

Review of DAMANEK "In Flight" by Jason Bermiller
Host of The ProgDog Radio Show,
Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada.

Band: Damanek

Album Title: In Flight

Release: October 5th, 2018

Personnel:

Dan Mash - Basses.

Guy Manning - Lead and backing vocals, Keyboards, Bouzouki, Mandolins, Acoustic guitars, Basses, Percussion.

Marek Arnold - Saxes, SeaBoard.

Sean Timms - Keyboards, Backing vocals, Guitar

Additional personnel:

Brody Thomas Green

Drums

[Courtesy of 'Southern Empire']

Luke Machin

Electric Guitars (on 1,2,4,5)

[Courtesy of 'Maschine', 'Kiama', 'The Tangent']

Antonio Vittozzi

Electric Guitars (on 3,6,7,8)

Tzan Niko

Electric Guitars (on 6,7,8)

Raf Azaria

Violin (on 5)

[Courtesy of 'UPF']

DavidB

Backing Vocals

Julie King

Backing Vocals

Kevin Currie

Backing Vocals

The Gospo Collective and Jones Commentary

Choir (on 2,7)

Jessica Bigg

Ellen Walsh

Hannah Cooper-Dineen

Kelvin Maynes

Zac Moore

Bailey Barnes

Tracks:

1. Ragusa

2. Skyboat

3. The Crawler

4. Moon-Catcher

5. The Crossing

6. Big Eastern Pt 1 - Cruel Skies

7. Big Eastern Pt 2 - The Shaking Earth

8. Big Eastern Pt 3 - A Life In Chinatown

“Damanek: Artistry, Sophisticated Pleasure”

Often the word “artistry” gets tossed about in a review of any release by veteran progressive musicians. The question is: Is the moniker valid? In this case, yes. The artistry here, though, unlike many other prog releases, is shared across several artistic criteria rather than focussed on one iconic attribute.

Damanek’s sophomore album “In Flight” opens with the song “Ragusa”, a splendid journey through some excellent textures and keyboard improvisations. The piano solo that graces the song appears early, followed by a bold guitar solo by Luke Machine. Manning’s vocals are subtly enhanced with choir-like chords in the gently rolling pulse that leads to an ethereal finish.

“Skyboat” demonstrates Damanek’s versatile use of funky guitars, jazzy motifs and quintessential classic prog patterns. This should be no surprise to any listeners who are familiar with Manning’s previous releases, as the comparison between Guy’s and Ian Anderson’s vocals stands proudly through the track.

The additional personnel lend the album an authentically “larger” sound, reminding the listener somewhat of the great, expansive multi-track extravaganzas when the studio engineer reigned as King, but, instead of simply descending into a series of production-created trickery as many bands do, Damanek wisely maintains a focus on the song, on the stories. Rather than making the mistake, as many prog bands in the past have, of extensive noodling and technological clutter, Damanek respects the role of songwriting and natural performance, possibly because of the genuine enjoyment that the band relishes in performing together.

Traditional Prog fans will be pleased that the album closes with an epic. While some could argue that a shorter piece would be more profound, the three-part epic “Big Eastern” is the journey that all classic prog fans look forward to: a spacious ride of sound melodies, great harmonies and rousing lyrics. Vibrating between melancholia and triumph, “Big Eastern” reminds the listener of the Hi-Fi Wars era of progressive music, although it’s not derivative per se. The conceptual thrust of In Flight comes into full bloom on this last piece. Employing a full choir - when’s the last time you heard a choir without having the urge to smirk on a rock album - in Part 2, the song roars along a path of exult and verve. Lightly dancing between reminiscences of an Alan-Parsons’-produced sonic experiment and a mature, world-music fiesta, this closer of Damanek’s latest effort is a fitting conclusion to this excellent release.

Approachable and yet dramatic and poignant, In Flight’s organic and elegant songs remind us again what drives this group: solid songwriting, relevant lyrics and astute performances.

Highly recommended for the sheer pleasure of listening to well-seasoned players and songwriters.

9/10.