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Fish: 13th Star

It would seem that nothing inspires Fish to write some of his best material quite like personal demons; and so it is with *13th Star*, far and away Fish's best album in a decade. The ex-Marillion front man recently went through a rather public breakup with fiancé Heather Findlay from Mostly Autumn and one can't help but assume that the new album is a direct result of the end of that relationship. Filled with anger, bitterness and regret but also suffused with moments of tenderness in remembering happier times, the big guy opens his heart like he hasn't done in a very long time.



13th Star is very neatly split between rockers and ballads. The heavier songs contain Fish's most muscular arrangements since *Sunsets on Empire* while the ballads are among the very best he's ever written. Crunchy guitar riffs, sequenced keyboards and spacey interludes are sprinkled into pieces like "Square Go" and opener "Circle Line". "Square Go" recalls "The Perception of Johnny Punter" in its menace and simple but heavy groove.

"Manchmal", a song of betrayal, is probably the heaviest cut on the album and calls to mind recent Porcupine Tree. The lyrics are particularly clever here as Fish tells the metaphorical tale of a turtle and a scorpion agreeing to cross a riverbank together before the scorpion stings the turtle just as the pair reach the other side. To make his meaning clear, Fish breaks through the metaphor with: "I can sense you're going to leave me, I know you'll break the deal, I'll drown in my sorrows and I'll drink at your shrine".

"Openwater" continues the bitterness with a bluesy infectious heavy rocker that's almost uplifting...unless you're paying attention to the desperate lyrics. "Dark Star" is an imposing moody piece of self-recrimination that builds and builds to an awesome Middle Eastern tinged finish.

The ballads, likewise, do not disappoint. "Miles de Besos" is a soft jazzy piece that tells of a torrid brief love affair in Chile. "Where in the World" speaks most directly of his recent split with Heather Findlay: "This time last year I was in love, this time last year there was a dream". The hauntingly vivid "Zoe 25" tells of a pair of tragic figures and each time I hear it, I can't help but think of Peter Hammill's "Curtains".

For many listeners, the true highlight among the ballads will be