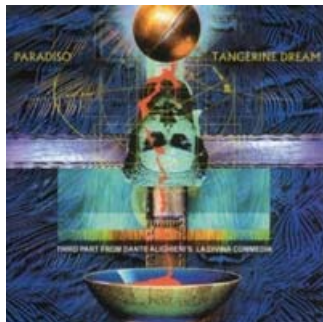


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Paradiso Tangerine Dream



How could any red-blooded American male forget those delicious scenes of Tom Cruise atop a writhing Rebecca De Mornay in the movie *Risky Business* (remember the 'choo choo' train scene?). Behind all that carnal mayhem pulsed the intricate ethereal soundtrack provided by seminal "krautrock" band Tangerine Dream. Twenty years later, with countless albums under their belts, Tangerine Dream has released **Paradiso**, based on the third part of Dante Alighieri's "La Divina Commedia" (Dante's "Divine Comedy" for us layman).

The creator and only original member through every incarnation of Tangerine Dream, Edgar Froese teamed up with fellow West Berlin underground 'arty' types in the late 1960's. Forming TD after studying under Salvador Dali, of all people, Froese and company were one of the first purveyors of what has been termed "krautrock." Froese welcomed various members into the 'Dream' fold over the years, most notably, Christopher Franke and Peter Baumann and most TD listeners — even those of us with only a passing knowledge of the band — recognize their pulsating synths. Tangerine Dream actually gained a solid reputation through their soundtracks for movies like *Legend*, *The Keep* and *Risky Business*, and continue to tour (as members come and go) with multimedia live performances. As testament to Froese, it is said he welcomes new members as writing contributors and not just players (as he did with Franke and Baumann). On the double CD **Paradiso**, however, Froese composed and produced all of the music.

I do not doubt Froese's talents. Translating the third act of "La Divina Commedia" is a formidable task and one he manages well. But I feel, for even the most ardent TD fan, **Paradiso** is a bit chewy. Of the 15 songs here (more like the typical classical music 'movements') the first CD (seven songs) are pretty thick, static stuff. Occasionally punctuated by some high soprano singing (lyrics that don't always translate all that well in this form), I found the middle part of the first CD, "Mercury Sphere", "L'Era della Venere" and "Invisible Sun" the most listenable of the first 'set'. I still had some trouble discerning where Froese' keys and the orchestra ended and began (and maybe that's the point). I'm not sure really if anything here compliments as much as it all meshes together to create a thick sonic whole (and maybe again, that's the point!). If that's your kind of thing, cool, but there aren't enough dynamics from movement to movement to make it all that interesting for yours truly.

As for the second CD, I like it yards better. First of all the pulsating Tangerine Dream vibe is back in the first three songs, "Jupiter Lightning" and "La Forza del Santurmo" and "Stars In Distance Glow" ('Stars' might be the most listenable track here). Sorry to say the English lyrics still don't work for me; they don't fit too well to what's being played, kinda clunky, like bad poetry, but overall the vocals are engaging, the synths arranged well with the backing orchestra, and the end of "La Forza" features some really nice atmospheric touches of darkening moods; it's a nice way to begin the second CD after the slow-moving first one. "Trasformazione" is absolutely beautiful with some amazing vocal harmonies and a heartbreaking orchestral score. This really is Froese at the height of his compositional powers. "L' Ultima Tromba d' Oro," the second to the last piece, is also notable for the vocal performances, although it might be a tad bit too long and trying on ears not trained for this sort of thing.

OK, **Paradiso** isn't going to be earning the big download numbers right next to Justin Timberlake's latest. Tangerine Dream, even in their most popular phase, the band's celebrated "Pink Period." will never be a household name. But Edgar Froese has survived a 40- year plus career with this group, welcoming in new members with their own style of playing and writing, meshing the whole into a litany of albums and live performances. A quick survey of what TD is up to lately and one sees a whole bunch of releases released. Tangerine Dream are alive and well, and though the "krautrock" tag might be a thing of the past, the whirling humping-beat synths a little too lacking here, (the first CD here certainly delivers little to no synth relief, but maybe that's the point?!) I still feel **Paradiso** is a solid two-CD set.

~ Ralph Greco, Jr.

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