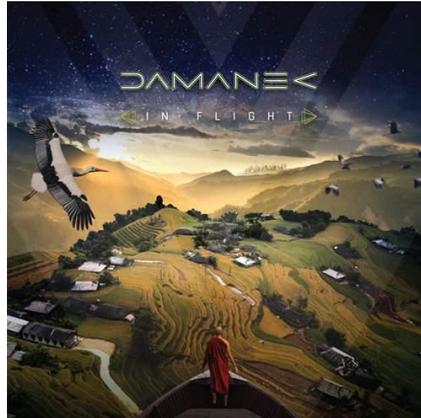


DAMANEK – In Flight

Giant Electric Pea 2018



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Over the mountains and far away: universal collective of art-rock practitioners break the ties that bind and take wing.

Here's an ensemble whose members don't care about belonging to prog domain, and here's an album which isn't in a hurry to hug you and offer up all of its delights right away. The quartet aren't obsessed with defining themselves as supergroup, despite each of the players' independent renown and the presence of their extended musical family, because that may be too restraining for the aerial observations their second longplay is comprised of; instead, the foursome focus on clear melodies rather than redundant complexity, and this approach yields a multitude of surprises.

If the record's cover and opener "Ragusa" reveal an arresting vista, it's but a pale, if playfully shimmering, teaser of what's to come further down the line. Blazing boleros and sizzling spirituals don't frequent art-rock landscapes, yet they're at home here, in the light of Guy Manning and Sean Timms' keyboards... or in flight, indeed. There's a lot of soaring guitars to let the listener get off the ground and behold the action from above, even though non-pretentious vocals and N'awlins-styled piano tether "Skyboat" to surface before the piece's funky undercurrent becomes loose to usher in sax and synthesizers and leave organ down below. Not that the pop sensibilities of "The Crawler" would sound mundane once Marek Arnold's reeds have cleared the view which will bare a few sharp riffs along the way – passing them on to "The Crossing" for brass-splashed boogie and soul to have a field day, while fusion and folk loom large on the horizon.

Picking up where "The Cosmic Score" from the band's 2017 debut left off, "Moon-Catcher" – explicitly marked as "Heaven Song Part 2" – takes its tremulous lyricism to celestial, orchestral heights that only a barroom balladry is able to embrace, but the three-part epic "Big Eastern" goes all over the place without entertaining both the public and the performers on a concept level. Given a tribal throb, "Cruel Skies" feels so delicate thanks to flute woven into its gauzy fiber, until the cut turns into a Celtic-tintured kaleidoscope to run through the whole variety of genres, including rumba, opera, hard rock and new age, and to ready the terrain for the Caribbean carnival that is "The Shaking Earth" – yet "A Life In Chinatown" is chiseled deliberately simple to propose a deceptive sort of exotica.

The result seems captivatingly amusing – and liberating. When nomenclature is thrown to the wind, flying is really easy.

****2/3