

Fish

Communion: Live at St. Mary's Church

Chocolate Frog Record Company (CF040807)

Grade: ★★★★★

13th Star

Chocolate Frog Record Company (CF1402207)

Grade: ★★★



If Derek Dick, A.K.A. Fish, hasn't exactly established himself as a household name here on this side of the Atlantic, you can't blame him for lack of trying. In a career that spans nearly three decades — seven with prog-rockers Marillion and the past 20 on his own — he's become something of a one-man music machine, with no fewer than a dozen albums released under his own aegis. Epic in scope, his sonic template resides somewhere between Phil Collins' quiet contemplation and Peter Gabriel's more insightful ambitions.

Communion isn't the first live Fish set to survey his sweeping pastiche; in fact, he's released several double-album epics that effectively convey the vibrant complexity of his expansive sonic palette. Nevertheless, it provides an ideal guide for the uninitiated, particularly those who long for the elaborate approach Genesis took prior to Gabriel leaving the fold. Combining progressive influences with Celtic imagery, Fish and his exemplary backing band weave tone and texture into soaring, sprawling anthems. Disc one is more majestic, with songs such as "The Field," "State Of Mind" and "Fortunes Of War" building steadily from quiet rumination into an overwhelming surge of sound. The second part of the set meanders toward mellower terrain, the pretty piano ballad "Scattering Crows" and the sprawling, stealth-like "Tara" proving both affecting and compelling.

Fish's latest studio album, *13th Star*, recasts these rich designs in a sumptuous

set of songs that strike a generally downcast disposition. Wrapped in dense atmospheric arrangements, the keyboard-laden melodies are too uncommonly dense to allow for instant accessibility, the brash onslaught of "Circle Line" and the contemplative repose of "Square Go" notwithstanding. Nevertheless, Dick proves himself a man of many moods, whether he's expressing dark uncertainty in "Manchmal" or gliding on the haunting allure of "Dark Star." The cosmic sentiments are often difficult to grasp, but when "Arc of the Curve" finds him declaring, "If love is blind, then I will never see again," his arched pronouncements clearly find focus.

— Lee Zimmerman

Beardfish

Sleeping in Traffic: Part Two

InsideOut Music/SPV (IOMCD 294)

Grade: ★★★★★

Beardfish has been one of those progressive-rock bands that toil in relative obscurity. But after three ambitious and expressive albums, the Swedish quartet (most easily compared to fellow countrymen the Flower Kings) seems ready to give listeners a wake-up call with *Sleeping in Traffic: Part Two*.

More cohesive than its 2007 predecessor, *Part Two* continues *Part One's* concept of chronicling 24 hours in one person's life, focusing here on the nighttime. By incorporating rock, jazz and a little heavy metal, country jam and musical wit into these eight songs, Beardfish offers a refreshing take on a genre long criticized for its earnestness.

The album's highlight has to be the 35-minute title track — "a dream, basically," according to versatile vocalist Rikard Sjöblom — which echoes some of Beardfish's earlier, more eclectic work and incorporates spoken words, sound effects and parodies. *Sleeping in Traffic: Part Two* is a welcome addition to the modern-prog canon. insideoutmusic.de

— Michael Popke

Magenta

Metamorphosis

Laser's Edge (LE1052)

Grade: ★★★

Not for those lacking long attention spans, *Metamorphosis* is a long climb through tricky melodic switchbacks, soaring, string-laden instrumentation and unpredictable dynamics that demand the assistance of a sherpa guide.

The weather of Magenta's fourth studio album is in constant flux, as its two 20-minute-plus epics go from dark and stormy to heavenly and



angelic in a matter of moments. Alternating between periods of sublime beauty and heavy drama, Magenta approaches disturbing, almost gothic, subject matter with the pristine innocence of Christina Booth's vocals, the detailed intricacy and unbridled power of Chris Fry's virtuoso guitar playing and Rob Reed's expressive keyboards.

Following the twisting roads Magenta takes, as long as they may be, and witnessing the sonic artistry at work here makes for a lush — albeit a tad overblown and overly earnest — listening experience. Don't turn back, even if you're scared of *Metamorphosis's* heights.

— Peter Lindblad

Dominici

O3: A Trilogy — Part 3

InsideOut Music/SPV (IOMCD 292)

Grade: ★★★★★

Vocalist Charlie Dominici calls his music "metal progressive pop," but the emphasis for the final two albums in the *O3* trilogy clearly is on chunky, symphonic and often bombastic metal.

Dream Theater's original singer (he appeared on *When Day and Dream Unite*) self-released the acoustic *Part 1* in 2005, then signed with InsideOut Music for the sequels. They sound as heavy and intense as his old band, and *Part 3* marks the culmination of an unlikely progressive-metal comeback.

Dominici, surrounded by crack Italian musicians and songwriters, gives the vocal performances of his life on *Part 3* and could go throat to throat with current Dream Theater front man James LaBrie. Lyrically, the album concludes the tale of a desensitized New York City cop's quest to derail terrorists before World War IV annihilates the planet. It's a gripping concept with a surprise ending — and it makes clear that Dominici's resurrected career seems far from over. insideout.de

— Michael Popke