



Steve Adams - Camera Obscura (3 Ears)

This is one of those CDs I got blind in the mail. The name seemed sorta familiar, then it clicked that he played guitar with Peter Bardens in Mirage. Adams is a breezy, precise player in the Frank Gambale/Joe Satriani school, only with more depth and melodic panache than either. The dozen tunes on "Camera Obscura" run the gamut of feels while falling into, for lack of a better term, jazz prog. The mood never gets too heavy, and there's a sort of California laid back attitude to everything, exemplified in the bright, peppy cover of Steve Hackett's "Jacuzzi."

The female rhythm section of bassist Desha Dunnahoe and drummer Karen Teperberg (from B.L.U.E.'s Chris Botti's jazz band) are tight as anything and help propel Adams' fluid riffs. 9 of the 12 tracks are instrumentals, and Adams' vocals on the other 3 are very pleasant. For prog fans and guitar hero lovers, this is quite a delightful disc!

Jon Anderson - Live In Sheffield 1980 (Voiceprint)

Recorded on the **Song Of Seven**

tour with the New Life Band (which includes such notables as John Giblin, Morris Pert & Chris Rainbow) this 2 disc set is part of Jon's 20 disc set of "lost tapes." There's lots of tape hiss and the bass gets too boomy in spots, but you get beyond it rather quickly, and into the performance. What a performance it is! Jon Anderson is in great voice and backed by a solid, energetic band.

The show is a nice mix of solo numbers, and Yes medleys. I love how **Wonderous Stories** breaks down into Beach Boy-ish harmonies before it segueways into **Rejoice**. The section of **The Remembering** going into **Ritual** gave me goose bumps. **Some Are Born** is a beautifully happy piece of ear candy. **Hear It** and **Heart Of The Matter** are wonderful. This sounds like an infectiously happy band and they create true moments of magic.

The better part of disc 2 has the added bonus of band rehearsals for the gig. **Live In Sheffield** isn't as finished and polished as most live albums. It's rough and raw in spots, sounding like an FM broadcast or perhaps a soundboard as the source. Don't let that dissuade you, though. This is a solid set that will delight both Jon and Yes fans alike. Cool Mark Wilkinson cover art as well!

Chris Arduser - Hostage (Crooked Mile Records)

Chris Arduser is one of the finest drummers I have seen in my entire life. When I heard he had put out his first solo album, I was expecting a veritable drum clinic. After all, this is the man who can play in any signature & tempo and handle the most demanding pieces with total ease. Much to my surprise, "Hostage" is all about songs rather than chops.

Arduser sings and plays every instrument on what is a very folk-rock-pop album. His voice is strong, with a biting delivery. The songs have twinges of bitterness and irony. A tune like "You Just Don't Get It" is remindful of the best elements of the Byrds and Elvis Costello: tart lyrics and jangly guitars. While not what I expected at all, this is one hell of a great album. Perfect listening for a drive on a hot summer day with the top down with the wind in your hair. Nice drums, too!

Asia - Fantasia Live In Tokyo (Eagle Records)

2006 / 07 has been very very good to Asia. Not only did the original quartet of Geoff Downes, Steve Howe, Carl Palmer, & John Wetton reunite for their 25th anniversary, but they sounded great! This March 2007 show sees Asia delivering the goods. **Wildest Dreams**, **Cutting It Fine**, **Here Comes The Feeling**, **Sole Survivor** all show the band working as a unit rather than 4 soloists. Not to say that there aren't solos. Downes & Palmer have that flash when needed, and Howe has a fire in him that was missing from the last few Yes tours. Balancing everything out is Wetton. His urgent, creamy voice is strong and to the front, and his bass playing (as well as a bit of nice acoustic work) is elegant.

The sound quality of **Fantasia Live In Tokyo**

is superb. Crisp and well balanced with each instrument placed nicely in the aural landscape. The package is simple but nice, with a swell fold out booklet with some great photos. Over the quarter century, Asia has seen its share of ups and downs. They are currently in the midst of a major upswing, living up to their supergroup status. If you were unable to catch any of the live shows, this 2 CD set shows you the magic you missed!

Tony Banks - Seven (Naxos)

Tony Banks is one of my favorite musician/composers on the planet. He was the driving force of all that was brilliant about the best days of Genesis. Banks gives you that chord. The chord you didn't expect that is the perfect one. The chord that makes a great song glorious. "Seven" is Banks' latest and a totally classical themed album. Banks himself only plays piano on a few pieces, the orchestra carrying the rest. So, is it a vanity project of puff pastry pseudo-classical claptrap? Not at all!

"Seven" is a work of stirring beauty. Banks continues to represent utter quality with no commercial concern. This CD is no "classical" treatment of rock pieces. It is a solid disc of strong pieces that hold up as strongly to Grieg as they do to Genesis. At the center of it all is "The Ram," a piece bursting with rapturous themes, elegance, mystery, delight. For the listener open to orchestral music, "Seven" is heaven for your ears, heart, & soul.

Barclay James Harvest - "All Is Safely Gathered In" An Anthology 1967-1997 (Eclectic)

It's as easy to get a boxed set wrong as it is to get it right. They got this one right. 74 songs over 5 CDs tell a story. From the early pastoral folk / orchestral days, to prog rock, to exotic pop rock, the discs flow seamlessly from 1 to 4, with disc 5 saved for bonus material. Not unlike the Beatles, Barclay James Harvest go from a young band that thought like a band to solo artists playing on each others' songs. Songs are what the boxed set really brings to life. Guitarist John Lees, bassist Les Holroyd, keyboardist Woolly Wolstenholme, and occasionally drummer Mel Pritchard (sadly deceased) are all excellent writers. Deft, well crafted compositions, impeccable playing, and thoughtful production drip from every recording like thick, rich honey.

Signature pieces like **Mockingbird, Hymn, Berlin, Medicine Man, Titles**, and **Poor Man's Moody Blues** flat out glow. Lesser known numbers such as **Brother Thrush, Ra, In Memory Of The Martyrs**, and **The Song (They Love To Sing)** are no less brilliant. Bonus tracks are wonderful, and the historical book is packed with photos, info, and interviews. See why Woolly Wolstenholme is the finest mellotron player ever! This is a boxed set that respects both the band and the listener.

Barclay James Harvest - BBC In Concert 1972 (EMI/Harvest)

This is a very interesting way to present a performance. "BBC In Concert 1972" is a 2 disc set - disc one being the complete performance in original running order in glorious mono; disc 2 being mildly edited with the order of a few songs swapped & in stereo. For this vintage broadcast, BJH were joined by the Barclay James Harvest Symphony Orchestra conducted by Martyn Ford.

It's a stellar lineup of songs: "Mocking Bird," "Medicine Man," "Galadriel," "Summer Soldier," "The Poet," "After The Day," "Moonwater," and "Dark Now My Sky." Not a clunker in the lot. Les Holroyd's bass playing is immaculate, and John Lees' voice as delicate as a butterfly at times. This set is a breathtaking snapshot of BJH at their creative best. How on Earth can you *not* own this?

Barclay James Harvest - Time Honoured Ghosts (Polydor)

Hot on the tail of the EMI remasters, Polydor replies with remasters of the first 5 BJH studio releases on their label all with bonus material. "Time Honoured Ghosts" was BJH's only album to be recorded in the US, and stands as one of the pinnacles of their career. The sessions for this album yielded some of the bands' all-time strongest material: "Jonathan," "Titles," "Beyond The Grave," "Sweet Jesus" & "One Night."

The remaster is interesting. No one element stands out. Yes, drums resonate more; yes, highs are cleaner. While some remasters reveal unheard layers, or an instrument seems to suddenly pop out, "Time Honoured Ghosts" sounds like....an album. Mind you, a sharper, clearer album; but the mix remains unchanged and the "feel" is exactly as it was in 1975. This, by the way, is a *good* thing. The one bonus track is a remake of "Child Of The Universe" from the "Everyone Is Everybody Else" album. A

satisfying & essential remaster.

Barclay James Harvest - Live (Eclectic Discs)

In the fall of 1975, my art teacher, Ms. Almond, had come back from a Summer vacation in England. She brought back rubbings she made from old British gravestones, and this album. She used to play music during classes and in fact encouraged her students to bring their favorite albums. I don't recall how the other students reacted, but I was mesmerized. I distinctly recall the powerful live version of "Paper Wings" with John Lees' wicked wah wah guitar solo burning into my brain. It was my introduction to BJH and I still consider it their most indispensable live document. It has a harsh edge, a few clunky notes, and a raw energy that is just flat out wonderful.

This new remaster is light years ahead of the original CD pressing. It is still brittle in places, but that has everything to do with the source material and nothing to do with the fine effort done here. "Medicine Man" still has punch, only now with added depth and clarity. "Negative Earth" blasts away somewhere into outer space. "For No One" is pure prog crunch. The packaging is deluxe, with a nice slipcase and impressive booklet. Woolly Wolstenholme is still the king of the mellotron!

Barclay James Harvest - Baby James Harvest (EMI/Harvest)

EMI has remastered the first 4 Barclay James Harvest albums with deluxe packaging, bonus tracks, and truly superb sound. Of the quartet, "Baby James Harvest" has always been considered the runt of the litter; a bunt rather than a home run. Passage of time shows that this is far from true. While perhaps a bit more fragmented than its predecessors, there is not a bad track to be found amongst the 6 tunes.

Songs like "Thank You" and "One Hundred Thousand Smiles Out" showcase some of John Lees' finest guitar work ever, and the Woolly Wolstenholme epic "Moonwater" is...well...*epic*. 10 singles, b-sides & rarities are tacked on as well as fascinating liner notes and archival photos. The sound quality is nothing short of breathtaking. Technology has become our friend and this album in no way sounds 29 years old. All 4 BJH remasters are well worth every penny. Go out and rediscover just how good this band is!

Martin Barre - Stage Left (Fuel 2000)

For over 3 decades, Martin Barre has held down the lead guitar spot in Jethro Tull. His work on everything from "Aqualung" to "Steel Monkey" has earned him a ranking in all-time great guitarists. On "Stage Left" he adds to his stature even further.

The 14 tracks run the gamut from rock to jazz to just plain impossible to categorize. Barre is ably backed by Jonathan Noyce (bass), Andy Giddings (keys), and Darrin Mooney (drums) on standout tracks "Count The Chickens," "Winter Snowscape," and "Spanish Tears." Barre's fretwork slides effortlessly from fluid to fierce on all of "Stage Left." Very little on here sounds very Tull-like, but it *all* sounds fantastic!

Craig Bartock - The Finer Points Of Instinct (Craig Bartock)

For those that may not know, Craig Bartock is guitarist / producer with Heart. In between playing **Straight On & Magic Man**, Bartock took some time out to write, record, & produce an album. The end result is **The Finer Points Of Instinct**, and it's pretty much a one man show (Nancy Wilson co-writes & plays mandolin on one track). Bartock has soaked this album full of sound. If **Revolver** era Beatles and **Pet Sounds** era Beach Boys had a musical child, here he is.

Where do I start? **Goodbye** - sad, melodic, brilliant. Brian Wilson chimes and bells on a fragile, poetic angel wing. *"Nothing lasts forever except for heaven and hell."*

Agreed, and in this case it's definitely a slice of heaven. Bartock's vocals are honest & kind - like listening to your best friend. Instruments are spare for the most part, multilayered as needed - never overwhelming the fabric of the song. An important factor, as this album is all about the song.

In addition to **Goodbye** - **The Nevermind**, **100 Reasons**, **Electric Bullets**, **I'll Remember You**, and **Doll House** are all songs any artist would kill to have written. **The Finer Points Of Instinct** ignores genres & boxes and captivates the human heart. Brilliant!

The Bears - Eureka! (The Bears)

Eureka! is the studio follow up to **Car Caught Fire**

and finds the lads having as much fun as ever. 11 songs here - 3 by Adrian Belew, 3 by Rob Fetters, 2 by Bob Nyswonger, 2 by Chris Arduser, and 1 traditional. **Normal** by Fetters and **We Never Close** by Nyswonger pop out immediately.

Arduser has a winner with **Troubled Beauty**. I love the line *Ever since we met i've been haunted by your frown. Just like a book i just can't put down*. Everyone knows that exact feeling, captured so well by Arduser. Belew scores with the somewhat philosophical **On**. Playing is, as expected, pretty much flawless. Arrangements are simple, yet not. Easy on the ear, tricky in the mind, I'd say. Belew & Fetters are truly brothers joined at the fret, making it difficult at times to here where one ends and the other begins. With **Eureka!**, the Bears continue to build a catalogue of solid pop/rock numbers with that extra thing to set them apart from the pack. Grrrrrrrrr!!!

The Bears - Car Caught Fire (The Bears)

WHAT TOOK SO LONG?????? I've heard of breaks, but 13 years between albums is a bit much! Having said that, it was worth the wait. **Car Caught Fire**

is a corker of a twisted pop album & pure ear candy. You say you crave guitars playing wild riffs? Here they are in abundance. You say you need a rhythm section that is so tight it will straighten Tony Levin's mustache? Look no further. You have been starved for fantastic songs with crisp harmonies? Hey! They're here too!

Adrian Belew, Rob Fetters, Bob Nyswonger, Chris Arduser & guest Bear Robert Fripp deliver the goods on every track. It is rumored (with a wink) that Fripp just might be the subject of Belew's wry **Mr. Bonaparte**. This is not prog in a strict sense - it's just good music! I've seen many posts in the prog community asking if they should give the Bears a chance. Listen close. Pay attention. YES!!!!!!!!!!!!!! You will send me email thanking me for turning you on to this impeccable band. The converted are already on their 2nd copy of this one.

The Beatles - The Capitol Albums Vol. 1 (Capitol)

When you grow up hearing something a certain way, that is what you are used to, for better or worse. Growing up in the 60s in the USA, I heard **Meet The Beatles, Second Album, Something New, and Beatles'65**. My brother and oldest sister played them so much, they are in my DNA. It wasn't until my 20s that I heard **Please Please Me, With The Beatles, and Beatles For Sale**.

To complicate matters, the CDs of the latter 3 were remixed by George Martin and presented in mono. The US versions were left to vinyl and to memory. Years later, someone at Capitol finally got on the ball and put this wonderful boxed set together.

The Capitol Albums Vol. 1

gives you those first 4 US releases in cool replica album covers shrunk by science to CD size. They are in the original "duophonic" stereo with the mono versions tacked on to the end of each disc to boot. The mixes are un-screwed with, as well. They present the songs in a different light than the British counterparts. Great to have songs like "Thank You Girl" back in their original mixes. Listen to that harmonica! Buy it. Play it loud, you really *can* go back!

Blazing Bronze - Dominion Of The East (Blazing Bronze)

Hailing from Japan, Blazing Bronze play dark GothProg with a definite flair. "Dominion Of The East" feels like the soundtrack to a progressive horror movie. The sound is keyboard driven with lots of mellotron samples, string sections, & organ. The end result reminds me of a dark version of the Enid, as the sound is very symphonic.

"Black Puppeteer" is a gem of a piece with layers of keyboards slashed by jolting cymbal crashes and piercing shrieks of guitar. "Time Scamper" is a longer piece punctuated by some "Lark's Tongues" era Crimsony violin work. But the cornerstone of the disc is the 14 min epic "Goetia." It's very polyrhythmic, shifting in an out of tempos while driving ever forward. Fierce guitar and violin dive-bomb in and out of the aural landscape. The music is dense and relentless and very satisfying. "Dominion Of The East" is not an easy CD to find, but it surely well worth the effort it takes!

Sam Brown - Reboot (Mudhut)

Simply put, Sam Brown has the finest, most acrobatically flexible and expressive female voice in progressive music. While

not in the same style, Sam Brown picks up the gauntlet dropped by the now-reclusive Kate Bush in making creative, provoking, personal musical statements. *Reboot* is a series of contrasts: from aggressive to delicate; soulful to playful - it's all there.

Musicianship is flawless on numbers like *In Light Of All That's Gone Before* and *Breathe In Life*. But why you are here is to hear that astounding voice. Brown has absolute command of her pipes - jumping octaves with awe-inspiring ease, stopping to caress a word, to wrap a note around her tongue. It's inspiring to hear someone do something this well with ability and conviction. Buy this CD now!

Bruford - Rock Goes To College (Winterfold)

The things that pop up nowadays! It seems that someone took a dip into the BBC vaults and pulled out a plum! This go around, we take the time machine back to March 7, 1979 for a TV gig at Oxford Polytechnic. It's the ultra-hot line up of Bruford with Jeff Berlin on bass, Dave Stewart on keys, Allan Holdsworth on guitar, Annette Peacock on vocals, and Bill Bruford on drums and tinkly bits. The sort of band you dream about.

Killer set list: **Sample And Hold, Beelzebub, Sahara Of The Snows 1 & 2, Forever Until Sunday, Back To The Beginning, Adios A La Pasada (Goodbye To The Past), and 5G**. Performances are smokin'! Holdsworth rips it up on **Sahara Of The Snows**. Bruford, being Bruford, drums dynamically throughout. Let's face it, there are no slouches in this band.

Rock Goes To College

is a lovely souvenir of a much missed ensemble playing their butts off. Packaging is nice, with a tasty little booklet. You can't go wrong with this one.

Bill Bruford's Earthworks Featuring Tim Garland - Random Acts Of Happiness (Summerfold Records)

When I was a teen, I first heard Bill Bruford drum on various Yes and King Crimson recordings. He smacked those skins in a way that was different than any drummer I had ever heard. His playing had an urgency and invention like no other. The years have passed and Bruford has eschewed the rock world to explore jazz. Explore being the key word.

From the opening syncopations of "My Heart Declares A Holiday" to the closing moments of "One Of A Kind," "Random Acts Of Happiness" brings us Earthworks in a live setting playing with elan and a sort of breezy effervescence that demands your feet to tap in restless excitement. Bruford is aided on this fine endeavor by horn player Tim Garland, pianist Steve Hamilton, and bassist Mark Hodgson. Garland just flat out flies, spurting notes and phrases with joyous abandon. Hamilton has his spots of melodic splendor, but he and Hodgson are the anchors of this quartet.

Bruford is a terror. The older he gets, the more he seems to revel in exploration. Sit through the entire disc and just follow his hi-hat if you dare. It's a clinic. I'll be honest. I started to listen to Earthworks in the late 80s out of respect for Bruford's impressive progressive work. Nowadays, I bask in Earthworks as its own beast. Brilliant and colorful. More at home with Art Blakey and Bobby Hutcherson than with Jon Anderson and Robert Fripp. Pure, unadulterated beauty.

Kate Bush - Aerial (Columbia)

12 years is a long time between albums. I had my worries, I must admit, not being a huge fan of **The Sensual World** or **The Red Shoes**. I'm pleased to say that **Aerial** finds Kate Bush in a more creative mood. A good road map would be to say I hear elements of **Hounds Of Love** filtered through **The Kick Inside** but with a more mature approach to production. Fairly simple, fairly pure.

Bush plays to her strengths, painting sound poems and telling quirkly slices of life and love. **An Architect's Dream, Sunset, and A Coral Room** fill my ears with small moments of beauty. **Aerial** is a short 2 CDs, but filled to the brim with sounds and ideas and sweet little lisps in your ear calling you in deeper and deeper with each listening. Very much worth the wait. A soft pastel work of elegance.

Dik Cadbury - About Time (Choice Of Music)

I first became aware of Dik Cadbury through his bass work with Steve Hackett. A few years later, I was turned on to his work in the eclectic folk rock band Decameron. For a while there, it seemed as if he fell into a musical black hole, to be seen

no more. I went searching for Cadbury on the web, and discovered that he not only had his own website, but a new CD as well. "About Time" is a quiet gem of an album, I'm happy to say.

The CD is a family affair in several senses. Members of Cadbury's family very ably add backing vocals on several tracks. Decameron bandmate Dave Bell co-wrote several tracks as did former Hackett pal Pete Hicks. Throw Pete Zorn and former Hackett producer John Acock into the mix and you get a pretty can't-miss piece of work. The songs are stately, quiet folk with exotic tinges. Cadbury has a wonderfully soothing voice and his acoustic guitar work is exceptional. Perfect late night listening.

California Guitar Trio - Whitewater (InsideOut)

The job of a producer is to make the work of the artist shine as brightly as possible. "Whitewater," produced by Peter Gabriel / John Lennon / King Crimson bassist Tony Levin shines like a diamond in the noonday sun. Levin knew that the best thing you can do to the California Guitar Trio is to pretty much leave them alone. Bert Lams, Paul Richards, & Hideyo Moriya know exactly what they're doing!

In many ways, this is the album I have been waiting for them to make. The originals are their strongest yet - some delicate as a souffle, others dark and stompy. All filled with daring licks and impossible playing. "Red Iguana" is even downright funky! For those in the know, there's a wonderful circulation piece on here called "Prelude Circulation BWV 988." The CD closes with "Ghost Riders On The Storm" which successfully blends "Ghost Riders In The Sky" with "Riders On The Storm." Yet another exceptional outing by three classy gentlemen!

Caravan - The Unauthorized Breakfast Item (Eclectic)

35 years on, Caravan still have the feel. Melodic, pastoral, and jazzy in spots, "The Unauthorized Breakfast Item" is a very satisfying, comfortable listen. The line-up is Pye Hastings, Richard Coughlan, Geoffrey Richardson, Doug Boyle, Jim Leverton, & Jan Schelhaas with guest spots by Dave Sinclair, Jimmy Hastings, Simon Bentall, & Ralph Cross. Schelhaas fits in smoothly for Sinclair on keys and interacts well with Boyle.

Boyle delivers a packet of wild, fluid guitar licks on "Smoking Gun." Hastings shows he's still a melodic genius on "Tell Me Why." The title track is a wry little true story based on an event at NEARfest 2002. This CD is a very pleasant diversion I find myself listening to more & more. Perhaps the band's best sing "Better By Far." Canterbury freaks & fanatics will surely not be disappointed.

Caravan - Caravan & The New Symphonia (Decca)

I was very excited to hear that this album had been newly remastered as it is a long time favorite. "Mirror For The Day" and "Virgin On The Ridiculous" are so beautiful as to be beyond words, and they are gloriously remastered here, sounding fresh and resonant. As a bonus, Decca went the extra mile and restored the entire concert - 5 songs swelling to 9.

The added material is all drawn from the "For Girls Who Grow Plump In The Night" album. "Memory Lain, Hugh/Headloss," "The Dog, The Dog, He's At It Again," "Hoedown," and "A Hunting We Shall Go" are presented in full splendor. Pye Hastings, Dave Sinclair & the lads sound better than ever. So set your controls to October 28, 1973 and thrill to all the wonderful sounds and naughty bits that only Caravan can deliver on a CD you truly must own.

Carbon Leaf - Echo Echo (Carbon Leaf)

Hailing from Virginia, Carbon Leaf is a contemporary folk band; combining traditional folk with a contemporary approach. Think of Fairport Convention with a smidgen of Dave Matthews and you get the picture. This band is young, but they play like seasoned pros. Bassist Jordan Medas is a standout - turning in some fierce work. "Echo Echo" is a CD packed with tight harmonies and earthy instrumentation. The sound is warm & friendly with pennywhistles and mandolins everywhere.

Traditional and original tunes intertwine seamlessly in the hands of Carbon Leaf. There's a youthful exuberance to the performances - a definite energy driving the pieces. While new boys to the scene, Carbon Leaf already can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with many of the old guard. I see them as a bridge between Fairport Convention, Great Big Sea & the current acoustic rock scene. Most definitely a great place to be!

Joshua Charles - A Positive Flow (Carealot Productions)

This is an odd but fun lil CD. Gong-meets-the Residents-on mind altering substances is the vibe for *A Positive Flow*. Sounds pluck and surge and plink all over the place with crunchy guitars and unusual percussives. Vocals are altered and squeezed to good effect. The only misstep on the entire CD is a misplaced cover of the Beatles' *Here, There And Everywhere* that misses the delicate beauty of the original.

That minor flaw aside, this is a very entertaining disc that holds up well over repeated listenings. A homegrown production very much worth seeking out if you like your prog with more than a dash of humor.

Conspiracy - The Unknown (InsideOut)

If there is a man I feel sorry for, it's Billy Sherwood. A multi-talented multi-instrumentalist / vocalist and production wizard, he has been vilified and crucified for not being Steve Howe. Newsflash: he doesn't need to be. Sherwood is a creative wunderkind. Conspiracy is basically Sherwood and his former Yesmate Chris Squire. They have quietly released a CD that's better than the last 5 Yes CDs combined.

"The Unknown" is rock/pop/progressive/energy/energy/energy. From the first note, they grab you by the cajones and don't let go. Squire's bass percolates and propels like it hasn't done since, oh, "Relayer" era Yes. Sherwood and Squire's voices blend wonderfully on pieces like "1/2 A World Away" and the title track. There's something timeless and majestic about Squire's best work. It's a feeling that is difficult to put into words. The closest I get is to say he embodies the original spirit of progressive music: to move existing forms forward. On this disc, Squire and Sherwood take elements of the Yes sound, twist them, turn them, and ignore them as they reinvent them. Exciting stuff.

Coyote Poets Of The Universe - Coyote Poets Of The Universe (Coyote Poets / Square Shaped Records)

Back in the early 80s, I was charmed by Laurie Anderson's **Mr. Heartbreak** album with its blending of word pictures and abstract paintings of sound. It was and is an eye opening piece of work. **Coyote Poets Of The Universe** is very much in that vein. A peaceful yet confident voice intones fascinating observational slices of psyche set against calm/funky/jazzy/world backdrops. The disc is a nice balance of poetry with music and instrumental pieces.

Of the spoken pieces, "Dreaming Of Dusty Springfield" drew me in deepest, weaving a quilt of words about youth and desire with aplomb. This CD is very hard to categorize. It's not really any particular genre, yet incorporates so very many styles and sounds into a melting pot of sound. Buy it & name it yourself, but definitely make the effort, as it's a fine late night disc to unwind to.

The Cyrkle - Neon (Sundazed)

A psychedelic treasure unearthed. 1966's **Neon** is the 2nd album from the Cyrkle, best known for the hits **Red Rubber Ball** (penned by a young Paul Simon) and **Turn Down Day**. What **Neon** lacks in hits, it makes up for in great songs. **Don't Cry, No Fears, No Tears Coming Your Way, The Visit (She Was Here)**, and the gossamer **Two Rooms** are heaven for the ears. Beatles-meet-Association harmonies, guitars, sitars, great bass, great everything.

Commercial success eventually lead to the band knocking it on the head before they went much further. Commercial success, literally, as vocalist / guitarist Tom Dawes left the band to work on ad classics like **Plop Plop Fizz Fizz, Oh What A Relief It Is** for Alka Seltzer and **Coke Is It**. A year later, the band were history, but their 2 proper albums and 1 soundtrack (for **The Minx**) left us with fantastic psychedelic pop rock to enjoy for decades. This CD adds 9 bonus tracks including the wiggly **Red Chair Fade Away**. Love beads and paisley Carnaby Street vests for everyone!

Deep Purple - The Book of Taliesyn (Spitfire Records)

Well, it's about time! This landmark album from 1968 never had more than a fair mastering onto CD until now. It was certainly worth the wait. "The Book of Taliesyn," the second Deep Purple album, has never sounded better.

When I was a teen, songs like "Shield," "Anthem," and "Listen, Learn, Read On" were essential in guiding me towards progressive music. At the time Ritchie Blackmore, Jon Lord, Ian Paice, Nic Simper, and Rod Evans pushed the Pop/Rock genre into some very interesting places.

The remastering is sterling, with Nic Simper's bass sounding especially fat. 5 bonus tracks, copious notes, and rare photos

make "The Book of Taliesyn" a downright bargain! Spitfire have also released equally fine remasters of Purple's 1st & 3rd albums: "Shades of Deep Purple" and "Deep Purple." All are worthy investments.

Joe Deninzon & Stratospherius - Live Wires (D-Zone Entertainment)

Live fusion hot as a habenero! These guys kick major colon! The feel is Jeff Beck meets Takanaka with a hint of Dregs - hot rockin' jazz fusion that never lets up. Deninzon is wicked on electric violin - his fingers are on fire! Jake Ezra matches him note for note on guitar, and the rhythm section of Ron Baron on bass & drummer Luciana Padmore are twin firecrackers. There are a few "jam band" elements here, but never to a point of annoyance.

I was enthralled by their reinventing of The Simpson's theme and a cool cover of Frank Zappa's "Magic Fingers" from the "2000 Motels" soundtrack. Deninzon originals like "What's That Thang" and "An Evening Nap In The Afternoon Sun" are tasty, tasty fusion. While not in the prog realm, if your tastes run to "Blow By Blow" era Jeff Beck, Weather Report, or Steve Vai, you'll find "Live Wires" has much to offer.

East Of Eden - Snafu (Eclectic)

I remember seeing the album covers. I vaguely knew that Dave Arbus, East Of Eden's violinist, was the guy on the Who's classic "Baba O'Reilly." I just had no idea how they sounded. "Snafu," the band's sophomore release circa 1970 deftly combines avant garde jazz with a Van Der Graaf Generator sort of twisted prog rock. Even that is underselling this album. The experimentation and invention are nothing short of stunning.

Numbers such as "Leaping Beauties For Rudy Marcus Junior" and "Gum Arabic Confucius" take you on audio excursions into places few have tread. Jazzy, world, impossible to define slices of pure bizarreness ooze creativity. The remaster is respectful of the era - it *sounds* like 1970, dammit! Get this now. Hurry up before it goes out of print!

Egg - Egg (Eclectic)

Egg was the short-lived trio of keyboardist Dave Stewart, bassist/vocalist Mont Campbell, & drummer Clive Brooks. You can feel the development of the Canterbury style emerging from psychedelia on this 1970 release. Campbell's vocals are trippy in an early Mothers Of Invention sort of way and his bass playing is fluid & grand. Brooks is at times a basher and at times gentle as a lamb. Stewart is, well, Stewart. Even in these early days, he explores his chordal options, adding a jazzy flair to every piece.

Eclectic's expanded remaster sounds rich and alive. It has a sort of analog depth that shows off the bass end beautifully without getting muddy. A piece like "Fugue In D Minor" shines with Procol Harum-like glory. Egg's debut is a disc of historic importance to the prog world that is also listenable as all get out. Classic stuff.

Emerson, Lake & Palmer - Isle Of Wight 1970 (Eagle Rock)

This is one of those Dual Discs with CD on one side, DVD on the other. **Isle Of Wight 1970** gives us the debut performance of the trio. The CD side is straight stereo audio of the concert. The DVD presents it in 5.1 surround and has a documentary mixing recent interviews with concert footage. The audio sounds honest and spiffy, and the video quality is surprisingly nice.

The show is **Pictures At An Exhibition, Take A Pebble, Rondo, and Nutrocker**. I can't help but feel that **Take A Pebble** and **Rondo** are edited a bit. Keith Emerson is strong but loose, Carl Palmer is 100% energy, and Greg Lake plays solid bass but his voice is a bit pitchy.

Listening to this over 35 years later, you can hear stars in the making. There is an excitement, an energy here that is undeniable. This is a must own not just for ELP fans, but for prog aficionados of all types. A chunk of progressive history right in your hands!

Fairport Convention - Over The Next Hill (Compass Records)

I picture a plush den, all oak & leather with bookshelves and a globe. The air smells faintly of pipe tobacco. There's a comfortable coat over an old leather chair. Comfort and elegance. That's this album in a nutshell. Classy, melodic British

folk rock. Fairport own the patent on this sort of music. At this point in time, the band is comprised of Simon Nicol, Dave Pegg, Ric Sanders, Chris Leslie, & Gerry Conway. For those who may not be aware, these guys can play. Listen to "Canny Capers" if any doubts exist. "Over The Next Hill" is packed with great tunes. "I'm Already There" blows my mind with emotionally moving chord changes and a fantastic chorus. "The Wassail Song" reminds me of "Bonny Bunch Of Roses" era Fairport in the hands of this masterful lineup. "Westward" and the title track will make you sing along by the 2nd chorus.

For a band that's been around over 35 years, this CD sounds pretty darned fresh. The only sign of age is the knowledge of knowing where not to play, where to leave little spaces open for a vocal to resonate, for a lyric to hang. While many older bands make a career out of looking backward, Fairport Convention are looking ahead - over the next hill and far beyond.

Tim Finn - Feeding The Gods (What Are Records?)

The term "journeyman" is often synonymous with "burnout." Thankfully, not in the case of Tim Finn. From his days as a creative spark in Split Enz to his wonderful work in Crowded House, ALT, and Finn, Tim Finn's journey has taken him 'round the world and back. His most recent release, "Feeding The Gods," finds this journeyman making an album for adults. Not because it's explicit & rude - it's not. It is a work of sophistication and maturity from a stellar songwriter.

Songs like "Sawdust And Splinters" and "Party Was You" are personal, simple, direct. The years have taught Finn what a song *doesn't* need - he strips away the excess and leaves the meat. It works. Tim Finn's voice illuminates every corner of every piece with experience and honesty. Great musician - great music.

Fish - Return To Childhood (Snapper / Chocolate Frog)

It's the 287th double live CD from Fish. Honestly, Fish puts out quite a few live discs, doesn't he? Better too many than too few, it can be argued. **Return To Childhood** is definitely one of the very best he's done. Hot band, good song selection, nice sound quality, great packaging.

Disc 1 is all solo material.

Big Wedge, Moving Targets, Brother 52, Goldfish And Clowns, Raingods Dancing, Wake Up Cal (Make It Happen), Innocent Party, Long Cold Day, & Credo are the songs represented.

Disc 2 revisits the Marillion days. The entire **Misplaced Childhood** album, plus **Incommunicado, Market Square Heroes, & Fugazi** are what you get.

The band are fabulous. Drummer John Tonks comes close to stealing the show with his powerhouse playing. Bassist Steve Vantsis is totally in the pocket. Tony Turrell adds tremendous color on keys. Frank Usher and Andy Trill are flawless on twin guitars - brothers joined at the neck. Deborah Ffrench is a fine backing vocalist, but at times her voice in the mix competes with Fish's lines. Fish himself is in very decent voice and full of emotion and attitude.

Lots of standout tracks. **Big Wedge, Brother 52, and Long Cold Day** on the solo disc all roar with emotion. The entirety of disc 2 is like visiting old friends. **Return To Childhood** is a solid career resume wrapped up in an outstanding Mark Wilkinson sleeve. Now into his 3rd decade in the public eye, Uncle Fish still has much to say.

Fish - Field Of Crows (Chocolate Frog Records)

We all have our preferences. As far as Fish goes, I prefer a fired-up Fish. On "Field Of Crows," that's what I got. Full of passion and fire, it leaves the releases between it and "Sunsets On Empire" in the dust. "The Field" and "Innocent Party" mix power with cynicism, pride and regret.

It's great to see Frank Usher and Mark Brzezicki back on board - both bring back that great fishy feel. Fish is in fine voice - a bit lower in tone, a bit more mature - which only add to the power of the pieces. Even a fun piece like "Zoo Class" still has an underlying bite and world weariness to it. Fish has found his groove, it seems. A pointed observer of the underbelly of society - poking bravely where other writers fear to tread. A mighty album. A mighty statement of unbowed maturity.

The Flower Kings - Betcha Wanna Dance Stoopid!! (Foxtrot Records)

There is a vast difference between jamming and improvisation. Jamming more often than not ends up walking the path of wanking solos meandering endlessly and reminding an audience that it's OK to go and pee. Check out the merch table. Perhaps get another drink. Improvisation is a sort of birth. Creating musical life on the spot from notes thrown into the air like sparks. This disc houses 7 improvs by the Flower Kings circa 2003. It smokes!

Now here's the fascinating thing. Roine Stolt, Captain of the Kings, writes complex, solid songs that you'd think would sound basically the same night after night. Wrong. The band use these pieces as springboards. The improvs on "Betcha Wanna Dance Stupid!!" are songs unto themselves, not just solos. You can hear them develop & mutate. It's an electric feeling. You can only find this disc at live gigs and on the internet. If you are up for audio adventure, here tis!

The Flower Kings - The Rainmaker (InsideOut Music America)

Yet another great outing from The Flower Kings. A bit darker than the brightly melodic "Space Revolver," "The Rainmaker" is no less majestic than its predecessors. "Last Minute On Earth" starts things off nicely, driven by a big Roine Stolt guitar riff and a great shift mid-song to a wicked 7/8 section with explosive soloing. As this band evolves and matures, pieces get more confident and push boundaries farther and farther.

You can still hear little bits of Yes and Pink Floyd influences scattered here and there. But the Flower Kings have a defined sound by this point with wonderful psychedelic harmonies, 8 million chord compositions, elegant keyboards courtesy of Tomas Bodin and the perfectionist touch of Roine Stolt. I'm amazed at how many progressive fans have still not explored the catalog of this band. If you are one of them, do yourself a favor and pick up this disc - it's a great starting point for new ears. This is the tip of a very deep iceberg.

The Flower Kings - Alive on Planet Earth (InsideOut Music America)

This is a 2 disc set, disc one recorded in the US & Canada in 1998, and disc two recorded in Japan in 1999. The Flower Kings are in superb form on both, playing with energy & imagination. Disc one features Robert Engstrand on keys, disc two has Tomas Bodin in that slot.

Ultra-swell versions of "There is More to This World," "The Flower King," "Church of Your Heart," and "In the Eyes of the World" feature terrific work from guitarist/vocalist Roine Stolt, 2nd guitarist Hans Froberg, bassist Michael Stolt, and drummer Jaime Salazar, as well as the aforementioned keyboardists. Disc one concludes with a tasty cover of Genesis' "The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway." "Alive on Planet Earth" is 2 Discs worth of bright, bubbly prog at its finest. My highest recommendation.

Robert Fripp - Exposure (DGM)

I remember picking this up back in the vinyl days. It felt caustic, sharp edged, perhaps a bit dangerous. None of that is bad. Peter Gabriel, Daryl Hall, Brian Eno, Peter Hammill, and many more join in on the fun. And fun it is. Fripp may spend 27 online diary entries complaining about someone sneezing on a plane, but he sure can play a geetar. **Exposure** crackles with spiffazoid guitars and buzzes with ideas. It is the connective tissue between Daryl Hall's **Sacred Songs** and Peter Gabriel's 2nd album. It is a yearbook of creative snapshots.

This new 2 CD remaster is fascinating in that it presents 2 points of view in terms of vibe. CD 1 is the original vinyl mix. CD 2 is the early 80s remix with a few bonus tracks & different vocals by Hall. Is one preferable to the other? Honestly? No. Both mixes are AOK. The remasters are deep and colorful, and very very nicely done. **Exposure** gives insight into many aspects of Fripp the guitarist / composer / producer / arranger. Over 25 years later, I'm still franxious!

Fripp & Eno - The Equatorial Stars (DGM)

OK, so there was something close to 30 years between Fripp & Eno releases. They were busy. Seriously, in the intervening years, both Fripp and Eno have walked down various creative paths. This left me wondering if the magic would still be there as it was in the past. It is.

The 7 pieces on "The Equatorial Stars" range from the beautifully tranquil to the darkly menacing. Brian Eno lays down fascinating textures and loops and ambiances that are at times spare and simple, but at all times exactly what the pieces require. Robert Fripp uses his guitar as an explorer, working across the nooks and crannies of Eno's landscapes finding moods and melodies and bringing them to light.

This disc succeeds on several levels. It is relaxing, arousing, and disturbing - sometimes simultaneously. It is its own world. It is an affirmation. It is Fripp & Eno. It is essential.

Derryl Gabel - Visions And Dreams (Progressive Arts Music)

I was sent this CD out of the blue, presumably Gabel wandered across the site & sent me this CD to review. Let me tell you - this is great stuff! Gabel is a guitarist with stunning chops that he balances with a great sense of melody. Think of Frank Gambale, but not boring! This one man outing flies along at mach 2 with guitar riffs that will knock you out. Jazz/fusion with exotic touches, "Visions And Dreams" fits nicely between Brand X & Return To Forever.

Gabel is a player of great expression, and pieces like "Song For Jessie" and "Miles From Home" combine tasty licks with strong melodies, all featuring shimmering guitar solos. As jazz and prog hold hands more and more every day, Derryl Gabel has come up with the right goods at the right time. This is an independent release well worth your money and effort! A very nice start from a very promising player.

Genesis - 1976 - 1982 (Atlantic / Rhino)

The term *much awaited*

applies here. It took me over a month of absorbing this set to be able to write about it. All discs here were remastered & remixed by latter day Genesis cohort Nick Davis. The albums in question are **A Trick Of The Tail, Wind & Wuthering, ...And Then There Were Three..., Duke, & Abacab**, as well as a bonus disc of B-sides. Each is a double set with disc one presenting the remastered remixed CD and disc 2 featuring the album in 5.1 plus interviews and video extras.

The remixes bring many new elements to light. Too many, in fact, to list here. Besides, discovery is half the fun. Here are a few examples: a previously buried guitar on the right channel of the instrumental ending of **Entangled**. A lovely isolation of Phil Collins' vocal just before the solo section in **One For The Vine**. Extra guitar parts revealed on the fade of **Deep In The Motherlode**. Mike Rutherford's lead guitar part removed from **Misunderstanding**. Loads of extra percussion during **Lurker**. A new keyboard melody revealed on **Evidence Of Autumn**. The list goes on. Discover the others yourself!

The DVDs include fascinating interviews (from 2007) with Collins, Rutherford, Tony Banks, & Steve Hackett as well as music videos, concert footage, TV appearances & tour programs. Not to mention the 5.1 mixes. The bonus disc is housed in a lovely illustrated book and contains the songs

Paperlate, Evidence Of Autumn, Pigeons, You Might Recall, Naminanu, Inside And Out, Vancouver, Me And Virgil, It's Yourself, Match Of The Day, Open Door, The Day The Light Went Out, & Submarine. Fans will be pleased to know that **It's Yourself** has a previously unheard verse discovered by Davis while going through the masters.

The quality is excellent on all discs, in fact staggering in places. The box, book, discs & every aspect of the package are as good as it gets. Davis' work has breathed new life into these historic recordings, adding a new depth and color. This is a must for all Genesis fans. Can't wait for the next set!

Genesis - Archive #2 1976 - 1992 (Atlantic)

A puzzling mixed bag of a boxed set. The 3 CDs in this set span the years 1976 - 1992 and show the last creative spurts of Genesis before they headed down the road of safe music. Before we go any further, there are 2 glaring omissions. *Match of the Day* (from the *Wind & Wuthering* sessions) and *Me & Virgil* (from the *Abacab* sessions) were left off because a band member evidently doesn't like them anymore. Also, the beautiful *It's Yourself* (from the *Trick of the Tail* sessions) has its ending truncated & faded for no particular reason.

That said, there are many gems to be found. Live versions of *Entangled* and *Duke's Travels / Duke's End* are simply awesome. Clean versions of *Submarine*, *Naminanu*, and *The Day the Light Went Out* will satisfy many who have waited years. They quality of the transfers varies according to the source, but even the worst still sounds quite nice.

The final line-up of Genesis with Ray Wilson on vocals is totally ignored, despite many very strong outtakes. Much of this boxed set smacks of "just get it done." A slapdash final chapter to one of the most creative progressive bands ever.

Gentle Giant - Free Hand: 35th Anniversary Edition (DRT Entertainment)

There have been numerous versions of this album available on CD. Get rid of them. This is *the* one to own. I know it's a

matter of opinion, but I stand firm in my belief that this is one of the most important progressive albums ever released. The writing, the performances, the influences, the ideas all thrown at the listener are dizzying. But most of you already know that. How does it sound? Beautiful. Bright on the high end, massive on the bottom. Listen to Ray Shulman's bass ring out on "Mobile" - awesome! What comes out with this remaster is the power of Gentle Giant - "Free Hand" is a forceful mother of an album.

A bonus live version of "Just The Same" is tacked on to the end, but utterly unnecessary. The 35th anniversary edition of "Free Hand" is all you can ask for in terms of sound. Nice package with a slipcase & original liner stuff as well. If you don't need this one as much as you need oxygen, kindly click off my site!

Glass Hammer - Lex Rex (Arion)

I remember hearing about "Citizen Kane" all through my youth. The best film ever; a piece of cinematic genius; a masterpiece. To a kid, this adds up to: boring. Then, in my late teens, I saw it. It *was* brilliant, but it was fun, as well. Orson Welles understood that brilliance needn't be dull or stodgy. The same can be said for "Lex Rex" from Glass Hammer.

"Lex Rex" is surely a work of some brilliance. It is also a fun treat for the ears. Fred Schendel and Steve Babb composed an epic concept piece that is chock full of "fan moments" if you keep your ears open. Bits of Yes, Genesis, Gentle Giant, Kansas, Tull & God knows what else are scattered across "Lex Rex." Not in a plagiaristic sense, but in a spiritual sense. Having said that, it's a work with it's own feel: joyous symphonic prog packed with melody and humor. This is a CD you will never tire of listening to. Production is clean and tight, as are the performances. Tennessee boys make good!

Steve Hackett - Wild Orchids (InsideOut)

A Steve Hackett album is always a bit of an event. After the classical joy of **Metamorpheus**, we're back to a "band" album with **Wild Orchids**. For those familiar with Hackett's catalog, **Wild Orchids** fits somewhere between **Darktown & To Watch The Storms** in terms of feel. It's a mixed bag album rather than the unified sound of, say, **Defector**.

A Dark Night In Toytown, Set Your Compass (which has a sort of *Scarborough Fair* feel to it), **To A Close, Ego And Id**, and **She Moves In Memories** stand out. **Why** is a cute optigan piece. **Howl** is a nice guitar screamer that closes the disc. Pieces like **Waters Of The Wild, Down Street, A Girl Called Linda**, and **The Fundamentals Of Brainwashing** feel like ideas that could have used more developing.

Performances are highest calibre. Hackett is joined by brother John, Roger King, Nick Magnus, and others. There is also a deluxe edition in a slipcase with 4 more tracks and a different running order, and a Japanese edition with yet another 2 tracks. Not as weak as **Feedback 86**, not as strong as **Spectral Mornings**.

Steve Hackett & The Underworld Orchestra - Metamorpheus (InsideOut)

One of the most difficult feelings to create through music is the feeling of beauty. Yet Steve Hackett does just that on **Metamorpheus**. Each piece is like a small sculpture of delicate marble, finely carved by the strings of Hackett's classical guitar and gently polished by the small orchestra that accompanies him. As a listener, I am transported to a small villa in Italy, perhaps several hundred years ago, sitting in the warm afternoon sun. There is something timeless and uplifting about this recording.

As the years pass, Hackett's mastery of the classical guitar has taken on breathtaking depth and expression. Is this a prog album? No. It's a classical work of genius by a musician who happens to know the solo to **Return Of The Giant Hogweed**. The journey **Metamorpheus** takes your head and heart on is nothing short of breathtaking. Life is better for having this one. A gentle balm for all your troubles, my friends.

Steve Hackett - Live Archive: NEARfest (Camino/NEARfest)

This performance, as the 2nd day headliner of NEARfest 2002 in Trenton, NJ, was a corker! Steve Hackett and his band were sharp as a tack that night, running through a set that spanned most of Hackett's career. I want to address 2 minor negative points. 1 - enough with the medleys. I have an idea - play less tunes, but play them complete. I don't just want to hear the solo from "Firth Of Fifth," I want the whole song. 2 - Don't rewrite other artists songs. "Mechanical Bride" is a reworking of King Crimson's "21st Century Schizoid Man" and "Serpentine Song" is an almost note-for-note clone of KC's

"I Talk To The Wind." On to the good!

"Hairless Heart," "The Steppes," and "Camino Royale" are flawless. Every piece on the 2 discs is packed with energy and sincerity. "Darktown" is evil, as is "Vampyre With A Healthy Appetite." This set is a wet dream for Hackett & Genesis fans. Production is great, Hackett is still the H.R. Giger of the guitar. Absolutely murderous!

Steve Hackett - Feedback 86 (Camino)

This CD was recorded in the waning days of GTR and shares much of its vibe. Definitely more of a rock outing than a prog one, *Feedback 86* nonetheless has worthwhile moments. *Cassandra* is notable for featuring Brian May, Pete Trewavas, Ian Mosley, and Nick Magnus in one place. The Hackett / Howe track *Prizefighters* from the aborted 2nd GTR album is here with a vocal by Bonnie Tyler. The opening of *Slot Machine* features a guitar riff Hackett later recycled as the intro to *Vampyre With A Healthy Appetite* from *Guitar Noir*. To be honest, the whole package has a "cleaning out the cupboard" feel to it right down to an old Kim Poor painting for the Genesis song *Blood On The Rooftops* as the cover, and a bunch of Hackett back catalog MP3s thrown on the CD as enticement.

It is very much a worthwhile CD, but certainly more as a time piece than a cornerstone in Hackett's illustrious career.

Steve Hackett - Highly Strung (Charisma / Virgin / EMI)

One of Hackett's best gets a nice oiling. Many fans see this as the end of phase 1 of Hackett's post-Genesis career. **Camino Royale, Cell 151, Always Somewhere Else, Walking Through Walls, Group Therapy**, and the oft-renamed and reinterpreted **Hackett To Pieces** (which is, in itself, based on a riff from **Camino Royale**) are all here. The word for this remaster is beefy. The bass and drums sound much bigger, fatter. I could use just a wee bit more on the treble end, but the bigness really suits the material.

While **Highly Strung**

is mostly the effort of 3 musicians - Hackett, Nick Magnus, and a pre-Marillion Ian Mosley (with guests spots by Chris Lawrence on contrabass & Nigel Warren-Green on cello) it sounds huge. Hackett has always known how to squeeze a lot of sound out of a few instruments, an asset that goes back to his days in Genesis. The thing that hits my ears on this remaster is the placement of the instruments seems more defined. I always found this to be a slightly muddy album in the past, but now things like Magnus' piano on **Camino Royale** have a greater presence & are more...rounded. The synth bass on **Walking Through Walls**

sounds richly sleazy. Nice slipcase on this with a closer view of Kim Poor's stellar work. Nice notes from Hackett, & 3 extra tracks all at a budget price make this a must.

Happy The Man - The Muse Awakens (InsideOut)

I'll cut right to the question you have - how does it stack up to the old stuff? Wonderfully! Everything you ever loved about Happy The Man is on this CD. Crazy, quirky figures. Impossible time signatures. Timeless passages of tranquil beauty. The years have not mellowed this innovative quintet. They have moved forward without abandoning the elements that made them great.

Two points to address. 1 - David Rosenthal is not Kit Watkins and does not try to be. He is his own man and fits gloriously into the band - retaining the spirit of the past while helping to move it into the future. Listen to his awesome "Maui Sunset" if you have any doubts. 2 - *Keep this drummer!*

Happy The Man's drum stool is as ever changing as Spinal Tap's (minus the vomit). New guy Joe Bergamini is tastefully aggressive and plays more as a percussionist than a drummer - exactly what this ensemble needs. The track "Kindred Spirits" is nothing short of perfection. Had to say that. Buy this right now. Words fail me.

Annie Haslam - The Dawn of Ananda (White Dove)

As this CD shows, Annie Haslam's voice is still as gorgeous as it was in the heyday of her stint in Renaissance. Haslam is joined on *The Dawn Of Ananda* by such luminaries as old Renaissance bandmate Mickey Dunford, Tony Visconti, Larry Fast, & Mickey Simmonds. If there is a theme to the disc, it is *angels*.

They are mentioned in some form or other on all of the 10 tracks. I must admit that at times this approaches overkill in one sitting.

Production is clean and clear, but sounds more like an excellent demo than a finished release. The melodies are beautiful and Haslam turns in truly flawless performances. Not quite Renaissance, but a fine overall effort from a still vital voice!

Heart - Jupiter's Darling (Sovereign Artists)

It's been over a decade since the last studio album from Heart. In the interim, the Wilson sisters explored more acoustic territory with "The Road Home" live album and in their spin-off group The Lovemongers. They released several Greatest Hits packages and a very swell live album, and somewhere along the way, lost longtime guitarist Howard Leese.

"Jupiter's Darling" ushers in the 4th period of Heart. "Dreamboat Annie" - "Passionworks" being the glory period; "Heart" - "Rock The House" the big hair period; "Desire Walks On" - "Alive In Seattle" the re-evaluation period. Let's call the 4th period the affirmation period, as Ann and Nancy go back to what made them such a wonderful band to begin with: great songs and great playing. Simple as that. No more Diane Warren sludge ballads. No more huge hair and huge production. Lean, mean, beautiful, adventurous, magical. "The Perfect Goodbye," "Move On," "Make Me," and "Down The Nile" are just a few of the strong, strong pieces here. Honestly, none of the 16 songs suck in any way.

Mounds of acoustics, smooth vocal harmonies, and the occasional autoharp and mandolin inhabit these pieces. Not to forget Nancy's Krushzilla riffs popping up on several songs. Get it, love it, bow to the sisters!

Heart - Little Queen (Epic / Legacy)

In 1977, I was a 17 year old with a crush on the Wilson sisters. This remaster shows why. Beautiful and ridiculously talented, Ann & Nancy weave lush landscapes of sound on "Little Queen." Fantastic fantasies filled with flutes, mandolins, acoustic guitars and vocals sent directly from heaven! Not to mention kickass crunchoid riffs and Ann's ability to hit any note on Earth with incredible power and conviction.

"Love Alive," "Sylvan Song," "Dream Of The Archer" and the title track all benefit from this luxurious remaster. Acoustics resonate like never before. It's just a straight gem. 2 interesting bonus tracks are tacked on, but this CD needs no extras. "Little Queen" was, is & always will be an artistic diamond - newly re-polished, but always dazzling.

Steve Hillage - L (Virgin / EMI)

What was that? Did you just hear my sigh of relief? For years, **L** had the dubious honor of being one of *the* crappiest masterings ever put onto CD, with screechy highs, tons of break up, and the sonic depth of a bad Edison cylinder. God bless EMI, as they finally saw fit to rectify this travesty. Welcome back to the world of the living, **L**, my dear friend!

This album, Hillage's 2nd solo outing, has always been a personal fave, so forgive my bias. Producer Todd Rundgren brought in Utopia to back up Hillage & Miquette Giraudy, and it's a great blend. The resurrected remaster shows the layers and smooth synth washes behind **Hurdy Gurdy Glissando** and **Lunar Musick Suite** to be deep and dreamy. **Electrick Gypsies** and **It's All Too Much** have their power restored at last. **Hurdy Gurdy Man** and **Om Nama Shivaya** are hippy dippy luxury rides once more. Listen to those drums by the other John Wilcox! Those synths by Giraudy & Roger Powell! That's what I'm talking about! 3 nifty bonus tracks & liner notes packed with info round out the package. The moon is full tonight! Rejoice!

Indukti - S.U.S.A.R. (The Laser's Edge)

The comparisons to King Crimson and Porcupine Tree are inevitable. There's a sort of 1974 KC syncopated punch to the music. A definite PT drone and crunch. Undeniable. But there's much more. This Polish prog band has a Middle Eastern feel to their compositions, adding an exotic edge to the album. The lines blur between guitar and violin at times and the compositions are very dark. In my mind, I see this as the soundtrack for a mad scientist's castle - dark, dank, brooding, heavy, gothic. I have to say, I just can't stop listening to it. This CD fills a gap that no other band quite covers.

The line up is drums, bass, 2 guitars, violin, with guests on vocals & harp. The vocals by Mariusz Duda (from Riverside) are mournfully dreamlike and suit the music well. No weak songs here, no filler. Heaviness abounds. Turbulent melodies with maximum crunch and punch. From the opening notes of **Freder** to the closer **...and weak II**, **S.U.S.A.R.** is solid, solid, solid. Indukti have come up with a classic here that should appeal to the majority of progsters out there. Do not hesitate to get this one, and play it LOUD when you do!

Jethro Tull - Nothing Is Easy: Live At The Isle Of Wight 1970 (Eagle Records)

The sounds of 1970. Jethro Tull were a very dangerous band in 1970, as this CD documents. Bassist Glen Cornick would soon leave, to be replaced by that wonderful loony Jeffrey Hammond-Hammond for the **Aqualung** album. If you have ever been curious how that album might have sounded with Cornick, listen to the early version of "My God" on this disc - it's an awesome brute of a thing!

Ian Anderson is in top voice on "My Sunday Feeling," "With You There To Help Me," and "Nothing Is Easy." The band just rips. The sound quality is pretty darn decent - it certainly doesn't sound like a contemporary recording, but it really shouldn't. It's marvelous for a show of this vintage. This Isle Of Wight show is like a comfortable coat: warm and toasty and just what you need on a cold night.

Jethro Tull - Living With The Past (Fuel2000)

"You're never too old to rock and roll if you're too young to die." The quote comes from a Tull song and this CD proves the lyric true. This is a collection of mostly recent live performances (with a few from 1989) of a wide variety of Tull pieces. The band are just blisteringly vicious on "My Sunday Feeling" and "Sweet Dream." "Jack-In-The-Green" is outright magical. Ian Anderson is in the best voice he's been in years on this disc.

The selection of songs is tasty, with "Life Is A Long Song" and "Mother Goose" sitting beside tried & true numbers like "Living In The Past." The original Tull line-up reunites on here for 1 tune - a brilliant take of "Some Day The Sun Won't Shine For You" that packs a massive punch. Young bands should hide in fear when these guys come to town! Time has not slowed the ass-kicking brilliance of this band.

Jethro Tull - Under Wraps (EMI)

Ask most any Tull fan which albums they like the least and you'll most always hear **Too Old To Rock & Roll...**, and **Under Wraps**. Listening to this spiffy remaster, it's certainly not because of the writing - **Later That Same Evening**, **European Legacy**, and the title cut (both the electric & acoustic versions) are as strong as anything in the Tull catalog. Nor is it the playing - Dave Pegg offers some harrowingly complex bass playing, Martin Barre is on fire, and Ian Anderson's vocals & flute work are beyond solid.

So what is it then? 2 things, I think. #1 - Peter John Vettese's keyboards are very 80s sounding in places & almost overwhelming. #2 - Plastic sounding electric drums. They lack the push, punch, & subtlety that Doane Perry brought to the songs on the tour for this album. Is this the low point of Tull's career? Hardly. That honor goes to Marjoe Gortner singing a song off of **Aqualung** on some TV crime drama in the mid 70s. Lots of great songs here! The remaster even includes the video for **Lap Of Luxury** for good measure!

Jethro Tull - Stormwatch (Capitol / Chrysalis)

"Stormwatch" has always been a sort of dark gem in the Tull catalogue. Following the country gentleman musings of the lush "Heavy Horses," "Stormwatch" was dense and slightly menacing. It also suffered from one of the worst transfers of all Tull CDs, rivaled only by the dismal sonic flatbread of "Broadsword And The Beast."

This new remaster not only throws in 4 bonus tracks, but it actually sounds nothing short of fantastic. "Something's On The Move" and "Orion" are brought back to life. "Dun Ringill" has a sonic depth to match its poetic beauty at last. "A Stitch In Time," "Crossword," "Kelpie," and "King Henry's Madrigal" are nice additional tracks rounding out the package. Now how about getting to "Broadsword"?

Jethro Tull - Bursting Out (Capitol / Chrysalis)

For years, if you wanted this double live CD intact, you had to buy it from Europe. This remaster corrects that situation and pumps up the audio quality to boot. "Bursting Out" captures Tull on their "Heavy Horses" tour and at the height of their success. Songs you'd kill to hear nowadays like "One Brown Mouse" and "No Lullaby" sound brisk and powerful.

The remaster makes the performances shine by and large, though a bit trebly. It also brings to the fore something I'd never noticed much over the years: **alot** of the vocals are doubled in the studio on this one. To the point of being a bit annoying, to be honest. I don't know if it was Ian Anderson's idea or the record company's at the time. It just should've never happened. That caveat aside, this album has never sounded so good. Pick it up and crank it LOUD! A perfect prog album for parties!

Jethro Tull - Warchild (Chrysalis/EMI)

When this album came out in 1974, it was a bit of a disappointment to some Tull fans looking for yet another continuous piece of music as "Thick As A Brick" & "Passion Play" were before it. Warchild was Tull's return to individual songs and stands to this day as one of the band's strongest albums.

The remaster reveals a dazzling recording that's a veritable sonic playground of flute, sax, glockenspiel, acoustic guitar, strings, and percussion. Every note has a newfound depth & clarity making songs like "Sealion" and "Only Solitaire" shine. The disc includes 7 bonus tracks including the previously unreleased "Warchild Waltz." As good as it gets.

Jethro Tull - A Passion Play (Chrysalis/EMI)

Yes, *that* album! Reviled by critics, revered by fans, ignored by the band, A Passion Play is an album that offers no middle ground - you love it or you hate it. I fall into the former category. After decades of listening to this album, my ears are pretty fine tuned to its nuances.

The acoustic guitars sound brighter & more resonant; the bottom end of the bass and drums have much greater depth without getting mushy. The vocals are clean and clear. The recording shows no signs of being 30 years old. The remaster includes the original video for "The Hare Who Lost His Spectacles" as a bonus. If you don't own this yet, shame on you!

Just Offshore - Just Offshore (Power Voltage)

"Just Offshore" is a one man project - the one man being keyboardist Russ Mate. The sound is very much "Exit" era Tangerine Dream, with bouncing sequences over synth beds with a melodic top line. Mate has a nice touch - very professional.

Pieces like "Meditation Medication" and "Galactic Construction" percolate along engagingly. Having said that, I have 2 caveats. 1: this is so much like Tangerine Dream as to be a near clone. 2: credit where credit is due. The booklet says "Written, Arranged & Produced by Russ Mate" which would be fine if it weren't for "House Of The Rising Sun" being on there. Don't get me wrong, it's a very good CD, and a fluid, pleasant listen.

Kaipa - Notes From The Past (InsideOut Music America)

Before there were the Flower Kings, there was Kaipa. Flower King mastermind Roine Stolt has returned to the fold for a new album along with FK bassist Jonas Reingold and the results are remarkable. Fronted by keyboardist Hans Ludin, pieces like "Leaving The Horizon" and "Folke's Final Decision" shimmer with elegant layers of sound.

The musicianship is tight and note perfect. The feel is symphonic prog - totally "old school" with no compromise. Melody reigns here with psychedelic flourishes of guitar and keyboards. How is it different than the Flower Kings? The songs have less chordal shifts and less of Stolt's wry humor - he is here more as a player than a composer. None of this is a knock - this is a thoroughly enjoyable disc from stem to stern. A feast for the ears!

Mike Keneally Band - Guitar Therapy Live (Exowax)

Not many CDs come with a free guitar pick. This one did, so I like it automatically! Just kidding - I'm not *that* easy! Culled from a handful of shows in 2005, **Guitar Therapy Live** shows off the skills of former Zappa guitarist Mike Keneally & his bandmates. Lots of strange chords and herky jerky rhythms all over the place.

The good natured Keneally is complimented by Rick Musallam on guitar, Bryan Beller on bass, and Joe Travers on drums. **Hum, Spoon Guy, Lightnin' Roy, and Panda**

are the most attention getting of the 14 cuts, with Travers shining on drums on every track.

The music is not as much a shredfest as I perhaps mistakenly anticipated. It's got a few Zappa tinges, but is mostly happy, noodly, bopping Phish-meets-Echolyn on their jammiest days. Good natured beer and pothead stuff played exceedingly well. If you're a Keneally fan, you already have and love this!

Khan - Space Shanty (Eclectic)

You will never defeat Kirk, villain! Oops - wrong Khan! This Khan was the launchpad for the career of guitar genius Steve Hillage. It's funny, this album always slipped between my fingers over the years. What a mistake on my part! "Space Shanty" is a warm, wonderful album. You can feel the future all across this disc. It is a sort of blueprint for what Hillage would later perfect in Gong & his solo albums.

The glissando guitars shimmer. The licks are wild and furious. Guest keyboardist Dave (I'm not the Eurythmics guy) Stewart adds glorious palettes of sound to the whole affair. Eclectic's remaster of this 1972 album is warm and clean. It also includes 2 spiffy bonus tracks to seal the deal. An eye opener.

King Crimson - The 21st Century Guide To King Crimson Volume One 1969-1974 (Discipline Global Mobile)

A fascinating overview of this influential band. The format here is 4 discs - 2 studio, 2 live. Disc 1 covers **In The Court Of The Crimson King** through **Islands**. Disc 2 is live material from that period. Disc 3 features selections from **Larks' Tongues In Aspic** through **Red** with disc 4 being live material from those years.

Song selection is...interesting. The entire **In The Court Of The Crimson King** album is here, yet only 1 brief track from **Lizard**. The sound is lovely throughout. The packaging is spiffy as all get out. A great introduction to the band, I must say. It is, however, a view of King Crimson, not necessarily **the** view. Nowhere in the copious notes for this set does it say that Greg Lake, Ian Wallace, Bill Bruford, John Wetton, David Cross, or any of the members of the band other than Robert Fripp were in any way consulted in regard to song selection. Perhaps they were & this was omitted from the liner notes.

King Crimson - The Power To Believe (Sanctuary)

This is the second studio CD featuring the Robert Fripp/Adrian Belew/Trey Gunn/Pat Mastelotto KC. The music is dark, modern, & powerful. There has been much talk about the new rhythmic approach of this incarnation of King Crimson. It is both solid and compelling. "Level Five" and "Dangerous Curves" pulse and crackle with smacks, beeps, buzzes, and snaps.

Belew turns in a charming vocal on "Eyes Wide Open" and contrasts it with the threatening "Facts Of Life." "The Power To Believe" is an album of strengths. The power of this unit is frightening, and the production touches of Machine add to the sonic assault. For long time Crimson fans, an interesting note: I played this CD while setting off numerous camera flashes and at no point did the music abruptly stop! Hee hee.

King Crimson - Heavy ConstruKction (Discipline Global Mobile)

Enough with the cutesypoo KC spellings! Yeesh! This 3 CD set is a fine, fine document of the European dates from the *ConstruKction Of Light* tour by the Fab Fripp Four. As you may be aware, King Crimson is back to a 4-piece, featuring Adrian Belew / Robert Fripp / Trey Gunn / Pat Mastelotto. Great versions of *Cage*, *The Deception Of The Thrush*, *One Time*, and *ProzaKc Blues* as well as many juicy improvs are amongst the highlights.

Fripp and the lads are in fine form, breezing & sneezing, but never wheezing. Each playing reveals more and more astonishing bits and funny lil moments. If you're a KC fan, you already own this. If you're new to the band, prepare to have your jaw drop.

King Crimson - The ConstruKction of Light (Virgin Records America)

This is the first King Crimson album in over 25 years that does not feature Bill Bruford on the skins. Nor does it contain a single bass note from the extraordinary Tony Levin. Pat Mastelotto and Trey Gunn occupy those stools on this outing. How does "The ConstruKction of Light" fare? Beautifully.

Rather than listening to the bass and drum parts to analyze and speculate, I decided to listen to the album and see how I felt about the songs. I like it, baybee! The album opens on a humorous note with "ProzaKc Blues" featuring Adrian Belew's voice taken down an octave and some genuinely raunchy guitar riffing by Belew & Robert Fripp.

The title cut has wonderful ping-ponging guitar lines that travel down marvelous melodic roads and resolving into a beautiful vocal section. "Into the Frying Pan" is a bit of KC psychedelia where drummer Mastelotto shines, playing absolutely huge sounding drums with 1 or 2 inspired edits. King Crimson tweezerboys will adore "FraKctured" where Fripp injures a guitar irreparably to great effect. Gunn's low-end work on this piece is nothing short of staggering! "The World's My Oyster Soup Kitchen Floor Wax Museum" follows with some goofily fun vocals from Belew and more huge riffs. "Lark's Tongues in Aspic - Part IV" is just massive with the quartet smoking gloriously, segueing into the lovely "Coda: I Have a Dream" which closes the album.

As a bonus, the ProjeKct X track "Heaven and Earth" is included. ProjeKct X is the same players as KC basically wearing beards and glasses to fool us all! All told, this is a solid, strong release. If you don't already own it, bow your head in shame for a moment, then get off your butt and buy it!

King Crimson - Collector's Club #13 Nashville Rehearsals 1997 (Discipline Global Mobile)

This CD contains the last twitchings of the double trio. Looking to sow the seeds for a follow-up to "Thrak," the sextet convened in Nashville to let the ideas flow. Evidently, someone was far from satisfied with the sessions and Bill Bruford and Tony Levin left for other endeavors. To these ears, there are several very satisfying moments here. The ideas are strong & vibrant, the playing impeccable.

Several of these pieces were further developed by the current quartet for inclusion on "The ConstruKction of Light." This brings up a simple question: if Bruford & Levin helped develop these pieces, why were they not credited on that CD? Puzzling. As ever, the King Crimson Collector's Club has served up another gem. Go to the DGM website and join the others already enjoying these fine, eclectic slices of time. Very well worth the effort!

King Crimson - Collector's Club #10 Live in Central Park, NYC 07-01-74 (Discipline Global Mobile)

For those unaware, KC basically put out their own bootlegs - fans get music they'd otherwise not hear, and the musicians get the royalties they deserve for their work. At \$16 per disc, a real bargain. Check out the DGM website for details.

This recording features the Robert Fripp/Bill Bruford/John Wetton/David Cross lineup at the peak of their powers. The set includes gems like "Fracture" and "Exiles" and smokes throughout. The sound quality, while not as glossy as today's standards, is quite good! The only bummer is the occasional, but audible ramblings of a pseudo-intellectual audience weenie that creeps into some of the quieter sections. For the sake of future live recordings, if you are reading this, please don't BE that guy!

Greg Lake - Greg Lake (MVD Audio)

Vivaaaaaaa Prog Vegas!! This CD is a live disc recorded at Stevenage Concert Hall, Hertfordshire in November 2005. The material spans Greg Lake's career, from King Crimson, to ELP, to solo material. Lake is in fine voice on songs like **In The Court Of The Crimson King**, **Take A Pebble**, and **Lucky Man**. His acoustic & electric playing is spot on. So, why the Prog Vegas comment?

For starters, I don't really think **Take A Pebble**

suddenly needs 7 musicians and an "Esteban" sounding faux classical guitar break by, as Lake exclaims, "The talented young hands of Florian Opahle." **Farewell To Arms**

sounds like it is going to be followed by a PBS pledge break, offering an exclusive Greg Lake mug & umbrella with every \$75.00 pledge. Great songs, for the most part. Just waaaaay overdone, bloated arrangements. But now I know what Emerson, Manilow, & Palmer might have sounded like.

Les Rita Mitsouko - La Femme Trombone (Virgin/EMI)

As expected, this French duo's latest release is a fountain of styles and ideas. From electronic to world to pop to rock, **La Femme Trombone** reveals their mastery of all forms. Catherine Ringer cements her position as the finest living female vocalist on tracks like

the ethereal **Triton** and **1928** and Fred Chichin is spot-on as ever with a wide palette of guitar textures.

Les Rita Mitsouko continue to break new ground and move music into unexplored territories. I suppose you could tie them conveniently to the *RIO* movement or as distant bastard cousins to Zappa, The Residents, and/or Bowie, but why bother? Les Rita Mitsouko are their own unique animal. Inspiring. Funny. Universal. That's *it!* Universal works - the songs are all in French and I don't even understand the language, yet I sing along! How cool is that? An indispensable album.

Tony Levin Band - Double Espresso (Papa Bear Records)

"Double Espresso" is a 2 CD live document of Tony Levin & his all star band. Larry "Wires" Fast on keys; Jesse Gress on guitar; and Jerry Marotta on drums accompany the bassist extraordinaire. The 19 songs feature lots of TL solo material & several tasty covers.

The band are tight & spirited - bounding through aggressive takes of "Peter Gunn" and "Sleepless." For all the energy, pieces like "Belle" show a sensitivity to textures and mood. All the players here are stars in their own right, but there's no stuffy egoism on display - just fun. Having seen this band, I was struck by what a great time they were having, and "Double Espresso" reflects this. Sound quality is stellar, as is the packaging. As always, Tony Levin is a class act with a class release. If you don't already own this, get it!

Levinhurst - Perfect Life (Full Contact)

Levinhurst is a project featuring Cure keyboardist Lol Tolhurst. So why is it being reviewed in a progressive 'zine? Because it fits. The music is clearly rhythmic and accessible/catchy. Yet I am struck by the depth and exotic nature of Tolhurst's keyboard work.

I hear auras of "Exit" era Tangerine Dream and sounds that Kraftwerk would smile upon. Genuine metallic electronics. Vocalist Cindy Levinson adds comfortable trance-y vocals, and Dayton Borders throws in interesting *stuff* to the mix. The results are satisfyingly quirky electropop that keyboard aficionados will deconstruct with a grin. A very very nice surprise.

Jon Lord - Sarabande (Spitfire)

Jon Lord's various forays into combining classical music with rock are a mixed bag in terms of quality. 1976's "Sarabande" is the finest of the lot. Backed by a 4 piece band that includes a pre-Police Andy Summers and joined by the Philharmonica Hungarica Orchestra conducted by Eberhard Schoener, Lord delivers the goods track after track.

The beauty of "Aria" and "Pavane" - the lilting "Caprice" - there isn't a weak track here. If you only think of Jon Lord as the wonderfully rocking keyboardist in Deep Purple, check out this beautifully remastered CD. This was a great one on vinyl when I bought it in my teens and it sounds fresher than ever on CD - discover or rediscover this gem before it vanishes!

Maestoso - Grim (Eclectic Discs)

For those who may not be aware, Maestoso is a quartet featuring Barclay James Harvest keyboardist Woolly Wolstenholme. Wolstenholme weaves together elegant melodies, tons of mellotrons, and very British sounding folk prog. **Grim** is as smooth as a Werther's original candy - buttery, sweet, and tasty.

Wolstenholme's songs glow with timeless beauty. Listen to the fragile harmonies on **That's The Price You Pay**. The simple, delicate **Love Is....** Maestoso can punch your gut with equal force. Put on **Through A Storm** or **The Iceman Cometh**

if you have any doubts. Steve Broomhead's electric guitar buzzes with fuzz & wah, Kim Turner smacks the hell out of his kit, and Craig Fletcher is the bass player everyone should be talking about.

When I listen to **Grim**, I'm reminded of everything I ever loved about Barclay James Harvest, The Enid, & The Moody Blues. To get this stellar CD of stately classic prog in the days of American Idol winners & rap "artists" is nothing short of a blessing.

Marillion - Somewhere Else (MVD Audio)

Since the middle 90s, Marillion is a band that you can never call predictable. I've never been a fan of "Radiohead Marillion" albums like **Radiation**, **Marillion.com**, or **Anoraknophobia**. Lots of people love those albums, but for whatever reason, they don't resonate with me. **Somewhere Else**

does. There is a sort of fresh energy to the album, a "live" feel that is endearing. Steve Hogarth is in great voice, and this disc has the best drumming from Ian Mosley since **This Strange Engine**.

The Other Half, **The Wound**, **Faith**, and the title track rank among the band's best. The album has a nice flow to it, very well paced emotionally. Mark Kelly uses some fascinating textures, as does Steve Rothery. Pete Trewavas is good ol Pete - never ever a bad bass lick in the man, always melodic, always lots of movement in his lines. An album like this gives you faith in the future of the band. Chock full of ideas. I love it!

Marillion - Marbles Live (Intact Recordings)

This is basically audio taken from the **Marbles On The Road** DVD. It's a good representation of phase 3 Marillion. Phase 1: The Fish Years. Phase 2: **Season's End - This Strange Engine**. Phase 3: "modern" Marillion. The **Marbles** songs have a mostly mid tempo feel and simple, straight drumming with downbeat melodies.

Angelina and Fantastic Place

sound much stronger in a live context. Steve Hogarth's voice is much more to the front and Pete Trewavas' bass playing is more defined. **Don't Hurt Yourself** gains more energy as well.

What Marbles Live

drives home is the chief change over the years in Marillion. The progressive side of the band has ebbed to be replaced by a strong songwriting band. Ian Mosley's playing is more metronomic and economic. Mark Kelly and Hogarth offer more keyboard textures and less solos. Steve Rothery has limited his at one time wide range of guitar sounds to 3, perhaps 4. This is not in any way a knock, just an observation.

Marbles Live

has a dozen strong performances of a band solidly in charge of its destiny. The sound is superb, the package simple but nice. Solid Stuff.

Marillion - Script For A Jester's Tear (Sanctuary)

Out domestically at last, it's the Marillion album that started it all: "Script For A Jester's Tear." This 2 CD remastering is mighty! The bottom end is deep, rich and tight. The clarity is awesome - revealing the beauty of the mix.

The title track is more majestic than ever and still elicits chills. "Garden Party" has so very many layers uncovered, it is like hearing it for the first time. Every track benefits from the thoughtful remastering, shining in a new light. A mention must be made here of drummer Mick Pointer. Much has been said in regards to his ability and his subsequent sacking. Listening to this CD, Pointer fares quite well indeed. His rolls and textures are inspired - the man can look back with nothing but pride!

Disc 2 is a feast of bonus material. "Market Square Heroes," "Three Boats Down from The Candy," "Charting The Single," and the much requested "Grendel" are all present along with a few early demos. A truly wonderful job by all. Remastering and packaging are impeccable. "Script For A Jester's Tear" is an essential cornerstone of any serious prog collection.

Lucia Micarelli - Music From A Farther Room (143 Records / Reprise)

The violin can engage or irritate. In the hands of young wunderkind Lucia Micarelli it soothes and inspires. Micarelli made her mark in the Trans-Siberian Orchestra & with popster Josh Groban as a guest soloist. Still in her early 20s, her playing on **Music From A Farther Room** is mature beyond her years.

Her choice of songs is eclectic to say the least. David Bowie's **Lady Grinning Soul** is followed by Ravel's **String Quartet In F Major**. Rodgers & Hart, Sibelius & Queen also populate the disc. A standout track is the lovely traditional piece **She Is Like The Swallow**

with a delicate guest vocal by Leigh Nash that would give Sandy Denny shivers. Micarelli's playing is sensitive to each song: delicate when necessary, an angry swarm of bees when called for. **Music From A Farther Room** shows a player with

decades of great music ahead of her. The CD you need for your next dinner party.

Neal Morse - The TransAtlantic Demos (Radiant)

The word here is "insight." This CD gives a fascinating inside look into the creative process. Morse's demos range from quickie cassette pieces to full blown pieces that are 99% there. The demos include pieces from both TransAtlantic studio albums.

Morse throws out melodies like a progressive Paul McCartney all across this CD. The demos also show what a kickass bass player the man is. Even in this relatively raw format, pieces like "We All Need Some Light" just shine. Great tunes are great tunes. Revealing liner notes round out this stellar package.

Neal Morse - Testimony (Radiant / Metal Blade)

When Neal Morse announced he was leaving Spock's Beard to explore his faith, I was just a wee bit worried. Christian music more often than not becomes cloying in it's "up with people" happy happy feel. I should have known better. "Testimony" is a fantastic work. It's a statement without preaching. A sort of musical diary taking the listener through Morse's heart and soul as he traveled a path to his faith.

Lovely moments like "The Land Of Beginning Again" and "Sleeping Jesus" blend with rockers like "The Prince Of The Power Of The Air." Guests spots by Kerry Livgren & Mike Portnoy add to the excitement. Morse is, as always, a melody machine and "Testimony" bursts with themes and hummable lines. It's Christian Prog that never gets treacly. It's Prog with a Christian bent. Whatever you want to term it, be sure to buy it - 'cos bottom line: it's great!

Neal Morse - It's Not Too Late (Ear Candy)

Listeners looking for a Spock's Beard-ish neo prog CD will be mighty disappointed in this one. It's a very pop/rock outing. But it's a brilliant one. Morse has always been a songwriter first, and that gift is showcased well on "It's Not Too Late." 13 songs, all under 7 min each, with nary an "epic" length piece in sight. This reminds me of those great Todd Rundgren albums of the early 70s bursting with great little personal sonic gems.

It's hard to pick favorites when every song on here is great. "The Eyes Of The World (George's Song)," "The Change," "The Wind + The Rain," and the lovely "Broken Homes" come quickly to mind. This CD goes from strength to strength. It's most definitely a crossover CD in that it's a prog act tackling the pop market. But it's a no-compromise affair and is worth the time & the dime! You truly can't miss with this one.

Nektar - Recycled (Eclectic Discs)

This is a sort of a fan's dream remaster. You not only get "Recycled" beautifully remastered, you also get the entire album again, in the original, unreleased mix by Beatles stalwart Geoff Emerick. It allows you to sort of A/B the 2 versions. It's not even close, let me tell you. Emerick's mix was unreleased for a reason.

While I surely respect Emerick's great work with the Fab Four, he clearly just didn't get what Nektar was about, or the "Recycled" concept. His mix lacks impact. "Recycled" is an album with punch, with balls. Having said that, it *is* fascinating to hear different elements & instruments pop up in the mix.

Getting back to the mix we all know and love. It shines in a way it never has in the past. It has punch, a tight, clear bottom end, and an overall sparkle that the old Bellaphon CD lacked. Add to that great liner notes and photos, and the result is a totally superior package.

Nektar - Down To Earth (Eclectic Discs)

A progressive album about the...circus? Huh? You're kidding! That's what I thought back in the day. How was I to know it'd be my favorite Nektar album? Song after killer song are a delicious treat for the ears. "Astral Man," "That's Life," "Fidgety Queen" - come ON!! Immaculate stuff. Not to forget the fascinating spoken elephant facts on the wonderful "Nelly The Elephant." "Down To Earth" fits between "Remember The Future" and "Recycled," but is, in its way, a more mature album than either. The writing is top notch on every track. 100% filler free.

As I've come to expect from Eclectic, the remaster is gorgeous. Roye Albrighton's guitars shimmer. The bottom end is solid. Great bonus tracks to boot. I just might even prefer the alternate "Nelly The Elephant" to the original. Strike up the band, it's time for Astral Man!

Nektar - Sunday Night At The London Roundhouse (Dream Nebula Recordings / Eclectic Discs)

You are taken into a room. There is a comfortable chair & your preferred beverage. A CD is put into a player. Just before play is pushed, you are told that it is one of your favorite albums, only now it's even better. Is this possible? As the music plays, you realize that indeed it is! Nektar's classic **Sunday Night At The London Roundhouse** has been remastered, expanded, and slightly reinterpreted. The original single disc was a combination of live tracks and live in the studio jams. The studio jams will evidently be added onto one of the other Nektar remasters. This set is now the entire Roundhouse concert from 11/25/73 spread over 2 discs.

This time "A Day In The Life Of A Preacher" doesn't fade out mid-jam. What can I say? "King Of Twilight" is like a hammer made of sound. "Odyssey (Ron's On)" shows the jazzier side of Nektar. "Cast Your Fate" is, well, unbelievable. The clarity & depth of this live recording is magical. Eclectic has done it yet again. An absolutely essential part of your collection. Buy 4 copies: 1 for home, 1 for car, & 2 to hoard just because!

Nektar - Remember The Future (Bellaphon/Bacillus)

A great wrong has at last been righted. When this album was released on CD some years ago, Roye Albrighton's shimmering guitars were buried in the mix, leaving listeners frustrated and helpless. This travesty has been rectified at last. Albrighton himself had a hand in the remastering process and "Remember The Future" once more shines like a radiant jewel.

An essential of any prog collection, few recall that this 1973 release cracked the US top 20, peaking at #13 in the charts - a feat unheard of nowadays for a straight prog album. You can see why. Full of breathtaking guitars and packed with melody, it's a prog album even a non-prog listener can embrace. The remaster has a depth and dimensionality to it that is a treat to the ear. After years of sonic dust and smudges of careless pressing, this conceptual masterwork is the new car on the lot - sleek, fast & shiny. Without reservation, worth the wait!

Omni - Paint By Numbers (no label info)

The first word that comes to mind is "muscular." This guitar/bass/drums trio have a ferocious depth to their sound. While the vocals are soft, almost trance-like, the accompanying music lulls then pounds fiercely.

Omni are a fresh young trio that slides nicely between Porcupine Tree & Tool. The playing is all first rate with drummer Will Andrews grabbing the ear immediately with his hyperkinetic percussive flourishes. Songs like "Release," "Inward," and "Porcelain" balance dark and light to fascinating effect, taking the listener on an audio journey.

The production by the band and Ronan Chris Murphy is clean and precise - lean with very few embellishments. If this CD is any indication, Omni have a bright future ahead!

Alan Parsons - A Valid Path (Artemis)

With "A Valid Path," Alan Parsons dips his toe into the world of electronica with by and large pleasing results. If you're used to the lush sounds usually associated with Parsons, you'll find this CD a bit harder edged. Lots of sequencers, buzzes, beeps, and loops all over this CD. Not a bad place to be, actually. I like the fact that I can't just keep Parsons in 1 box now.

David Gilmour adds some fine guitar to "Return To Tunguska," lifting the piece significantly. "We Play The Game" is a collaboration between Parsons and electronicameisters The Crystal Method - an outstanding track! Alan's son Jeremy helps reinterpret a few Parsons classics, and Monty Python alumnus John Cleese lends his voice to "Chomolungma." There are a few pieces that get a bit repetitive, but that's a minor flaw on a nice lil adventure. Good stuff!

Phideaux - Domsday Afternoon (Bloodfish Music)

Interesting how things conspire, if you will. Pieces fall together seemingly randomly. The other day, the line "This is much too good for the people" from the Anthony Phillips song **Um & Aargh** was a topic of discussion. A few days before I was

contemplating long form apocalyptic pieces like Genesis' **Supper's Ready** and the first 2 **Robot Woman** albums by Mother Gong. Today, this CD showed up in my post office box. **Doomsday Afternoon** is a long form apocalyptic piece much too good to have ever been released on a major label.

The album is a simple, yet complex story driven by solid piano and strong vocals. Everything about it makes sense. Spare in spots, lush in others. All serve the piece. I can draw comparisons in little parts to Pink Floyd, Beatles, Camel, and Oasis. Another pair of ears may hear none of those. It is derivative of nothing, most definitely its own animal. Sadly lovely, the album filled me with emotion. I cannot recommend this album enough. I felt like I was listening in on a quiet piece of genius. Own this.

Pinnacle - A Man's Reach (EverythingToExcess Productions)

I was on line to get tickets for NEARFest 2004. I had been talking on & off to the guy behind me in line - a drummer named Greg Jones. He gave me this CD EP of his band & I was worried. He's a great guy & what if the CD wasn't good? No matter what, I'm 100% straight up in all my reviews! Thankfully, this is a pretty damned good lil CD!

Pinnacle is a bass/guitar/drums trio playing fierce prog fusion. Jones & his cohorts Karl Eisenhart on guitar & Bill Fox on bass are excellent players. They have the playing chops, but more importantly, they have the writing chops to boot. "Unsung Hero" (Jones' nod to Steve Morse) and "Lifeboat" are solid stuff and there's even a fun version of Jethro Tull's "Minstrel In The Gallery" thrown in for good measure. Tighten up the vocals a bit & this is a trio to contend with! A great beginning!

Steven Seagal & Thunderbox - Mojo Priest (Steamroller)

Yes, I know it's not a progressive album, but it piqued my interest. Yes, it's Steven Seagal, the actor. I promised myself to listen with open ears. I can honestly say... this is quite an ass kicking blues album. Seagal has a relaxed, smoky voice well suited to the blues, and he plays a wicked guitar.

Seagal chose his guests wisely. Ruth Brown, Pine Top Perkins, James Cotton, Bo Diddley - all stars in their own right. **Mojo Priest** is a mix of originals and blues standards. Solid versions of **Hoochie Koochie Man**, **Dust My Broom**, and **Red Rooster** are swampy and gutsy. **Gunfire In A Juke Joint**, **Talk To My Ass**, and **BBQ** fit right in with the standards with bits of wry humor to boot.

I don't quite know what I expected going in. I'll tell you what I came away with. This guy can play a fine guitar! Seagal has a bunch of smokin' licks in his fingers. He also knows his blues. **Mojo Priest** is a hot chili pepper that's a great CD to pump up at your next party or BBQ. Hot stuff!

Spiraling - Transmitter (Brizmuzik)

A few years back, I saw Yes on their orchestral tour. On keyboards was a positively demonic player named Tom Brislin who handled Wakeman's & Moraz's parts as if they were child's play. In 2003, I saw Brislin fit in with equal ease with Camel. What a player! Then I heard that he had his own band called Spiraling. What would it sound like? Let me tell you.

"Transmitter," from Spiraling is ultra solid smart pop/rock with exotic flourishes here and there. The sound to me fits in with the Beatles / XTC / Split Enz / Crowded House - witty, wily pop full of hooks and riffs. Brislin has a comfortable vocal style that serves songs like "The Girl On Top (Of The Piano)" and the wonderful "(I Don't Want To) Grow Up." The title track is driven by a great, infectious synth riff that bubbles and blurs along. If you're looking to see 140 mph arpeggios, look elsewhere. If you want songs you'll keep singing, get this one!

Split Enz - See Ya 'Round (Warner / Mushroom)

This, the final Split Enz studio album, is very much the bridge from Enz to Crowded House. By this point Tim Finn had moved on and younger brother Neil assumed the helm. Future Crowded House drummer Paul Hester made his debut in Enz on this release as well. **See Ya 'Round** is a breezy collection of songs - less compelling than **Time And Tide** or **Corroboree**, but still full of nice tunes like **Years Go By**, **Voices**, and **I Walk Away**.

The remaster is bright, shiny, & well balanced with a wonderfully clean and strong bottom end. **Next Exit**, a great Tim Finn composition that actually fits between **Time And Tide** and **Conflicting Emotions** chronologically, is included as a bonus track. All the Split Enz Australian remasters are top notch and well worth searching out. Release these in the USA!!

Spock's Beard - Feel Euphoria (InsideOut America)

Forget the very crappy cover - this is a great disc. "Feel Euphoria" is the first post-Neal Morse outing with Nick D'Virgilio stepping from behind the drum kit to assume lead vocals. The Beard are a touch less poppy & a touch more rocky now. Ryo Okumoto is the sole keyboardist now, and handles the transition beautifully.

"East of Eden, West of Memphis" and the simple but gorgeous "Shining Star" are as strong as any in Beard's history. The "epic" tune - "A Guy Named Sid" is perhaps not the strongest piece of the set (although that was fabulous live!) but that's a minor quibble. Whatever bits of quirkiness they lost in Neal Morse, they gained unity and purpose. Spock's Beard are still alive and well and dare I say - prospering!

Spock's Beard - Don't Try This At Home (Radiant/Metal Blade)

Spock's Beard are always put forward as new successors to the progressive throne: the next Yes or Genesis. Listening to this live disc shows why, but also shows an equal influence of the Beatles in terms of melodic composition & vocal harmonies.

Leader Neal Morse and bandmates are all players of the first order. "Day For Night," "Mouth of Madness," and "The Healing Colors of Sound" are chock full of chops, but grounded in strong composition. Where Spock's Beard is perhaps different from many prog bands is that their songs are bursting with positive energy. No doom and gloom here.

Speaking of chops - what a band! Neal Morse and Ryo Okumoto turn in excellent, tasty key work. Brother Alan Morse is a tight, melodic guitarist; and the rhythm section of bassist Dave Meros and drummer Nick D'Virgilio are totally locked in. "Don't Try This at Home" is a killer live document. Performances and sound quality are flawless. Own it now!

Steely Dan - Everything Must Go (Reprise)

This is how I know I can be a snob, I guess. I was always a huge Steely Dan fan. To this day I adore "Pretzel Logic," "Katy Lied," and "Royal Scam" as albums of wry, witty pop with a touch of jazz. By "Aja" they were dipping their toes deeper into the jazz waters and way slick production and by "Gaucho" they lost me. They certainly haven't won me back with "Everything Must Go."

Fagen & Becker have lost none of their chops, nor their songwriting skills. Songs like "The Last Mall" and "Green Book" are full of slick hooks and well crafted lyrics. I've just heard them do all this before and do it much better. There is no challenge here. Creamy smooth peanut butter rather than the acidic wit and topsy turvy melodies I grew to love by these guys. Let me be honest, though. If this was a CD by a new no name band, I'd find much to celebrate. With the caliber of Fagen & Becker, this is like Spencer Tracy acting in an episode of "Friends." They *can* and *should* do much, much better.

StereoKimono - Primosfera (Immaginifica)

How's this for an odd combination?: King Crimson meets Passport. That's the vibe I get with this Italian trio. Angular at times, Eurojazzy at others. The band define their music as "Psychophonic Oblique Rock." I must admit, it's a very good feeling. Antonio Severi wields a mean guitar, laying down Strat sounding, almost Steve Hackett circa "Cured" figures & contrasting them with harsh bursts of chainsaw guitar. Bassist Alessandro Vittorio is very solid, with rubbery lines ala Colin Bass, and percussionist Cristina Atzori is tastefully tight.

"Rosso Di Luna" and "Onda Beta" shine, but there's really no bum tunes here at all. PFM drummer Franz Di Cioccio did a wonderful job on the production end. This is the sort of instrumental music I can listen to over & over and just never tire of. Hackett, Camel & Moerlen-era Gong fans, give this one a look!

Stratospheerius - Headspace (Stratospheerius)

In my head, there are times I listen to a piece of music and subdivide the beat, then subdivide the subdivisions, trying to look at rhythms in different ways. I was in that sort of mood listening to this CD. The song **Old Ghosts** is a good example. Vocal rhythm, bass accents, guitar groove, drum groove, percussion, and violin all dividing the rhythm in their own ways yet united at the same time. A funky one, that tune. **Sold Out** is full of exciting changes - Jean Luc Ponty and Chick Corea gig with the Dregs is what it reminds me of.

Headspace

is a cranker of an album, with Joe Deninson showing some vocal chops in addition to his Herculean violin skills. Drummer Lucianna Padmore, bassist Bob Bowen, & guitarist Mack Price play baffling beats, power passages, and some sweet grooves. Guest artist Benny Koonjevsky adds great percussion as well - a sort of modern day Morris Pert. A high voltage cover of the Police's **Driven To Tears**

is a welcome addition to this wonderful jazz / rock / fusion / world disc. A massive energy generator of ideas. I needed this.

Strawbs - From The Witchwood (A&M)

Why don't albums sound like this anymore? Was the magic formula lost? Heavenly layers of acoustic guitars and keyboards with vocals from another time backed by stately bass and tasteful drums. Is that too much to ask for?

The year was 1971, and the Strawbs were Dave Cousins, Tony Hooper, Richard Hudson, John Ford, and Rick Wakeman. Cousins was at his poetic best on pieces like "A Glimpse Of Heaven" and "The Hangman And The Papist." Wakeman would soon leave to join Yes, but for the moment added his magic to an already heady mix of voices and instruments.

"From The Witchwood" benefits nicely from a lovely, honest remastering. Rich is the word that comes to mind. No sonic surprises, really, and none were necessary. The mix feels like 1971. Trippy and colorful. "Keep The Devil Outside" was added as a bonus track and is a sort of after dinner mint to one of the Strawbs' most cohesive masterpieces, restored lovingly to it's deserved glory.

Tangerine Dream - Sydney - February 22nd 1982 (TDC/Bootmoon)

Tangerine Dream can run hot and cold. For every slice of brilliance, there is much that falls flat. This official 2 CD bootleg, part of the "Bootmoon" series, is one of the slices of brilliance. It features one of the most consistent line-ups of the band: Edgar Froese, Christopher Franke, & Johannes Schmoelling (not that you would find that information anywhere on the frustrating liner notes of the digipak!).

Pieces like "White Eagle," "Choronzon," "Force Maeure," and an excerpt from "Logos" sound positively otherworldly. The sound quality hovers between a great boot & a pro release - all in all very sonically satisfying. Hopefully Froese listened closely to these recordings when he tweaked their sound and will be re-inspired to record new TD music that matters! Til then, we have this gem to remember how great this band CAN be!

Toyah - The Safari Records Singles Collection Part 2: 1981-83 (Cherry Red Records)

If part 1 showed an artist's growing pains like a flower reaching from punk rock to pop rock, part 2 shows a coming of age. Toyah's confidence brings maturity and range to balance out raw energy and enthusiasm. **I Want To Be Free**, one of her signature songs, opens the disc on a bright popish note. The near perfect **Thunder In The Mountains** is here as well. Around this time, Simon Phillips joined the Toyah band on drums, adding power to **Warrior Rock, Brave New World**, and others.

Street Addict, with it's sleepy bass line is a standout, as its manic companion **Voodoo Doll**. If there's a caveat, it's the puzzling omission of **Stand Proud**, a free flexi included with early pressings of the **Four More From Toyah EP**. At 11 songs, it's still a packed disc. For reasons that elude me, Toyah is still an unknown quantity here in the States. Perhaps these beautifully remastered packages from Cherry Red will help recruit a few new Toyah fanatics on these shores!

Toyah - The Safari Records Singles Collection Part 1: 1979-81 (Cherry Red Records)

Toyah Ann Willcox has certainly had a varied musical career - from punk to pop to prog to dance/trance and many points between. The 19 song disc opens with the very experimental "Victims Of The Riddle" featuring Toyah's rubber band vocals over some fairly bizarre synth work. It sets the stage for Toyah's career - music that's fascinating but far from comfortable. Odd, creepy, moving, funny, but almost never soothing. "IEYA" is a short horror movie of sound. "Fear the beast!" she sings. Indeed. "War Boys" kicks major colon with a driving bass/drum riff. So does "Tribal Look." For 2 short years, you can see the growth track to track in terms of writing & vocals. Raw enthusiasm gains polish & focus quickly.

If Safari was known for 1 thing, it was the crappiness of their pressings. This Cherry Red CD brings a new life and depth to the material. I never knew "The Helium Song" could sound this fine! The booklet has repros of all the singles sleeves, a discography, and well researched notes with vital input from Toyah herself. Can't wait for part 2!

TransAtlantic - Bridge Across Forever (Radiant/Metal Blade)

The sophomore release from the prog superstar quartet of Neal Morse (Spock's Beard), Roine Stolt (Flower Kings), Pete Trewavas (Marillion), and Mike Portnoy (Dream Theatre). On this outing, the band are a bit more focused, yet looser as well - the feel is that they were more comfortable with each other. "Suite Charlotte Pike" starts out jammy but quickly gets very tight with Beatlesque harmonies and riffs galore.

There are 4 songs served up here, and all but the title track intertwine in some way. A bit of "Duel With The Devil" is reprised in "Suite Charlotte Pike," and a section of "Suite Charlotte Pike" turns up in "Stranger In Your Soul." While Marillion head ever towards the mainstream and eschew adventurous music in an attempt to be Radiohead, Trewavas turns in some of his most complex, aggressive bass playing ever. Portnoy shows admirable restraint and allows the melody twins - Morse & Stolt - to shine uncluttered. What started out as a project seems to be actually becoming a band. A very solid prog effort. Are Yes listening?

Transatlantic - STMP:E (Radiant/Metal Blade

What an assemblage! Roine Stolt on guitar from the Flower Kings. Pete Trewavas on bass from Marillion. Neal Morse from Spock's Beard on keys, and Dream Theater's Mike Portnoy on drums. Unlike many "jammy" prog super projects that have been floating around, this is very much a song-based disc.

Clocking in at just shy of 31 minutes, "All of the Above" opens the disc. Bursting with melody and ultra-fine musicianship, the piece flies by like a 3 minute pop ditty! While most lead vocals are handled by Morse, all 4 members sing - often in wonderful harmony as on "We All Need Some Light" - an acoustic-based piece penned by Morse.

The quirky/funky "Mystery Train" is next with tasty breaks by all and a lyric that relates the adventures of putting the band & album together. Stolt takes center stage on the Beatle-esque piece of psychedelia "My New World." The album closes with a 17-min-plus cover of Procol Harum's "In Held (Twas) In I." Transatlantic manage to capture elements of classic prog in terms of richness and color, while keeping the feel totally modern. This is not a time piece. Transatlantic is absolutely NOW!

Trespass - In Haze Of Time (Musea)

I'm a huge fan of the old Charisma label. Not only was it the home to Genesis, The Nice, & Van Der Graaf Generator - but to Audience, Capability Brown, Rare Bird, and many other notable acts. Trespass would fit in well amongst these acts. This Jerusalem-based trio play solid "old school" prog with a joyous orchestral feel and tinges of jazz.

"In Haze Of Time" has a wonderful "live" quality to it. The music breathes and flows beautifully. This is a very young band, but quite mature in a compositional sense. I'll stack songs like "Creatures Of The Night" and the title track up against any of the current prog crop!

If it sounds like I'm gushing, it's because I am. This CD caught my ear from the first listen and only gets stronger as time passes. Truly worth hunting down, folks!

The Tubes - Now (Acadia / Evangeline)

The great overlooked 3rd studio album by the Tubes on CD at last! Caught between 2 powerhouse albums (**Young And Rich & Remote Control**) Now

never quite got its due. Listening to this 1977 disc years later, it's hard to understand why. "Smoke (La Vie En Fumer)," "God-Bird-Change," "This Town," and "You're No Fun," not to mention a staggering cover of Captain Beefheart's "My Head Is My Only House Unless It Rains" are all as strong as any of the very best of their catalog. In retrospect, it may just have been timing. These things happen.

This remaster is not perfect but not bad either. If I want to nitpick, I'd like the mids and highs a bit cleaner. Part of me suspects this may have been mastered off of vinyl, but I can't swear to it. If it is, it's a nice job. Great liner notes by producer John Anthony. Worth tracking down.

Tunnels - Progressivity (Buckyball Records)

With forearms like Popeye, bassist Percy Jones has thrilled my ears since I heard the first Brand X album in the mid-70s. His ferocious yet melodic playing has never failed to inspire. *Tunnels* is his latest venture: a trio with Jones, vibesman Marc Wagon & drummer Frank Katz. If you ever enjoyed Brand X, you will love this CD. Prog jazz with lots of rhythmic shifts & deft solos in abundance.

Wagon has his vibes MIDIed out, so they sound like keyboards. Brand X guitarist John Goodsall guests on several tracks adding lightning licks to the mix. Some of the more recent Brand X & Percy Jones stuff has been a bit stiff for my tastes, but "Progressivity" is a leap back to quality compositions. A true faith restorer!

12 Girls Band - Shanghai (Manhattan Records / EMI)

More pleasantry from the 13 girls of 12 Girls Band. **Shanghai** gives the listener 12 new studio tracks as well as 2 live ones. It's definitely smooth listening with easy on the ears melodies. What separates this music from John Tesh or Yanni is taste. Smooth, as I said, but not sappy. Easy but not E Z. There is a quality to the work that lifts it high above the majority of commercial new age and world music.

Fragile, Flowers And Juveniles, and **Shining Energy** have a lyrical quality to them, almost like little sound poems. The only faltering element to these ears was **My Heart Will Go On**, the sappy theme from the movie *Titanic*. Nothing can save the pomposity of the piece. But, hey - 13 out of 14 is a fine average for any album! The 13 12 girls are all fabulous musicians, playing traditional Chinese instruments with amazing precision. Such a nice listen!

12 Girls Band - Eastern Energy (Platia Entertainment)

Here in the States a guy decided to create a band & he came up with New Kids On The Block: a bunch of low talent kids dancing & singing pop fluff for preteens. A man in China had a similar thought & devised 12 Girls Band: a dozen incredibly talented women playing neo-classical & world music on traditional Chinese instruments. My ears like his idea much better!

These powerhouses can really play! On pieces like **Forbidden City** and **Alamuhan** sing with shimmering melodies. The songs are slick but not cloying. It's oddly refreshing to hear Eastern music presented this way. **Eastern Energy** also includes a free DVD with 25 min of live performances plus a nice lil "get to know the band" segment and a concept video. Fans of Enya and the exotic side of Steve Hackett will enjoy this one quite a bit.

Utopia - Bootleg Series Vol.2 KSAN 95FM Live '79 (Sanctuary)

Volume 2 in a series of official bootlegs by Todd Rundgren. This 1979 concert shows Utopia at the peak of their powers. The rhythm section of John "Willie" Wilcox on drums and Kasim Sulton on bass are nothing short of outstanding. Keyboardist Roger Powell & the aforementioned Rundgren on guitar turn in stunning solos.

The vocals don't exactly suck either. Neither do the songs. "Abandon City," "The Wheel," and "Can We Still Be Friends" all get superb readings. If there's a breakout amongst the gems, it just may be "The Seven Rays" with its amazing, intense instrumental passages building to a fierce climax.

The classic wry Rundgren humor shows up throughout the 13 selections. The sound quality is delicious. When I was a teen, I loved tuning into my favorite FM station and listening to a hook up from some club bringing me a band giving their all. This CD captures that feeling wonderfully. It's a lovely little journey.

Various Artists - Buddha Bar IV (George V Records)

A double CD with a purpose: to relax. The Buddha Bar series are CDs designed to serve as background music for dinner, drinks, & making out. Volume IV is mixed by David Visan and features a diverse selection of World music artists embracing styles from Latin to Middle Eastern.

The flow between tracks is seamless and never breaks the mood. Relaxing but nonetheless tasty, songs by Nitin Sawhney, Agricantus, Gotan Project, and others blend flawlessly under the guidance of David Visan. If you are new to World music, here's a great starting point. The same holds true if you're interested in opening up the ears of friends to something other than top 40. Beautiful, relaxing, & utterly painless, Buddha Bar IV hits the mark. More, please!

The Watch - Vacuum (Lizard)

Solid neoprogr from Italy in the Arena/Pallas/Galahad vein with a heavy early Genesis influence. I'm loving the drums & bass, and the keyboard textures catch my attention. Some of the transitions in the songs take a bit of adjusting to, but that's minor. Vocalist Simone Rossetti has a very pleasant, capable voice that I grew comfortable with quickly. Keyboardist Sergio Taglioni is fabulous, painting colors uniquely his own.

Vacuum has much to offer. **Wonderland**

is an especially nice piece, featuring great drumming from Roberto Leoni. Nice to hear a band discovering its own sound. The Watch have pepped my ears up with this fine release. They pick up the slack that Twin Age left behind. Very European sounding, lush with tons of energy and a theatrical feel. Gotta love it!

Carl Weingarten - Hand In The Sand : A Collection 1990-2004 (Multiphase Records)

"Machine Head" from Deep Purple. "Yes Album" from Yes. "Blow By Blow" from Jeff Beck. Some albums transcend genres and find their way into a broad variety of listener's collections. This CD is worthy of that sort of recognition. Carl Weingarten plays slide guitar and dobro with maturity and confidence. All 16 songs on this impressive collection are bursting with melodies, textures, and soothingly exotic flavors.

Weingarten's compositions often find him accompanied by bass and percussion - tasteful but never overwhelming. The 16 instrumentals range from world to proggish to jazz to pop to undefinable. If you enjoy the California Guitar Trio, you will do handflips for Weingarten. I truly can't imagine any music lover not adoring this one. The perfect soundtrack to your next dream.

Ann Wilson - Hope & Glory (Zoe / Rounder)

An interesting concept. **Hope & Glory**

is 11 covers & 1 original, and predominantly duets. The result is a bit of a mixed bag, musically. Lucinda Williams' **Jackson**, for example, with great harmony vocals by k.d. lang and a killer arrangements is everything you'd hope it would be and then some! Ann Wilson's duet with Wynonna on **We Gotta Get Out Of This Place** suffers a lack of punch and, to be honest, Wynonna. Wynonna has the vocal power of a vacuum cleaner, while Wilson is a vocal tornado. Rufus Wainwright's appearance on **A Hard Rain's A Gonna Fall** does nothing for me and detracts from an otherwise fine version of the Dylan classic.

Thankfully, the great far outweighs the average. The duet with Elton John on **Where To Now St Peter?** has the best vocal Sir Reggie has delivered in over a decade. **Darkness, Darkness** with sister Nancy feels like the Lovemongers, which is a great thing. Gretchen Wilson is a nice fit on a fun take of **Bad Moon Rising**. Thoughtful, inventive reworkings of **Goodbye Blue Sky** and **Immigrant Song** are risky and rewarding. **Get Together** delivers the goods in a way that makes you fall in love with Wilson's voice the way you did when you first heard **Dreamboat Annie**. The sole original, **Little Problems, Little Lies** is a fabulous song with Wilson caressing the vocal on a sad little war story.

Ann Wilson's vocals are utter perfection on each and every number. Her voice is a clinic for singers everywhere. Former FM violinist Ben Mink's production on **Hope & Glory** is layered but clean - accompanying but never burying Wilson's voice. A few odd choices keep this from being a perfect album, but having said that, it's pretty damned fine!

Wishbone Ash - Clan Destiny (Eagle / Talking Elephant)

I first became aware of Wishbone Ash around 1974 with such classic Ash tunes as **Phoenix, Jailbait, Vas Dis, Pilgrimage, Warrior & Throw Down The Sword**. Smooth vocals and twin guitars. Over 30 years later, not much has changed except the lineup. At this point, only guitarist / vocalist Andy Powell has stuck around, joined by guitarist Muddy Manninen, bassist Bob Skeat, and drummer Ray Weston.

The Ash sound is much the same on songs like **Eyes Wide Open, Loose Change**, and the lovely **Surfing A Slow Wave**. Powell and Manninen play tightly locked harmonies backed by unadorned but precise rhythms courtesy of Skeat and Weston.

Clan Destiny shows Wishbone Ash to be very much alive and kicking. Nothing here to replace the glory of the **Pilgrimage**

or **Argus** albums, but that's an order few can fill! Several nice tunes including the butt kicking **Slime Time** should make fine additions to their live set. Nice.

Wobbler - Hinterland (The Laser's Edge)

Wobbler are one of those bands being touted as the next big thing. After listening to **Hinterland** it's easy to see why. Hardcore prog all the way served up straight from the Netherlands. A million mellotrons and keys, acoustic & electric guitars, and herky-jerky rhythms. Squire-y bass and almost overstuffed with melodies. This is a great eclair of a CD - sweet, creamy, airy. Long dreamy compositions with breathy vocals and "bits" reminiscent of Genesis, Yes, Camel, Gentle Giant, Tull, Caravan, and Renaissance.

Hinterland

is a love letter to progressive music. There is no attempt to stray from formula. That's not a bad thing, by the way. Different for the sake of different can suck at times. This is not fan club stuff like "original" bands that are really just sideways Rush or King Crimson. Wobbler do not imitate - it's more about inspiration and springboards. The compositions are strikingly original yet use an aural palette that fits perfectly in the classic prog genre. This CD is a sort of Godsend to progressive music. Unfiltered, with no commercial concerns. Find out why folks are talking!

Yes - Live At Montreux 2003 (Eagle Records)

Yes have an excellent track record of live releases, with gems like **Yessongs**, **Yesshows**, and **Keys To Ascension**. **Live At Montreux 2003**

continues the tradition. This double set, featuring the prime Anderson / Squire / Howe / Wakeman / White line up kicks ass from start to finish. From the first notes of **Siberian Khattru** to the applause fading after **Roundabout** and everything in between, this is a remarkably passionate concert.

Anderson, Squire, & White are pretty much always solid, so the quality of a Yes gig tends to depend on how *on* Steve Howe or Rick Wakeman are. In the case of this show, they are in fine fettle. Listen to both on **South Side Of The Sky** as they turn in inspired performances. The set is a good mix with numbers like **Heart Of The Sunrise**, **Don't Kill The Whale**, and perhaps the finest live version of **Awaken** you will ever hear.

Sound quality is awesome. Package is simple but nice. Very few bells and whistles, just great tunes. DVD of this performance is one of Yes' very best. Highest possible recommendation.

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