

It gets without actually playing tunes from the venerable Canadians.

Specter, Fate & Fable

re-imagines the classic power-trio format – chiming guitars, trebly bass and melodic drums – that made Rush iconic. But singer/guitarist Ed Moehring has a more understated voice than Lee (and is a tasteful soloist). Drummer Pat Bascunan is, like Neil Peart, practiced in the art of sensitive cymbal work but has his own sound. And bassist Brian Cohen's rumbling freight train of a bottom end clearly captures Lee's textured, punchy style.

The album (Myriad's second) opens with "Beyond This Realm," a 22-minute suite possessing 2112-like sensibilities via blistering solos, tricky meter shifts and galloping rhythms. Similarly, "Eternal Spring" evokes Hemispheres. There's even a classical guitar piece ("Special K") echoing Alex Lifeson's intro to "The Trees" and a drum solo ("Eva") to display Bascunan's chops.

With a band mirroring influences this faithfully, it's important to walk – but not cross over – that line separating homage and mimicry. Myriad navigates that divide with exciting results. – NICK TATE

MY SOLILOQUY

The Interpreter
2013 (CD, 52:01)
SENSORY SR3063
PROGRESSIVE METAL
RATING 14.5

The fact that British vocalist/multi-instrumentalist Pete Morten plays guitar in Threshold helped generate buzz for this debut effort from one of Morten's other projects, My Soliloquy. But frankly, The Interpreter can stand on its own without references.

My Soliloquy has been active more than a decade, formerly known sans the "My." This current version sounds significantly more accomplished than many "official" debuts by other contemporary prog-metal acts. But then, this band always seemed ahead of the game, even while building its rep on EPs and so-called "demos."

Symphonically orchestrated keyboards, shredding guitars, soaring vocals and powerful melodies surge forth in propulsive opener "Ascension Pending" and following track "Flash Point." Then The Interpreter makes a dramatic left turn on "Corrosive De-Emphasis," with an intro of decidedly pop persuasion. This nevertheless exceptional album closes with My Soliloquy's most exquisite song to date:

"Star" melds aspects of Yes and Ayreon to rapturously progressive effect.

Morten's vocal dynamics shift quite a bit throughout these eight tracks, but similarities to James LaBrie and Lance King are obvious.

– MICHAEL POPKE

MYSTERY

The World Is a Game
2012 (CD, 59:55)
UNICORN DIGITAL UNCR-5090
PROGRESSIVE ROCK
RATING 13.5

Yes saying "no" to vocalist Benoit David might have been the best thing for Canadian act Mystery. When David was dumped by Yes after just one studio album (2011's Fly From Here), Michel St-Pere, Mystery's guitarist/composer, welcomed him back where he belongs. This led to The World Is a Game, Mystery's seventh and most accomplished recording.

David's voice is a crystalline hybrid of Jon Anderson, Ted Leonard, Lawrence Gowan and Max Bacon. While his singing carries this effort, St-Pere deserves praise for channeling David Gilmour's dulcet tonalities on "Superstar," and turning what could have been a heavy-handed epic called "Pride" into something approaching sublime. The pretty ballad "Dear Someone" plays out like a prayer to the future, while 19-minute finale "Another Day" comes closest to resembling classic Yes.

Guest Nick D'Virgilio's drumming and St-Pere's impeccable production make The World Is a Game even stronger. Compelling artwork showing a rain-drenched toy merry-go-round on a leaf-scattered lawn even has its own (slightly warped) soundtrack in 49-second instrumental, "The Unwinding of Time." – MICHAEL POPKE

OBLIVION SUN

The High Places
2012 (CD, 41:47)
PROPHASE MUSIC PMCD1301
PROGRESSIVE ROCK
RATING 15.5

Oblivion Sun is an offspring of Happy the Man, featuring guitarist/vocalist Stanley Whitaker and keyboardist/reed player Frank Wyatt (the album was mixed by HTM Moog guru Kit Watkins). Both alums play at the top of their game, which says something as both have been dealing with cancer scares

these last few years. In fact, Wyatt underwent surgery shortly after the album was recorded which, thankfully, he has recovered from successfully. David Hughes (bass/vocals) and Bill Brasso (drums/percussion) complete the quartet, bringing a true love of progressive music to their enviable roles.

The album opens with two instrumentals, "Deckard" by Wyatt and "March of the Mushroom Men" by Whitaker. Both have that classic Happy the Man sound: elegant but powerful playing, tuneful melodies with plenty of left turns, and a sheer musicality that serves the songs vs. simply emphasizing chops. The cream of this album, though, is the six-part 22-minute title track, penned by Wyatt. All the parts feature Whitaker's strong vocals, and all the solos by Whitaker and Wyatt (both on synthesizer and acoustic piano) are exceptional. – JASON M. RUBIN

OPUS SYMBIOSIS

Nature's Choir
2012 (CD, 50:06)
RECORD UNION OPSY003
PROGRESSIVE ROCK
RATING 15.5

This Finnish band blew the top off my head with its maybe-a-concept-album about tigers and clones and rain – or something like that! Be that as it may, these folks rattle off one good tune after another, often segueing into one another in a manner reminiscent of Pink Floyd or Lamb-era Genesis. These songs are performed with both skilled musicianship and alluring musicality, topped off by the heavenly voice of Christine Sten.

Most of the writing was done by guitarist Victor Sagfors. While he certainly shines this album is not a guitar wankfest, but a modern take on the melodic legacy of classic progressive rock. King Crimson completeists take note, as drummer Pat Mastelotto guests on one track. But the best thing I can say about this band's level of musicianship is that he isn't even necessary.

Even the production is exemplary, with every nuance coming through clear, crisp and sharp.
– DAN'L DANEHY-OAKES

JOHN ORSI

A Room for the Night
2012 (CD EP, 23:10)
TWILIGHTTIME RM-9
ELECTRONIC/PROGRESSIVE
RATING 12.5

Following the broader scope and breadth of previous project Weathering (2011), realized with the collective Knitting By Twilight, percussionist/composer John Orsi scaled down here to a more intimate vocabulary. Rarely exceeding three minutes apiece, the sum of these six pieces effectively seems one large sketch.

High quality (and economically accessible) sampling technology has rendered it a challenge on this kind of recording to distinguish sounds that are actual acoustical events from those which are synthesized. The battery of percussives and field recordings, primarily of paltry human activity and dialog, are overlain with some interesting synth scapes. A lonely piano triplet on "Hodges Lodge" morphs from white key Aeolian to augmented/whole-tone triads. Sustained polychords summarize the folly of modern technocracy on the sole epic, "Two Trains Passing in the Night."

Self-described as "sound designs both proper and improper," the idiom of this disc evades tidy and convenient categorization. Mr. Orsi agrees: He admits to "not having a clue," and is awaiting the weigh-in of us "aficionados." "Then, we'll both know," he chides.
– JOHN PATRICK

PANZERBALLETT

Tank Goodness
2012 (CD, 47:36)
GENTLE ART OF MUSIC GAOM 012
FUSION/METAL/FUNK
RATING 12

Panzerballet is a German act of exceptional virtuosity led by classically trained guitarist Jan Zehrfeld. The band takes fusion to a different place through its intriguingly complex blend of metal, jazz and funk, favoring none above the other.

Opening track "Some Skunk Funk" exemplifies this eclectic mix in arrestingly accessible fashion: A metal-ized version of Randy Brecker's classic original, it suggests elements of Miles Davis, Tower Of Power and the Mahavishnu Orchestra. On the spectrum's opposite end are a couple ill-advised forays into vocal territory, hardly this instrumental powerhouse's cup of tea. Tank Goodness includes "(I've Had) the Time of My Life," a badly conceived cover of the Bill Medley-Jennifer Warnes finale from 1987 hit film Dirty Dancing. "The IKEA Trauma," which includes Freak Kitchen's Mattias Eklundh on guitar, fares little better.

Additional covers of John