The Mars Volta and A Perfect Circle. In 2012 he started a three-piece instrumental outfit which would ultimately become Black Peaks. Following the addition of Will Gardner on vocals, the group began to write "proper songs" and toured solidly until Sony came knocking to release debut album *Statues*. Hundreds more shows followed, including a support slot to Deftones at Wembley Arena in 2016.

Writing 30-40 songs for *All That Divides*, which was eventually condensed down to nine pieces of music, Gosney admits he is his own worst critic and something of a perfectionist. And with just two weeks to record the album, Black Peaks decided to record each song in full in the order it appears on the album, fully immersing themselves into the music.

"It was a really cool experience because you got to hear the album take shape: it's like listening to it really slowly over the course of two weeks," says Gosney. "Having all your ideas realised in such an amazing way was a beautiful thing. It was hard work, as making an album always should be, but there was a point right at the end, where we stood in the control room and listened to desk mixes of the whole record from start to finish, and it was an insane moment to properly hear it all for the first time."

This approach to recording makes the album less of a jigsaw and more of connected organism. Gosney is mindful of the album's ebb and flow, almost making it one piece of music. However, each song has its own identity, from the crunching *Blood Mountain*-style riffs of *Can't Sleep* to the brooding darkness of *Home* to album standout *Aether* with arena-sized Gojira-esque hooks. This isn't a straight-up metal record by any means.

"There are some long songs on there but also some dynamic shifts in the way the songs sound: it's not your normal rock structures."

Songs From The Wood: Black Peaks are poised to set the prog world alight.

"There are some long songs on there but also some dynamic shifts in the way the songs sound: it's not your normal rock structures," Gosney says of the album's inherent proggy sound. "We'd never class ourselves as a prog band, but I guess we are because the music's progressive and is in that form. Prog's a very broad genre, there are so many different types, but people that are into progressive bands of our ilk like Tool or Mastodon will dig it."

And like those bands, Black Peaks are eyeing up bigger things. Following a weekend-winning performance at this year's ArcTanGent festival, the band recently completed a headline UK tour of venues that they'll undoubtedly outgrow, given the size of these new choruses.

Black Peaks have their songwriting down to a fine art, with both albums sounding unmistakably them, and Gosney is always conscious of pulling a song into a state where it's "listenable". But despite the Radio 1 airplay, accessibility and mainstream appeal is not on their agenda.

"The moment we start to cater our music toward the radio we'll lose the essence of what we're doing," Gosney says confidently. "You can have some sensibilities to your music without sacrificing your original inspirations and ideas for songs. You've got to be true to yourself.

"We're always striving for bigger and better things. We haven't sat back and said, 'This is fucking great, we're doing really well,' we're hypercritical of everything we're doing to be the best version of ourselves we can be. I always watch our live stuff back to work out how we can sound better. Even though we're not sat there saying, 'Let's make three-and-a-half minute pop songs,' we definitely want to be as big as we can be without sacrificing musicality."

And these are not three minute pop tunes, in fact just one track dips below four minutes on *All That Divides*, giving each musical idea the time to breathe and expand into something altogether more satisfying. Second track *The Midnight Sun* has a vast post-metal mid-section while *Slow Seas* calls to mind a more anthemic Leprous. With so much tightly packed in to the second album, what else is there left to explore? Outside of the band, Gardner is a saxophone player, and while Gosney isn't closed off to the idea of incorporating some jazz into album number three, he has some other ideas.

"I don't think any of us have an answer about how we want things to sound, but after the next two years of touring this album, we'll be different musicians and different people because you experience new things, you grow, your styles refine and mature.

"I'd love to get some slide guitar on parts, maybe some more keys and bring that into the live aspect. We're a constantly evolving beast and if it calls for it we'll never shut it down because it's different."

Whatever it is, it'll be undeniably Black Peaks.

All That Divides is out now via Rise/BMG. See www.blackpeaks.com for more information.

THE PROG INTERVIEW

GEOFF DOWNES

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 **Geoff Downes**. From The Buggles to Yes to Asia, the keyboard maestro has earned his place in the prog pantheon. He's had numerous side projects, from Downes Braide Association to Wetton Downes, and is still going strong touring with Yes today. From house sharing with Chrissie Hynde to dealing with Yes dramas, Downes looks back over a life lived in music.

Words: Dave Everley

Everybody needs to start somewhere. For Geoff Downes, that break came in the orchestra pit at London's New Theatre. It was 1975, and the 23-year-old Downes was playing keyboards in a brand new stage show. And his unlikely paymasters? Pointy-nosed kids' TV characters *The Wombles*.

"It was my first job after I finished music college," says Downes, northern accent undiluted after more than 40 years on music's frontlines. "I answered an ad in *Melody Maker* looking for musicians for a theatrical production, and I got the job. It turned out to be the stage version of *The Wombles*." And did he have to wear a costume? "Thankfully I didn't," he says with a laugh. "They were bloody unhealthy things."

Downes has come a long way since rubbing shoulders with Uncle Bulgaria and Madame Cholet. His journey has taken him from new wave pop stardom with The Buggles to prog's upper echelons as a two-time member of Yes, via a stint as a bona fide rock star with multimillion-selling 80s arena-prog titans Asia.

The list of people he's worked with over the years reads like a Who's Who of prog royalty: Chris Squire, Steve Howe, Greg Lake, Carl Palmer, John Wetton. But his most enduring relationship has been with Trevor Horn, whom he first met as a member of disco singer Tina Charles' backing band. If Downes and Horn haven't quite been constant musical companions, they've taken many of their most significant steps together.

Above: that single with The Buggles.

"I've never, ever argued with Trevor about anything," says Downes. "Not once. Some writing partnerships only work if there's some conflict, but we've never had that. We spent more time defending our own ideals from everybody else."

> "Chris Squire was the guy who invented how to live a rock'n'roll lifestyle and be a fantastic musician – he could do the two things together."

Today, Downes shows no sign of slowing down. He's currently seven years into his second stint as Yes' keyboard player, while a fruitful collaboration with British-born, American-based singer-songwriter Chris Braide has produced three albums under the name Downes Braide Association. Unlike some of his flashier, more combustible contemporaries in the prog world, Downes' course has been relatively free of turbulence.

"I'm a non-confrontational kind of person," he says. "I don't get upset by criticism. I'd rather be a catalyst to work with than someone who is in people's faces. I've never actually fallen out with anybody. I don't think there's a musician I'd say I'll never work with again in my life."

But neither is Downes the quiet man of prog. "Oh, I've got some ego, I do like to pose a bit sometimes," he says with a grin as he prepares to look back on his 40-plus years bridging the worlds of prog, pop, rock and, well, *Womble* music.

Geoff Downes in a London recording studio, 1989.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

Geoff Downes at the 2018 Progressive Music Awards, where he performed with Nathan James.

With fellow "mad scientist" and Buggles buddy Trevor Horn (right).

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Which band first made you want to be a musician?
The light bulb moment was probably when I jumped the train to go to the Isle Of Wight festival in 1969. The Nice were playing and I saw Keith Emerson. That was probably one of the biggest things that led me along the road of being a keyboard player. I was really interested in the keyboard-driven bands that were around at the time – Procol Harum, the Canterbury bands. Anything where the keyboards played a dominant role.

You were born in Stockport and studied at Leeds College Of Music. When did you decide to move to London?
A friend of mine who I was at college with went there in advance. He lived in a big house in Clapham, south-west London and invited me to move in. Weird place, loads of odd people. Chrissie Hynde was living there. Nick Kent, the journalist from *NME*, had been living in the room before me. There were a few hypodermic syringes about. It was a pretty scary place.

Where was your head at musically at that point?
I'd moved away from prog. I was more into the disco scene at the time – Earth, Wind & Fire, people like that. Steely Dan too. It did have an influence on me over what came later with The Buggles.

Where exactly did you meet Trevor Horn?
There was an ad in *Melody Maker* saying, "Keyboard player wanted for chart act." I went down to this rehearsal place in Bermondsey. I had a Minimoog and a Fender Rhodes in the back of my battered old Ford Escort estate. It turned out that it was for [disco singer] Tina Charles. Trevor gave me the job straight away. He said it was because he was impressed that I had my own keyboards. I'd actually borrowed them from a friend.

What were your initial impressions of him?
He seemed a good guy, pretty sincere. He didn't feel like a long-lost buddy – it was more of a working relationship. But there was a bond between us. We were both a couple of northern lads trying to make it in London, struggling against the southerners. I think he liked the fact that I was a bit of a perfectionist and wanted to get everything dead right.

Yes' *Drama* (left), and the line-up that created it (below).

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

You put together The Bugs, who became The Buggles, not long afterwards. Was there a grand plan behind it?
It was just something we drifted into. Trevor had started to get these small production things and he used to rope me into them. At the same time I was doing ad jingles, just bread and butter stuff, and I'd get him involved in those. The Buggles mainly just grew out of that.

You came across like a pair of mad scientists locked away in a laboratory. How accurate a description is that?
In many ways that's how we saw ourselves. We were the backroom boys. Our motto was, 'The Buggles will never go live.' It was only ever going to be two studio creatures beavering away.

And then *Video Killed The Radio Star* came along and everything changed...
I remember a very rudimentary demo we did and even at that point, there was something extra special about that song. But Trevor and I took the demo around to every single record label in London and got knocked back by them all: "Nah, don't think so, it's okay, but we just signed The Corgis." It just so happened that my girlfriend at the time was working for Island. She played it for her boss, and it got to the ears of [Island boss] Chris Blackwell, who said, "You'd better sign these guys straight away."

Did you enjoy being a pop star?
I did. It was something I'd aspired to, being on *Top Of The Pops* and all that stuff. So when it actually arrived, I took it in my stride. Having a number one record around the world was great. Trevor didn't take to the teen mag stuff that went with it – he wasn't really happy with that.

But within a year, both you and Trevor ended up in Yes. That was quite some left turn. How did it happen?
We were being managed by the same company and we'd ended up writing our second album in the studio next to Yes.

Downes with his discs at his studio in Wales.

GEOFF WILKINSON/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

Well, it was really just Steve [Howe], Chris [Squire] and Alan [White] – they'd just come back from Paris after the ill-fated sessions with Roy Thomas Baker. They wandered in one day and said, "Have you got any songs that might be suitable for us?" So we put together a couple of ideas and started playing them. We just carried on like that and eventually just sort of morphed into them.

What was the mood like when you joined?

They were slightly confused about what direction they were going to go in, because they were just rehearsing backing tracks at that time. They were playing some fantastic music, but it didn't have any keyboards or vocals on it. We were the ideal thing to come along to them at that time and help carve a new direction on the *Drama* album.

Not everyone saw it like that. You were booed on the subsequent tour...

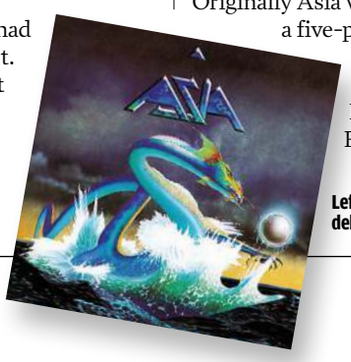
Oh yeah. There's no doubt about that. The Americans were much more accepting – they were so stoned they didn't really care who was in the band. But people were much more cynical in the UK: "Oh, The Yeggles have spoilt it all." There was a lot of animosity towards us. I remember we were doing a gig in Brighton and halfway through the keyboard solo, someone shouted out, "Rick Wakeman!" in the middle of it.

Was that demoralising?

It was at the time. And ultimately it had a destructive effect. Chris thought that maybe we weren't going anywhere with it. I think he was looking to do something else at that point. After the last show, at Hammersmith Odeon, it just dissolved. So I went back to working with Trevor on the second Buggles album. And then that's when I got the call from the management, saying they were putting together this new band, Asia.

What was the idea behind Asia?

The plan was to offer a Yes-type alternative at a time when Yes wasn't operating. The idea had been floating around a couple of years earlier, with Carl [Palmer] and John [Wetton] and, I think, Rick Wakeman or Eddie Jobson. Originally Asia was going to be a five-piece. That's what the label wanted. We auditioned Robert Fleischman, who was briefly the singer in Journey. Trevor Rabin came over. He didn't get the job because I don't think Steve would have been happy with a second guitarist floating around. John was singing the vocals while we were looking for this extra person, and eventually we just turned around and said, "John sounds great, we're sticking as a four-piece."



Left: Asia's self-titled debut from 1982.

The first Asia album was a huge success on the back of the single *Heat Of The Moment*...

> *Heat Of The Moment* nearly didn't end up on the album. It was an afterthought.

That nearly didn't end up on the album. It was an afterthought. We were going to lead off with *Only Time Will Tell*, but the label said, "Do you have anything else?" So John and I came up with *Heat Of The Moment* in one morning. Literally, the bones of the song were written in maybe a couple of hours.

What was it like being in the eye of the hurricane?

The massive success did offer up some problems. It was a big gravy train for a lot of people – management, the record label. People start to try and pull you in different directions, starting picking people off for their own ends.

It was a band made up of four successful musicians. Did you have egos to match?

I wouldn't say so. Everyone had respect for each other. But then John and Steve weren't really seeing eye to eye over a lot of things. It wasn't fraught, they were just different personalities. Carl and I were more middle ground in that respect.

I think that original line-up was always going to fall apart. We'd all come in at a higher level. We didn't have to do our time scrubbing around the northern club circuit in the back of a transit van. It was no surprise when it started to change.

Asia went on hiatus after 1985's *Astra*, and then you released your first solo album, *The Light Program*...
After *Astra*, we'd lost the confidence of the label, we didn't have Steve on board and John wasn't really happy with the way things were going. I had this idea to do something with all these synthesisers I'd got and the technology I worked with. That's when I came up with *The Light Program*.

You say "all these synthesisers". Just how many synthesisers did you actually have?
Oh, an astonishing amount. I must have had 40 different kinds of keyboards at that point. Most of them were in storage a lot of the time. But I'd been in three huge projects in a row, and I wanted to do something that was just me.

With Chris Braide (left) in Downes Braide Association.

STEPHANIE CABRAL

Did you enjoy working on your own?
It was interesting but I wouldn't say totally satisfying. It was an experimental time and I enjoyed making up sounds and trying to emulate other instruments. But you can come up with some of the best work when you're collaborating with other people. I've been lucky to work with some of the best musicians in the world, people like [ex-Deep Purple bassist] Glenn Hughes, Greg Lake...

You worked with Greg when he temporarily joined Asia in 1983, then again in the late 80s on an aborted collaboration. What was he like?
He was difficult to work with. He was a good guy, no doubt about it, and a fantastic musician and a fantastic singer. But he was very much a perfectionist. It wasn't a very productive collaboration. We only wrote about six songs in six months. He didn't want to sing one day or do this the next day. That project never had the legs.

You had a much more productive relationship with John Wetton. What was he like?
John was a blood brother to me, but he was a very enigmatic character. At times he was very insular, but then at others we'd talk for hours about football and politics. It's well-documented that he had a lot of problems with alcohol over the years, but I never fell out with him. We never had cross words. He'd always take it out on somebody else. And he was a brilliant bass player. He was in the league of Chris Squire.

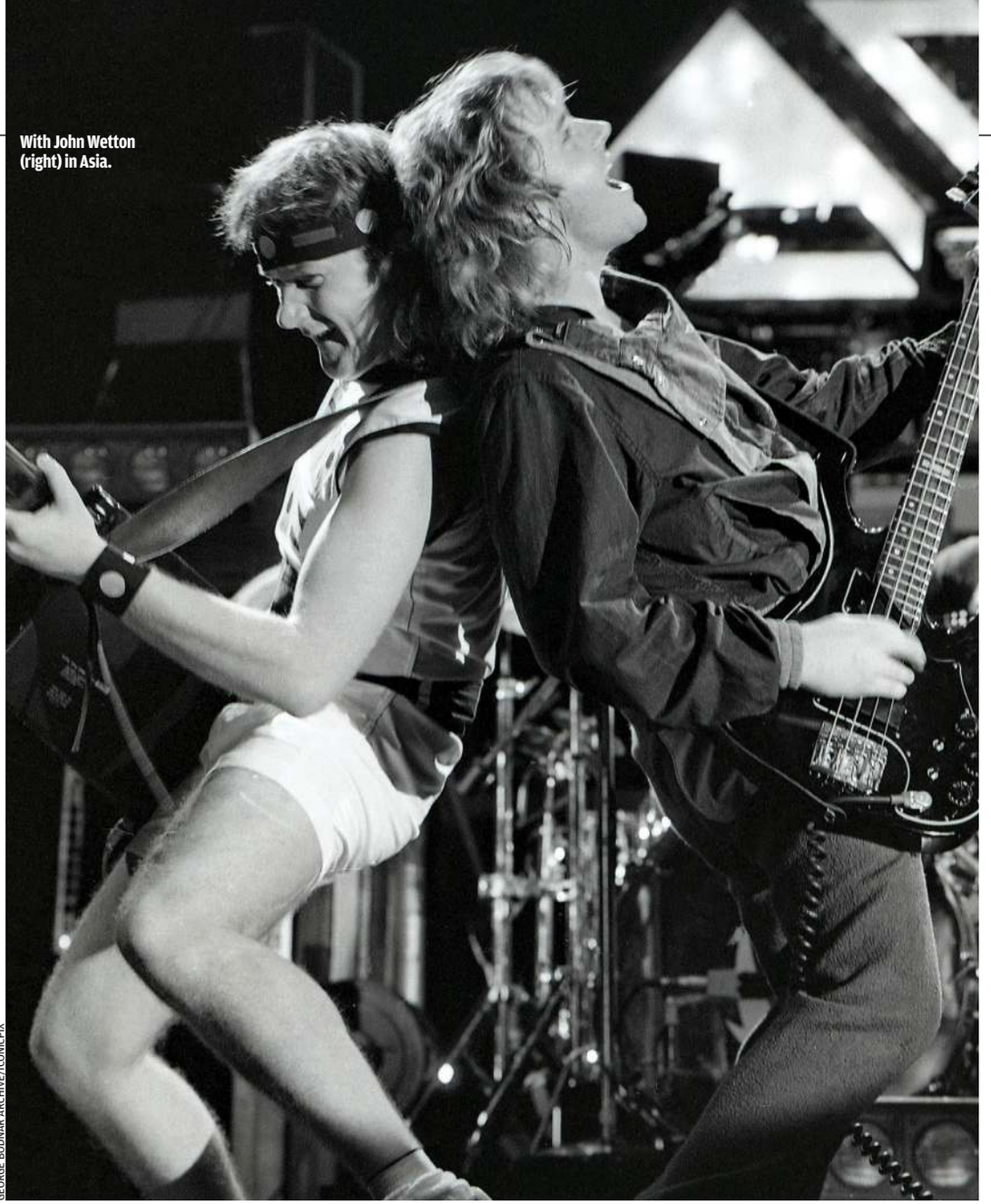
Chris Squire casts a big shadow over two very distinct parts of your career: your original stint in Yes and when you rejoined in 2011. What are your own memories of him?
Chris was the guy who invented how to live a rock'n'roll lifestyle and be a fantastic musician – he could do the two things together. He was a great guy socially. On the *Drama* tour, we had a private plane and he used to turn up wearing a very smart jacket and a pair of underpants, because he was late getting up at the hotel. That was Chris all over – they used to call him The Late Chris Squire. I know that frustrated people. Bill Bruford was super critical of him for being late all the time, but I just accepted it.

> "You can come up with some of the best work when you're collaborating with other people. I've been lucky to work with some of the best musicians in the world."

Can you remember the first gig you played after he died?
I can. It was strange, because I always got comfort from looking over at his side of the stage and him giving me a little wink, and that wasn't there. Not only was he a big guy in terms of his size, but his presence was huge.

Downes' 1987 debut solo album *The Light Program*.

When Chris was ill, did you think he'd get better?
We did at the time. He had a very aggressive form of cancer, but at the same time, he was in a very good facility in Phoenix, one of the top cities in America for medical schools. We felt that maybe he had a chance. But unfortunately it took a downward turn quite quickly. And at that point everyone thought the worst.



With John Wetton (right) in Asia.

GEORGE BODNAR ARCHIVE/ICONICPIX

The prog world lost Chris Squire, Greg Lake, John Wetton and Keith Emerson within the space of 18 months. How did that affect you?
It has been a bad few years, for sure. It does make you look at yourself and your own mortality, and you think, "Well, it's going to happen one day." By the same token you look at the achievements of all those great musicians and the impact they've had on people.

Right now, you're firmly back in Yes. It's been a fairly turbulent few years, what with Chris Squire's death and Jon Anderson, Rick Wakeman and Trevor Rabin launching their own version of the band...
People have said to me that Yes is like a dysfunctional family. It seems to stumble its way forward with some high moments and some low moments. It runs essentially on the dedication of the fans who have followed every twist and turn. But there's a general consensus that Yes will carry on and make new music and whatever.

It seems like there's tension between the two versions of the band. Is there?
Any real direct confrontations have hopefully been nipped in the bud. As time has progressed it's become less critical. When they first came out they were pretty gung-ho – they were making a lot of comments in the press which were not very pleasant, calling us The Steve Howe Tribute Band. A lot of it was unnecessary. For the most part, we've attempted to keep the high road and not get involved too much with slagging them off.

Have you spoken to Rick or Jon?
No. The last time I saw Rick was at Keith Emerson's memorial. He was perfectly decent, even though he wasn't particularly enamoured with our version of Yes. I've very rarely spoken to Jon Anderson in my life. I think I've only met him once.

If you were in the same city as them on a night they were playing a gig, would you go and see them?
Probably not, no. I don't think that would work. But they do their thing, they've got their own agenda going on. They're not getting in my face. That's all I'm particularly bothered about.

Do you ever wish you were more of a showman, like Rick or Keith Emerson?
No, I don't. I enjoy being an integral part of something bigger rather than being a singular personality like that. I don't think I could pull it off anyway. I know my limitations in that department.

What's the secret to staying in demand for as long as you have?
I don't know. I suppose I like the camaraderie of being in a band. There's a point where you really don't need to fall out with people, particularly when you're my age.

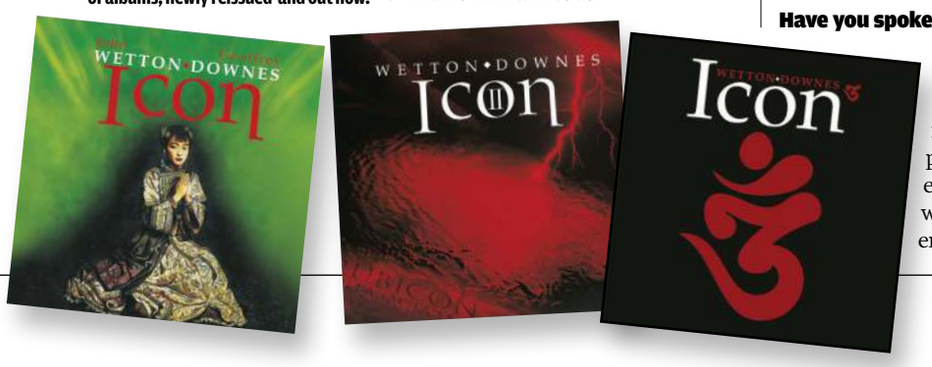
Who is the biggest pain in the arse: singers or guitarists?
Singers are difficult, but then they've got the job of being at the front. I don't mind guitarists. They just do their own thing and pose around.

Do you look back and think, "I've not done too badly?"
I could sit in the garden or go in my studio and look at the gold records on the wall and go, "It didn't work out so bad, did it?" But I'm not one to rest on my laurels. I like to challenge myself. It's been very interesting being with Yes. We've done a very varied set each time we've come out. That's been interesting for me. It keeps you motivated.

If you had a chance to speak to that 23-year-old guy in the orchestra pit at the *Wombles* stage show, what piece of advice would you give him?
[Laughs] I'd tell him to keep on wombling.

The Wetton Downes iCon trio of albums have been reissued via Epicon/Cherry Red and are out now. See www.geoffdownes.com for more information.

Below: The Wetton Downes iCon trilogy of albums, newly reissued and out now.



Edited by Jo Kendall
jo.kendall@futurenet.com

New spins...

STEVEN WILSON

Synonymous with spectacles and now *theatrical spectacle*, the unassuming gent in clothes that don't clash with his music's charisma delivers the gig of his life.

Words: Chris Roberts **Illustration:** Pablo Lobato

If you were at Wilson's Albert Hall shows in March, you'll want this document of the final night as an audiovisual aid to reliving the experience. If you weren't, you should masochistically wallow in what you missed. It captures an artist at the top of his game, enjoying a career high.

The polar opposite of an overnight sensation, Wilson has worked his way to his current revered status across decades of mastering varied genres, initially with such slow-burning successes as No-Man and Porcupine Tree, latterly as a solo star who incorporates what he's distilled from all that versatility into one big, broad musical church. Sometimes into one big, broad song, which is how he got labelled 'prog'. Yet his own righteous protestations about the magic of pop — from The Beatles to Tears For Fears — dispute the very notion of limits. His last album *To The Bone* found him in the peculiar position of being sniped at by some for taking risks. It also became his best seller.

It still feels odd to describe Wilson as a star. As the adoring applause on this concert film proves, he certainly is. Yet his demeanour through this almost three-hour show speaks of modesty, and a focus on music rather than personality. Perhaps that's through necessity when you're changing instruments and tempos every couple of minutes, and his audience is here for the majesty of the songs, not for him to adopt Messiah poses in a gold lamé suit. Even so, the bespectacled all-rounder's humdrum black clothes and T-shirt suggest he's aware that to compete with his music for charisma would be a losing battle.

Visually then, as superbly as the concert is filmed and edited, any sparks which fly come from the films and projections, with which Wilson is very hands-on. Sociopolitical slogans concerning our mad modern planet are flashed up briefly, but with a thought-inducing ambiguity that makes, say, Roger Waters' choices seem like cracking nuts with sledgehammers. Lasse Hoile's creations, Jess Cope's animations and multiple near-magical tricks raise the energy. One effect, during the Gabriel-tinged *The Song Of I*, where it appears that a giant translucent dancer is stepping around, between and above the musicians, defies you to deduce how it's done.

Speaking of dancing, if someone had said a couple of years back that Wilson would be joined onstage by a group of smiling, whirling Bollywood Company dancers, the idea of something so colourful and upbeat might have seemed implausible. Here, on *Permanating*, that happy marriage of indie and India works perfectly. Wilson's teased his fans that people in King Crimson T-shirts have never been prompted to move so much. Again, it's this open-mindedness to the possibilities and fun of fusing unexpected strands, and the nerve to disobey some of the rock world's more conservative elders and declare that disco doesn't suck, that has placed him as a Top Three album chart act and the man who is, with love for the genre, coaxing prog forth into the brave new world of the 21st century.

He has a huge catalogue to cherry-pick from now, so while the emphasis is on newer material, he reboots Porcupine Tree numbers and designates a set which finds its flow amid contrasting yet complementary periods of heavy riffing and lofty pathos. Early on, it seems like a sudden U-turn to go from the slashing *Nowhere Now* to the big ballad of *Pariah* (with Ninet Tayeb contributing soulful vocals), but as the momentum gathers, such yin and yang tactics reveal their inherent tact.

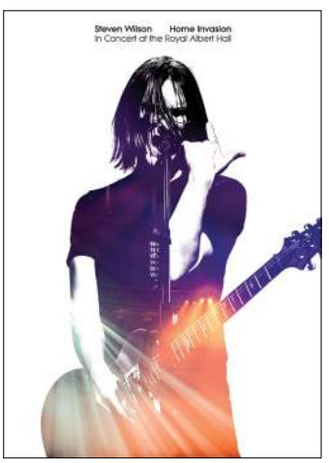
If there's any criticism — and we'd better strain for one before readers write in complaining that *Prog* dotes on Wilson's every hiccup — it's that his voice, while functional, doesn't have that extra je ne sais quoi that elevates the good to the great. Given his other numerous talents, it'd be kind of unfair if it did. You could also argue that there's so much going on in every track that a showier voice might only distract, and tangle the channels.

Where it does cut through is on the closing *The Raven That Refused To Sing*, as his Lennon-esque, arrowing tone perfectly serves the growing drama. And none of this would fly without the musicians surrounding him, whether it's the ever-glamorous Nick Beggs constantly reinventing the bass or guitarist Alex Hutchings, who's already made it seem an eternity since he was the 'new' guy.

A live CD is an optional extra with this Blu-ray/DVD, and a five-vinyl box set is out next spring. Here, the bonus material offers an interview and three songs (*Routine*, *Hand Cannot Erase*, *Heart Attack In A Layby*) filmed in pre-show rehearsal in an empty Hall. The atmosphere's more intimate, less electrifying, and makes you return to the main event with fresh eyes. Which you will do happily. Welcome it in.

Home Invasion: In Concert At The Royal Albert Hall

EAGLE ROCK

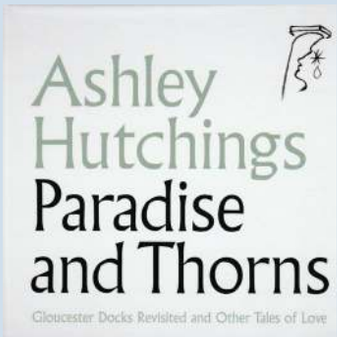


> **It still feels odd to describe Wilson as a star. This proves he certainly is.**

ASHLEY HUTCHINGS

Paradise And Thorns – Gloucester Docks Revisited And Other Tales of Love TALKING ELEPHANT

A founding father of prog folk revisits the scene of his magnum opus.



History will record Ashley Hutchings' greatest achievement as his co-founding role with prog folk's titanic triumvirate of Fairport Convention, Steeleye Span and The Albion Band. But he believes his finest recorded moment may be one that was also perhaps his most personal.

> **It's a poignant essay of love both personal and universal.**

1987's *By Gloucester Docks I Sat Down And Wept*, which Talking Elephant reissued to acclaim in 2013, described an unfinished love story as it developed, with love letters, poetic musings and backdrops from rock'n'roll to balladeering.

Hutchings' bucket-list new project is, in some ways, what happened next, conceived after he re-established contact with the amour of the original. That framework, which forms the first CD here, would be ambitious enough for many, but *Paradise And Thorns* becomes wide-angle in scale by adding a second disc, *Other Tales Of Love*, which comprises the broader musings of Hutchings and others on the physiognomy of love, and the gamut of emotions it engenders, from joy to grief.

The new visit to *Gloucester* is what you might call a reimagined director's cut, but that of an older and wiser director with more detail to share. He uses several recordings from his past to that end, including 1980s performances by his Allstars and one from 2005 by the Rainbow Chasers. Hutchings also uses the power of his speaking voice to good effect on inlays of a John Donne poem, a snippet of Louis MacNeice and even an excerpt from Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*.

It may sound like bookish stuff, but there's an inclusive elegance, and it serves as a poignant essay on love both personal and universal. *Devil-May-Care In Our Dancing Shoes* and *Thirty-Two Years And A Lifetime*, new songs co-written with Hutchings' son Blair Dunlop, add even greater cross-generational depth.

Dunlop also plays on disc two, which has the father-and-son duet *Lost In The Haze* amid showcases from other recent collaborators, like vocalist Polly Bolton, singer-guitarists Kitty Macfarlane and Becky Mills, and actor Michael Maloney. In Dunlop's adaptation of *Polly On The Shore*, bloody war rages as the narrator wishes himself alone with his girl. The device also serves on *I Was Dreaming Of Clarissa*, a quotation from the 1968 film *The Charge Of The Light Brigade*.

Cinema's unlimited ability to convey romantic longing prompts quotations from *Casablanca* and Frank Borzage's adaptation of Hemingway's *A Farewell To Arms*, before Chekhov and Shakespeare level the scores for the written word. As a creative achievement and a far-reaching narrative, this is a love story with a happy ending.

PAUL SEXTON

ALITHIA

The Moon Has Fallen WILD THING

Aussie collective blow hot and cold on second LP.

Extra prog brownie points must go to AlithiA for introducing their new album with a dreamy 10-minute long-haul, which takes the listener through post-rock soundscapes and succulent harmonies. Perhaps the Australian sextet's most redeeming trait is their knack for doing these hypnotic meanderings just as convincingly as the more modest four-minuters, and it's evident to impressive effect on this, their second album. For every psych space-out like opener *The Sun*, there's a *The Knife*, a trimmer ditty that ends up more Deftones in scope. But with their chameleon-like nature, there's a feeling AlithiA aren't so sure of their own identity. The shapeshifting *Empress* sounds confused, juggling electronica and edgy rock like two hot potatoes, while the near nine-minute *Breathe* fails to warrant the repeat button. By the time closer *Faces In The Leaves* emerges with its absorbing, hazy vocals and stirring atmospherics, you're left wondering what the takeaway message is. Modern-day prog fun, atmospheric, synthy ruminations or left-leaning alt-rock? AlithiA are to be applauded for furrowing their own path, but there's a danger of things slipping through their grasp. **CC**

ANNEKE VAN GIERSBERGEN

Symphonized - With Residentie Orkest In The Hague INSIDEOUT

Depth and softness for a classic catalogue.

In May this year, Dutch vocalist Anneke van Giersbergen performed two spectacular concerts accompanied by the Residentie Orkest orchestra in The Hague. Having gained worldwide success with melodic electronic rock band The Gathering, multiple collaborations with the likes of Devin Townsend, Danny Cavanagh from Anathema and Arjen Lukassen (Ayreon), the multifaceted singer returned to her native land. Combining career-spanning material, the live set list is pleasing and well-pitched. While *Two Souls*, *Travel* and *Forgotten* are a blast from The Gathering's past, *Feel Alive* stems from her budding solo path in 2012 and *Your Glorious Light Will Shine – Helsinki* from her latest prog metal project VUUR. Among the hits, her spellbinding interpretation of *When I Am Laid In Earth*, Dido's lament in composer Henry Purcell's powerful baroque opera, is a testament to her truly incredible vocals and vocal range. This is followed by *Zo Lief*, a charming unreleased Dutch song and a nice touch. An uplifting and personal musical presentation of stunning vocals and talent, the orchestral arrangements add depth and softness to Anneke van Giersbergen's songs. **ILD**

ARABS IN ASPIC

Live At Avantgarden APOLLON

The Norwegian proggers debut live album recorded at the Trondheim club.

The 11-minute *Sydenes Magi* begins with wispy Mellotron chords redolent of King Crimson's *Starless*, but its regular mid-paced tread soon morphs into a heavy Sabbath-like passage. It's not often that one sees "for fans of Uriah Heep" in contemporary press material, but Arabs In Aspic also favour high vocal harmonies, and when Stig A Kvam-Jørgensen's Hammond organ joins in with their big twisting riffs, it gives considerable heft to the sound. Add to that Jostein Smeby's psych/metal guitar style and Alessandro Elide on clattering percussion, and AIA combine familiar elements into an original mix. A number of their songs are of similar length and as this live set continues, one can see a pattern. AIA allow their tracks to unfold gradually, sometimes achieving a near-Floydian grandeur. *Pictures In A Dream* finds them exploring melody, with delicate guitar arpeggios and a synth around the vocal lines, but they inevitably culminate in a collective power surge. On the relatively concise *Mørket 2*, intricate guitar and organ lead into the big finale while *Silver Storm* smoulders, builds momentum and finally climaxes with a spectacular wah-wah guitar wig-out. **MB**

BUILDING INSTRUMENT

Mangelen Min HUBRO

Enchanting out-there post-pop hybrid.

The second album by this Norwegian trio, 2016's *Kem Som Kan Å Leve* was such an understated yet stunning mix of trad, psych folk, electronica and pop, it left this listener wondering if their next release could match it. The good news is that they've come up with a collection that's every bit as good. Sung in Norwegian, Mari Kvien Brunvoll's words spiral and shiver like falling leaves beneath the canopy of drummer Øyvind Hegg-Lunde's rippling beats and the subtle gauze of colours cast by Åsmund Weltzien's synths. Each of the 12 songs is exquisitely minted, with finely crafted components such as glistening zither, autumnal Mellotron flutes and luscious vocal textures that move effortlessly between confessional intimacy or slipping away into outer space. With harmonies drifting over insistent percussion accompanied by aquatic bubbling and sonar pings, the danger inherent in offering something that is at various times ephemeral and ambiguous is that it all becomes too dreamy and soft-focus. However, the delicate and beautiful melodies encountered throughout this short yet expansive album carry a satisfying definition and weight that lingers long in the ear. **SS**

CAMERA

Emotional Detox BUREAU B

Classic krautrock through a new lens.

Starting life in Berlin as Krautrock Guerilla in 2012, the band formed by constant member Michael Drummer is up to their fourth album of motorik whoopee with a twist, wisely changing their name to Camera along the way. It's hard not to recall Neu! as the high-tensile bass throb and metronomic drums kick up tracks like *Gizmo* or the 12-minute *Patrouille*. However, with Drummer now joined by Michel Collet, Andreas Miranda and returning keyboardists Timm Brockmann and Steffen Kahles (after two albums as a trio and one as a duo), there's fresh dirt and texture on Camera's lens. They're not only holding up this grand, often neglected tradition but also becoming a genuine force in German electronic music as grooves motor and embellishments reach for glistening transcendent hypnosis. The album is saved from homage by constantly questing light and shade dynamics that can make *Ciao Cacao* a breezy translucent glide or *Himmelhof* a dense wall of pulsating krautrock celebration: loud, proud and romping like it's the 70s again. Side two sees them stretching out in neighbouring sonic vistas with equal abandon. Ultimately, quite glorious. **KN**

CRACK THE SKY

Living In Reverse LOUD & PROUD

Power pop meets prog with Baltimore's veterans.

Much has been made of Steven Wilson's recent diversion into progressive pop on *To The Bone*, but Baltimore's veterans Crack The Sky have been exploring the space between pop and prog for decades. The title track for *Living In Reverse* boasts a catchy 60s power pop hook and jangly guitars reminiscent of XTC. There's strong guitar work from Rick Witkowski and Bobby Hird, with some fierce soloing in *Raining Rain* and *Hit*. At times they tap into the sound of the more daring bands of the 80s New Wave, particularly in *Jacket* and *I'm On The Radio, Mom*, the latter of which recalls The Tubes. The cynical tone of *Home Tonight* suggests Warren Zevon casting his withering gaze over humanity's foibles. John Palumbo's dry vocal style occasionally brings to mind Peter Gabriel – *I'm A Good Man* being a good case in point. The album is strongest when the band embrace their pop sensibilities, which seems to produce their most infectious material. When they push the boat a little further out, as on *Talk Talk* or *Big Dipper*, they can wind up rowing in circles. But 43 years after their debut album, Crack The Sky are still blessed with energy and ideas. **DW**

JEAN-MICHEL JARRE

Equinoxe Infinity COLUMBIA

Synth pioneer makes waves with inspired follow-up to a classic.

In 1978, the 30-year-old Jarre released his fourth album. Like his breakthrough *Oxygène* two years before, *Équinoxe* had an enormous impact worldwide, selling in excess of 10 million copies. Its themes permeated the public consciousness and its iconic artwork left a retinal imprint. It's the staring figures from Michel Granger's concept art that triggered the composer to revisit *Équinoxe* and create a new work 40 years on.

> **Engaging multi-layered fusions of past and present.**

Equinoxe Infinity isn't so much a sequel as a meditation on what Granger's faceless watchers might be fixated on over the horizon. At Jarre's request there are two different covers – the watchers petrified to stone on an unspoiled landscape or in a technological dystopia. Which one arrives through your letterbox is left to chance.

Duality is le mot juste for every aspect of *Equinoxe Infinity*, from art to subject matter to the music itself. Ten movements fuse the traditional free-flowing style of his most celebrated works with the EDM he favoured on recent releases.

The elemental musique concrète of bubbling gurgling liquid permeates the album, as it did in 1978. First movement *The Watchers* will instantly put admirers of the original in familiar territory, with the sound of massive objects crashing into water. A meteor shower hitting the ocean or gigantic breaching whales? Choose your own adventure.

Analogue and digital vie for supremacy. *Robots Don't Cry* seeks to revisit *Oxygène Part IV*'s insistent bass sequence, while soloing Mellotron is aggressively flanked by swirling futuristic effects. Headphones are a must. As the album progresses it assumes a darker tone. A portentous tolling bell dominates the fourth movement, *All That You Leave Behind*, perhaps sounding humanity's death knell as we enter the age of the automaton. Voices are manipulated to become more synthetic and during the magnificent *Machines Are Learning*, robotic articulations begin to mimic speech. A terrifying glimpse of an inorganic future or an exciting evolution of our species? This too is left as an exercise for the listener.

Infinity and *The Opening* are classic Jarre given a techno makeover. In the hands of a lesser craftsman they would be faux-anthemic Europop pastiche, rather than these engaging multi-layered fusions of past and present.

Aside from the last movement's conspicuous debt to the pulsating brain of The Orb's Alex Paterson, *Equinoxe Infinity* is an unalloyed success. No rehash, it stands apart from its source material, looking Janus-like to the past while contemplating the future. Try your luck or order two copies. It's worth it.

CHRIS MCGAREL

MUSE

Simulation Theory WARNER BROS

Back to the future – and a return to fun – for the Teignmouth trio.

As abstract or allegorical as Muse might have been about the subject matter and themes — virtual reality, fantasy as reality — of *Simulation Theory* in the lead up to the release of their eighth album, the cover artwork is certainly less wary about what lies beneath. Imagine if Steven Spielberg had cast Muse in the games arcade universe

> **Pop, pomp and prog in roughly equally measure.**

that was the *Ready Player One* movie and you're close. With a cover created by Kyle Lambert, who worked on *Stranger Things*, *Simulation Theory* visits a dreamland inhabited by *Tron* and Spielberg's last trip to digital fantasia. The music on the album itself leans that way too: doomy synths spiralling off into a dark and threatening sky. A jagged string section acts as a prelude to cartoon storm troopers swarming across the landscape in a tightknit formation with evil at its heart.

To be alive in Muse's universe is to be pinned to the stars, to dine in a remote, alien landscape, to take flight or crash to the earth. Or at least it was, little wonder they were admired by everyone: from people who thought music began and ended with Queen, to arduous teenage boys learning to play their first guitar. It was quite the trick, one whose magic was beginning to pale with the strangely pedestrian *Drones* concept album from 2015.

Simulation Theory might have its overarching themes, but it is altogether less serious (understandably given that *Drones* dealt with long-distance, targeted warfare and its bleak consequences), case in point, the chiming *Something Human*, that skips along like Erasure and an especially poppy U2 jamming at a backstage bar long after closing time. It's delightful and quite easily one of the weakest songs on *Simulation Theory*. And not because of its pop presets either: Muse's globe-straddling, off-kilter, throw-the-kitchen-sink-at-it approach has rarely been more honed or realised than here. Which might make it sound like everything is around the same length as *Firth Of Fifth* when the reality is that nothing much comes in at over five minutes.

Compacted, streamlined, whatever you want to call it, this is pop, pomp and prog (apologies to the faint-hearted or elitist among you) in roughly equal measure, especially good in the lilting *Get Up And Fight*, as they are in the strident *Blockades*; 80s synth barrage meets a tattoo of drums and Brian May's guitar, or the swirling *The Void*, which sounds like the title of a film that John Carpenter might make with a score to match. It's irredeemably and absolutely Muse and yet another record that sets them apart.

PHILIP WILDING

CUSTARD FLUX

Helium SELF-RELEASED

From the heart of the English countryside via Detroit.

Custard Flux is the new project from Gregory Curvey of The Luck Of Eden Hall. Based in Detroit, it seems a safe bet to guess that Curvey may be something of a musical Anglophile. The premise behind the project is to make music using instruments that don't require electricity, so that means a lot of Harmonium, acoustic guitars, upright bass, and drums. The result is a sound that blends psychedelia and the Canterbury scene with early Genesis and XTC. Happily, Curvey's songwriting is strong enough that while he wears his influences on his sleeve – in the track *Golden Opportunity* he sings about watching Soft Machine in a field – *Helium* is full of memorable melodies. The folky *Forevermore* is lovely with Curvey sounding like a young Peter Gabriel, and *La Mort* is just lush with its overlapping guitar parts. The only production quibble would be the slightly flabby drum sound, but Curvey has made an album full of warmth and whimsy. *Helium* is available in a one-disc edition or in a fancy box set that comes in an actual wooden box with a lyric booklet and a bonus five-track disc that includes a cover of Lou Reed's *Satellite Of Love*. **DW**

EMILIANO DEFERRARI

Monty RATTSBURG

Brussels-based Italian art-rock ingénue takes us on a bewildering trip.

Sneaked out at the start of the summer, *Monty* makes a lot more sense as the soundtrack to a wet and windy autumn. Multi-instrumentalist Emiliano Deferrari dwells squarely in art-rock territory, with all the expected side orders of jazz, musique concrète and freewheeling minimalism, but this is a timeless collection of smart but soulful songs; the Italian's more freaky instincts held in check by a sublime musicality and knack for subtly skewed textures. Educated observers will spot plenty of obvious influences here, but it's Peter Hammill's solo work that seems most pertinent: as with the Van der Graaf legend, Deferrari follows no clear blueprint for his songs, preferring to sway with the wind, taking in everything from instrumental acoustic guitar pieces to the lurching, Bill Nelson-esque anti-funk of *White Life*. The closing *Fuoco*'s underlying groove borders on Balearic house music, albeit with droning brass, torrential strings and, from Deferrari, a precise, poetic vocal that will make most of us dearly wish we could speak Italian. Bursting with brilliant ideas but also pointedly, consistently unsettling, *Monty* is a fascinating journey through the wild mind of a maverick. **DL**

RANDALL DUNN

Beloved FIGUREEIGHT

Tense, atmospheric debut from sonic architect.

Best known as a producer and arranger who's worked with Sunn O))), Earth and Anna von Hausswolff, Randall Dunn is hardly a household name. His minimalist electronic soundscapes saw him working with composer Jóhann Jóhannsson on the score of horror film *Mandy*, and Jóhannsson encouraged Dunn to develop his solo material. Inspired in part by Jóhannsson's untimely death earlier this year as well as other serious life events, it's no surprise that *Beloved* is dark. Dirge-like opener *Amphidromic Point* sets the tone, with legato synthesisers and detuned oscillations painting a heartsick and forlorn sonic landscape. At other times, the record moves closer to musique concrète or sound collage, as with the crackling, electrical shocks and hum of *Virgo*. At these times, *Beloved* is disorientating, but it has a more melodic and intimate side too. *Something About That Night* features Frank Fisher of Algiers on vocals in a minimalist trip-hop arrangement that devolves into simply 'bad trip'. Album closer *A True Home* is also striking for its use of vocals, with Zola Jesus guesting. It's gorgeous, a stunning release after a record's worth of build up tension. **AL**

FISH

A Parley With Angels CHOCOLATE FROG

An absorbing glimpse into the prog icon's last hurrah.

Releasing this much new material so far in advance of widely-discussed final album *Weltschmerz* might seem like an avoidable case of premature, um, elucidation, but the songs on this EP are so good that Fish can be forgiven for hastening the process. The ambition and the intimacy of this material has brought the best out of the big man. In fact, he hasn't sounded this committed or consumed by the power of his own poetry for a very long time. Defiantly prog-to-the-core and at times almost mischievously Floydian, *Little Man What Now* is the finest of the three tracks: a gently harrowing tale of real world struggles in the face of economic disarray, it's as deeply affecting as anything Fish has sung since leaving Marillion; his self-evident emotional investment in the subject matter making it feel vastly more personal than political. *Waverley Steps*' 14-minute sprawl is guaranteed to delight veteran fans: more upgrade than throwback, it's the sound of Fish approaching the exit with his prog rock head held high. *Man With A Stick* completes the trilogy with a dash of menacing pomp. If the rest of *Weltschmerz* is this good, we may be talking about a classic. **DL**

FLYING MACHINES

New Life UBUNTU

Second album by the acclaimed London jazz fusion four-piece.

Flying Machines have been categorised as a mix of jazz, rock and prog, and they overlap those musical areas in a way that sounds original and fresh. On their self-titled 2016 debut they came up with the drolly titled *Emotional Math Metal*, but while music in the 'math' genre can be almost neurotically tight, and over-complicated to an enervating degree, Flying Machines blend shifting rhythmic figures in compound time signatures from bass guitarist Conor Chaplin and drummer Dave Hamblett, with more relaxed, lyrical themes. On the opening title track, guitarist Alex Munk plays spiky riffs and fluid melodic lines that evoke Allan Holdsworth, while Matt Robinson's speedy electric keyboard lines give way to piano, as the composition opens out. By contrast, with its syncopated drum rhythm, *Bullet Train* is stark and subtle, one of the three pieces made collectively "on the fly". Wordless vocals emphasise the song-like quality of *Prelude To Elation*, and although *...Elation* sounds like jazz, it doesn't swing in the jazz sense, but instead Flying Machines' singular approach yields a mix of rhythmic sleight of hand, intricate unison sections and inspired improvisation. **MB**

JACCO GARDNER

Somnium FULL TIME HOBBY

Dutch artist re-emerges as instrumental cosmic voyager.

Jacco Gardner is clearly mindful of the grass growing under his feet. After two albums of mellifluous psych pop, forays into dance music and involvement in the touring ensemble of Zambian psych rockers Witch, Gardner has now left the ground completely with *Somnium*. It's an album that sees him dispense with vocals, preferring instead to create a series of moodscapes that co-opt elements of dub, ambient and electronic space rock. The inspiration, he says, is Johannes Kepler's 17th century novel of the same name, a lunar odyssey that helped popularise the idea of science fiction. High concepts are well and good, but Gardner proves to be a natural at this sort of thing, imprinting the music with the same curious sense of wonder as forebears like Tangerine Dream and Mike Oldfield. The Oldfield connection is deepened by the inclusion of mastering engineer Simon Heyworth, who co-produced the original *Tubular Bells*. The chillout vibes of *Eclipse* embody *Somnium*'s languid aesthetic, though much of its appeal lies in the tiny details. *Rain*, for instance, takes up where Lemon Jelly left off, gliding into an experimental realm between the prog and the pastoral. **RH**

PSYCHEDELIC PROG

Take a trip with **Rob Hughes** as he seeks out the latest mind-expanding music.

Oh Sees leader John Dwyer, who knows a thing or two about wired psychedelic rock, calls **Straight Arrows** "the fuzziest, most catchiest, escapist, good-times vending, rapscallion trampoline shiners this side of the Murray River". The Australian quartet's third effort, *On Top!* (Agitated), pounds forth like a bull from a gate, evoking the wild R&B of 60s primitives like The Sonics and Them. Fronted by guitarist and songwriter Owen Penglis, there are also nods to freakbeat, garage punk (*Gun Man* feels like a lost outtake from *Nuggets*) and the classic age of psychedelia (the fuzz-smothered *Buried Again*). The overall effect is invigorating.

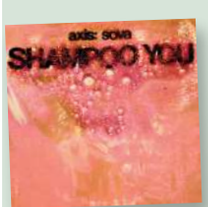
Dwyer may well also fancy the equally ferocious *La Planète Inexplorée* (Stolen Body), from French trio **Slift**. Under the guidance of noted producer Lo Spider in Toulouse, the band immerse themselves in distorted psych jams, at their best on the riffy might of *Something In The Mist* and *Ant Skull*, which borrows its intro groove from the Stones' *Sympathy For The Devil*.

Closer to home, *Nothing In Particles* (Dawn Chorus Recording Company) is an intriguing EP from **Nelson Parade**, otherwise known as Callum Magill. Cue five tracks of keyboard-driven psychedelic pop from the youngest brother of Syd Arthur's familial clan, aided by Josh and Joel Magill. Best of the bunch is the luminous *Kevin Crashed And Then Woke Up*.

Carlisle's **The Lucid Dream** have chosen to deviate from their usual prog stylings on *Actualisation* (Holy Are You), moving into the unexpected realm of acid house. It's still pretty out-there though, with frontman Mark Emmerson using vintage Roland synths as the basis for epic spacetronic grooves that shimmy and jitter with real purpose. *Alone In Fear*, a caustic response to the calamity that is Brexit, sounds like Underworld in top gear. *SX1000*, already a favourite of DJ Andrew Weatherall, is restlessly inventive, offset by the King Tubby-ish comedown of *No Sunlight Dub*.

Another culture clash is provided by **Schizo Fun Addict**, whose *El Shoegaze Bossa Nova* (Sugarbush) — as its title implies — hitches the Brazilian esoterica of Sergio Mendes and Antonio Carlos Jobim to the gliding reveries of 1990s indie. Led by Jet Wintzer and Jayne Gabriel, the band make it work admirably, from the beatific psychedelia of *Alone At Makaha* to *Window Pain*, with its gentle trumpets and wistful descriptions of sea spray on glass.

Back on a heavier tip, *Shampoo You* (God? Records) finds Chicago trio **Axis: Sova** in psychedelic jam mode, tearing through songs with a petulant sneer and fearsome volume. Mainman Brett Sova is an astute operator, creating a near-perfect balance of melody and raw noise.



SPACESHIP LANDING IN A CEMETERY

by JOHN SHIRLEY & JERRY KING

'"Dark lyrics meet prog, jazz and experimental sounds.
There are musical vibes of Frank Zappa, Lou Reed,
King Crimson and the Talking Heads." - Break Out Magazine'

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Adam Warne is a professional musician, recording and mixing engineer and music producer. Having founded and fronted up-and-coming progressive and alternative rock group KYROS since 2012. The group have played in support to the likes of Marillion, Anglagard, Haken, BigElf, Anathema and IQ, Spock's Beard and Special Providence. Work continues on album three (due for release in 2019) following their critically acclaimed 2016 double album, 'Vox Humana' of which, Adam - as well as contributing a significant amount of the writing - also mixed and engineered.

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GOATMAN

Rhythms ROCKET RECORDINGS

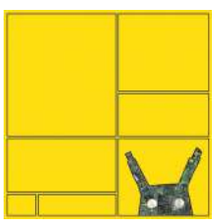
Rewarding solo effort from unnamed member of Swedish psychonauts Goat.

In the absence of any fresh studio product by Goat, who most recently provided the soundtrack to last year's British horror flick *Double Date*, one of its members has now branched out into solo work. Given Goat's insistence on anonymity, there are no clues as to Goatman's real identity. What we do know is that he/she plays more or less everything you hear on *Rhythms*, save for a handful of cameo turns. Dedicated to the pursuit of a decent groove, the album isn't a radical departure from Goat, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. Opening track *Jaam Ak Salam* is magnificent, rushing forward on an irresistible West African rhythm, punctuated by brass and featuring Senegalese singer Seydi Mandoza. There is, too, a sly nod to Funkadelic's *One Nation Under A Groove*. The gospel-indebted *Carry The Load* is brightened by woodwinds and Swedish singer Amanda Werne, offset by the slow swing of *Hum Bebass Nahin*, with its squawky horns and jazzy sense of the avant-garde. *Rhythms* doesn't always live up to its promise, most notably on *Limelight*, with its popping electronic drums, but the album rediscovers its mojo on the Fela Kuti-like Afrobeat of *Aduna*. **RH**

HEN OGLEDD

Mogic WEIRD WORLD

Prog pop Celtic madness from Richard Dawson-featuring band.



Originally the avant improvisational project of anti-folk man of the moment Richard Dawson and maverick harpist Rhodri Davies, Hen Ogledd (Welsh for 'The Old North') have expanded on third album *Mogic* by becoming a quartet, with Sally Pilkington joining Dawn Bothwell on keys and vocals. That title is apposite too, because much of this album sounds like a collision between magic and logic, where songs that don't initially sound serious can morph into sinister, sci-fi inflected fables for our time. Wonkiness is everywhere, but contrasted with moments of strange beauty: the artless singing and skittering guitar of *Sky Burial* flower into a wonderful vocoder chorus; *Gwae Reged O Heddiw* is a Welsh poem being taught to and repeated by a child over an enviro-ambient backing. Elsewhere, *First Date* is a creepy ballad played by a robot, while the insectoid techno of *Transport & Travel* soundtracks a Caledonian acid trip. But ace in the pack here is the post-punk prog pop perfection of *Problem Child*, Dawson's propulsive bass and near falsetto vocal driving what is surely one of the year's must-hear tracks. Not always the easiest of listens, *Mogic* is a playful yet disquieting album. **JB**

HENGE

Attention Earth! LOVE LOVE

Alien space cadets land with genre-hopping rave-up of a debut.

Any band that play shows dressed as alien artistocrats replete with masks, headdresses and capes are alright by us, and this four-piece from distant corners of the galaxy (or possibly Manchester) have been a highly entertaining live draw in recent years. They manage to bottle their unruly strand of sci-fi silliness quite effectively in the studio here. A focus on infectious, danceable grooves helps – a clipped guitar lick helps *Indigo Dust* lodge itself in our heads before *In Praise Of Water* offers a cartoonishly fast-paced synth rock stomp that adds extra layers of intrigue with a superbly unhinged synth solo. Best of all is the Marimba-led mission statement of *Demilitarise*: *'We demand that the weapons of war are manufactured no more, demilitarise,'* they chant. *'We demand that we have in its place, the means to unite and colonise space.'* Good luck getting that past Trump, Kim and the rest, chaps, but good attitude anyway. Their penchant for pitch shifted sci-fi voices and faintly zany arrangements might irritate some, but if you can embrace the spirit of anarchic fun in which it was surely created, you'll welcome them to your planet with open arms. **JS**

RIKARD SJÖBLOM'S GUNGFLY

Friendship INSIDEOUT

One of Big Big Train's drivers reverts to day job.

Sweden's Rikard Sjöblom certainly has impeccable prog heritage. His band Beardfish bestrode the 21st century with eight albums of increasing individuality, while in recent years his work – both live and in the studio – with Big Big Train has brought both consolidation and expansion to their already epic sound. His Gungfly (a Swedish word meaning "insecure ground") project began back in 2009, and last year's *On Her Journey To The Sun* album showed him moving tentatively away from the Beardfish template, dipping into Frank Zappa weirdness, jazz and even spoken word.

> **Possesses an identity both reassuring and reviving.**

It'd be fibbing to declare that *Friendship* pushes out further, for it is at root a very rock album, its bones firmly based in guitar surges, its bloodstream heavy with grungy but clean chords. Yet, pleasingly, throughout its grandiose journey, you're never able to take what might happen in the next minute for granted. The 14-minute title track exemplifies Sjöblom's desire to reach for the epic, as it burns a trail across a beefy rock platform, digressing into curious keyboard splashes, staccato piano stabs, a dubby symphonic section which feels like a cousin to Gainsbourg's *Histoire De Melody Nelson*, a Gilmour-esque stretch of Floyd-ish axe heroics, jagged theatrics which evoke 10cc and an ivory-tickling finale which whispers of Wakeman. Yes, that's all in one number. Another long'un, *If You Fall, Part 2*, isn't quite as ambitious, though that's a high bar: it still mixes in rhythmic switches which conjure up Rush (frenetic) and Camel (languid).

It's a given that Sjöblom's a sensational musician (vocals, guitar, bass, keyboards), and the drumming of Petter Diamant and interjections of guitarist David Zackrisson and bassist Rasmus Diamant are diamond-sharp. If there's a weakness, it's Sjöblom's voice, his Achilles' heel. It lacks texture, lapsing into the reedy at times. This doesn't dilute the album's range and robustness, but your ears almost subconsciously twitch for a timbre more warm and welcoming.

That would only enhance the charm of his themes, whereby he delves into childhood memories of friendships which form when young, then peter out as maturity and reality kick in. *A Treehouse In A Glade* (like the title track) explores this, as Sjöblom seems still mystified by life's ups and downs. His innocent yearning for the idealism of kids is disarming. He returns again, in his mind, to that treehouse, as the album concludes. Meanwhile the twists and turns of his music remain compelling, and for all the aforementioned comparisons, possess an identity both reassuring and revivifying. On this insecure ground, you're in safe hands. **CHRIS ROBERTS**

ROINE STOLT'S THE FLOWER KING

Manifesto Of An Alchemist INSIDEOUT

Flower Kings mainman re-examines his roots.

An alchemist seeks two things: the elixir of life and the ability to transmute base metal into gold. Stolt's latest offering suggests that the answer to both lies in a relentless and tireless search for prog perfection. Since the last Flower Kings album *Desolation Rose* in 2013, he's created new material with Transatlantic and Jon Anderson, as well as forming a new supergroup, The Sea Within.

Given this frenetic, creative pace, it might be reasonable to expect this new album to be a modest affair. Rather — as Stolt's band name suggests — this project refers back to his seminal solo 1994 album *The Flower King*. *Manifesto Of An Alchemist* is an examination of the components that propelled Stolt into arguably his greatest and most creative era.

> **Immediate and energetic, gaining in grit.**

...Alchemist represents Stolt — to borrow a painting metaphor — working more like a watercolour artist than a portrait painter. Stolt tries to capture each song's shifting essence, rather than creating his effects layer-on-layer. This could have turned *...Alchemist* into a rough-and-ready album. Rather, it makes it more immediate and energetic. What it loses in slickness, it gains in grit. Put together in less than two months, this is reflected in its rocky and unmassaged style, especially Stolt's mostly unadorned guitar work.

Over 10 minutes, *Lost America* places Stolt's soloing over gritty, groovy riffing from Jonas Reingold's Pastorius-like bass and Marcus Minnemann's drums. If Stolt has always had a gift for jazzy prog, this song's mood is a million miles away from the lush extravagance of, say, *For The Love Of Gold* from *Banks Of Eden*. The deliberately muddy vocals as Stolt sings about the *'same old treadmill'* capture a disappearing America beautifully.

Lest anyone think that Stolt has abandoned his trademark epic über-prog, the 13-minute *High Road* uses tripled vocals and precise keyboard and guitar layers that match anything he's done in his career. What is fresh, even on this prog-out, are the sudden tonal shifts. Just as one expects *High Road* to fly off in ever wilder directions, Stolt and co take the mood down into simple acoustic chord progressions.

There are some tracks, including the spiky jazz-inflected title track and spaced-out *Six Thirty Wake-Up*, that may take a little while to bed-in (pardon the pun). Those accustomed to Stolt massaging his material to within an inch of its life might find these tunes a little too jammed and relaxed. *Manifesto Of An Alchemist*, however, indicates some exciting developments in Stolt's busy schedule. There is a simplicity, a joy and an honesty that bodes well as he heads deeper into his seventh decade.

RACHEL MANN

JOHN MCLAUGHLIN & THE 4TH DIMENSION/ JIMMY HERRING & THE INVISIBLE WHIP

Live In San Francisco ABSTRACT LOGIX

The inner mounting flame still burns bright.

Had McLaughlin only worked with Tony Williams' Lifetime and Miles Davis, he would still be regarded as a catalyst that ushered jazz and rock music's vital transformation at the tail end of the 60s. But it's the Mahavishnu Orchestra's phenomenal success that has ensured his legacy achieved an astonishing global reach. At 76 years old and with arthritis encroaching upon his legendary technique, McLaughlin's decision to retire is understandable. However, this album is not the swan song of someone past their prime. Containing a potent collection of tracks from the Mahavishnu songbook, the tempi may be slower but the pieces sound all the better. Jimmy Herring, a veteran of the US jam band scene whose head was rewired by McLaughlin's innovations, adds rich depth to the material. With no unnecessary notes, the many points at which both bands mesh on the stirring themes are simply glorious. A massive sound, alternating between pensive intricacy and roaring urgency, remains hot to the touch nearly 50 years after jazz rock's big bang. A truly brilliant and dazzling farewell. **SS**

NORTH ATLANTIC OSCILLATION

Grind Show VINELAND

Four is the magic number for exploratory Edinburgh electro prog pioneers.

NAO's fourth album comes four years on from *The Third Day*. In the interim, mainman Sam Healy's second solo release as Sand, *A Sleeper, Just Awake*, proved his growing proficiency in experimental electronic alt-rock. *Grind Show* maintains that upward trajectory. Opener *Low Earth Orbit* exhibits a greater reliance on synths and effects that underpin the album. Breathy vocals are layered and manipulated to an extent we've never heard before from NAO, while the meshing of electronic sounds and rock instrumentation creates palpable tension. Noise threatens to erupt, but each time we're pulled back from the brink. *Downriver*'s inexorable progress and thunderous denouement is reminiscent of Steven Wilson's *The Raven...* and no less emotive. *Sirens* splices heavy post-rock with IDM. Radiohead comparisons are unavoidable but there is a joyous hazy veneer over these songs – a summery perfume that intoxicates. *Sequoia* and *Fernweh* are slow-burners, their pleading vocals scaffolded by grinding organ, piano and brass that evokes Robert Wyatt's mid-70s albums. There's a lot of detail to lose yourself in here on this opulent yet intimate slice of contemporary prog. **CMG**

IRMIN SCHMIDT

5 Klavierstücke MUTE

Poignant piano pieces by the man from Can.

The octogenarian Can founder member still defies convention. His first solo release since 2015's retrospective consists of five piano improvisations played once, no edits or corrections. They're rich with emotional evocations, as he coaxes elegy and agony from the ebony and ivory. For all the minimalism, the listener projects that the recent deaths of Holger Czukay and Jaki Liebezeit flicker through this like benevolent ghosts. Schmidt is now the last Can standing. He honours both the band's legacy and his own with a wilfully sparse set of music which somehow embraces nostalgia, futurism and timelessness. The pieces are numbered *I* to *V*, and while the first is a haunted series of notes which set the tone, the second – where there's a gap of over 25 seconds after the first note – brings in rustling ambient sounds and tinny rhythms recorded around his French studio. (It's something of a jolt when those rhythms come in.) *III* and *IV* also feel percussive; *V* reverts to spiky melancholy. Schmidt has cited Schubert and John Cage as influences, and of the two pianos used, one was prepared with the stylings he was taught by Cage. A hypnotic duel between silence and humanity. **CR**

SHATTERED SKIES

Muted Neon SELF-RELEASED

Prog metallers triumph over adversity with aplomb.

Losing half of your line-up might strike a fatal dagger into the heart of many groups, but Shattered Skies are made of steelier stuff. The prog metallers – based just outside London – have welcomed new singer Gerry Brown and bassist Chris Borland in recent years, and it appears the upheaval has only fuelled the quartet's fire. Second LP *Muted Neon* is a cauldron of grooved-up guttural riffs, brain-searingly catchy melodies and fretboard wizardry – think Haken's perfect tour support act they've never had. More confident and fuller in sound than their 2015 debut, *Muted Neon* is a clear step-up; opener *The Disaffected* is tech prog done just about right, with a brooding intro catapulting into a series of bouncing riffs zapping out the guitar neck which are both bludgeoning and bloody catchy. They thankfully haven't lost the theatrics that former vocalist and stage musical man Sean Murphy brought to the mix, with the synth-speckled *You Will Know My Name* sounding a bit like Meshuggah on the West End. The album's lyrical theme is about triumphing over adversity, and having seemingly come through line-up changes in style, it looks like Shattered Skies have plenty to celebrate. **CC**

JOHN SHIRLEY & JERRY KING

Spaceship Landing In A Cemetery SELF-RELEASED

Blue Öyster Cult lyricist teams with guitar ace for a complicated but thrilling listen.

In the blue corner, it's science fiction writer and occasional Blue Öyster Cult lyricist John Shirley. In the red, Jerry King, a man with fingers in too many pies to list here, although he did appear on the *Frets Of Yore* compilation alongside Fred Frith, Henry Kaiser, and 48 other guitarists. Together, they've made an album. The opening rock churn of *Pigzipper* gives way to the woozy, cocktail jazz of *Puppet Dance*, and it's immediately apparent this isn't going to be a smooth ride. Shirley and King take every opportunity to veer off on unpredictable tangents, from the atmospheric, spoken word of *Machinery Of The Sea* to the slightly sinister *Lou Reed's Last Words*, which appears to end with the Velvet Underground man being ferried off into the afterlife, desperate for it all to end. Some of it's genuinely thrilling; the sax on *Tippy Top* is a blast of untethered, Fela Kuti-style Afro-jazz, while the Claptonesque guitar solo on *Iniquities* is lovely. It all comes across as equal parts Crimson, Zappa, Iggy Pop, Marvin Pontiac and late night radio host. It's the sound of someone spinning records and yarns on obscure frequencies for lost drivers and acid trippers. By any measure, it's complicated. **FL**

SIGH

Heir To Despair CANDLELIGHT/SPINEFARM

The Japanese black metal aces return, bearing flute, trip-hop, 70s prog and more.

Sigh were pioneers of the Japanese black metal scene in the early 1990s, although over the course of 11 albums they've pulled in all sorts of unexpected sounds and influences. Mirai Kawashima is the band's driving force, and could politely be described as an eccentric, as he throws in flute solos amongst the metal riffs on *Heir To Despair*. Most of his vocals are in a classic black metal style, delivered as rapid-fire bursts. But it's not all black metal, with psych and weird 70s prog as influences. The synthesisers of *Heresy I – Oblivium* sound like they belong on the soundtrack of an 80s horror film blended with trip-hop beats. The title track has woodwind and chiming bells alongside the acerbic guitars, and that certainly sounds like a shamisen in *Aletheia*. This might be more properly described as avant-garde metal than prog, but while it's not completely accessible it's certainly bold, and fun. Although Kawashima clearly delights in confounding expectations, the most contentious moment comes in *Homo Homini Lupus*, which features a guest appearance from Down frontman and alleged drunken white power enthusiast Phil Anselmo. With all due respect, fuck that guy. **DW**

PROGRESSIVE FOLK

Paul Sexton scours the new releases to find there's nowt so prog as folk.

Karine Polwart renewed her already peerless credentials earlier this year with her sixth BBC Radio 2 Folk Award, as Folk Singer Of The Year. *Laws Of Motion* (Hudson) is a speedy follow-up to 2017's lauded *A Pocket Of Wind Resistance*, and *The Guardian*'s description of that project as an "epic, emotional endeavour" could happily do service again here. Much of the material on Polwart's seventh release is of a traditional hue, but her approach is so fearless and, often, socio-political that the effect is daringly cutting-edge.

After an acoustic opening for *Ophelia* (a mood that returns on the comely *Cornerstone* and others) comes a modernistic turn on the title song, one of those written with Midlothian neighbour Martin Green. Polwart's studio partners throughout are brother Steven on guitars and vocals and Inge Thomson on accordion, synths and more. Holocaust survival and migration are contemplated, as is a certain supposed leader of the free world with his "disregard for truth and appetite for lies" on the deliciously disparaging *I Burn But I Am Not Consumed*. Lionhearted work, start to finish.

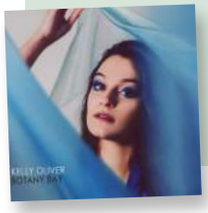
From Wellington, New Zealand come the singular **Orchestra Of Spheres**, whose double album *Mirror* (Fire) is an ethereal sonic soup. Elements of psychedelia, avant garde jazz and classical instrumentation abound on a fourth release of often bonkers eclecticism.

Meanwhile, clucking chickens and fiddle rock finery introduce *Tentation* (La Pruche Libre) from Canada's **Yves Lambert Trio**. It finds veteran Lambert, much respected on the Québécois traditional scene as founder of both La Bottine Souriante and the Bébert Orchestra, forging ahead with a trio sound illustrated by his accordions and, especially, Tommy Gauthier's fine fiddling.

Eight years on from their debut, female trio **Mountain Man** return with *Magic Ship* (Bella Union), a new platform for the vocal interplay shared by Amelia Meath, Alexandra Sauser-Monnig and Molly Sarlé since college days in Vermont. Instrumentation is barely more than restrained acoustic guitar, as on *Baby Where You Are*, and, often, not even that, so the canvas for their delicate harmonies is broad.

Darren Hayman offers the third volume in his remarkable *Thankful Villages* series (Belka), widely hailed for its collage of untold stories gathered in those 54 small settlements where every soldier returned alive from the Great War. Hayman has visited every single one, in a laudable endeavour for which he has created a sound recording, a painting and a film for each. Where churches and rivers were his previous themes, he now addresses the younger generation, with gripping actuality and bucolic accompaniment stretching from Hunstanworth to Helperthorpe.

Speaking of the younger generation, **Kelly Oliver** continues to represent it with elegant authenticity on her self-released *Botany Bay*. It's another vehicle for her vocal dexterity and page-turning tales of bold fishermen, dark-eyed sailors and the like.



THE TANGENT

Proxy INSIDEOUT

Passionate polemics for the here and now on album number 10.

Nostalgia can be a dangerous place if you spend too long languishing in its captivating embrace. The desire to re-experience a taste of the time and place of our past can not only be addictive but can easily switch from bittersweet pleasure to an obsession that defies rationality. One need only look at the nostalgic ideas infesting the current political narrative across both sides of the Atlantic for proof of this. When it comes to music it seems that, regardless of the genre, the past is constantly encroaching upon the present. Like some occupying army with an arsenal of retro sounds, retreads and references, it's very hard for

> **Spikey and combative arrangements with an unswerving velocity.**

anyone to sound different and fresh, never mind genuinely innovative, with too many groups piling on the Mellotron or revving up a mini-Moog in lieu of anything interesting to say.

While keyboardist Andy Tillison is often willing to set his oscillators to maximum wig-out mode, it's icing on the cake and never as a substitute for an intricate motif or a dramatic extension. With *Proxy*'s five tracks working as a kind of extended suite, the long-form writing displayed here is beautifully crafted. There are few composers working in the field that can claim to be as rigorous or as exacting as Tillison.

Not for the first time, the polemics hard-wired into The Tangent's lyrics recognise nostalgia's seductiveness as well as the traps it can set for bands operating in contemporary progressive rock. On the furious j'accuse of *Supper's Off* he spits out, *'I was born into a time when people walked on the moon/When bands wrote symphonies and tone poems.'* In those words you can hear the wonder and incredulity ultimately replaced by bewildered anger as he rails about the collapse of artistic aspiration and the race to the bottom: *'I find myself part of a generation that lapped up wealth/That created Simon Cowell.'* The appearance of Richard Farnsworth's voice and his line from David Lynch's *The Straight Story*, "the worst part of being old is rememberin' when you was young", hangs poignantly in the atmosphere.

With the title track taking aim at government's imperialist excesses, the indignation posited in the words finds a perfect vehicle for their expression in spikey and combative arrangements, which barrel along with a remarkable, unswerving velocity. Repeated listening reveals a multitude of details easily missed first time around. Exquisite work from guitarist Luke Machin, bassist Jonas Reingold and Steve Roberts' propulsive drumming, as well as decisive contributions from sax and flute from Theo Travis, all lend *Proxy* an effortless agility.

SID SMITH

THE MON

Dopelleben SUPERNATURAL CAT

Italian doom-monger lets loose his spooky demons.

Normally found serving up colossal riffs with doom band Ufomammut, The Mon (aka Urlo) has plunged deep into the nightmarish maelstrom of his own warped psyche for *Dopelleben*, an album that acts like the soundtrack to a film that, one suspects, only Italians would be even remotely equipped to watch. Intermittently redolent of the same primitive celluloid sonics currently being plundered in the synthwave scene, but still with strong links to the tripped-out doom and drone worlds (*Salvator Mundi* sounds like Om gone Satanic), this negotiates the fine line between drug-addled schlock and authentic, mind-altering exploration. The grandest moments are the most affecting. *Hate One I Hate* is both fiendishly immersive and subtly torturous: keening feedback spreads over ululating bass tones, ghostly piano for five disorientating minutes, before a giant guitar motif crashes in. *Relics* is meandering space rock, part jittery electro-pulse, part Sabbathian head-rush. *Blut*'s staccato groove and fuzzed-out wall of chords feel like early 90s shoegaze gone gloriously wrong, like The Jesus And Mary Chain remixed by Godflesh in Satan's garden shed. This is equally disturbing and absorbing. **DL**

TOSKA

Fire By The Silos SELF-RELEASED

Long awaited first from proggy YouTube stars.

What's initially most striking about *Fire By The Silos* is the length. Toska bill themselves as a prog rock band, and based on the track lengths and 70-plus minute total running time, they're not kidding. Particularly as an instrumental outfit, this running length is ambitious. Toska draw heavily from the modern prog metal scene, but there are lots of other, slightly less contemporary references in the mix. Writ large is the influence of Aussie proggers Karnivool, but other Australian bands feature in their sound too – like the Butterfly Effect feel in the 'verses' of *Abomasum*. As an instrumental group, you'd expect them to have serious chops, and they do. Stop-start dynamics, subtle playing with metrics and polyrhythms as well as more overt odd timings all feature, even within punchier, riff-led sections like in *Congress*. There's a truckload of good ideas in the chordwork and repetition on display, and the songs feel geared toward the presence of a singer that is not there. When this album works, it really works, but even when it doesn't, it's still close to excellent; it just could use the elevation of an explicit melody line – be that from vocal or guitar. **AL**

TWINSCAPES

Vol 2: A Modern Approach To The Dancefloor RARENOISE

Brothers in bass explore their happy place.

That's possibly the most 80s-sounding album title since the 80s, and it's no accident. Twinscapes' second album turns their twin bass attack into a homage to early heroes. Throw a Filofax at any gathering of prog musicians and you'll hit a Japan fan who worships Mick Karn, but this is an informed labour of love which acknowledges the contributions also made to that decade's defining sounds by Pino Palladino, Mark King, Tina Weymouth and others. Did we mention these guys both play bass? You doubtless knew that, from Colin Edwin's work with Porcupine Tree and Lorenzo Feliciati's offerings with Naked Truth. The pair played their first gig at a tiny London bar on the day they met in 2013, and their musical rapport has since proven fruitful, funky and exploratory. On paper, two Jaco Pastoriuses might sound a bit rich: in practice, with drummer Roberto Gualdi key, they've burrowed out a fascinating space of their own. *Tin Can* nods to the krautrock kings while *Severing Suns* brings in emotive choral voices. *Future Echo* encapsulates their deftness, dusting off that 80s scrapbook and spraying it with electronics and dynamism. A winning chemistry. **CR**

TWO MEDICINE

Astropsychosis BELLA UNION

Midlake bassist's solo project is just the tonic.

What would you do if your day job was put on hold for five years, while you still got paid? Once you'd finished celebrating your massive good fortune, you might get a little bored. And so, it appears, did Midlake bass player Paul Alexander. So with the Texan soft proggers inactive since 2013, he's taken the opportunity to make the record he says he always hoped his band would make – a more psychedelic, experimental affair. *'San Francisco is made of glass,'* he croons on *SF*, in a style reminiscent of the early 80s Paisley Underground scene, and *Astropsychosis* is sprinkled with such slightly wrong-footing lines. However, although much of the music is drenched in perfectly listenable, sunny harmonies twinkling over trippy, drifting dreamscapes, for long periods it drifts in one ear and out the other. We're snapped out of our reverie by *An Eye For An I*, which is bathed in an inviting fizzing synth bath as a transcendentally yearning melody plays out. Then the title track offers an alluring touch of Tame Impala's sun-dappled dazedness, underpinned by fuzzy bass and softly shimmying rhythm. More where they came from, please. **JS**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Three Seasons FRUITS DE MER

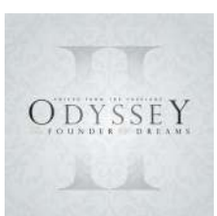
A triple album celebration of tasty forbidden (cover version) fruits.

It's been a good year for Fruits de Mer being recognised as a defiant last bastion of eccentric English psychedelia, releasing esoteric vinyl declarations of independence and honoured with their own book. A snippet of the theme to 50s kids fave *Andy Pandy* opens the door to their magical world, spread over six LP sides, where obscure psych-era nuggets from between 1966-68 are reimagined by label stalwarts (Moonweevil, Honey Pot, Sidewalk Society) and guests including the Yardbirds, Pretty Things and Electric Prunes. Obvious targets are eschewed in favour of curios such as LoveyDove's homaging *Bedazzled* by Drimble Wedge and the Vegetations (Peter Cook and Dudley Moore), Jack Ellister tackling *Aquarius* from *The Zodiac: Cosmic Sounds*, Rob Gould spiking Purple Gang's *Granny Takes A Trip*, Locker Room Cowboys liberating the Stones' *We Love You* and the Honey Pot flying Simon Dupree's *Kites*. Elsewhere you'll find gems by the Attack, Small Faces, Donovan, Love, Deviants, Alice Cooper, Neil Diamond, Hendrix, Touch, Anne Briggs, Jeff Beck, Family, It's A Beautiful Day and West Coast Pop Art Experimental Band. Heady, sometimes unhinged and often beautiful. **KN**

VOICES FROM THE FUSELAGE

Odyssey: The Founder Of Dreams WHITE STAR

Ex-TesseracT frontman gets stuck in a groove.



Voices From The Fuselage aren't ones to rush. They released an EP in 2011, followed by a lengthy break while vocalist Ashe O'Hara was off with TesseracT, then their debut album belatedly arrived in 2015, and now they return with their second full-length release. Musically, *Odyssey: The Founder Of Dreams* moves between chugging post-rock riffs and ambient harmonics, all dominated by O'Hara's clean, almost poppy singing style. Big voice, big talent: some of O'Hara's vocal acrobatics wouldn't be out of place in an Adele tune, as he taps into the same stream of anguished heartbreak in a lot of his lyrics. The album is produced by John Mitchell, who gives the songs a very contemporary sheen – sometimes overly so. Although strong on melodies, many of the songs are sonically indistinguishable from one another. The album offers a procession of mid-tempo rockers, each one certain to include a section that drops down to just a guitar line or keyboard, before the full band abruptly return. It's nothing if not formulaic and there's none of the rhythmic variety displayed by contemporary bands like Karnivool. Passionate perhaps, but this *Odyssey* lacks adventure. **DW**

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Grant Moon has a rummage down the back of the *Prog* sofa for the ones that nearly got away...

Pure prog, jazz fusion and rock come together in fine style on *The Courage To Be*, the self-released debut album from Cleveland, Ohio trio **Lux Terminus**. Pianist/keyboardist Vikram Shankar, drummer Matthew Kerschner and bass player Brian Craft are in perfect sync on eclectic tracks with proggy titles like *Electrocommunion*, *Aberration* and *Spectral Shapes*. What a breath of fresh air this is, a treat for fans of thinky piano-led prog, and the cherry on top comes in the form of a classy vocal slot from the ever-divine Anneke van Giersbergen.

London psych proggers **The Osiris Club** have removed their cultish masks of late and unveiled three-track single *Island Of Stone* (Indie). Ulver's Kristoffer Rygg sings the catchy title track — taken from the Club's recent second album *Wine-Dark Sea*; the Nik Void remix of *Into The Silent Sea* is a dispensable exercise in creepy ambient sound design (one for Ben Wheatley's next woozy horror), and the crunching *Machinations* sees these contenders wear their mid-70s prog influences on their berobed sleeves.

Talented upcoming Bristolian **Saul Blease** has a knack for alt-rock and industrial textures, and an appetite for big themes. *The Great War* (Bad Elephant) is released on November 11, the 100th anniversary of the end of World War 1. His songs (*Listen To The Man*, *War Machine*, *Passchendaele*) are by turns savage, melodic and dramatic, but while Blease commits fully to his gruelling subject, it's a weighty one which, for now, just exceeds his artistic grasp.

Public Service Broadcasting have the opposite problem on *White Star Liner* (PIAS), their take on the story of the doomed Titanic. As befitting PSB's usual style, it features first-person narrative, from the son of one of the Belfast shipwrights (*The Unsinkable Ship*) and survivor Eva Hart (on chilling closer *The Deep*). The motorik title track is the highlight of an accomplished but all-too-brief EP; an amuse-bouche in comparison to their previous treatments of the space race and Welsh mining industry. The brevity of these four (yes, high quality) tracks is markedly at odds with the scale and significance of the source tragedy.

Back to our own century, and as things turn further to shit by the week on the world stage, Brighton rockers **Black Peaks** are here to articulate the rage. Riven with anger and alienation, their second album *All That Divides* (Rise/BMG) is a rebellious scream into the darkness. Those System Of A Down and Mastodon comparisons are well-made, but there's a substance to this work that's all their own. They deserve their current wave of success and it's a thrill to hear them grow.

Meanwhile, in a faraway field that is forever prog, Germany's **Fairytale** follow their 2015 debut *Forest Of Summer* with *Autumn's Crown* (Magic Mile). Mediaeval and Celtic tones abound on another spirited and authentic dive into oak-solid folk tradition. Composer Oliver Oppermann has got the goods, with vocalist Laura Isabel Biastoch and violinist/violist Berit Coenders adding glamour and, more crucially, real musical talent.

JETHRO TULL

This Was, 50th Anniversary Edition PARLOPHONE

Tull's debut celebrates its birthday with the Steve Wilson treatment.

Ian Anderson has described *This Was* as a "foot in the door" of the music business and reckons that it consists of "cheerful, slightly home-grown, very middle class, white boy English blues". Jethro Tull were on the edge of the 60s blues boom of musicians who sought out music of a greater authenticity than British popular culture could offer. But many soon realised that their own renderings were anything but authentic and began to adopt a more personal approach.

> **Anderson said they'd never do anything like this again.**

In 1968, Jethro Tull were already an impressive unit. Clive Bunker drummed in a fluid, jazzy style, while Mick Abrahams played exciting incisive blues guitar and their version of Doctor Ross' *Cat's Squirrel* equals the version recorded by Cream. But Jethro Tull were also a little bit different — not least because in Ian Anderson they had a lead flautist — and so while *Some Day The Sun Won't Shine For You* is basically a competent re-tread of Big Bill Broonzy's *Key To The Highway*, songs like the freewheeling *My Sunday Feeling* and *A Song For Jeffrey* carried a hint of the post-Brubeck jazziness that would infuse their work further on their second album *Stand Up*, and on the hit single *Living In The Past*.

In this set of three CDs and one DVD (for 5.1 sound; there is no video footage), Steven Wilson's stereo remix nicely buffs up the original 4-track recording and the original mono mix is warm, punchy and well worth a listen.

The disc-and-a-half's worth of associated recordings includes outtakes, singles and B-sides, two 1968 Top Gear sessions and the pre-*This Was* single *Sunshine Day* and its B-side *Aeroplane* (recorded a few months earlier as The John Evan Smash).

One particular avenue that Jethro Tull decided not to pursue was the freeform improvisation of the studio outtake *Ultimate Confusion*, but they also began to pull away from blues rock, a change of tack that prompted Abrahams to leave the group. But one can see why, when comparing Anderson singing, rather unconvincingly, about how his mule got lame on a cover of Brownie McGhee's *So Much Trouble* to the captivating post-album single *Love Story*, with its mix of hard rock and folky refrain.

Right from their inception Jethro Tull set themselves apart with their eccentric image, and *This Was* made anti-image its selling point — the front cover photograph shows the group made up to look like grizzled, elderly farm workers. Anderson has said that he came up with the album's title because he knew the group wouldn't do anything like this again, and in that respect he was not wrong.

MIKE BARNES

KINGDOM COME/NICHOLAS GREENWOOD

Journey/Cold Cuts SWORDFISH VINYL

Two branches of the Arthur Brown family tree are given a good shake.

From Carl Palmer to a drum machine. That's an interesting journey, but exactly the kind you'd expect from great British loon Arthur Brown. After his Crazy World was dismantled in 1969 when Palmer and Vincent Crane left to form Atomic Rooster, Brown set up shop in Kingdom Come, an adventurous bunch who were among the first bands to use synthesisers.

By album three, *Journey*, they were operating in a different sphere altogether, with their beats provided – in a world first – by a Bentley Rhythm Ace drum machine. The result is a kind of peculiar prog rock proto-glam space opera affair, with tracks ranging from opener *Time Captives*, which accelerates in barely perceptible fashion until crackling into life and climaxing amidst a sea of bubbling synths, to closer *Come Alive*, built on a wobbling, almost krautrock rhythm. In some places the album feels a little tentative, as if the musicians are a little fearful of operating with such a rigid backbone, but when it works – as it does in spectacular fashion during the trampoline bounce of *Spirit Of Joy* – it's a surprisingly soulful collection.

Meanwhile, over in the £2,800-on-Discogs corner, you'll find the first (official) vinyl reissue of *Cold Cuts*, recorded in 1970 by former Crazy World bassist Nicholas Greenwood and barely released in late 1972. Thankfully, the album is still wrapped in its man-made-out-of-meat cover art, and the innards are just as enticing. The feast was assembled in Los Angeles with a cast of characters including Mothers Of Invention woodwind maestro Bunk Gardner and keyboard player Dick Heninghem, who plays like Dave Greenslade possessed throughout.

If Greenwood's voice is occasionally theatrical (maybe he'd had lessons from Arthur), songs like the surprisingly sexy *Melancholy* and *Big Machine* – which sounds like an English take on The Doors at their smooth, stoned best – lift the album well above the ordinary. It's an album that deserves its cult status, if not the eye-watering price tag. **FL**

ELECTRIC LIGHT ORCHESTRA

The UK Singles Volume One: 1972-1978 EPIC

From proto prog to pristine and polished. Here, the B-sides come out of the blue.

Anyone doubting Electric Light Orchestra's prog credentials should lend an ear to the live version of *Daybreaker*, the B-side to their 1976 single *Nightrider*. Or *Fire On High*, B-side to 1976's more poptastic *Livin' Thing*. Or *Poor Boy (The Greenwood)*, B-side to 1977's *Telephone Line*. It's all there to hear, from rolling keyboards, conceptual storytelling, even the odd quirky time signature. Of course no one is saying that ELO were up there with Yes or Genesis or even Greenslade, but there has always been more to Jeff Lynne's musical imagination than pastiching his beloved Beatles.

In this set of the first 15 ELO singles plus 1978's *The ELO EP*, the Birmingham band's progclivities are writ large, sat happily alongside the band's more popular and poppier moments. In fact, given the immense popularity of the band's hit singles from 1976's *Livin' Thing* onwards (the band racked up 15 Top 10 hits, although only 1980's *Xanadu*, featuring Olivia Newton John and from the failed movie of the same name, got to No. 1), it's very easy to overlook quite how exploratory Jeff Lynne's songwriting could be. Look no further than the band's very first single, 1972's *10538 Overture*, which cracked the Top 10 and would later have its cascading riff shamelessly purloined by none other than Paul Weller for 1995's *The Changingman* at the suggestion of Weller's co-writer Brendan Lynch.

Aside from their walloping cover of Chuck Berry's *Roll Over Beethoven*, most of the early singles and B-sides are the really proggy fare, even more than the albums from which they came, although even the bigger hits from *A New World Record* and the mega-selling *Out Of The Blue* all have something going for them. For this writer, the better singles would actually follow on from 1978, so it will be interesting to see if a second volume of this ever arrives. But we challenge you to listen to *Poker* without jumping around the room with a massive grin on your face! **JE**

CHARLES MINGUS

Jazz In Detroit/Strata Concert Gallery/46 Selden BBE

A ringside seat for memorable Mingus live show recordings.

Jazz fans are being spoiled right now. Recently we've seen the discovery of 'lost' recordings from Bill Evans, John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk and now, a previously unheard recording from another giant of the genre across five discs.

This live recording from a week-long residency in 1973 captures Mingus' quintet turning in robust extended performances of scorching material that includes some of the revered compositions that established him as an innovative voice in the 1950s. His appearance at Detroit's Strata Concert Gallery came between gigs by Keith Jarrett's quartet and Herbie Hancock's Mwandishi outfit. Compared to that exotic amalgam it might be supposed that Mingus' brand of combative post-bop seemed backward-looking. However, through this intimate recording, we are given a ringside seat as Mingus more than holds his own against the new generation of players. Possessing a restless, timeless quality, Joni Mitchell nailed it when she spoke glowingly of Mingus' work and the era from which it first emerged: "Music like this has more power than a decade in it."

Pivoting between jagged outbursts, sudden double-time accelerations or thrilling turns into harmonically detailed themes with pin-sharp accuracy, the quintet embody the discipline that was part and parcel to Mingus' rigorous approach. Though it's stripped back, they forcefully convey the rambunctious spirit woven into his writing for larger ensembles.

Don Pullen's piano simmers against drummer Roy Brook's sharp responses, frequently swirling into floating clusters and spiky shards that conjure a fugue state of expressiveness which the man himself anchors to the irresistible tempo. Joe Gardner's effusive trumpet crackles with joy, adding the contrasting light to the dark rumblings of John Stubblefield's tenor sax, showcasing great if overlooked players of passion. Overflowing with wild, fresh takes and two tracks foreshadowing their studio debut, this is a major addition to Mingus' already substantial legacy. **SS**

PINK FLOYD

A Foot In The Door - The Best Of Pink Floyd PINK FLOYD

Floyd's vinyl procession nears the end.

Originally released via CD only in 2011 as part of the *Why Pink Floyd?* retail campaign that saw the arrival of the hefty Immersion box sets of *Dark Side Of The Moon*, *Wish You Were Here* and *The Wall*, *A Foot In The Door - The Best Of Pink Floyd* has largely been viewed as a poor relation to 2001's more expansive and inclusive double set *Echoes: The Best Of Pink Floyd* (which probably explains why sales of the latter overshadow those of the former). And admittedly, you certainly won't hear any argument against that school of thought from this writer. However, this package still serves as a fine introduction to the band for any newbie fan whose interest has been piqued by the current wave of enthusiasm for vinyl, or indeed anyone revisiting the format after decades of dealing with shiny discs.

Spread across four sides of lush heavyweight vinyl are 'the hits'. Only *See Emily Play* predates *Dark Side Of The Moon*, and there's just *The Fletcher Memorial Home* (from *The Final Cut*), *Learning To Fly* (from *A Momentary Lapse Of Reason*) and *High Hopes* (from *The Division Bell*) post-*The Wall*, which does a disservice to the pre-*Dark Side...* material now being revived with vigour by Nick Mason and his Saucerful Of Secrets.

So what does the Floyd completist need to know? Well, everything's been newly remastered by James Guthrie and Joel Plante. Longtime Floyd associate Aubrey Powell and keeper of the Storm Thorgerson flame, Peter Curzon, have tweaked what was Thorgerson's final artwork prior to his death, adding alternate versions of the original photos that were used in the packaging. And the chiming clocks that were curiously omitted from the start of *Time* on the CD version have finally been reinstated. And of course, it all sounds amazing. However this writer, and one suspects many other Floyd fans, would much have preferred to see *Echoes* reappear on vinyl. 2010's *An Introduction To Syd Barrett* would be a most welcome addition too. **JE**

PETER BANKS

Peter Banks' Harmony In Diversity CHERRY RED/RIGHT HONOURABLE RECORDING COMPANY

Prog architect's later-life improv trio unveiled for first time, over six discs.

It was difficult not to feel sorry for Peter Banks at times. A founder member of the original Yes, who he named, Banks complained when he was sidelined by an orchestra on *Time And A Word*, and was then promptly sacked in April 1970. He could only watch as the band became prog gods with another guitarist.

Over the years, Banks tried his luck with Flash, Empire, solo releases and collaborations before finding himself increasingly called up to annotate Yes' early legacy for reissues and archival projects. In 2004, he got together with drummer Andrew Booker and bassist Nick Cottam to form the improvisational Harmony In Diversity, finding an open field to run in rather than being shackled to nostalgia. Booker and Cottam have delved into the vaults to produce six CDs of recordings to follow last March's *Be Well, Be Safe, Be Lucky* anthology in this fifth year since Banks passed and 50th since his original band formed: all previously-unreleased (although such music of the spheres would probably have sailed over many old fans' heads if any record company had dared release it).

> **An architect of prog going beyond what he helped to build.**

Disc one (*Struggles Discontained*) kicks off the set with relatively short pieces that veer between gentle pulsing (*On The Sixth Attempt They Trod On It*), scrabbling funk (*Inversible Flaw*) and vintage Magma bass rumble (*Everything Ends In Nothing*). The trio start spacing out on four lengthy dissertations on disc two (*What Is This?*), Banks exploring his effects boxes to get into Sun Ra-Miles Davis space jazz vistas.

By disc three (*Trying*) and four (*Trying Again*), the trio have hit an intoxicating stride, cooking up a psychedelic space mantra on *No Harm* as multi-tracked guitars scream and squall into rare peaks of sonic catharsis. Although Banks can attack with early John McLaughlin intensity, on deeper cuts he recalls overlooked New York electric guitar evangelist Loren Connors, entering a haunted blues hole with every note perfectly placed to leave the right emotional vapour trail. Other times like *Sods At Odds*, he drops a riff that would have made another Yes classic.

Disc five's *Hitting The Fans (Live)* continues the mesmerising Connors-style reveries along with romps over sturdier beats (even Jimi's *Third Stone From The Sun* on *Out Of The Garage*). *Spontaneous Creation* (disc six) closes the collection with 11 shorter missives of an electronic, metal jazz hue, often graced with spellbinding alien beauty.

This hefty monolith is genuine affirmation that this architect of prog was going way beyond the structures he helped build when he passed; progressive to the end. **KRIS NEEDS**

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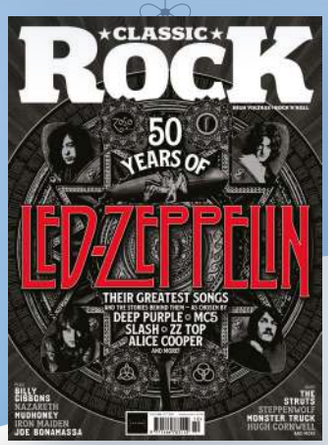

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SANDRA KERR AND JOHN FAULKNER

The Music From Bagpuss EARTH

Music from 70s children's TV favourite gets remastered and reappraised.

It starts with the metallic ring of a dulcimer, and then a sudden swirl of notes, the sound of a magic curtain being drawn back. For those of a certain age, it's the very sound of childhood, a mysterious earworm that's been with them since they first heard it, when a saggy cloth cat came to life...

Bagpuss is perhaps the best loved of Peter Firmin and Oliver Postgate's animated TV series, and part of its appeal is the music that was used to help tell the stories at its heart. Just like the programmes themselves, there's a folky, idiosyncratic quality to these songs and interludes.

Sandra Kerr and John Faulkner were established figures on the traditional music scene, and had already made a record together, when they were approached to make these recordings. Along with music from the series, the album also includes outtakes from their sessions with Postgate and a tape recorder in "a fairly silent room in a remote house", where they would conjure up the required songs and atmospheres with whatever instruments came to hand – though mandolin, fiddle and the aforementioned dulcimer feature prominently throughout.

As befits a children's programme, many of the songs are mischievous and comical, if not a little surreal. *Row Your Boat* becomes a tale of mice in a boot sailing *'across the mahogany seas'* before ending up covered in *'revolting Stilton cheese'*, while *The Princess Suite* is a lovely ballad where the suitors all turn into dragonflies. There's also *The Bony King Of Nowhere*, inspiration for Radiohead's *There, There*.

Yet among the helium-voiced chorus of make-do-and-mend mice, there are inevitable echoes of Kerr and Faulkner's roots: the grainy melodica of *The Elephant's Fable* could almost be Dolly Collins' pipe organ, and *The Miller's Song* is a compendium of English weather and hints at the melancholy that comes with it.

Alternative nostalgia for hauntologists and the young at heart alike. **JB**

SKY

Carillon: The Singles Collection 1979-1987 CHERRY RED

Seven-inch slices of classical prog pleasure.

With hindsight, John Williams and Herbie Flowers' decision, in 1978, to form a new classical-rock band with Francis Monkman, Kevin Peek and Tristan Fry seems – depending on your point of view – either very bold or crazy. 1978, after all, was arguably prog's lowest point. Post-punk and new wave were riding high. Yet, as Sky's success testifies, you can't keep good prog down. Indeed, as *Prog*'s Sid Smith points out in his excellent liner notes, the roots of Sky can be traced back to 1971 when Williams recorded his fusion album *Changes* with guest slots from Flowers, Monkman and Fry.

Carillon is both a completist's delight and a welcome opportunity to witness how every Sky A- and B-side stacks up against each other. If the band's A-side masterworks, including the title track and their version of *Toccata*, remain breathtaking, the band can't be accused of ignoring the importance of a quality B-side. In particular, *Carillon*'s flip-side, Williams' arrangement of *El Cielo* stands its own ground nearly 40 years on.

It's the previously unreleased material that's likely to garner most attention. There's a seven-inch edit of Monkman's *Dies Irae*, an intense capsule of electric darkness which proves that Williams and co could really rock-out. There are also rare edits of *Desperate For Your Love* and *The Great Balloon Race*. Most exciting is the first CD release of *The Spirit*, among Williams' last recordings with the band. The interchanges between Williams and the too-often overlooked Kevin Peek are brilliant.

The remaster adds volume to the original recordings as well as brightness. In an age of bass-heavy tastes, the latter might present some challenges to Sky newbies. They always had a clean, hi-fi friendly sound, and some might think the remaster pushes the treble too high. Yet this is an accomplished reissue, not simply because of the rarities and curiosities, but as a reminder that Sky were masters in finding the connective tissue between the classical and rock worlds. **RM**

THE MOODY BLUES

In Search Of The Lost Chord UMC

The authentic sound of a band finding their collective feet.

Never underestimate the power of positive thinking. Seemingly doomed to end their days on the cabaret circuit and playing to increasingly indifferent punters, instead of being ground down by adversity The Moody Blues used it as a spur to reinvent themselves from washed-up one-hit wonders to counter-culture conceptualists. Their 1967 album *Days Of Future Passed* was an act of will, a last throw of the dice in the pop game. It was certainly a gamble, but one that also paid off, enabling

> **A determination to move forward in their own way.**

The Moody Blues to shift their attention to the more open-minded sounds of the day.

Unlike other groups labouring in the underground scene hoping to get some mainstream success, The Moody Blues – who'd already had some of that – actively wanted to burrow deep down into some subterranean real estate. The grass is always greener they say, and in their search for that elusive chord they did more than their fair share of checking out exactly how green that grass might be.

Suggesting that listeners can be 'as high as a kite' as they grapple with the great spiritual and existential questions of the age, *The Best Way To Travel* vibrates to Edge's powerful tub-thumping underpinning the glorious close harmonies of the airy vocals. Initially digging a deep groove that brings to mind more than a touch of *Strawberry Fields*, it then veers into some psych-saturated tone-bending and an impressionistic outro that wouldn't sound out of place on Pink Floyd's second album. To these ears *House Of Four Doors* has always sounded like the best track The Zombies never recorded.

While other acts from the era have always been on the receiving end of gushing praise, there's an argument to be made that the Moodies haven't quite been given the respect due to them. Why is this? Reading through album reviews of the time, more than once critics get sniffy about the ability of the Brummie accents to point towards the path to nirvana.

Of course, it's easy to be snarky about the earnest recitations that feature here along with a few trippy endorsements of astral travel and the obligatory Eastern exoticism of strumming sitars. Yet listening with 21st century ears to this music, scrubbed up with new stereo and surround sound mixes by King Crimson's Jakko Jakszyk, a brace of radio performances and a collection of TV appearances, what comes across is ambition, well-crafted songwriting and a determination to move forward in their own distinctive way. This is the authentic sound of a band finally finding their collective feet and planting them firmly in the clouds.

SID SMITH

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CONNY PLANK

The Potential Of Noise CLEOPATRA

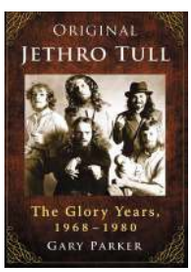
Son of krautrock linchpin goes in search of his father.

The origin of the title comes early on in this feature-length documentary about the German producer – Plank wanders through night time Tokyo, recording sounds on a Walkman before proclaiming, "Any noise has the potential to be music." It's this anything-goes attitude that would guide Plank's career, from his pivotal role in enabling krautrock pioneers such as Kraftwerk, Neu! and Cluster to his later work with post-punk, new wave and new pop bands. Rather than being a straight biography, the film is structured as a personal road trip into the past by his son Stephan, whose father died in 1987 and is "a blur in my memory". Cue lots of driving along the autobahn and chats with Michael Rother, Hans-Joachim Roedelius, and The Scorpions, with Klaus Meine describing how Plank would "go wild" in the studio to encourage the band, while Rudy Schenker delicately understates that Plank "liked a smoke". Yet the krautrock era occupies just the first quarter of the film, and it's interviews with Ultravox's Midge Ure and DAF's Robert Görl that reveal more about Plank's unique working methods. An essential, and oddly touching, tribute to a genuine innovator. **JB**

ORIGINAL JETHRO TULL: THE GLORY YEARS, 1968-1980

Gary Parker MCFARLAND & COMPANY

Tull's 70s documented diligently.



Solidly written and researched, this is an absorbing read for fans, with the main players interviewed. There are, however, a couple of curious issues. One is its very American-ness: there are sweeping statements about "Great Britain in the 70s" – apparently the finest decade in musical history was "inhospitable to creativity". There's also an obsession with the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, about which Brits barely give a monkey's – although, obviously, Tull should be in it. The second curveball is the intro's declaration that Tull went crashing downhill from 1980 onwards: that the early line-up is the only one that counts. Ian Anderson would disagree. Yes, that's when they made their best albums, but it's not like Anderson fell off a cliff artistically. One more quibble: its anecdote about Anderson acquiring his first flute doesn't dovetail with what the singer told this writer (that he part-exchanged Lemmy's old Stratocaster for it). Still, it flows well through its preferred decade, shining new light on, for example, *Minstrel In The Gallery*. A concise close-up, focusing on one period of Tull's past. **CR**

KING CRIMSON COVER

Dominique Dupuis ÉDITIONS DU LAYEUR

In a French collection of career-spanning artwork, the images speak for themselves.

Written in French by *Progressive Vinyls* author Dominique Depuis and published by artist cover art specialists, Éditions du Layeur, *King Crimson Cover* is a vibrant collection of illustrations, album covers and band photography, including the iconic *In The Court Of The Crimson King* from 1969 to the more recent *Radical Action To Unseat The Hold Of Monkey Mind* in 2016. Each colourful page of this coffee table book presents an album from the band's vast music catalogue enriched with anecdotes, track listings and rare quotes from personnel involved. "We were all standing around it, as though we were faced with a treasure chest of gold on a desert island," Greg Lake says of the moment Barry Godber's famous illustration of the Schizoid Man was unveiled to them. As a piece of classic prog art – never shy of delivering something that will cause a reaction – it certainly takes some beating. *King Crimson Cover* is also a goldmine of candid pictures, ticket stubs and promo shots. This 34 euro (£30 approx) hardback is 223 pages of influential Crimson imagery, a testament to the resonance of Crimson, and progressive album concept art in general. **ILD**

OPETH

Garden Of The Titans: Live At Red Rocks Amphitheater NUCLEAR BLAST

Live at a legendary location, prog sorcery to the fore.

This live DVD, also available on CD and vinyl, captures the Swedish genre-mangling quintet on thrilling form at Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Colorado on a chilly night in May 2017. Progressive metal as a genre tends to involve bands that essentially play metal with longer song forms and odd time signatures, but that's not the case with Opeth. Mikael Åkerfeldt and his bandmates can go from crushing death metal heaviness to symphonic rock, and from prog keyboard workouts to sweeping acoustic passages all within the space of a single song.

> **An exhilarating summation of their progress so far.**

It's been eight years since their last live release with 2010's *In Live Concert At The Royal Albert Hall*, and *Garden Of The Titans* features a completely different setlist, so there's no danger of experiencing déjà vu. "We have a potpourri of songs," says Åkerfeldt, perhaps the most self-effacing frontman in the business. "We're going to play some old shit, some new shit, and just some shit."

Filmed during the *Sorceress* tour, they select three songs from that album, opening with the title track which sees Joakim Svalberg channelling Jon Lord through some fabulous organ playing. *Ghost Of Perdition* is a monster of a track that shows how Opeth balance classic prog influences from the late 60s and early 70s with the intensity of modern Scandi death metal. The latter has often presented a barrier to the more traditionally minded sections of the prog community, particularly regarding Åkerfeldt's growled vocals. Yet he has an excellent singing voice when not in full metal mode — as his performance in *Ghost Of Perdition* amply demonstrates — and that's an increasingly rare ability in an age when too many heavy bands rely solely on incoherent growlers.

In My Time Of Need, from 2003's *Damnation*, has no metal in its DNA at all with its clean guitar lines, a lush melody, and an excellent keys solo from Svalberg. The heavy prog of *Cusp Of Eternity* leads straight into the darkness and menace of *Heir Apparent* and it would be remiss not to mention drummer Martin Axenrot, whose versatility is essential to the band's ability to morph between moods. He really drives the band on tracks like *The Devil's Orchard*, hammering away like Carl Palmer or Ian Paice in full flow, yet he also can groove in 5/4 on *Era*, while *Deliverance* sees him switch between battering double-kick beats and gently tinkling his cymbals.

Opeth have spent more than 20 years pushing back the boundaries of metal and *Garden Of The Titans* is an exhilarating summation of their progress so far.

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Take a bow

SUMMER'S END FESTIVAL

VENUE	DRILL HALL, CHEPSTOW
DATE	05-07/10/2018

What was once the annual trip to Chepstow (and previously Lydney) to spend the weekend in the company of a group of largely male prog fans of a certain age has, for those that indulge, now become a six-monthly jaunt. The first Winter's End took place in April and so it's just six months later that *Prog* finds itself back in Wales. It's a slightly strange feeling of 'Was I only here yesterday?' rather than 'Ah, Chepstow, a weekend in the company of a group of largely male prog fans of a certain age…' And to be honest, it throws you a tad.

So too does walking into a packed Drill Hall, not just to discover that Cliff Richard is playing here next week, but to witness probably the most diverse audience Summer's End has seen in a while. A fairer gender split, and a few younger fans to boot. They say time moves slowly. In prog it moves slower still, but with more interesting shifts. But this represents a shift in the right direction, we'd say.

FRIDAY

Holland's **Sky Architect** start Friday's festivities on a high, their technically complex, fluid guitar- and keyboard-led songs showing a maturity that belies their relative youth. Deft changes of tempo, jazzy overtones and strong narratives, especially in the expansive *Woodcutters Vile*, are impressive, as is the unexpected trumpet introduced on *Endless Roads*.

Less impressive, to be brutally honest, are **Moonparticle**. It's very rare a band comes a cropper at Summer's End — the bill is too well curated, the crowd often too partisan — but Niko Tsonev and gang came perilously close. Heckling at Summer's End is normally at the level of good-natured banter between artist and crowd, so when someone hollers out, "Hasn't someone strangled that cat yet?" midway through Moonparticle's headline slot, you know things aren't going down too well. Singer Grog Lisee is the subject of the put-down, the Die So Fluid singer's art-rock pretensions and voice clearly not wowing the crowd. Tsonev's a talented guy, but live, like on record, Moonparticle lack cohesion and direction.

Sky Architect open the festival with a bang.

Dutch neo heroes Silhouette.

SATURDAY

Norwegian dark electro proggers **When Mary** get Saturday underway. They look like a strange proposition for Summer's End: former White Willow singer Trude Eidtang working banks of synths and other instruments, Christian Paulsen at her side like a demented Smeagol, thrashing away on guitar. It works though, their wonderfully melodic and occasionally dark poppy prog (or proggy pop) charming the crowd. At one point Eidtang asks the audience if they think the band are proggy enough. Thankfully we're spared the week-long debate that could potentially ensue and are instead left with one of the best sets of the weekend.

> **"Lazuli's well-tuned set shows a confident band riding the crest of their wave."**

It's five years since Dutch symphonic neo-proggers **Silhouette** last graced Summer's End. An instrumental passage heralds their arrival, which leads into the rousing *March Of Peace*. They showcase songs from latest album *The World Is Flat And Other Alternative Facts*, including the long and winding *The Flow*, and the 17-minute *Symphony For A Perfect Moment*. Daniël van der Weijde's fluent guitar solos inject verve, together with Erik Laan's elegant keyboards and his vocal harmonies with singer Brian de Graeve.

Germany's **Frequency Drift** offer an interesting sound, although sadly for much of the set, Nerissa Schwarz's often beguiling harp is too low in the mix. But that small hiccup is offset by the whirlwind performance of new singer Irini Alexia. One minute she's jovially berating the crowd with, "Don't make me put on my German accent," delivered in mock overdone Teutonic tones, the next she's waving around a massive winged cape to startling effect. If it doesn't all completely hit the mark, it's certainly moving in the right, cinematic direction.

When Mary's Trude Eidtang mixes prog and pop with style.

Frequency Drift's Nerissa Schwarz.

A completely re-energised **Landmarq** deliver one of the weekend's surprise packages. singer Tracy Hitchings' replacement Wolf Campen possesses a youthful, restless, sinewy presence and a powerful voice that hints at Joe Payne. Featured songs include favourites from the Damian Wilson and Hitchings eras. *Turbulence* proves the most challenging in the high note department, while Campen's voice blends beautifully with keyboardist Mike Varty's on *Solitary Witness*. New drummer Andy Allen shows his mettle

Claude Leonetti (left) and Lazuli play a thrilling headline set.

WHEN MARY. SKY ARCHITECT AND FREQUENCY DRIFT: MARTIN REIJMAN. SILHOUETTE AND LAZULI: CHRIS WALKDEN

Landmarq with new singer Wolf Campen (right).

in the dance-along *Mountains Of Anglia*. The dramatic, atmospheric *Lighthouse* closes this significant milestone for the veteran proggers. On this showing, a promised new album next year could be something special.

It's been seven years since **Lazuli** graced a Summer's End (not to mention UK) stage for the first time, but the French quintet's appearance as headliners for Saturday is a shining example of how and why Summer's End works so well. Back then, few had ever heard of them. Now back for a third appearance, they're treated like the old friends that they have become. But without the organisers of Summer's End taking that chance back in 2011, whither might they be?

Admittedly, on tonight's showing, Lazuli deserve to be a much bigger band than they are, and one can't help but think that more astute management and a better understanding of promotion would give them better momentum to get to where they deserve to be. But with a well-tuned set built around latest album *Saison 8* and deserved dips back into the excellent *4603 Battements* and *Nos Âmes Saoules*, this is a confident band riding the crest of their wave. As for that old trope that prog fandom is male dominated? Well, you can't see a male face in the audience going back a good four or five rows!

SUNDAY

Golden Caves, contenders for *Prog*'s 2018 Limelight award, are a revelation. After a nervy start, the energetic young Dutch proggers suddenly explode, the voice of dynamic singer Romy Ouwerkerk soaring high over their edgy, heavy, melodic rock, especially on killer song *Hey You*. Prog's future is certainly looking very exciting.

The rather enigmatic qualities of

VdGG's David Jackson lending his lungs to Kaprekar's Constant.

Sinfully Good: Magenta revisit *Seven* for their brilliant headline set.

"Magenta are tight and having fun - this is one of the band's best performances."

PROCOL HARUM

VENUE	THE PALLADIUM, LONDON
DATE	09/10/2018

On 18 November, 1971, Procol Harum played a concert augmented by orchestra and choir. Released the following year as *Live: In Concert With The Edmonton Symphony Orchestra*, the live document would go on to be their biggest seller. Tonight in London, the current incarnation reproduce that album, aided by the Senbla Orchestra and English Chamber Choir.

Leader Gary Brooker takes the stage to a rousing welcome from a partisan crowd who clearly hold him in deep affection. It sets the atmosphere for what promises to be a special night of symphonic prog.

Conquistador dazzles with its effortless complexity. Cinematic Sergio Leone strings and trumpet flourishes are sublime, while Geoff Whitehorn's dextrous lead guitar grounds us in rock. And yet there's a problem – Brooker's unmistakable voice sounds laboured and cracking. The choir provide support during *All This And More*, after which Brooker addresses the issue by applying a well-known Swiss-brand throat lozenge and "something medicinal", and he sails through the following *Luskus Delph*.

A Salty Dog gives the massed ensemble an opportunity to flex their muscles. When the orchestra and choir join forces in its climactic denouement, the balcony above us starts to rattle in resonant sympathy. It's a magnificent rendition that's nonetheless overshadowed by the

Tim Bowness, the Master Of Melancholy.

Golden Caves: the future of prog rock.

Kaprekar's Constant continue to confound and delight in equal measure. This musical collective's complex song-stories sail along on a mellow, almost ambient groove, enriched by the extraordinary blasts from VdGG legend David Jackson and his huge armoury of wind instruments. Self-deprecating, humorous banter between songs from genial bassist Nick Jefferson and some very intricate, expressive instrumentation, especially on the moving *Hallsands*, are the plusses. However, vocalists Dorie Jackson and Bill Jefferson really need to part with their music stands that serve as an unconscious barrier between the band and the audience. The jury is still out here.

There are no such barriers for New York proggers **Edensong**, who amiably confound some of the audience with their between-song banter about levitation and suchlike. More than once we hear utterances of "like Jethro Tull", but really? Barry Seroff plays the flute and progland expects them to be decked out in tights and codpieces, pirouetting on one leg? Fortunately they offer a heavier and more intricate take on progressive music, and no doubt made plenty of friends on their first foray to the UK.

The appearance of bass legend John Jowitt almost threatens to upstage his 'boss', **Tim Bowness**. The Master Of Melancholy gives a masterclass in art rock and it's soul-achingly beautiful. Steve Bingham's mournful violin perfectly complements the nuances of Bowness's expressive, intimate voice. Extracts from the No-Man canon include funky *Time Travel In Texas*, followed by *All The Blue Changes*, which gradually builds into a mind-melting crescendo. Bowness even tells an unexpected humorous story about Judas Priest's Rob Halford needing a lyric crib sheet for *Breaking The Law* to introduce the exquisite heartbreaker *Sing To Me*. It's one of the weekend's triumphs.

It's been said before that the Sunday headline slot can be a thankless billing. Three full days of progging can take their toll on even the hardiest Summer's Ender, but there's neither any sign of flagging, nor a diminishing audience as **Magenta** take to the stage with *Trojan* from latest studio album *We Are Legend*. The bulk of tonight's set comes from the band's much-loved 2004 concept album *Seven*, but before that, *Speechless* offers a glimpse of Rob Reed's ability to pen an excellent prog pop song, and both *Colours* and *The Lizard King* show how the band have developed from those early days.

The band are tight and having fun, Christina Booth good-naturedly chiding the audience. She's on top vocal form too, and although the *Seven* material shows how close the band sailed to heroes Yes in the early days, this ranks as one of the best Magenta performances this writer has witnessed — and this writer has seen a few! Having dealt with six of the deadly sins, they return for a shimmering *Pride*, rounding off a thoroughly enjoyable weekend of prog in real style.

JERRY EWING/ALISON REIJMAN

Orchestral heavy proggers Edensong.

MAGENTA, GOLDEN CAVES AND EDENSONG: MARTIN REIJMAN. LANDMARQ, KAPREKAR'S CONSTANT AND TIM

epic five movements of *In Held 'Twas In I*, which careers from dark mysticism to surreal music hall via romantic choral music. Breathtaking.

The second set shifts gear with hard rockers *Businessman* from 2017's *Novum* and seldom-performed B-side *Into The Flood*. In jovial form, Brooker begins, "If anybody's got any requests..." to numerous shouted pleas, before finishing "...we won't be playing any of them." Instead, another rarity, *Within Our House*, is dedicated to the Procol faithful and absent friends. Its hymn-like cadences raise goosebumps.

Whaling Stories from the original Edmonton concert then finally shows up, omitted by an earlier setlist malfunction. Its dramatic heavy riffing renders it the perfect closer.

A Whiter Shade Of Pale summons those goosebumps again. The instrumentation matches its baroque origins and it soars. *Conquistador* is reprised in an orchestration by collaborator Nicholas Dodd, a fitting end to an evening's masterclass in arranging symphonic rock, not merely augmenting the band but elevating their music.

CHRIS MCGAREL

DOWNES BRAIDE ASSOCIATION

VENUE	TRADING BOUNDARIES, EAST SUSSEX
DATE	28/09/2018

There's a palpable air of expectation tonight in deepest East Sussex before Downes Braide Association begin their first ever live show. They're introduced by Roger Dean, who quips that he first met DBA's Geoff Downes and Chris Braide about 40 years and 40 minutes ago, respectively.

While this is DBA's live debut, they don't lack ambition tonight, playing *Prelude* before launching with gusto into the 18-minute title track from last year's *Skyscraper Souls* album.

The key question is how DBA's meticulously studio-crafted music will translate live. While the first two albums relied exclusively on the duo's own talents, *Skyscraper Souls* deployed assorted guests.

DBA's live configuration tonight features bassist Andy Hodge and Rick Wakeman guitarist Dave Colquhoun, both of whom played on that album, but there's no drummer, with the band using backing tracks. Live music hardliners may blanch at this, but they work pretty seamlessly here in tandem with the four musicians.

The band play a quartet of songs from previous album *Suburban Ghosts*, with *Machinery Of Fate* in particular given a sharper edge by Colquhoun's guitar and Hodge's insistent bass, while *Live Twice* is enlivened by an impressive, lengthy closing solo from Colquhoun.

Downes, more visible than usual without a phalanx of keyboards, plays *Bolero* and *Video Killed The Radio Star* solo before the show's second half, which consists of the balance of the *Skyscraper Souls* album. It's a strong finish, of which the highlight is the reprisal by Big Big Train vocalist David Longdon of his album guest appearance on *Tomorrow*, transforming that song from solid to spine-tingling with his vocals and flute.

DBA encore with stripped down versions of Asia's *Heat Of The Moment* and *The Smile Has Left Your Eyes*, Braide displaying genuine affection for the latter in particular.

It's musically stunning, with Hodge and Colquhoun impressing alongside Downes, but the real revelation is Braide, whose clear vocals are top-drawer. While his pop songwriting credentials are undeniable – Lana Del Rey, Sia, Beyoncé and Britney Spears being just four of his clients – he rarely performs. But if Braide has any nerves about playing live, they're not on display here.

It's unclear whether tonight is a one-off or the launch pad for future shows. Hopefully the enthusiastic response DBA receive will encourage its key protagonists to venture beyond their day jobs more often to ensure it's the latter.

NICK SHILTON

10 YEARS OF KSCOPE

VENUE	UNION CHAPEL, LONDON
DATE	02/10/2018

Incredibly, a decade has passed since a new imprint unveiled the No-Man album *Schoolyard Ghosts*. Since then Kscope have presented music from across the globe, but tonight we are gathered in a Grade 1 listed place of worship in the label's home city for a (mainly) acoustic birthday party celebration.

There's no doubting the Chapel's beauty, but it isn't a great venue for rock. Volume is controlled, and up in the balcony, views can be limited. And does anyone really want to sit on a wooden pew for almost four hours?

There's another drawback. Over the course of any evening, regardless of its quality, acoustic material tends to sound earnest and repetitive. A four-song set from Nosound leader **Giancarlo Erra** is full of dark, melancholy gravitas, but in terms of projection, it gets slightly lost in the cavernous rafters.

The news that Marjana Semkina is at home in Russia due to 'administrative reasons' is greeted by weary sighs, but the singer's iamthemorning bandmate **Gleb Kolyadin** has made it to London. Performing on a baby grand piano, Kolyadin begins with a concerto-style improvisation on themes from his self-titled solo album, followed by another vocal-free track. Steve Hogarth guests on *The Best Of Days*, a track he sang on Kolyadin's record, and despite vanishing into the wings after the pair take the applause, an awed hush descends when H returns to sit at the piano for Marillion's *Fantastic Place* and *The Hollow Man*. There's a notable sense that things have moved up a gear.

Late additions **Godsticks** perform two songs as a drum-free trio. With the emphasis switched from metal to the vocal interplay between guitarist Darran Charles and bassist Dan Nelson, we experience a whole new side to the Welshmen's oeuvre.

Introduced as "someone who has been No.1 in the charts", Mansun vocalist/guitarist **Paul Draper** is accompanied by a nimble electric guitarist whose welcome presence adds a crucial backbone to Draper's solo material, such as *Friends Make The Worst Enemies* and *Things People Want*, plus Mansun's own *Wide Open Space*.

"Anathema boot the unplugged format out of the door, by turns enticing the audience to headbang, dance and simply swoon in appreciation."

Over the course of a riveting headline set, **Anathema** boot the unplugged format out of the door, by turns enticing the audience to headbang, dance and simply swoon in appreciation. Besides the incredible male-female vocal interplay between Vincent Cavanagh and Lee Douglas — something that threatens to make them The Beautiful South of prog — the band have an uncanny understanding of where to place the spaces in their music. With iPhones illuminating the Chapel like a swarm of celestial fireflies, swansongs of *Untouchable Part 1* and 2 are simply breathtaking.

DAVE LING

WILL IRELAND

Giancarlo Erra: dark sounds from the Nosound man.

Grand Ideas: Gleb Kolyadin.

Marillion's Steve Hogarth.

Godsticks as a drum-free trio.

Former Mansun man Paul Draper (right).

Anna Phoebe with Anathema.

Worship Music: Anathema's Lee Douglas at the Union Chapel.

GRYPHON

VENUE	UNION CHAPEL, LONDON
DATE	14/09/2018

"So who's playing here tonight?"
"It's a band called Gryphon."
"What do they sound like?"
"They're folky, proggy, rocky... everything!"

This is an actual chat between a vaguely interested passer-by and a security bloke on the door at the Union Chapel tonight. And it sums up the Gryphon conundrum. Just what *do* they sound like? The best description is 16th-century music, laced with Vaudevillian humour, wrapped in a package that's astonishingly apposite for contemporary audiences.

Tonight, the venerable bards play two sets. The first begins with *Kemp's Jig*, and immediately the coloured trousers being worn by the barefoot Brian Gulland catch *Prog*'s attention: he looks like a psychedelic Catweazle. He and Andy Findon spend the night darting between a blur of wind instruments, with the fabled crumhorn to the fore.

Much of both sets comes from new album *Reinvention*, and all of the band members, except new bassist Rob Levy, take it in turns to introduce each song. Just how relaxed everybody is onstage can be seen by the good-natured ribbing that goes on throughout the set: at times, it feels like we're looking in on a rehearsal.

Onstage, Graham Preskett butts in to tell us, "I was told I could only talk for 12 seconds, while the rest of these guys are talking for two minutes at a time!" to which Gulland responds, "Last time we played here two years ago, I apparently spent six-and-a-half minutes talking about one song. I got told off by the rest of the band, so I'm keeping it a lot shorter tonight!"

Of the new tracks performed in the first set, *Rhubarb Crumhorn* and *Sailor V* ("The sort of clever play on words we love doing," quips Gulland) in particular catch the attention, but it's the much older *The Astrologer* which is the high point, featuring a lyrical conversation between percussionist Dave Oberlé and Gulland, the latter wearing a hat that would make Arthur Brown proud.

The second set follows the same pattern as the first, with new material such as *Haddock's Eyes* – where Oberlé plays the role of an old man: "In this band I am either a young girl [referencing *The Astrologer*] or an old man!" – as the fulcrum, while there's a brilliant medley from the *Red Queen To Gryphon Three* album. This is easily the high point of the night as it showcases what many regard as the band's finest work. It would have been wonderful to hear tracks from *Red Queen*... in their full state, but time constraints won't allow for this.

It all finishes with *Estampie*, which builds to a charismatically frenzied virtuoso crescendo, with Gulland and Findon reaching hyperspeed. Who needs shredding guitarists when you've got the woodwind and violins going crazy?

Folking brilliant – the best way to sum up the night.

MALCOLM DOME

STEVE HACKETT

VENUE	ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL, LONDON
DATE	04/10/2018

Hackett remains the focal point of the show.

WILL IRELAND

Once again we are going to witness Steve Hackett and his exemplary band revisit the earlier work of Genesis, a gift the self-professed "keeper of the flame" has been giving us for six years now. But this time there's a difference. Sitting behind them is the 41-piece The Heart Of England Orchestra, conducted by the enthusiastically bouncing Canadian Bradley Thachuk.

In theory, this should make some of the biggest soundscapes in art rock history even bigger. It sort of works, and makes for some exhilarating moments, although oddly – and despite the evidence of them fiddling busily away in front of your very eyes – the orchestra aren't always audible. Perhaps it's because the band are so colossal that there's no space for them, or perhaps it's just a mixing flaw, but the orchestra are generally present only as an underlying added flavour, rather than bringing any new, unanticipated spice.

> **"The orchestra are generally present only as an underlying added flavour, rather than bringing any new, unanticipated spice."**

This isn't a major problem, as of course Hackett's band are deft and powerful in their presentations of the hallowed canon. Opening with a throbbing *Dance On A Volcano* – and just to get the reservations out of the way, this writer always finds the Festival Hall's sound so pristine that it can be *too* perfect, lacking the edges that snag you – they deliver two sets which revive the classics, while punctuating affairs with a sprinkling of the guitarist's solo material. *Serpentine Song*, where Hackett's brother John joins in on flute for a song about their artist father, is the pick of these, and the monumental *Shadow Of The Hierophant*, sung by Hackett's sister-in-law Amanda Lehmann, is its ever-escalating self, wherein the bombast of the orchestra (audible on this one) feels like Tchaikovsky showed up and shook, rattled and rolled.

In truth, everyone sits up more eagerly for the chapters from the Genesis bible. *Dancing With The Moonlit Knight* (which Hackett declares a favourite) has developed a limber skip in its step with this ensemble, and a lovely *Blood On The Rooftops* (sung by drummer Gary O'Toole) is the epitome of English melancholy. The sweep from ...*In That Quiet Earth* to *Afterglow* showcases the towering talents of first the band (Jonas Reingold on bass, Roger King on keyboards, saxes/flutes by Rob Townsend), then of vocalist Nad Sylvan, who's now very comfortable in his well-gauged fop-meets-steampunk theatrical role.

Sylvan tackles the stirring home straight of *Supper's Ready* (at the end of which Hackett delights by soloing extensively and dazzlingly) and the encore of *The Musical Box* with aplomb. This is an old Jerusalem we're being led to, but there's a joy to its guaranteed eternal sanctuary.

CHRIS ROBERTS

Symph Rock: Hackett and his orchestra.

NICK MASON'S A SAUCERFUL OF SECRETS

VENUE	THE ROUNDHOUSE, LONDON
DATE	24/09/2018

Nick Mason: "The heartbeat of Pink Floyd."

JAMES SHARROCK

Nick Mason sets us straight early on. "We're not the Australian Roger Waters. Or the Danish David Gilmour." He's given up waiting for a phone call from his fellow Floyd survivors, he adds. As tonight affirms, he's making hay while the heart of the sun shines, fully in control. Halfway through an exhilarating show, he jokes that Roger was "not good at sharing", so the drummer never got to bang the gong at the start of *Set The Controls*.... "But tonight," he declares wryly, "is my night..."

It certainly is, and not just because he gets to bang that gong. The 74-year-old has quipped that it's akin to playing in his own tribute band, but this unit combines devoted discipline with the confidence to get stuck in. There must be many Floyd-heads here who once decried Spandau Ballet as the root of all evil, but the packed house is whooping as Gary Kemp and Lee Harris (Blockheads) trade twin guitars (carefree axes) on *Interstellar Overdrive*. Guy Pratt (bass) has plentiful Floyd experience, and keyboardist Dom Beken subtly fills planes of aural space. The front three share vocals, Kemp's tempered Cockney traces a fitting fill-in for Syd Barrett, whose image onscreen draws cheers. Mason pays respects to him and to Rick Wright, while Kemp eulogises Mason ("the heartbeat of Pink Floyd") and Pratt observes, "For many of us, *Relics* was our introduction to Floyd at school, because it was half-price."

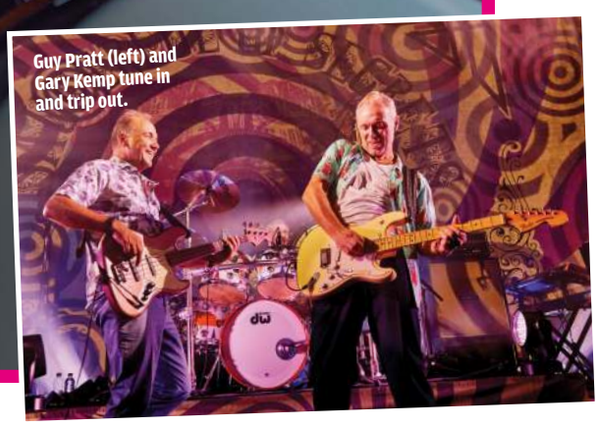
It was also priceless: the gateway drug. Tonight's thrilling ride through the early psychedelic material and Barrett's barbed anti-pop may be, by nature, nostalgia, but it's also a life-affirming reminder that music can side-wind and surprise.

"Tonight is a life-affirming reminder that music can side-wind and surprise."

Whether it's the mesmeric murmurs of *Obscured By Clouds* or *A Saucerful Of Secrets* itself, or the spiky rush of *Arnold Layne*, *See Emily Play* or *Bike*, the ensemble stride that coveted line between replica and sparky exuberance. The sonic epiphanies make you wonder if Floyd invented both Mogwai and Moroder. Worries that they shouldn't meddle with idealised memories are dissipated when *Fearless* floats into a transcendent hazy pathos, and *One Of These Days* closes with a thumping, dramatic fusion of electro and headbanging rock.

Over half a century since Pink Floyd debuted here at an all-night, acid-addled, "pop-op costume-masque-ball", much has changed. The venue is cleaner, technology is god and the audience are more likely to have ingested a cheeky half than LSD. Yet your ears don't lie: there's more oxygen and fire in these sounds than any number of V&A embalmings. "I hope you've enjoyed this as much as I have," says Mason. He and his cohorts have bent time, bringing Floyd's fertile, avant-garde spirit back to life. The secret's out.

CHRIS ROBERTS



Guy Pratt (left) and Gary Kemp tune in and trip out.

VOIVOD

VENUE	THE GLOBE, CARDIFF
DATE	03/10/2018

The T-shirts here say a lot: Megadeth, Motörhead, Vader. The music fans in this club venue aren't your average prog audience. But Voivod aren't your average prog band. The Canadians' roots are in 80s thrash, yet over their career they've developed a style of brutally refined, thinky metal that's all their own.

They're touring Europe to mark their 35th anniversary and promote new album *The Wake*, and their vibe is celebratory.

The four are all smiles as they walk on, and things get loud as Dominique 'Rocky' Laroche kicks off the sphincter-bothering bass riff of *Post Society*. "All this time together and this is our first time in Wales," says singer Denis 'Snake' Bélanger at its end. Throughout, he's chatty, funny and slightly frazzled looking, chugging from a can of IPA between songs. His vocals and showmanship are laconic, honed over years of club gigs like this. At one point in *Technocratic Manipulators* he high-fives a fan's outstretched hand almost on the beat, a Pavlovian response that is yet totally in the moment, and oddly cool. Whether he's punching the air to get us to sing along or rocking an air guitar during another speedy Dan 'Chewy' Mongrain guitar solo, he does it with charm.

Mongrain's been with the band for a decade, replacing the late Denis 'Piggy' D'Amour. On the doomy *Ravenous Medicine*, *The Prow*, and the intense read of anti-censorship track *Order Of The Blackguards*, his guitar smarts are stunning, and chime with Piggy's own approach. Plug your ears to filter out the extremes of drummer Michel 'Away' Langevin's dazzling sturm und drang, and you'll hear Voivod's distinctive, thrilling harmonic language all in there.

Their performance makes the sparse audience feel legion, and as the set wears on those years fall away. "That was fucking awesome," shouts one fan after ... *Blackguards*. As the dynamic rollercoaster of *Fall* ends, one bloke says, "They're just... the maddest good band... ever!"

And the maddest best part? The highlights of the night are all from *The Wake*. "We're so proud of this album," says Snake. "You should be!" yells one fan. They're right, and as Voivod repay the compliments with the song that bears their name a friendly moshpit forms, and all is very well in here.

GRANT MOON

THE ARISTOCRATS

VENUE	ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON
DATE	18/09/2018

There's no support for The Aristocrats tonight, but with more than two hours of music, there's little danger of anyone going home with their appetite unsatiated. The band request no filming or photographs and it's such a treat to be able to watch a show without peering through a glowing crop of smartphone screens.

Happily, the venue boasts excellent sound, which is vital given the sheer density of the music tumbling off the stage. Guthrie Govan, Bryan Beller and Marco Minnemann have chops to spare, but what separates The Aristocrats from so many fusion and progressive bands is their resolute determination to have fun. As fiendishly difficult as their compositions may be, they're clearly having such a laugh playing this stuff that their concerts feel like a house party, not a clinic or masterclass.

They open with *Blues Fuckers*, and who else would write a blues shuffle in 5/4? They're impressively tight on the madcap syncopation of *Furtive Jack*, while *Culture Clash* is a showcase first for Govan's firebrand guitar work and then Minnemann's frantically fast double-kick playing. "There were so many notes in that last song!" says Beller, and they ease off a little with *Through The Flower*, which starts with a slow, heavy blues lick before Minnemann cuts a mean drum solo over the vamp.

They've embraced the jazz tradition of introducing songs with a little chat about what inspired them, but it's always with a gag. Minnemann's impersonation of Govan during his introduction to *Ohhhh Noooo* draws a big laugh, while the song itself is a constant three-way conversation between the players as they pass ideas back and forth. *See You Next Tuesday* (cheeky!) is full-on fusion that switches between passages where Minnemann throws out swing patterns on his ride cymbal to a grinding, dirty funk courtesy of Beller's bass groove. *Get It Like That* sees Beller and Minnemann trading licks on a squeaky toy pig and rubber chicken, before Minnemann's featured drum solo that sees him introduce a series of rhythmic phrases, each one providing the starting point for improvisations.

After a snippet of the *Father Ted* theme, they launch into *Bad Asteroid*, which comes off like a Joe Satriani track gone rogue, while *Kentucky Meat Shower* is a country song gone terribly, delightfully wrong. The mellow vibe of *Flatlands* provides another brief respite from the mania of their denser material, but they return to full pelt for *Desert Tornado*.

They encore with *Smuggler's Corridor*, which sees the band pluck a somewhat willing Nick Beggs out of the audience for a singalong and, while anyone would be forgiven for experiencing cerebral overload after a night of so very many notes and odd time signatures, it's nigh impossible to leave an Aristocrats' show without smiling.

DAVID WEST

THE PINEAPPLE THIEF

VENUE	SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE, LONDON
DATE	06/10/2018
SUPPORT	LIZZARD

Tonight is kind of a big deal. It's the last night of The Pineapple Thief's tour, in support of new album *Dissolution* (their first to make the UK Top 40), and their biggest ever headline show. Oh, and main man Bruce Soord is set to become a father again — like, *imminently*. This anticipation is reflected in the waves of punters in T-shirts from various Pineapple Thief tours (interspersed with other Kscope-y names) excitedly jostling from bars to stalls and seats.

By contrast, it's fair to guess that most people here don't already know LizZard. It *is* fair to say, however, that they'll remember them after this. The French trio peddle a contemporary, hard-hitting fusion of art-rock and meaty progressive rock, with nods to the more organic end of Muse in upbeat instrumental passages.

Ultimately, however, it's all about The Pineapple Thief, who stride out and dive straight into the emphatic, moodily sharp *Try As I Might*, followed by *Your Wilderness* favourite *In Exile* — all flanked by big lights and much gesticulation and guitar-brandishing by Soord (a singer with the capacity to both break your heart and shake you into life). Their ability to move from lo-fi intimacy to heavy 21st century Floydian rock is fantastic, as on the likes of *Alone At Sea* and *All That You Got*.

Much has been made of sticksman Gavin Harrison's new role in their sound, and justifiably so. Tonight his highly original yet poised approach to the drums is extraordinary, and propels TPT further into jazz-infused dynamism.

Main man Bruce Soord commands the crowd.

WILL IRELAND

But to overlook everyone else involved would be inappropriate. Guest guitarist George Marios brings a level of Malmsteen-meets-Satriani flashiness, while longtime bassist Jon Sykes adds gorgeous vocal harmonies to songs such as *Far Below*.

And then there's Soord. A big part of his and the band's appeal lies in their relatability, alongside the blend of very 'human' lyrics and otherworldly musical qualities. Soord manages to be a likeable, warm stage presence without saying a great deal. Between-song chat seldom veers beyond "we'll play another song now...", until the encore as he thrusts his beer to his guitar tech with the resonating command: "guitar slave!"

About half of the set draws from *Dissolution*, and is all the stronger for it; proof that they're getting better, rather than trading exhaustively from past glories. Saying that, some of those past glories are undeniably good, as shown with a brilliant *Nothing At Best* (probably still their most 'single-y' single to date), before they close with an acoustically rooted *Snowdrops*. Taking a final bow the band look tired, but genuinely delighted. It's taken them a while to get here, but from where we're standing it was worth the wait.

POLLY GLASS

"Bruce Soord is a singer with the capacity to both break your heart and shake you into life."

Out With A Bang: it's the last night of the tour...

SONS OF APOLLO

VENUE	ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON
DATE	28/09/2018

It's interesting to note Sons Of Apollo's intro and outro music tonight, which is Van Halen's *Intruder* and *Happy Trails*. The band even throw in a boisterous cover of *And The Cradle Will Rock* during their encores, while keyboard player Derek Sherinian incorporates a piece from *Spanish Fly* into his solo spot and guitarist Ron 'Bumblefoot' Thal toys with *Mean Streets*.

While it's hardly surprising that a bunch of US musicians of a certain age are still in thrall to the mighty Van Halen, much of the drive behind Sons Of Apollo's juggernaut blend of prog and heavy rock seems to be derived from Deep Purple more than anything else.

You wonder what any dyed-in-the-wool progger would make of it all, until you remember that there are probably few in attendance, as many would have already been put off by Mike Portnoy's prog metal days in Dream Theater, the CVs of the musicians in the band (who have played with the likes of Guns N' Roses, Mr Big and Journey) or simply because they've heard that Sons Of Apollo like to rock. But the Assembly Hall is packed with a good-natured crowd who are happy to rock out with Portnoy and his pals.

And rock out Sons Of Apollo most certainly do, mixing the bulk of their self-titled debut with Dream Theater's *Just Let Me Breathe* and *Lines In The Sand*, the onus throughout being very much on having a good time.

And, boy, do the band look like they're enjoying themselves. Shapes are thrown, hair is tossed around, grins abound as the Sons Of Apollo party rides into town. Sure, when you're dealing with musicians of this calibre you get the expected solos, but they're well enough paced and placed within the set to assuage the boredom some of us might feel seeing Billy Sheehan strut his four-stringed stuff while his bandmates depart the stage.

The star of the show, however, is singer Jeff Scott Soto. Having previously toured with the likes of Talisman, Journey and, er, Yngwie Malmsteen, Soto's better known to melodic rock fans, but he can really wrap his vocal round a prog-meets-heavy-rock tune like *God Of The Sun* or *Labyrinth*. And his solo spot, tackling Queen's majestic *The Prophet's Song*, is the standout moment of the night, with the audience joining in for the rousing rendition of *Save Me* that follows.

Like many of the projects Portnoy's thrown himself into since he left Dream Theater, prog is only part of the equation. Sons Of Apollo sound like how Deep Purple might have if they had they gone a bit prog back in the day. That might not be to everyone's taste, but man is it great fun to watch.

JERRY EWING

WILL IRELAND

Above: Jeff Scott Soho rocks out.

Two Heads Are Better Than One: guitarist Bumblefoot (left) and bassist Billy Sheehan.

> "Shapes are thrown, hair is tossed around, grins abound as the Sons Of Apollo party rides into town."

LOUISE LEMÓN

VENUE	THE BLACK HEART, LONDON
DATE	26/09/2018
SUPPORT	THE OSIRIS CLUB

A small, dark room in a North London pub, a glow of purple and reddish light and – out of nowhere – a little ambient mist. Just the setting for five figures in black robes to enter and take up sonic arms. But wait – is that a bearded lady on bass? No, it's The Osiris Club's Sean Cooper, his long, wavy hair and face fuzz enhanced by some glam eyeshadow beneath his dark hood. It's a signifier of the psychedelic pop sparkle these gothic proggers have, within a catalogue of expansive, brooding epics.

Inspired by Dark Horse comic hero *Hellboy*, there's a cartoonish element to the look of the London-based band but that doesn't detract from what they do. Saxless tonight (regular member Hanna Petterson is unwell), they still whip up very accessible and darkly dramatic ditties. Most compelling are tracks from latest album *The Wine-Dark Sea* – the eerie title track, Hammer Horror banger *Wormwood Grange* and darkwave earworm *The Hopeless Distance*.

As a tiny rock venue, The Black Heart is kitted out with a massive PA that can often be too loud. This was the case tonight, but remedied quickly, so every synthy nuance of *Island Of Stone* shines through. It seems a more electronic direction beckons, so watch this space.

Headlining tonight is the much-whispered-about Scandi singer Louise Lemón. The Swede moves in muso circles, currently collaborating with sonic influencer du jour Randall Dunn, notable for his work with elemental wailer Anna von Hausswolff, drone commanders Sunn O))) and black metal types Wolves In The Throne Room. Her trick is a haunting hybrid of goth, pop and blues that's termed 'death gospel', and it's one she pulls off very well. Statuesque in a fringed black mini dress and with long bleached hair, Lemón cuts an alluring figure, but like all the best sirens, she ultimately slays. Her voice is a breathy contralto on creepy death ballad *Shipwreck*, rising to powerful, emotional, soulful pop heights by *Appalacherna*.

If von Hausswolff, Myrkur and Chelsea Wolfe have floated your goth banana, Lemón is for you. And if those artists have been too harsh for prog ears, Lemón could *still* be for you. A bridge between goth, soul and prog, ignore the hipster tag and let yourself get swept away.

JO KENDALL

LEPROUS

VENUE	GORILLA, MANCHESTER
DATE	22/09/2018
SUPPORT	AGENT FRESCO, 22

Because the venue is turning into a club night after this live show has finished, the 10pm curfew means the three bands on tonight's Scandinavian triple-bill get less stage time than they ordinarily would. Nevertheless, the compact hall is healthily full by the time the first of the bands comes on stage at 6.45pm.

The oddly named 22 get only half an hour in which to impress with their angular, staccato approach, pummelling the crowd with a visceral sound from the off. At times somewhat reminiscent of Thumpermonkey if they were accompanied by a truckload of drum kits being pushed off a cliff, the Norwegians get a rousing reception from the fearless stage-front devotees.

Next up are Agent Fresco, from Iceland. Describing themselves as math metal, the elements of precision pummelling in their set are mitigated by strong melodic content courtesy of the almost falsetto vocals of frontman Arnór Dan Arnarson. They fit plenty of succinct tracks into their time, and Arnarson delivers some arresting showmanship, making his way through the crowd to the back of the venue (accompanied by a lengthy corded mic no less), before climbing onto the bar and up into the balcony.

When Norwegians Leprous come onstage, however, it's clear who the headliners are. It isn't often that the phrase 'the opening cello solo' is used with reference to a rock performance, but tonight is that exception as the band open with the slow burn of *Bonneville* from latest album *Malina*.

Such moments of calm are rare, however, as the eerily backlit band turn everything you thought you knew about progressive metal on its head in a presentation of merciless intensity.

By the time *Third Law* twists King Crimson's *21st Century Schizoid Man* riff inside out and spits out the bones, you have the feeling that this is what 50 years of that track's subversion have led to. Meanwhile, *Mirage* has moments of such monolithic intensity that it seems as if your record collection is being reflected in a dark, distorted fairground mirror while being burnt to ashes. In a good way.

Leprous are unstoppable, irresistible and fearsome. With a cello.

STEVE PILKINGTON

No Pain, No Gain: Pain Of Salvation's Daniel Gildenlöw.

PAIN OF SALVATION

VENUE	ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON
DATE	13/09/2018
SUPPORT	KINGCROW

Kingcrow's inclusion on this tour gives the Italian prog metal veterans the opportunity to play to their own fans alongside much deserved exposure to a wider audience. Showcasing tracks from their recent *The Persistence* release as well as airing a couple of older tunes, they win over a fair swathe of a partisan Pain Of Salvation audience, closing with the minor epic *If Only*.

A suitably atmospheric intro ushers in the ferocious and tricksy *First Tuesday* as Pain Of Salvation gather, with *Reasons* and the heart-rending *Meaningless* up next. For a man who nearly died of a horrible flesh-eating disease just a few years ago and then spent a long time in recovery, Daniel Gildenlöw's voice is just as astounding as ever, and he looks gratifyingly healthy and full of beans tonight.

Striking images abound: Gildenlöw playing the whole of the beautiful guitar piece *Falling* on one knee, then silhouetted in piercing white light, arms outstretched, delivering *The Perfect Element* (which also features wonderful four-part harmonies), or uplit in sombre hues on an otherwise darkened stage.

> **"There is a raw, sometimes agonisingly honest humanity that bleeds through everything Pain Of Salvation do."**

He leads his band through tracks from their most recent release, alongside songs from across their back catalogue (although interestingly, in what feels like a very definite decision, there's nothing from either *Remedy Lane* or *BE*). How is it that a band who have been touring last year's *In The Passing Light Of Day* on and off for about 18 months now still manage to bring such vitality and excitement to the songs?

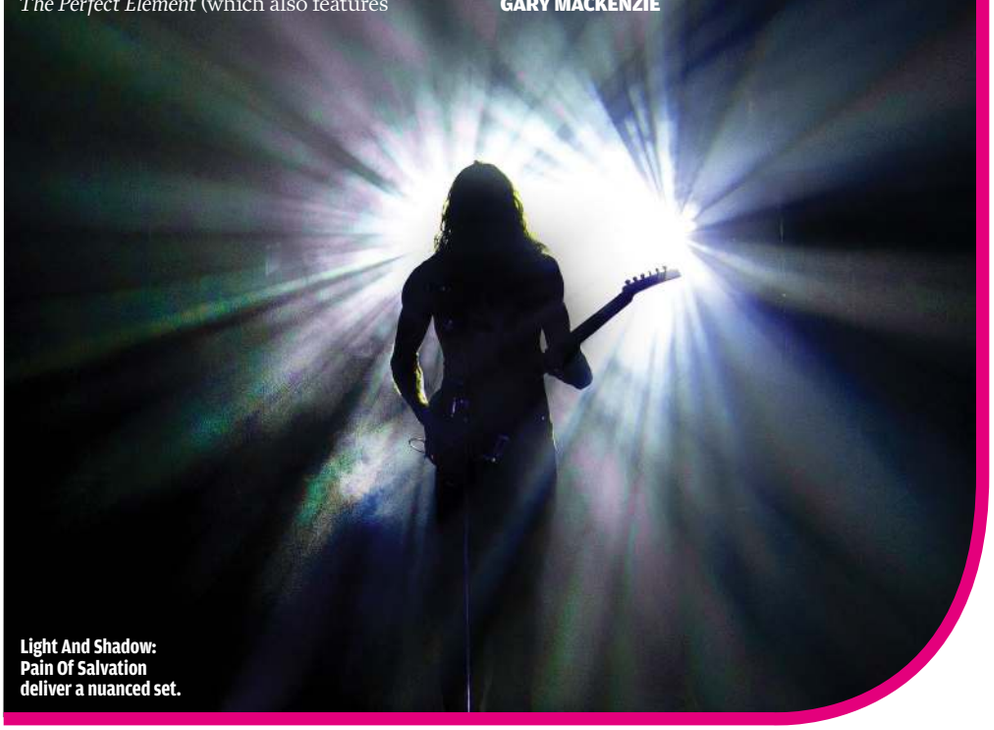
Topless and intense, returned guitarist Johan Hallgren prowls like a caged animal, and very ably shares vocal duties with Gildenlöw. He demonstrates repeatedly, especially on tracks like *Kingdom Of Loss* and *Ashes*, that he can riff and shred brilliantly.

It's not all earnest severity. A quirky gear change leads us into *Disco Queen*, with the lighting rig reflecting the music in a twisted take on garish, 70s nightclub primary colours, the crew on the desk getting in on the act by donning hats festooned with fairy lights.

The set concludes with the insane polyrhythms and metric modulation of *Handful Of Nothing*, the brutal yet lovely *Inside Out* and the stunning energy of *Full Throttle Tribe*.

Returning for the encores, *Used* and an emotionally charged and powerful *In The Passing Light Of Day*, Pain Of Salvation leave a rapturous audience. While their talent and utter commitment to what they do can't be in question, Gildenlöw and his cohorts combine this with something other similarly labelled bands often miss — a raw, sometimes agonisingly honest humanity that bleeds through everything they do.

GARY MACKENZIE



Light And Shadow: Pain Of Salvation deliver a nuanced set.

TINA KORHONEN

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MY PROG

LORRAINE POOLE

Mikko Von Hertzen

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon**

Where's home?
Kulosaari. It's an island near Helsinki. My family has deep ties here.

Your first prog memory?
Watching the Bob Geldof film version of *The Wall* on VHS. I was about 10, it was a big thing for me.

The first prog record you bought?
Close To The Edge by Yes, in my first year of high school. I bought it on vinyl from Tunnelin Levy, a small record shop in Helsinki's main railway station.

First prog gig?
Pink Floyd on their Momentary Lapse Of Reason Tour in [arena venue] Globe in Stockholm, 1989. A great, two day trip with my friends that sealed my love for Pink Floyd.

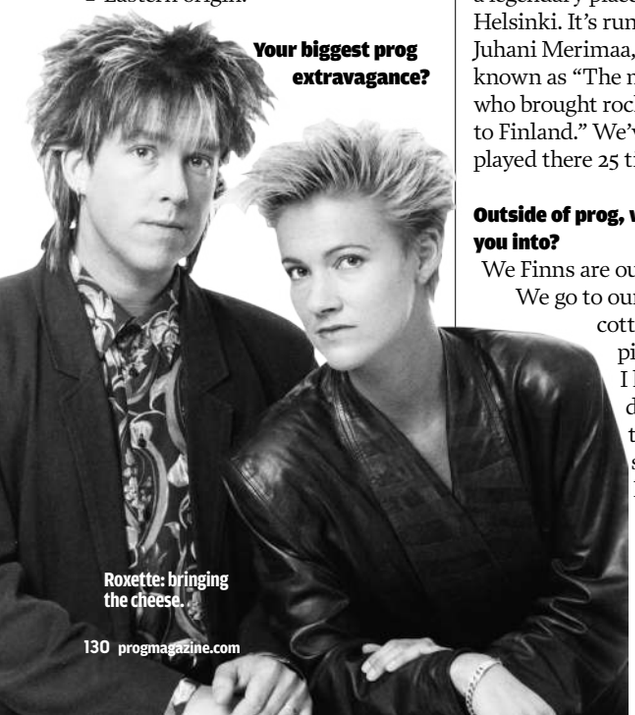
Favourite piece of technology?
My three sets of Sennheisser headphones: HD 25-II, HD 600 and Momentum 2.0.

Any guilty pleasures in your music collection?
I adore the Swedish pop band Roxette. I love pop, but Roxette? That's where most people draw the line! They are a bit cheesy, but I love them.

DAVE HOGAN/GETTY IMAGES

What would be your *Mastermind* specialist subject?
Advaita Vedanta. It's a non-dualistic philosophy of Eastern origin.

Your biggest prog extravagance?
My dream extravagance would be to go on one of these cruises, Cruise To The Edge or Progressive Nation At Sea. Pay for the VIP experience, have parties, see friends, it'd be amazing.


Roxette: bringing the cheese...

Your favourite venue?
Tavastia Club, a legendary place in Helsinki. It's run by Juhani Merimaa, who's known as "The man who brought rock'n'roll to Finland." We've played there 25 times.

Outside of prog, what else are you into?
We Finns are outdoor people. We go to our summer cottages, fish and pick mushrooms! I love to scuba dive, I go on these scuba safaris in The Red Sea.

Who is your prog hero?
Honestly, my number one musical hero is John Bonham. But if we're talking real prog, then Roger Waters, or David Gilmour.

Are you a collector?
Like many musicians I keep my laminated passes from all the shows we've done. I'm going to make a canvas of them one day.

The last album you bought?
Steven Wilson's *The Raven That Refused To Sing (And Other Stories).*

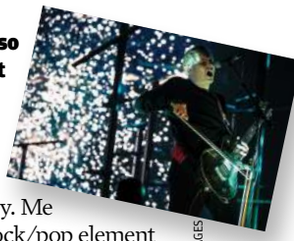
What was the last gig you went to?
On my birthday this year [21 August] I saw Roger Waters on his Us And Them Tour, at Hartwall Arena in Helsinki.

> I love to scuba dive, I go on these scuba safaris in The Red Sea.

Ever had a prog date?
No! I've taken girls to the opera, to the theatre and to rock concerts, but never prog!

Who do you call in the prog community for a good night out?
The Swedes we've toured with are really good fun, the guys in Opeth and Pain Of Salvation. It'd be great for all three of us bands to go out together.

What's the most important prog song for you?
Close To The Edge, but also Queen's *The Prophet's Song* and Pink Floyd's *Echoes*.



Which prog muso would you most like to work with?
Sigur Rós. They're proggy and arty. Me bringing the rock/pop element to their cinematic style – I can see something great coming from that.

CASSANDRA HANNAGAN/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

Which prog record always gets you in a good mood?
Hocus Pocus by Focus. It's so out there.

Who's the best prog artist you've ever seen?
So many: Roger Waters, Steven Wilson, but I saw Sigur Rós at Helsinki's House Of Culture in 2008 and I was absolutely transfixed. It really was magical.

Recommend us a good proggy read.
I've read all of Haruki Murakami's books. *A Wild Sheep Chase* is great, weird and psychedelic.

What's your favourite album cover?
Pink Floyd's *Ummagumma* always amazed me, with that Droste effect on it. It's so cool.

What are you up to at the moment?
We've got a set of shows in the UK in December [2-16] and then that's a wrap on the *War Is Over* tour, and we'll start work on the new album.

For tour dates and more info go to www.vonhertzenbrothers.com.

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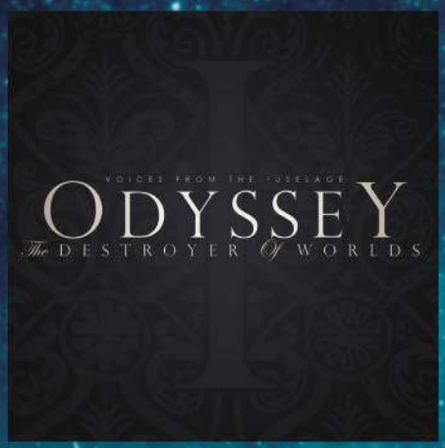

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