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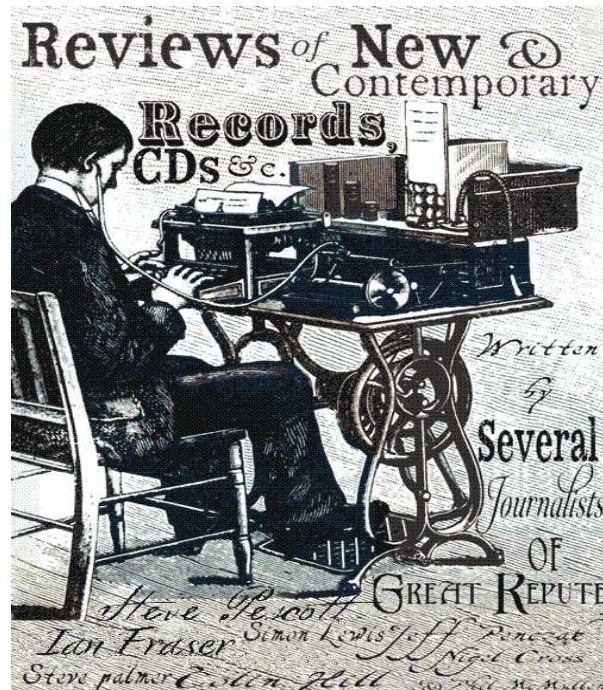
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= February 2014 =



**PETER HAMMILL/GARY LUCAS – OTHER WORLD (CD from Esoteric Records [www.cherryred.co.uk](http://www.cherryred.co.uk))**

You desperately hope that a creative collaboration twixt Van Der Graaf Generator legend and cult solo artist Peter Hammill and one-time Captain Beefheart sidekick and self-confessed anglophile Gary Lucas will turn out to be something special. Thankfully “Other World”, which at times lives up to its name, proves to be a reassuringly rewarding treat...

...and then some...

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Described by Hammill as “something quite strange, but strangely powerful”, all the music on “Other World” has been crafted using nothing more than guitars and Hammill’s distinctive vocals to create something extremely profoundly atmospheric whilst giving the impression of effortlessness as befitting masters of their art..

Hammill’s voice remains a highly idiosyncratic trademark and yet at times he sounds as if he has mutated into Roy Harper – that same emotive, slightly wavering delivery and just a hint of being off-key on occasion. Quite what a Hammill/Harper hook-up would sound like is a tantalising prospect (particularly if they were to cover each other’s compositions).

After the measured acoustic opener, “Spinning Coins”, Lucas begins to blow the dust off his amps and the album hits its strides with “Some Kind of Fracas”, a reverb-heavy collage of sound effects playing supplementing Hammill’s thespian narrative. “I found myself there, wrong time, wrong place”, he opines. Been there, Pete, been there.

“Cash” further underlines Hammill’s lyrical astuteness while Lucas throws out a lovely simple run with a hint of backward tape overlapping an acerbic vocal delivery. “Built from Scratch”, with its juxtaposition of sweet harmonics and a hint of discord and “Attar of Roses” – a chilled-out, contemplative composition – are back to back instrumental passages. Possibly this is where Pete nips off for a costume change, pee or a cigarette or whatever else during live performances.

If intense mood and atmosphere is your poison then look no further than “Reboot”. Some delightful, cosmic noodling presages a woozy vocal hinting at some kind of acid psychosis while some top-drawer experimentation in the mid-section makes for an unsettling yet highly effective and oddly enjoyable listening experience. Some basic riffing pulls us briefly Earthwards before subsiding back into deep space. Yes, most enjoyable and very Terrascopic.

Across the rest of a generous yet hardly overblown 14 tracks we are treated to a tantalising and almost flawless assortment of power chords, shimmering and ethereal languidness, energetic acoustic workouts, cosmic noodlings and ambient ambling and spiky, eastern tinged fretwork while on all but three of the cuts, Hammill's imperious story-telling and vocal phrasings show why despite the decades and the ebb and flow of fickle fashion he remains one of the most innovative and respected figures in popular music.

In conclusion then, there is plenty to like and how great it is to know that Hammill is still capable of turning out work that not only impresses but pushes the boundaries, huge credit for which must go to Lucas for some expressive and inventive instrumentation. It's fair to say that one could not have achieved such creativity without the other. The press blurb from the record label trumpets that "Other World" is certain to be one of the most unique and atmospheric albums of 2014". It's still early-doors as far as this year is concerned but on the evidence of this, who am I to argue?

**(Ian Fraser)**



### **SHARRON KRAUS – PILGRIM CHANTS AND PASTORAL TRAILS**

(CD from <http://bit.ly/1gQ6UzY>)

Before I begin this review I feel I should mention that I visited Sharron several times whilst she lived in Wales, the inspiration for this album and that a few years ago I recorded some sounds on a Korg MS-20, some of which also appear on this album. So, yes, there may be a bit of bias in my review, certainly I feel personally connected to it, but even if I did not, the album is a powerful and beautiful collection that is a pleasure to hear.

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Having moved to Wales to explore the music in the landscape, Sharron immersed herself in the area, discovering myths and legends, meeting local musicians and organising gigs in the local art centre. She also walked the land a round here allowing its magic to fire her imagination, sowing the seeds that would take form with this release.

Moving away from traditional song structure, the music on this album is more experimental and drone-based, featuring field recordings, harp, recorder, guitar, dulcimer, synth and Sharron's exquisite voice. The voice used as an instrument as well as a carrier of the lyrics.

Beginning with "Hiraeth", the gentle fragile music deals with the longing to be in a certain place, to be part of the landscape, the recorder singing a soft refrain over twinkling harp and velvet vocals, drawing the listener in, using sound as enchantment.

Reminding me of Rusalnaia (Sharron Kraus and Gillian Chadwick), "Rowan" has a hypnotic quality that is hard to shake off whilst "Cadair Idris" perfectly evokes the feeling of mystery that surround the mountain it is named after, The sparse instrumentation and arrangement allowing Sharron's voice to shine through with power and clarity.

Whilst there are eight individual tracks on this release it is hard not to see it as one complete work, the pieces creating a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. Throughout you get an overwhelming sense of the love and commitment that went into making the album, the wild beauty and contrasts to be found in the landscape shining out through the music no more so than on the pairing of "Candlemas Moon", a delightful folk tune that is almost a hymn and "Winding Road" a song that speaks of the joy of returning, two of the most gorgeous tracks on the album.

Exploring the bleakness that you sometimes encounter in the Welsh landscape, "Dark Pool" has a sombre mood, this mood broken by "Y Fari Lwyd" an almost traditional folk tune, the whole album rounded off by "Farewell", the song opening with the sound of Jackdaws, something I remember from my time there, the tune a sad lament filled with fond memories taking the listener back to the longing of the opening track.

Also available to subscribers of the 2L Library Series, of which this is number 5, is a second disc entitled "Nightmare", here Sharron explores some darker moments during her time in the