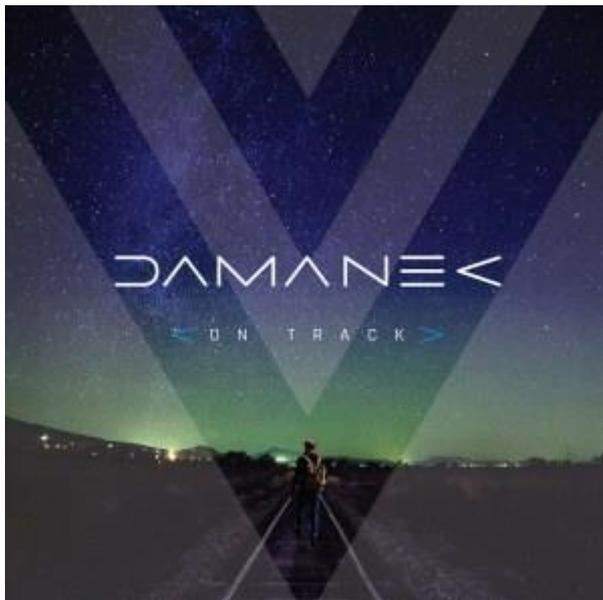


Review – Damanek – On Track by Emma Roebuck



Damanek is **D**An Mash, Guy **MA**Ning and Mar**EK** Arnold (with **Sean Timms** coming to the party just a after the band name was decided, Guy tells me.)

A fairly stellar cast is joined by other heavenly bodies to guest on this, the debut album of this project.

Brody Thomas Green ('Southern Empire') – drums.

Tim Irrgang ('UPF') – percussion.

Antonio Vittozzi ('Soul Secret') – guitars.

Luke Machin ('Maschine'/'Kiama'/'The Tangent') – guitars.

Stephen Dundon ('Molly Bloom') – flute.

Nick Magnus – keyboards.

Phideaux – vocals.

Ulf Reinhardt ('Seven Steps to the Green Door') – drums.

Their live debut at **Summers End 2016** caused a stir and a buzz of excitement in the crowd and the Prog community as a whole. It is strong album from beginning to end and it is also, as you would expect from Guy, one with a message. If I am honest it has many messages all in the main told through the allegorical story telling of guys lyrics.

We have 8 tracks that have light and shade along with the complex use of instruments and layers to play parts in the sound. The production is outstanding and reminds of some of the classic albums of the 80's (but without sounding like an 80's Prog album.) Sean has done an excellent job in the mix and production of this truly global album.

The opener *Nanabohzo and the Rainbow* opens with a tribal rhythm and an insistent bass and drum riff throughout give an exotic feel to the track and a rather excellent ear worm quality. Marek has a big part to play with his Sax and, along with Sean on keyboards, is the flesh on the bones of the rhythm. Guy's voice is on form all the way through the album, it slots so well in the sound as it shifts in form throughout the song.

Long Time, Shadow Falls, this has the most 80's feel to me, drawing from the best of what Peter Gabriel in style and form did in the mid 80's. I think it is the keyboard sound but the song is a commentary on poaching and the impact of man that is sung from the view of the victims, the Rhino, the Elephant and the Hippos. It is our gift to stop this but as a species we are doing a poor job.

“Just pictures in a glossy magazine

Long time, a shadow falls and the Earth is lessened”

With the demise of the natural world we are lessened more than we realise.



The Cosmic Score is told on a much larger scale with the keyboards of **Nick Magnus** adding much to it. Imagine if you will the stars are notes on the score of the universe and the music of the universe is playing forever but how badly are we affecting that score on our little planet? It is massive in scope and symphonic in sound.

Believer – Redeemer could be a jazz-funk soul piece, in fact it is to these ears and a real pleasure to listen to as well. The music is a metaphor to the lyric, challenging the prog fan to step outside and listen to a world beyond the Prog bubble. The lyric does the same to the intolerant and unaccepting people of this world. I could honestly hear **George Benson** or **Stanley Clarke** doing a cover of this with little or no changes. Oh, by the way, this is a good thing!

Guy has a pixie like sense of humour and in *The Big Parade* it comes out in spades. The guys here write an anti-war song to a martial beat. The pomposity of marching music along with the beat of an Umpah band make the idiocy of war look like what it is – a playground for overgrown bullies. Reminiscent of **Tom Waits** “*In the Neighbourhood*”, with hints of ragtime and New Orleans jazz, here Marek gets to show off his skills to great effect.

The Finale on the album is *Dark Sun*, a 14 minute epic and truly prog of ‘*end of days*’ proportions, it’s honestly scary and as ominous as its topic. The sun is getting darker and light gets dimmer as we kill the planet. Air gets thicker with pollution. The sight of our cities in the sunlight with unbreathable air and thick smog hanging like a veil over our lives. It utilises an excellent instrumental break and brilliant piece of guitar keyboard jamming with the brass synchronising beautifully.

I paint a picture of an album that is fundamentally depressing and dispiriting but it is actually very uplifting. The music is tight and full with the quality you would expect from the players but no one dominates in this and it feels like a complete piece of work. The album feels global with influences from across boundaries and geography. The messages may be a warning but each song offers hope rather than a sense of inevitable doom. It bears playing and playing again.

I sincerely hope that **Damanek** produce another album and take it out on the road. I won't reference bands (as I usually do) but this is an album that has melody and song structure by the bucket load and is not frightened to go outside limiting parameters.

Released 15th May 2017