

KOID9 Review of "In Flight" by Damanek (Stephane Mayere)

After a first album, *On Track*, which put them on the track of success, *In Flight* confirms that the international collective Damanek flies towards recognition. Always based around Dan Mash, Guy Manning, Marek Arnold and Sean Timms, the band is once again joined by a guest cast including Luke Machin, Brody Green and other members from Manning or United Progressive Fraternity. Less eco-conceptual than its predecessor, this disc however remains mainly focused on snapshots, clichés, depicting societal situations ("Ragusa", "The Crossing" or "Big Eastern").

"Ragusa" starts where *On Track* had stopped, making an immediate junction between the two albums: falsely simple melody, with a monstrous piano / guitar complement, all of them supported by these slightly ethnic percussions that gave the color and the heat to the sound of the band on the first opus. Luke Machin and Sean Timms carry this piece that ideally starts the album.

"Skyboat" sees the talented Marek Arnold enter the dance with his sax. This title, based on duality keyboards / saxophone is a song between pop-prog and Latin / Cuban rhythms that sees gospel choirs carry the final to a happy end, positive as is the theme addressed in the piece (see published KOID9 interview).

More disturbing and dark is the intro of "The Crawler" which illustrates the nightmares that are made by being afraid of the monster in the closet. Once again here, the rhythmic pop synths come and collide to more progressive passages, especially thanks to Marek Arnold and Dan Mash who bring a jazz flavour in the central section.

After three songs rather fast, the rhythm falls with the poetic "Moon-Catcher": a low-tempo rhythm almost blues and sumptuous arrangements of strings that tickle the ear. Almost no guitar needed here, almost the whole piece is led by Marek Arnold's sax.

"The Crossing" brings us back to the news of migrants. A new rhythm with faster tempo for this title which, like a film soundtrack, illustrates the organized escape of a family by the patriarch. The central section, which illustrates the separation is poignant, with a theme that sees succeed a slow guitar solo and especially a violin drowning in the sax of Marek Arnold.

One of the highlights of the record with the following monument. Monument as "Big Eastern" has to be named. This 30-minute sequence of three chapters is for me the finest piece of work that Damanek has done on his two albums. It was difficult to mix the group's pop / prog with traditional Chinese music and they did it very well. This epic will propose a music where the usual Asia / Unitopia color of Damanek will be adorned with Far Eastern reflections. Sometimes almost commercial (the first section of "Cruel Skies"), sometimes complex and tortured ("The Shaking Earth" and "A Life In Chinatown"), "Big Eastern" is a great title that brings together everything that a lover of prog likes in an epic: a cinematic general atmosphere, we literally visualize the music, successions of breaks and different sections but which assemble harmonious ways and very intelligent lyrics. This is also a recurring point on all the titles of Damanek: writing lyrics. I think that non-English speakers, miss a big part of what makes the quality of Damanek: lyrics.

A second record that is a real success, and confirms all the good things that their first effort had imply ... Indispensable to any lover of Unitopia, The Tangent or other Saga.

Stéphane Mayère 5/5