



Damanek - 2017 - "On Track"

(54:03, Giant Electric Pea)



TRACK LIST:

1. Nanabohzo and the Rainbow 7:49
2. Long Time, Shadow Falls 7:47
3. The Cosmic Score 5:56
4. Believer-Redeemer 5:48
5. Oil Over Arabia 5:33
6. Big Parade 4:15
7. Madison Blue 3:12
8. Dark Sun 13:43

LINEUP:

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Guy Manning - vocals, keyboards, guitars, mandolin, bouzouki, e-bow, percussion

Marek Arnold - saxophones, clarinet, keyboards, Seaboard

Daniel Mash - bass

Sean Timms - keyboards, banjo, vocals

With:

Phideaux - vocals (8)

DavidB - backing vocals

Julie King - backing vocals

Kevin Currie - backing vocals

Antonio Vittozzi - guitars

Luke Machin - guitars

Chris Catling - guitars

Nick Magnus - keyboards

Stephen Dundon - flute

Eric 'Tooch' Santucci - trumpet

Alex Taylor - trombone

Brody Thomas Green - drums

Ulf Reinhardt - drums

Tim Irrgang - percussion

Prolusion. 'Damanek' is an abbreviation for the names of the three of the band's four core members – DAn Mash, Guy MANning and MarEK Arnold. The fourth founding musician, Sean Timms, was involved later. To produce their first album On Track in 2017 they employed a great number of diverse performers. Although this was Damanek's debut album, its founders were already quite experienced musicians: so Guy Manning, the main composer and poet for the project, had been the leader of the band under his own name and participated in a series of other prominent acts such as

The Tangent, Parallel Or 90 Degrees, United Progressive Fraternity (this last band also featured Dan Mash and Marek Arnold) and some others, while Sean Timms had come from Unitopia.

Analysis. Probably, there are three words that would best describe the music on On Track. The first of them is 'integrity.' Every element in the structures offered on the album seems ideally in its place, and the removal or addition of any component, any portion of a song, any musical line, any instrument, obviously, would spoil the entire picture. It is like a jigsaw puzzle, where thousands of parts gathered in a correct way present a glorious landscape - but try and put a couple of them in a wrong place, and there would remain nothing to please your eye. The other epithet is 'light' in a variety of the meanings this word has (the music is 'light' in the sense that it is 'not dark,' optimistic, on the other hand, it is light because it is not intense, very easy-going - which, however, in no way may be interpreted as 'not serious' or 'superficial'). And the third elephant on which the planet On Track rests is 'professionalism.' Each musician seems to know perfectly well his role in the band and the task they are to perform - which largely accounts for the first quality of the music described above. So let us see what the life is like on this wonderful planet. The album consists of eight songs of a moderate length between 5 and 7 minutes on average, with the only two exceptions being the two last ones - the ballad Maddison Blue of a little more than 3 minutes long and the almost 14-minute Dark Sun. The structure of the tracks is also similar throughout - it is a verse-and-chorus melodic song with some instrumental passages in-between and around. Arrangements grow steadily all along a song, altering and adding up, to culminate towards the finale. At the very end there is often a short closing part where emotions subside. Even the last composition which has a touch of epic to it, as can be seen from its length, generally follows this pattern. However, this simple description alone may lead to a totally wrong understanding of what the album really presents. To begin with, despite the seeming predictability of the songs, there is not a moment in the entire album where you can feel bored. This is achieved through the use of the widest range of instruments and styles, frequent change of moods and dynamics within one composition. So on On Track you can find styles such diverse as folk music from different parts of the world, jazz, blues, classical rock, classical music and many others. Moreover, very often two or more types of music can be present in one song. However, what is truly marvellous is that nowhere on the album can you find a seam between different elements. So, for instance, Oil Over Arabia begins with a soft 'classical' intro and continues in the same vein through to the end of chorus 2. After that it enters an interlude consisting of three parts - a rock section with somewhat aggressive guitar riffs supported by a contrastingly soft and refined piano melody suddenly falls into a very gentle Arab tune played (as it seems) on the clarinet, which then switches into a virtuosic piano jazz improvisation. Another song, Big Parade, combines blues and traditional march, both served in quite a sarcastic way, which evolve finally into a dramatic finale abruptly interrupted by a short jolly 3/8 coda. All these miscellanea dwell in perfect harmony, however, and are characterised by perpetual smooth flow. The lyrics on the album are mainly dedicated to problems of relations between man and nature and between humans.

Conclusion. Although not very intricate and innovative, Damanek's album is a truly nice listen, which I would recommend to a wide range of progressive rock fans. It would be an excellent relaxation for highly experienced and demanding listeners, a

strong step forward for young fans and really a perfect example that music of the highest standard can be made even using relatively simple means.

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