



## DAMANEK – “MAKING SHORE” Review by Rick Peuser

### Damanek – Making Shore

Article by: [Rick Peuser](#)

I practically leapt at the chance to have an early listen to *Making Shore*, the latest release by the progressive rock supergroup Damanek. And that leap of faith was thoroughly and satisfyingly rewarded! This is sumptuous, literary, cinematic, compelling, and meaningful music delivered with confidence, vitality, and joy.

Damanek is comprised of Guy Manning (vocals, keyboards, acoustic guitar, samples & percussion), Sean Timms (keyboards, vocals & programming) and Marek Arnold (saxophones, SeaBoard & additional keyboards). Over their two previous superb releases, *On Track* (2017) and *In Flight* (2018), the band utilised a host of supporting musicians, and this continues here. One constant on all three albums is Brody Thomas Green, a marvellous drummer who sits behind the kit for Southern Empire, a band which also provides the terrific guitarist Cam Blokland who adds his signature brilliance to the album.

*Making Shore* consists of twelve songs, five of which comprise ‘the Oculus Suite,’ filling the second side of the album. Like their other albums, *Making Shore* has stellar, polished production and engineering, and the clarity of the music is utterly superb. A huge part of this is due to Sean Timms’ magnificent work in these areas. Like their previous music, Damanek addresses a range of relevant contemporary topics and subject matter with intensity, honesty, and hope. The music is truly breath-taking, the lyrics genuinely profound and impassioned. The range of musical styles captured within these songs and the overall production, lyricism and creativity of this album is phenomenal.

And there is the stunning album artwork. In a previous review, I mentioned that the artwork ties the listener into the music. *Making Shore* is the perfect example of this thinking. The front cover was designed by Cas Reason, a digital artist who in this reviewer’s opinion has created one of the most gorgeous album covers he has ever seen. It shows the full power and majesty of the natural world, and how man needs to react to things like climate change, food insecurity, over-population and related issue, homelessness, animal extinction, etc. We are in dangerous times (storm, sharks) and with limited resources. The distressed boat represents humanity and the lighthouse, salvation. There is still time and there is always hope! An exquisite and dramatic cover that reflects both the lyrics and the music.

*Mountains of Sky* begins the album with soft windchimes, gentle drumming, flutes, and bells, calling people together like a Tibetan Prayer, slowly building, and then - Wham! In a thunderous approach, the listener is jolted with a driving rhythm of guitars, drums, and saxophones! The music is so exhilarating. It is also powerful and driven, and the lyrics rich in imagery and feel. The song is about the majestic (and some feel sacred) Mahalangur, the highest range of the Himalayas in northeast Nepal. It is as if you are right there as the song progresses. I got chills on my first listen.

*"High in Mahalangur, it towers above the floor  
29,000 ft. from mankind's petty wars  
The summit approach from the South-east, casts a shadow on Nepal  
The banner cloud above some majestic wall  
A Mountain of Sky  
Category 5 hurricanes blow the climber down  
In a freezing Jet stream blast... no warning sound  
Oxygen at one-third... oh, the air is thinner here  
Where 'No Man is an island' and No Man is wanted near..."*



Manning's rich, deep, resonant vocals embrace and coat the song. The sax on this piece is vibrant and intoxicating, with its subtle weaving and playful notes, putting the listener in a trance-like state. Three-quarters through and there is a shift of rhythm to a lighter more "reggae" feel, which is just magnificent. The song finishes with the chorus and Cam Blokland's sensational lead guitar balanced by Green's out-of-this-world rhythmic drumming. The song allows the band to flex their musical muscles, and highlights Timms' delightful layered keyboard proficiency and Arnold's top-notch prowess of sax and keyboards. An absolute stunning song to start with!

The second cut, *Back2back*, is a funky bass-led song about the Earth's limited resources, the population explosion predicted in the last century and that sense of urgency in dealing with problems on a global scale. Compelling and driven keyboards open the song and subtle guitar work bridges and guides it. With Guy's impassioned pleas for sanity in dealing with climate change and limited resources by working together to pull us back from the brink. The lead guitar is spine chilling and Arnold's jazzy sax play is heaven, creating an insatiable groove. The harmonies are just spectacular. And those intense drum rhythms! Green's pulsating beats create the palette that allows the others to shine. This is one of the best songs about the environmental challenges that I have ever heard, and with such energy and vibe!

Catching my breath, and slowing the pace a bit, *Noon Day Candles* brought this reviewer to tears. The combination of an utterly sublime prayer-like melody with an intense lyric makes for such an impassioned song. There is a sense of immediacy and with it, emotion. The beauty, textures and overall message of this tune are so poignant, relevant, and universal. The song begins with a chant-like soft beat, with a Hindu feel. A whirling, spinning, sensation permeates a sound landscape with Guy's gut-wrenching vocal:

*"A candle in the noon day Sun is dwarfed in daylight but it still burns bright, with condensing light  
If we put a man on the Moon, can we not put food on the table of every child born? Every child alone?"*

The dreamy chant-like Middle Eastern beat combined with the melancholy melody is quite dramatic, and the sumptuous bassline and fantastic piano solo near the end close out the track brilliantly. It's a song about fairness and balance, feeding and nurturing, a plea for all of humanity to provide basic care to the world's starving children. We can build million dollar missiles and weapons programs and rockets that can travel to the moon, but why cannot we feed everyone? One of the hardest existential questions to answer...

Moving on to the US, *Americana* succinctly captures the many and varied challenges facing farmers and their families. Focusing on the American Midwest, the song begins with a jazzy, funky, gritty, groove, with a bassline that is brutal! Guy's voice is pleading and anguished as he describes the conditions and situations growing up in a farming family in Missouri. The keyboards and the drumming steer the melody with a rhythm guitar adding colour and texture to the tune. In Guy's vocals, you can feel the anguish and the exhaustion that farming can bring. The lyric is like a narrative of what it is like to be a farmer and its associated struggles and let downs. But this song also gives a tinge of hope! The chorus reflects this with such warmth and feel. About half-way through, a splendid piano lead kicks in a jazzier feel with Arnold's sax adding another layer. My goodness, what a track. I could see this song being enjoyed in Nashville, it has that wonderful crossover effect.



*In Deep Blue (Sea Songs Pt. 1)* is both a love song to Guy's son (who according to Guy has Asperger's Syndrome, a severe debilitating form of autism), and his first scuba dive (in the Mediterranean near Greece) and the wonder that is under the ocean. The vivid descriptions of the underwater world, the stunning colours, anemones, angel fish, the gorgeous blue of the water... But more, it is the courage of his son to step - or rather, dive - into the unknown. The pride felt by Guy and the delight in his son's adventure is palpable and moving. The imagery in the lyrics is so powerful here on both levels with a delightful island mood.

Sultry and intoxicating, *Reflections on Copper* begins with a jazzy African vibe and rhythm, all rounded and girded by Sean's atmospheric synthesiser work. Sadly, the song is about the effects of dementia, and the eventual loss of memory as it advances:

*"Come on memories – please don't fail me now  
Help me to remember this dirty old town.  
Was it over there that we used to play?  
Were those the friends I had back in the day?  
A glimpse of the past is all I can see  
A shaded copper mirror, waits inside me  
Offers up a chance to watch all that's long gone  
My clothes are neat, my shoes still shine, my hair is parted down a centre line  
But I'm not really here anymore  
Where did the days of my life go?  
They drift away with every moment...  
And as the darkness quietly comes  
Peace will return but I no longer know you"*

Such relevance for so many afflicted people. My dear late father-in-law, whom I adored, struggled with it and at times had trouble remembering me and my name. Another truly emotional gut-wrenching song, expressed with such moving lyrics.

*Crown of Thorns (Sea Songs Pt.2)* comes out swinging! Green's pulsating drums and Timms' dazzling keyboards, create such a groove and Guy's confident and enlightened vocals take the song over the top! Lyrically, it is about the dangers posed by climate change and predators of Australia's Great Barrier Reef, one of the few remaining wonders of the natural world. With gusto and spirit, the song crashes with an infectious rocking rhythm, held deftly together by Timms' keyboards. The last time I was this enthralled by a song about the environment it was 1996 with Dan Fogelberg's *Blind to the Truth*. At about two minutes in, a dramatic change of pace slows the song down and Manning proceeds to paint a sumptuous underwater world with all its life, ebb, and flow for the listener to grasp and appreciate. Weaving in and out, Arnold helps paint this tapestry with his sax and SeaBoard. I was just enraptured by it! The song then reverts to the earlier heavy groove, with great background descant vocals, ending on the positive note that we need to take a stand and get involved! A powerful, beguiling, uplifting, and edifying tune which ends the first half of the album. Such profound music with such poignancy and relevance.

The second half consists of *Oculus*, with its overture and four acts – a prog lover's dream, and a masterpiece blending literature with music.

The "Suite" is broken down into four separate sections, or acts with *Overture*, kicking things off:

Act I - Spot the Difference?

Act II - The Corridor

Act III - Passive Ghost

Act IV - A Welcoming Hand

It is a very congruent, engaging, literary piece and as such best heard as a whole, instead of the individual tracks. Combining great vocals, infectious rhythms, stellar musicianship, and cinematic landscapes, the suite is a cautionary tale about being drawn into a parallel universe or alternate reality. Fertile ground gone over by some of the master's in literature, including C.S. Lewis, Isaac Asimov, and H.G. Wells, to name a few. The whole tale is summed up superbly with notes, context, and personal observations by Guy at [DamaneK's website](#).

The overall musicality of the Suite is glorious and engrossing. Whether it's Sean Timms phenomenal layered keyboards and gorgeous piano leads or Brody Green's sensational drumming, or Cam Blokland's stunning guitar, or Marek Arnold's glorious sax leads and interplay, *Oculus* showcases the worldly talent and confidence of the band. One section that I must highlight is the ending of *Act IV* which ties everything up with absolute authority. The drumming, builds to forge a sense of urgency; outlandish sax riding along with storming guitar, and the wonderful deep rich vocal tones of Guy Manning, akin to some of the best of Theo Travis, Peter White, and Al Stewart respectively. What a truly splendid piece of progressive music.

I cannot emphasise enough how beautiful and enriching the fabric and atmosphere created by this music is. There is energy, liveliness, confidence, and verve, the signature DamaneK sound ever expanding its boundaries to capture snapshots of incredible landscapes, emotional and relevant lyrics and mesmerising tales that take the listener to the highest of mountains and under the deep blue sea, driven by exceptional vocals and stellar musicianship. *Making Shore* is an inspired and captivating listen. There are other musicians who played on this album who I have not named, and they too contributed to the extraordinary music.

The variety of musical styles and textures create a marvellous tapestry that is soul food for the ears! Listeners will come back repeatedly to this truly remarkable tour de force of an album, which will most definitely be on my end of year best of list!