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801: Manchester

Continuing with my reviews of the 801 series is *Manchester*, recorded live in 1977 at Manchester university. Helping out Manzanera is Dave Skinner (keyboards, vocals), Paul Thompson (drums), Bill MacCormick (bass, vocals), Simon Ainley (guitars, vocals) along with Andy Mackay (saxes, oboe), Lol Crème (percussion, backing vocals) and Kevin Godley (percussion, backing vocals).



This music was made at a time when punk was rearing its head and progressive rock was beginning to take a downward slide from its lofty heights a few years before. Don't get me wrong, there was still some fabulous music being produced, but it was taking a backseat to other genres. I would not label this as pure progressive rock as there are a blending of musical elements like rock, pop and dare I say even new wave, all with Manzanera's eclectic take on things. Of course, there is also a Roxy Music vibe in some of these songs, however, this is clearly Manzanera's project and is by no means a clone of his former band.

The album gets off to an excellent start with The Beatle's classic "T.N.K. (Tomorrow Never Knows)". This is completely redone, and while it still pays homage to the original, this is a total fresh take and sounds great with its bare boned approach, great bass play and nice atmospheric. "Flight 19" boasts a tasty rhythmic melody and very nice harmony vocals that will stick in your head long after the song has finished playing.

One of my favourite songs has to be "Listen Now" with its choppy rhythm guitars, noodling synths, great sax work and fuzzy guitar chords. I get hints of 10cc, particularly in the vocal department, which may be due in part to guests Godley and Crème. There is an underlying quirkiness in many of these songs that just makes me feel good.

Also of note is the very good sound quality, especially for a live album. All of the subtle nuances are there for the listener to fully absorb making this a sonically enriching experience.

This is a great listen and one that I enjoyed very much. If you are fan of Manzanera you probably already know this but for those of you who have never heard of this project you are in for a real treat.