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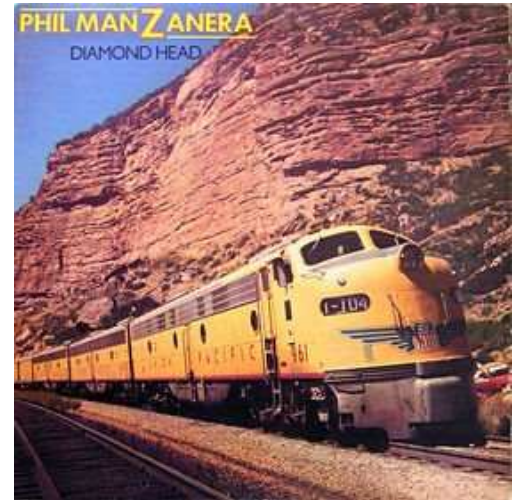
« [Album Review: Loveland - Order to Love Not Awesome.](#) »

[Album Review: Phil Manzanera - Diamond Head](#)

When, in 1975, **Phil Manzanera** put together his debut solo LP *Diamond Head*, fans of **Roxy Music** already expected something special. The versatile guitarist was already well-known for his highly textured guitar work. For the record he enlisted the aid of a number of talented friends: **Brian Eno** (ex-Roxy Music), **John Wetton** (**King Crimson, Family**), **Eddie Jobson** and members of Manzanera's old band **Quiet Sun**.

The original album featured nine songs, all composed totally (or in part) by Manzanera. From the Spanish language "Frontera" to the soaring instrumental of the title track, *Diamond Head* was both a showcase of Manzanera's talents as a guitarist, composer and arranger. But it also served to show that he could create some damn good songs.

The one thing Manzanera didn't do on *Diamond Head* was sing: he left the vocal duties in the capable hands of **Robert Wyatt**, Eno, Wetton, **Bill MacCormack** and others. On tracks like the infectiously poppy "Big Day," Listeners would be treated to the multiple-overdubbed singing of Eno; Manzanera concentrated on creating catchy guitar parts with innovative sonics. While about half of *Diamond Head* was comprised of instrumentals, the record was far from a guitar-wank excursion. Fascinatingly varied, the album included the funkified "The Flex," featuring some tasty sax work from Jobson, and — as always — fascinating sounds from Manzanera's guitar arsenal. The Latin flavor he'd explore in subsequent outings was already evident even on this early work.



Diamond Head was reissued in 2011 with bonus tracks (more on those forthwith). The album mixes progressive styles with proto-world music, art-rock and other styles. More commercially-oriented than Eno's solo work, it's occasionally every bit as adventurous. And it's as close to an ego-free outing as could be imagined for a solo record: Manzanera affords his mates plenty of space to do their things. Wetton's lead vocal on the tricky-beat "Same Time Next Week" (actually a duet with **Doreen Chanter**) is almost as musically off-kilter as King Crimson, yet it is somehow rooted in pop styles alien to that group.

Eno's contribution to "Miss Shapiro" helps create an arty rocker that one-ups the Roxy Music approach; whether it's Eno's perfectly dispassionate vocal, the corkscrew guitar lines of Manzanera's axe, or the whip-smart playing of the rhythm section, the song offers something for everyone. Manzanera's heavily phased guitar is a major feature of "East of Echo," a track featuring Quiet Sun. Notably, the timeframe for recording and mixing *Diamond Head* was a mere 26 days; even more notably, during that period Manzanera and his Quiet Sun pals also recorded *another* album!

"Lagrima" is built around backwards Spanish-styled acoustic guitar, with evocative oboe playing from **Andy Mackay**. The soaring "Alma" features a Bill MacCormack vocal plus a Leslie'd guitar and some subtle string synthesizer work from Manzanera and Jobson.

The 2011 reissue of *Diamond Head* offers up a digipak, a lovely and informative booklet, and a pair of bonus tracks. "Carhumba" features a group of African musicians playing in a Latin style, with a searing Manzanera solo (of course). The song tips Manzanera's hand toward his abiding interest in what is now called world music; had it been released in, say, 2002 instead of 1985, it could have been a hit. "Corazon Y Alma" is a lengthy piece — a demo of sorts — predating the *Diamond Head* sessions; it explores many of the musical themes fleshed out on the album proper. It marks one of the few notable uses of Farfisa organ (courtesy of Quiet Sun's **Dave Jarrett**) in a jazz-prog setting. The song sounds a bit like **Caravan**, not surprising in light of Quiet Sun's pedigree.

No catalog of progressive music should be considered complete without a copy of Phil Manzanera's *Diamond Head*, and if you're not going to track it down on vinyl, the 2011 reissue is the one to get.

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