



## Progradar

Music Matters

### REVIEW OF DAMANEK “MAKING SHORE” by MARTIN HUTCHINSON

**DamaneK** are a sort of Prog Rock supergroup formed by fellow Yorkshireman **Guy Manning** (lead/backing vocals, keyboards, acoustic guitar & instruments; loops; samples; percussion), **Marek Arnold** (saxes; seaboard; additional keyboards), and **Sean Timms** (keyboards; backing vocals; programming backing vocals & additional programming).

The talented trio are joined on *'Making Shore'* by an impressive cast of musicians including **Brody Green**, **Julie King**, **Cam Blokland**, **Kevin Currie**, **Riley Nixon-Burns** and **Linda Pirie**, to name a few!

*'Making Shore'* is the band's third album and is another genre-defying collection of sophisticated songs that again manage to combine impressive technical proficiency with catchy hooks and vast soundscapes. I was a big fan of the band's previous release, *'In Flight'*, saying, "A compelling, engaging and stimulating listening experience that leaves you high on music and life. Every absorbing minute of music is a minute that will bring a smile to your face." So I was really looking forward to the new album and, thankfully, I was in no way disappointed.

*'Making Shore'* is music with morality, an object lesson in how to get your message across (over population, global warming etc.) without shoving it down people's throats and alienating them. I've always felt that **Damanek** create music with the perfect blend of progressive rock and jazz and then the band introduce wonderful elements of world music into the mix (mandolin, bazouki etc.) and you won't find a better use of the saxophone in modern prog than on one of their albums and **Marek Arnold** is on fine form here!

The album is split between seven 'regular' tracks and then *'Oculus'*, an epic gothic flight of fantasy that comprises an overture and four suites, when I see that written down it does sound a bit pretentious but it is actually superbly done. The regular tracks all have a socio-political or ecological theme and work really well, I'm especially a fan of opener *A Mountain of Sky*, a song literally about Everest and how the notion of conquering the mountain is ridiculous, it is, after all, aloof, majestic, beautiful and timeless and this track is a great tribute to one of the giants of nature. Upbeat, fast paced and monumental, the music breezes along and Guy's elegant vocals just add real soul to the song, the keyboard breaks are properly 70's prog, the sax is vibrant and dynamic and the guitar playing is, well, epic, just like the mountain. *Back2Back* is about over-population and how it could be aggravating global warming

and pollution. It's a more laid back piece, one where the keyboards are one of the main characters, supporting Guy's soulful vocals. There's an especially fiery break in the middle that adds a more serious overtone and Marek's sax is always there in the background ready to erupt with class and spirit.

*"If we do nothing at all, then we will watch as populations rise and resources decrease in a state of Global inequality...standing by as children die of hunger."* **Noon Day Candles** has a melancholy, wistful feel, not surprising considering the subject matter but it is quite a beautiful song. The mellowness imbued by the elegant music and Guy's stirring vocals really hit home as Marek plays a tender sax in the background. It's a really moving piece of music and shows what sensitive, mature people these musicians are. **Americana** is about a fictitious farmstead in the US Mid West where a traditional family struggles to keep their heritage farm going against a backdrop of increasing climate changes and poverty and brings to mind 'So' era Gabriel to my ears. Adding that signature **Damanek** soulful groove to an Americana inspired song is a really clever idea and the lyrics are particularly pertinent on this track. The outpouring of emotion on the chorus is particularly touching and, along with the superb piano, adds real gravitas to this impassioned tale.

*“I wrote this piece for my youngest who has Aspergers and can find things challenging at times... On a holiday in Greece he decided (off his own bat) to try scuba diving...after the shock of the request settled in we of course said ‘Go for it!’...he went off by himself, signed up, faced his insecurities and did the dive...we were very proud of him and so I wrote this song all about it!”*

That’s the story behind ***In Deep Blue (Sea Songs Pt.1)*** and the fact that this song is based on Guy’s own personal experiences really touches me, the love he has for his son and the pride he feels as he overcame his disability is there for all to see and it gives the track a whole different aura. A wonderfully flowing piece of music with elegant vocals, it has a real feel good factor running throughout its four minutes and brings a warm glow to my heart. ***Reflections On Copper*** is about as laid back a piece of jazz/prog you are going to hear and talks about how dementia affects the everyday lives of those who are afflicted. It treats the subject matter in a very sensitive way and the music has substance at its very core, a very intelligent piece of songwriting. The edgy, animated vitality of ***Crown of Thorns (Sea Songs Pt.2)*** has a coruscating beat to it, perhaps replicating the crown-of-thorns starfish about which it talks. In normal numbers on healthy coral reefs, COTs are an important part of the ecosystem, however, when the coral-eating starfish appear in outbreak proportions, the impact on coral reefs can be disastrous. A song with a very serious mes-

sage but one that is put across with a sparkling vivacity.

Now for the mind warping, time spanning epic world of *Oculus*, a cautionary tale of a man who finds an alternative reality through a looking glass and how, after many trips back and forth, he nearly ends up trapped in the alternate world before, finally returning to really appreciate what he has at home. Now, let's be honest, there's something marvelously overblown and wonderfully pompous about a prog epic and, when they're done right, I just absolutely love them. Well, Guy and the band perfectly nail it within the thirty one minutes of the gem of a piece of music. From the uplifting power of the overture, almost classical in nature, through *Act I – Spot the Difference* where there's a childlike wonder of discovery that opens up into something more profound with an underlying medieval impishness and then *Act II – The Corridor* which could have come straight out of some 80's stylish pop/rock album, the keyboard blasts and funky riff almost straying into **Level 42** territory, there's a playful subtlety to the songwriting and a knowing nod to those epic multi-piece tracks of the 60's and 70's. Guy's fine baritone is core to everything going on here, he really does have a great voice. *Act III – Passive Ghost* starts with a simple keyboard and piano overlaid with Guy's heartfelt vocals. What seems an uncomplicated ballad then builds with layers of sophistication, musical and lyrical nods to **The Animals**, **Joni Mitchell** and even **The Wizard of Oz**, to become some-

thing all together more complex and delightful. *Act IV – A Welcoming Hand* is an inspirational, uplifting end to the saga and opens with some intricate sax play before Guy's compelling voice takes centre stage. You can feel the hope and optimism throughout, the song really putting you in the right frame of mind and the funky sax and fiery guitar ensure that it's a suitably joyous end to what has been a tremendously memorable experience.

Well 2023 has got off to a suitably auspicious start on the music front and this new album from **Damanek** has just raised the bar considerably. *'Making Shore'* is a momentous achievement, full of sumptuous music and elegant vocals and yet the cautionary tale at its heart is never lost in the process, bravo gentlemen, bravo!

Released 13th, January, 2023.

