

## DPRP - Dutch Progressive Rock Page

### Caamora - She

**CD 1:** Act 1 Overture (6:12), Scene 1: The Storm (4:31), The Veil (4:59), Covenant Of Faith (3:19), Rescue (5:04), Scene 2: The Lost City (1:57), The Bonding (5:25), Ambush (5:22), Scene 3: Judgement (5:27), History (5:36), Scene 4: Confrontation (6:16), Vigil (4:50), Scene 5: Shadows (7:20)

**CD 2:** Act 2 Scene 1: Fire Dance (9:56), Scene 2: Cursed (4:51), Closer (2:57), Disbelief (1:11), Murder (4:03), The Eleventh Hour (5:10), Scene 3: Resting Place (6:14), The Sands Of Time (4:18), Scene 4: Embrace The Fire (3:35), The Night Before (3:55), Scene 5: The Fire Of Life (10:12)

As someone that makes a point of never buying an album that's advertised on TV you could say I have an aversion to sales hype. I was therefore understandably sceptical when a fanfare of publicity announced the release of **Caamora's** 'Rock Opera' *She*. Two years in the making it was officially premiered in Katowice, Poland on 31st October 2007 with an extravagant stage show that was recorded for DVD. The album has just now been launched and is available in virtually every conceivable format. Depending upon your preference (and pocket) the options include (takes a deep breath) a double CD studio album, a double CD digipack with a bonus track, a triple vinyl album with bonus track, a live DVD, a DVD digipack that includes a double live CD, and finally a box set that includes the double studio CD, the double live CD, the live DVD and a bonus DVD. My review copy arrived in the most modest of these formats, the studio album minus the bonus track. Oh, and I almost forgot there is also an EP available headed by the song *Embrace*.

The concepts creator's are Polish vocalist Agnieszka Swita and UK keyboardist Clive Nolan who teamed up after meeting in England in February 2005. Clive is of course better known for his work with Arena, Pendragon and Shadowland. As Caamora they have two previous EP's to their credit, [Closer](#) from 2006 and *Walk On Water* released in 2007, both of which provide tasters for this album. The literary amongst you will be aware that *She* is based on H. Rider Haggard's classic adventure story of the same name. I've never read the book myself but I do remember being taken by my parents to see

the 1965 film version which starred a very curvaceous Ursula Andress in the title role of Ayesha. Unsurprisingly Agnieszka plays this part with the other principles sung by Clive (Leo), Alan Reed (Holly) and Christina Booth (Ustane). Alan and Christina of course need no introduction being familiar as the lead vocalists with Pallas and Magenta respectively. The backing band also features an impressive list of names including Mark Westwood (guitars), John Jowitt (basses), Scott Higham (drums and percussion), Alaster Bentley (oboe), Mark Kane (horn) and Hugh McDowell (cello). Clive of course supplies the keyboards and is responsible for the music, lyrics, orchestrations and production.

As befits the story this is prog on a grand scale from the sweeping and symphonic *Overture* to the powerful and climactic *The Fire Of Life*. In between there is not one single disappointing track in the entire set. A tympani roll and a gong crash announce the *Overture* with its strident brass and swirling strings. **Danny Elfman's** gothic theme for the 1989 Batman movie seems to be an obvious influence here. It provides a perfect backdrop for Agnieszka's theatrical vocal style as the ruthless and immortal Queen Ayesha with powerful support from the massed voice choir. It's not all elaborate orchestrations however as exemplified by the fast and muscular proggy guitars that add a touch of **Neal Morse** to the *The Storm*. This song introduces Clive and Alan's characters two Victorian travellers, and joined by Agnieszka they deliver excellent and complex three-part harmonies. It's Christina's chance to shine taking the lead for *Rescue* and *The Bonding* which benefit from her commanding performance. Both songs feature infectious vocal hooks propelled by powerful, almost tribal drumming.

Alan comes into his own during *History*, a gloriously melodic mid-tempo song. A mellow synth break paves the way for a satisfying conclusion with the choir adding their weight behind Alan's uplifting choral refrain. *Confrontation* is a key song as Ayesha and Ustane clash over their shared love for Leo. Starting out as a reflective love song from Christina, it's interrupted by Agnieszka who will develop the same song herself in the delicate *Vigil* that follows. Staying with *Confrontation*, the mood becomes defiant with dramatic vocal exchanges between the two female leads against a backdrop of explosive percussion. Christina is at her absolute best here leaving the new **Magenta** album with a lot to live up to. Agnieszka's vocal range and versatility is demonstrated to the full during *Shadows*, a song that develops from the macabre to the monumental bringing disc one to a spectacular close.

*Fire Dance* opens disc two in style with stately horns and strings punctuated by triumphant guitar and drum crescendos. It lends an epic Hollywood gloss this time echoing **Alan Silvestri's** stirring main theme for *The Abyss*. A haunting oboe theme reveals that the dance will soon turn into a death waltz. With its gothic organ sound the menacing *Cursed* underscores Ayesha's evil intentions towards Ustane. Suitably Agnieszka is at her most strident here bringing the uncompromising style of new wave singers like **Siouxsie Sioux** and **Hazel O'Connor** to mind. Sadly and inevitably the fate of Christina's character is sealed but not before she delivers a heart wrenching performance of the bittersweet *Closer*. A stark but lyrical piano backing and a melody to die for (literally) provides a perfect platform for Christina's evocative vocal.

Until this album, unlike his keyboard playing, I was unfamiliar with Clive's vocal work. His performance was a real revelation therefore engaging in several outstanding duets with Agnieszka as the fate of the two lovers is played out. *Resting Place* features some of the album's heaviest moments with potent driving guitar and soaring symphonic keys underpinning the powerful but intricate counterpoint harmonies and yet another compelling hook. In contrast *The Night Before* is a beautiful ballad with lilting piano and strings supporting a memorable chorus that builds to a spine tingling finale. If the decision over my final rating was still wavering then it was sealed as Agnieszka leads the choir into the stunning choral majesty of *The Sands Of Time*. The two principles don't have it all their own way however with Alan taking lead once again for *Embrace The Fire*. It's an engaging guitar driven rock song with a ridiculously catchy chorus. Appropriately the album's longest song *The Fire Of Life* brings things to a dramatic conclusion. Several reflective moments that include harp, acoustic guitar, oboe and cello allows the singers to reprise some of their earlier vocal melodies. In between electric guitar and orchestral keys build powerfully and for the final time they are joined by bombastic choral work delivering a rousing climax.

Although I normally favour a complete track-by-track critique the observant amongst you will have noticed that I've omitted to mention several of the songs listed above. Such is the excellence of the album there are more quality songs here than there are superlatives to do it justice. Otherwise I would have waxed lyrical about the energetic and catchy *The Veil*, the graceful acoustic embellishments during *Covenant Of Faith*, the majestic **ELP** like organ and brass fanfare to *The Lost City*, the high drama of *Ambush*, Agnieszka's vocal tour de force throughout *Judgement* and so much more. Every single one of these

songs has the ability to lock themselves into your head and stay there long after the album has been returned to its elaborate packaging. That packaging includes superb graphics and artwork, and sound wise the discs also benefit from the involvement of Threshold's Karl Groom at the mixing desk.

This album has virtually become a permanent resident in my CD player and I never tire of hearing it. Furthermore I feel sure that repeated listens will reap its rewards for some time to come. For once this is a release that lives up to all the hype. The burning question should be not is it worth your time and cash but which version are you going to buy. In the meantime it's back to the Caamora's website for me. With my birthday just around the corner that box set is looking very tempting.

**Conclusion: 10 out of 10**

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