

Pendragon - *Past and Presence*



Performance ★★★★★★☆☆
 Production ★★★★★★☆☆

It goes to show just how many good progressive rock bands there are out there when a band like Pendragon can completely escape this prog-lover's ears for so long. Then again, prog rock still barely registers a blip on the radar screen here in the U.S. when compared to its popularity over in Europe. *Past and Presence* was my first introduction to this marvelous band, which only means that I've got yet another extensive back catalog to go out and start buying. Damn you Pendragon!

Pendragon was formed in Stroud, England in 1978 by guitarist/vocalist Nick Barrett and have gone on to release over twenty albums, if you count all of their live and best-of compilations. Their sound is best described as neo-progressive rock and reminds me a lot of Fish-era Marillion, and Peter Gabriel-era Genesis. After numerous line-up changes throughout their early years, the band eventually settled on the line-up that would serve them for the last twenty years; Nick Barrett (guitar/lead vocals), Clive Nolan (keyboards), Peter Gee (bass), and Fudge Smith (drums). In 2006, Smith left the band and was replaced by new drummer Joe Crabtree, who performs on this DVD.

Past and Presence was filmed at the Wyspianski Theatre in Katowice, Poland on October 31st, 2006 and finds Pendragon celebrating the 21st anniversary of the release of their first full-length album *The Jewel*. For this special occasion, the band treated their devoted fans to a performance of the entire *Jewel* album, as well as a few songs from the old days when they used to perform with Arena and Marillion at the Marquee Club in London. To top it off, they invited a few of their old bandmates, Rik Carter (keyboards, backing vocals), Julian Baker (saxophone, guitar, backing vocals), and John Barnfield (keyboards), to join them onstage for several numbers.

Nick Barrett is the driving force behind Pendragon and has been the only constant presence throughout their remarkable 30-year career. His vocals remind me somewhat of Fish, heavily English-accented, and often sounding more like he is reading you an epic tale, rather than singing in the classic sense. His guitar style is reminiscent of Marillion's Steve Rothery, with shades of David Gilmour, but he also weaves in enough Petrucci-esque licks to leave you nodding your head in admiration. He is easily one of the best players in the business.

So essentially, if you like Pendragon's *The Jewel* album, or simply have a taste for some fine neo-progressive rock, you are going to love this DVD. Not only are the songs fantastic, but the band exudes enough genuine energy and passion during the performance to make you feel like you are watching something truly special. Watch the emotion as Barrett welcomes his old friend and band co-founder Julian Baker to the stage to perform some marvelously updated versions of the Pendragon classics "Dark Summer's Day" and "Circus" to close out the main set. Since leaving Pendragon, Baker has become an accomplished saxophone player and Barrett was willing to let him jazz up a few of the old tunes with his excellent playing.

Highlights of the show were numerous, but the gloriously heavy "Armageddon" was certainly a show stopper. "Alaska" was one of the most majestic ballads I have heard in a long time, and Barrett really shows off his full range of amazing guitar styles on this one. The second and final encore began with an intimate jazzy rendition of the *Kowtow* epic "2AM", which again featured some marvelous sax work from Julian Baker. During the performance, Barrett climbs down into the front row of the theater and sings amongst all of the thrilled fans. For the "final" finale the

entire group of musicians who appeared throughout the night all take the stage together to turn in a fast and rollicking performance of "Stan and Ollie", which had the crowd in a frenzy, and left them cheering wildly for more.

Metal Mind Productions has hit another home run with this outstanding DVD. The overall production quality is nearly perfect. The Dolby Digital 5.1 surround track sounds crisp and the instruments are all well balanced in the mix. An excellent Dolby stereo track is also included for those without a surround setup. The video is very sharp and colorful, and the camera work was some of the best I have ever seen. The Wyspianski Theatre looks like an incredible venue to catch a concert in, offering three different seating levels that nearly surround the stage and put you almost within touching distance of the band. The camera crew brilliantly captures the performance, offering up amazing angles of the stage show as they routinely pan backwards to reveal the whole stage and soak in the wonderful atmosphere of the entire theatre, while never missing any of the key solos and events happening onstage with spot-on close-ups.

The Bonus Features are numerous and really set the standard for what all concert DVDs should include, especially one with an anniversary theme like this. Included are an interview with Nick Barrett and John Barnfield, extensive behind-the-scenes footage, and three songs from the band's performance at Riffs Bar, UK, on October 28th 2006, three nights before the filming of the DVD in Poland. Also included are a photo gallery, biography, discography, desktop images, and weblinks.

Pendragon have certainly made a new fan out of me with this DVD, and I recommend it enthusiastically.

Reviewed by Paul M. Roy - May 2007

[Comments or Complaints?](#)

| Technical Details | |
|--|---|
| <p><u>Audio Transfer</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround • Dolby Digital 2.0 Stereo | <p><u>Video Transfer</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.78:1 - Widescreen |
| <p><u>Set List</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 01. Higher Circles 02. The Pleasure Of Hope 03. Leviathan 04. Victims Of Life 05. Armageddon 06. Fly High Fall Far 07. Excalibur 08. Please 09. Oh Divineo 10. Alaska 11. Dark Summer's Day 12. Circus 13. The Black Knight 14. 2AM 15. Stan And Ollie | <p><u>Performers</u></p> <p>Nick Barrett - Vocals/Guitar Clive Nolan - Keyboards/Backing Vocals Peter Gee - Bass/Backing Vocals Joe Crabtree - Drums Rik Carter - Keyboards/Backing Vocals Julian Baker - Saxophone/Guitar/Backing Vocals John Barnfield - Keyboards</p> |
| <p>Running Time: 106 Minutes</p> | <p>DVD Release Date - June 2007 Performance Date - October 2004</p> |



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