



DAMANEK – ‘ON TRACK’ (*Giant Electric Pea*) **PROGRESSIVE**

I’m not sure if Damanek is an ongoing band or a one-off project, but whichever it turns out to be one thing’s for sure, it’s a “Prog super-group”. The name’s derived from Guy Manning, Dan Mash and Marek Arnold, albeit there are many other contributors including Sean Timms and Luke Machin. Manning is the driving force though, having written all the material, and he doesn’t hold back on his views regarding the state of the world and ecology. That may sound like a dreary prospect, but the songs have terrific melodies and plenty of hooks, even if the lyrics can be rather earnest in places.

‘Nanabohza And The Rainbow’ is a jaunty start with its simple but effective chorus; Manning’s vocal phrasing, at times, putting me in mind of Ian Anderson (Jethro Tull) as it does across the album. I’m not a fan of saxophone, but Arnold’s contributions never stray into shrill or discordant territory so are extremely palatable. The intro and outro remind me of some of Steve Hackett’s recent material. ‘Long Time, Shadow Falls’ evokes Africa, which is handy as the subject matter is about the poaching of elephants etc. Until the instrumental breaks, ‘The Cosmic Score’ has a middle of the road feel to it rather than a Prog one, while ‘Believer – Redeemer’ comes across like a Toto/Steely Dan hybrid, the rather nice shuffle belying the lyrical content regarding diversity. The trumpet, sax and guitar solos are just right and the chorus memorable.

‘Oil Over Arabia’ is enhanced by Arnold’s sax trills, embellishments and solo, plus the injection of a gritty guitar riff to change the tune’s dynamics half way through. ‘Big Parade’ again suggests Hackett, but this time his early solo material, as well as Viv Stanshall and The Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band which brings a comic quality to a serious subject. With President Trump boasting his “red button is bigger”, the line “I’ve got more bullies than you” seems rather prescient. As an antidote to the flippancy of the preceding number’s music, ‘Madison Blue’ is stripped down to piano and strings. ‘Dark Sun’ is the album’s epic and it’s also a poignant closer, dealing with the subject of global warming, but, just as the austere feel that opens the piece seems to be going on a tad too long, an instrumental section introduces some pace and several fine solos.

Overall, this is a fine album for the Prog fraternity.
Gary Marshall