

**Damanek - 2023 - "Making Shore"**

(71:54; Giant Electric Pea)

★★★★★!

Sometime in the last century I came across a band called Parallel or 90 Degrees, and when the guitarist started releasing his own albums, I followed the career of Guy Manning with great interest. Some time later I became aware of saxophonist and keyboard player Marek Arnold and have also followed his many bands ("Stay" by The Artwork Project is still a song I play regularly). Keyboard player Sean Timms is also someone of whom I have been aware for some years, so when the three of them, together with bassist Dan Marsh, formed Damanek and released 'On Track' in 2017 I was of course intrigued. They followed it up with 'In Flight' a year later, but since then there has been a gap until this their third, which has seen the departure of Dan. As with the other albums they have brought in additional musicians to help them fill the sound, including drummer Brody Thomas Green and guitarist Cam Blokland assisting their Southern Empire bandmate Sean, with Guy again providing all the material. Guy and Sean worked on the arrangements, with Marek then weaving his magic around them, the three combining to create something special which was then embellished by the additional players. At times Guy has a very similar vocal style to Ian Anderson, but that is his natural singing voice as opposed to an affectation, and like Ian, Guy often has important stories to share. Sometimes these can be fiction, such as in the dramatic and 30-minute epic which closes this album, "Oculus" or can be designed to make us think such as "In Deep Blue" and "Crown of Thorns" which are the first two in what may be a new series, subtitled "Sea Songs". It is important the lyrics are strong as they must stand out up against powerful prog which is incredibly deep and passionate. Damanek could never be considered "prog-lite" as while they do take on modern production and ideas, in many ways this is looking straight back into the Seventies in terms of its prowess and impact. They are a band who are making their own furrows in the field, not following others, but very much on their own path. That being said, there are some musical motifs borrowed during the mighty "Oculus" which make me smile, exactly as they are designed to do. This is majestic music, bringing together elements which people would not normally consider prog (love the backing vocals on 'In Deep Blue'), but surely that is what this is all about? There is no desire to sit within any preconceived boxes, instead the music goes where it will, and we are happy to have informative and intelligent guides for the journey at hand. Complex and complicated, almost orchestral in parts, this is never heavy handed but instead there is a lightness which is inviting us into the web. Here we have an album to be enjoyed on the first time of playing, which only takes us deeper each time we investigate further. Indispensable.

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