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Vander Graf Generator LIVE @ Metropolis Studios, London (Dbl CD + DVD) (<http://www.rocksbackpagesblogs.com/vander-graf-generator-live-metropolis-studios-london-dbl-cd-dvd/>)

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(<http://www.rocksbackpagesblogs.com/2012/07/vander-graf-generator-live-metropolis-studios-london-dbl-cd-dvd/vdgg-metropolis/>)

Of all the original UK progressive bands, VDGG was perhaps the least pop conscious of the lot. No matter how out-there most prog bands got, they always made at least a symbolic nod to pop in a song or two. It was almost obligatory, after all the generic "File Under Pop" section was where most all albums in those days were filed in record stores. Van Der Graf consisted of a top rate vocalist who wrote complex tortured psychological lyrics, and musicians who played serious avant-jazz, with a hint of rock, chops. Their music at times had moments of calm and beauty, but I can't easily remember a catchy pop hook or lyric filled with a whimsy or charm.

The pop-music pressure cooker took its toll and they called-it-a day in 1972, with vocalist Peter Hammill continuing on solo. Over the years,

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they occasionally reformed in various configurations, until 2005 when the full 4-piece band performed Live at Royal Festival Hall. Multi-instrumentalist David Jackson was there and it went down well. That generated the idea of continuing again, Jackson decided to defer, so the remaining trio brainstormed continuing on, ultimately deciding to give it a go.

In December 2010, the reconfigured Van Der Graf trio took the stage and did a show that initiated a new era, and somewhat different sound. Gone were Jackson's otherworldly solos, replaced with dual keyboards consisting employing at times of synth, piano and simulated Hammond B3 w/ bass pedals playing against a backdrop of Guys Evans rock solid drumming. Hammill's vocals were ever-present, still powerful, but age has mellowed him a bit. He sings now as if life lessons have given him knowledge of what he sings. There is less "strum und rang" in the music. The compositions are still free flowing and intense, but also more focused. The spaces between notes now add drama, not respite from the instrumental storm.

During the concert, they performed newer tracks from recent recordings, and older pieces re-arranged to suit the trio format. Highlights are – the song "Your Time Starts Now", and classic, closer "Man-Erg". Especially impressive are pieces where Hammill plays "interference guitar". On "Lemmings" & "Lifetime", he doesn't so much solo, as inject melody, intense chords and scathing riffs into the sound to achieve effect, bringing the trademark Van Der Graf element of dissonance and chaos into the mix.

The trio started the show off a bit tentatively, but before long, the instrumental voltage surged, ending on a high note with "Man-Erg". In the end the music of the trio reincarnation pays great homage to their past. The new arrangements and music in evidence here indicates the musicians and music they make has evolved, and today certainly has something to offer musically in the future.



About Archie Patterson

Got into the music business in 1970 on FM radio in California, hosting his Eurock radio program. In 1973, created the first issue of Eurock Magazine, which published until 1990. Concurrently helped found two of the leading import music companies in the USA, Intergalactic Trading Co. & Paradox Music. From 1980-2009 Eurock evolved from being one of the first Indie distributors and promoters of Euro Rock with its own D.I.Y. Cassette & CD label into one of the earliest WWW distribution networks. Recently, in 2010, Eurock morphed into a Webzine featuring Multimedia Podcasting, Interviews & Reviews.

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