

What to say about, to my ears, not only the strongest instrumental prog album of 2012, but also my favourite progressive album overall for this year? A self-titled debut crammed full of so many ideas and styles, all seamlessly flowing together, while at the same time heading in all sorts of directions. Highly melodic, always accessible, gorgeously produced, upbeat and emotionally driven instrumental progressive rock, it's a credit to the four piece that their compositions are so strong while maintaining a sense of control with real energy and excitement. It's also deliciously and proudly `Prog' with a capital P, with endless keyboard soloing, guitar histrionics, aggressive upfront bass and attacking drumming. What you hear on this album is the sound of musicians so devoted and truly in love with music, and it's impossible not to be caught up in that same affection. I can't think of an album that has brought me more musical pleasure and excitement in quite some time. It's not often that an album, especially a debut, totally grabs your attention and captivates you for its entire running time.

You want variety? You will not find a better prog album this year for that. Jazzy diversions, classical drama, middle-eastern influences, heroic motifs, crunchy hard-rock grunt, spacey jamming, reflective acoustic passages, grand symphonic rock, metal - it just goes on. Most of the compositions are filled with endlessly joyful and energetic soloing and oceans of Mellotron, so this is one album you 'Tron freaks are going to want to devour right away!

`Thoracic Park' opens with a pumping heartbeat, ghostly choral synths and somber operatic wordless female vocals, but quickly manic winding guitar riffs and swirling synths crash in with nightmarish energy. Darting back and forth between up-tempo runs and slower driving moments, filled with murmuring bass, snappy drumming and ghostly Mellotron, the band races through a blur of middle eastern-influenced themes, bluesy guitar wailing and Ozric Tentacles freeform keyboard soloing. Pay close attention to the emotionally charged passage that runs from 7:30 to 9:25. It begins with crunching Hammond and Nick Mason-style plodding drumming then quickly launches into the skies with a wavering keyboard swirl, searing electric guitar solo and eerie washes of synths before a cheeky snap back to the manic and twisted main theme. Totally addictive and begging to be replayed over and over. What am I saying, the whole album is just as good as this!

The bluesy guitar strut of `Welcome To The Edge' over Neo-prog styled keyboard themes truly humming with warmth and fuzziness, the Iron Maiden metal gallop and 80's synths that cut in from the ambient and haunting Middle Eastern ethnic/electric guitar introduction of `Obsession', and the creepy and moody King Crimson/Metallica/Mellotron meltdown of `It Can't Be So' (check those final three minutes especially!) all score so highly.

Also outstanding is the stomping and prog-metal/classical/Middle-Eastern crunch of `Obsidian' that's overloaded with Rick Wakeman/Clive Nolan dancing classical keyboard pomposity and thoughtful synth themes, as is the Alan Parsons Project instrumental/Pink Floyd guitar-play drama that gives way to a frantic synth heavy/Iron Maiden race against time hard-rock freakout on `Bio- Freez'. Closer `For All Time' starts with a lovely and reflective Camel-like floating romantic synth theme and grand guitar majesty, before classical drama and snapping technical riffs, attacking drums and wavering loopy keyboards wrap the album in a whirlwind of wailing urgency and wild grandiosity.

Special mention must go to the deliriously catchy and joyous synth themes spliced with driving riffs on love letter to 80's synth pop/AOR of `Batovich' that really shows the band have a sense of humour by composing such an upbeat and foot-tapping piece, and it will have you grinning in no time!

In a year full of so many wonderful instrumental progressive albums from bands such as ADM (Arena Di Tollo Marras), Forgas Band Phenomena and numerous others, this one is neck and neck for me with Kotobel's `Concerto for Piano and Electric Ensemble' as the true highlight. Although sounding nothing like each-other, both deliver exciting, energetic and wildly passionate progressive rock that display a true love for the freedom, joy and endless possibilities of the genre.

Carpe Nota's album is such a joy to listen to, one of the freshest, most uplifting and exciting albums I've heard in a long time, and it's already become one of my favourite modern progressive albums. The fact that's it's only their debut album suggests even greater things to come. But they've seriously set the bar so high that they'll have a hell of a time reaching the heights that this one does again. Then again, one listen to the sheer virtuosity of the four band members on display here reassures that they are definitely up to that challenge.

Five stars - Highest possible recommendation!

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