

SONIC PERSPECTIVES

REVIEW OF DAMANEK "MAKING SHORE"

ALBUM REVIEWS

DAMANEK – Making Shore (Album Review)



By **MARK BOARDMAN** — January 12, 2023 — No Comments



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For whatever reason, the first two records by **Damanek** more or less flew under the radar. And that's a shame, for they are well-worth the listen.



That should change with their third outing, "**Making Shore.**" It is well named, for it truly makes is a wonderful journey that explores new musical lands.

First, the introductions. **Damanek** is the brainchild of British multi-instrumentalist and vocalist **Guy Manning**. And he is joined by two prog-rock stalwarts. Australian **Sean Timms** (of **Southern Empire**) handles programming and production. German **Marek Arnold** – who is involved in too many bands to count – is on reeds, giving a distinctive feel to the proceedings. Sometimes he's jazz; other times, Middle Eastern. But **Marek** is a treasure.

The album is split into two sections. The first seven songs are socio-political-ecological pieces, the likes of which were the focus of the first two **Damanek** recordings (although these are unified by one central character). These things are close to **Guy Manning's** heart, as one can tell by listening to the music and going over the lyrics. Each cut is strong, reflecting **Manning's** taste in music—70s Prog, Easy Jazz, a bit of Rock, Pop, Folk, and smatterings of Ethno-Music. These are songs that are meant to be hummed along with, tapping the toes to the beat, immersing oneself in the sounds.

I want to pick out one song in particular—it is very special. "*In Deep Blue Sea*" has a wonderful backstory. The **Manning** family was on holiday. Their autistic son indicated that he'd like to try scuba diving. So he went through the training, learned what he needed, and then took the dive. The young man was pleased with the experience. So his father put all that in this song, one that is driven by Caribbean rhythms and a simplified instrumentation – some programming, voice, keyboards, sax. The lyrics are beautiful, especially when one knows where they came from.

*A brave boy stands on a foreign shore and looks at the waterline
Up here in the Sunlight, well everything to him feels fine*

*Going to leave the warmth of the comfort zone and plunge into the unknown
Move from the air above the surf to the mysteries of below, down below*

*Diving into the Deep Blue
Let the waves push over your head
An underwater land where the colours change
As you glide across the grey rock base and follow the current slow
Angel fish swim along Anemone row, Anemone row*

*Now he's back on dry land and he tells us of his tale
Total fear and wonderment, still tipping the scales.*

And then there's side 2 (yeah, I know, CD's and downloads don't have sides. But **Guy Manning** has gone with this, so we'll follow along). "*Oculus—an epic gothic and literary flight of fancy*" is an overture and four-part suite; this is new for **Dananek**, and, to be honest, **Manning** wasn't sure it would fly – even after the record was in the can.

He needn't have worried.

It is the tale of a man(ning?) who finds an alternative reality through the looking glass. He makes trip after trip, experiencing new and different lives as he does so. But during his last voyage, the narrator comes across an urn of his own ashes on a mantle. He panics – a fear made worse when someone covers the looking glass with a shroud and he cannot go home. Finally, he runs into a younger version of himself. This gives him new strength and appreciation for life. When he returns to his real world, he is content.

Musically, the suite covers a lot of ground. The instrumental "*Overture*" is by turns urgent, contemplative, anthemic, moody, playful, and more – all in nine minutes. Special attention is given to **Manning's** piano and some lovely flute by guest artist **Linda Pirie**. It is the preparation for what's to come.

"*Act 1—Spot the Difference*" is more recognizable as **Damanek**, in no small part because of **Manning's** smoky baritone voice. This one is something of a power ballad – but it has a couple of breaks that remind one of **Jethro Tull**.

"*Act 2—The Corridor*" immediately comes in with a blast of sound. It has the feel of '70s-'80s pop rock—perhaps **Christopher Cross** mixed with **Alan Parsons**. This is a toe-tapper with a couple of quieter sections that provide an additional level of interest.

That blends into "*Act 3—Passive Ghost*." It starts quiet, with keyboards and voice, a lovely ballad that builds as more instruments are added throughout. It contains musical and lyrical references to **Joni Mitchell**, **The Animals**, and **The Wizard of Oz**. It is clever and appealing and anything but passive.

"Act 4—A Welcoming Hand" leads off with an interplay of **Marek Arnold's** saxophones with... **Marek Arnold's** saxophones. It's playfully intricate. As **Manning's** voice takes over (still with the saxes), it becomes something of a shuffle (which evolves from 4/4 to 6/8 time) before busting out in an **Al Stewart**-sounding rock section. **Guy Manning's** vocals are in top form here, really expressing the feeling of new hope and joy.

This is Prog, and it demonstrates that **Manning** and **Damanek** can succeed in various iterations of the genre. It makes me wonder where they might go in album number four.

Don't get me wrong—I enjoyed the first two **Damanek** albums. "**Making Shore**" is a big step forward – one that, as I mentioned – has direct lines to the past as it moves into an exciting future. The record title is absolutely correct: **Damanek** and **Guy Manning** are making shore, discovering new territory with this one. If all goes as it should, many listeners will catch this wave and ride it to shore. And then repeat...

One more point, something close to my heart. "**Making Shore**" is dedicated to super-Prog fan **Paul Hanlon**, who passed away last year – but not before he contributed some money to put this project together. **Paul** was a close friend of mine, and I'm overjoyed that artists have recognized him and what he brought to the genre. **Paul Hanlon** is still making waves in the music field.

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