

2009 : VOLUME 39

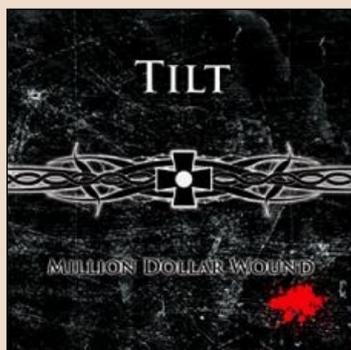
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Tilt - Million Dollar Wound [EP]



Country of Origin:	UK
Format:	CD
Record Label:	Independent
Catalogue #:	N/A
Year of Release:	2009
Time:	30:02
Info:	Tilt
Samples:	Click here

Tracklist: *No Superman* (4:30), *Long Gone* (5:43), *Gravity* (5:00), *Answers* (7:34), *Adore* (7:13)

Ed Sander's Review

Imagine that **Fish** would throw a reunion party for all the musicians he's worked with in his solo career, but forgot to turn up himself. And imagine that in a state of bewilderment the guests would look at each other until one of them cried out 'well, as long as we're here, we might as well play some music'. The result of such an unlikely event could well have been the debut album by **Tilt**.

Having said that I immediately need to correct myself, because referring to Tilt as a bunch of backing band musicians would certainly not do the members justice because they've also played with artists as diverse as Simple Minds, Sugababes and Stiltskin. Still, looking at the line-up it's the first thing that comes to mind. Tilt exists of Steve Vantsis (bass, keyboards), Dave Stewart (drums, percussion), Robin Boulton (guitars) and Irvin Duguid (keyboards), all of whom have played in Fish' band for short or long times. Now, if this Fish connection wasn't enough for you, just add the guest guitarists John Wesley and Frank Usher that appear on several tracks. If you're starting to wonder if Robin Boulton actually has something to do on this record, there's even a third guest guitarist named Nick Robertson. Besides all these instrumentalists there's also no less than four singers on this short EP, but more about them later.

I first heard about Tilt when Steve Vantsis contacted me a month or two ago. He asked me if I was interested in hearing a rough mix of *No Superman*. Sure I was. He might even have been quite amazed that I knew exactly who he was. Having seen him live on stage with Fish many times, often clad in camouflage pants and grooving behind the big Scotsman, who could have forgotten Steve. Moreover, Steve was the guy that Fish wrote his last album, *13th Star* with; an album I consider to be in my top 3 favourite Fish albums. So hearing that he'd formed a new band and being offered a sneak preview I was more than interested.

Not long after that Steve sent us a copy of the EP. Kinda weird, isn't it? A debut EP. We don't often get debut EPs from established musicians. And this is directly on of my minor gripes about Tilt's first release. They've announced that they are planning to release more EPs. So seemingly there's more material available. But if I like the music, it doesn't really feel good having to cough up 7 to 8.5 pounds (depending on where you live) for half an hour of music every time, does it? But for this amount you do get the *limited edition 'Super Jewel Case' CD version*. I wonder what's limited about it, the jewel case? As if anybody's really interested in the 'box'. It's all about the contents, isn't it? What's more, EPs just don't feel like a 'serious' thing, do they? Nowadays it's more a way to release outtakes and leftovers. And as one of my DPRP friends said 'I rarely play EPs, simply because they're too short and I like to listen to full albums'.

So far the bad news, the good news is that there's some very good stuff in the 30 minutes of music on the EP. As mentioned there's four singers performing. Two songs are sung by Paul Dourley, who's voice reminds me of Paul Stanley of Kiss and one of the singers of Salem Hill. He's got a nice and raw sound, which is counterbalanced by the angelic female voices of **Holly Tomás** and Kaela Rowan. Holly and Paul were 'discovered' by drummer Dave Stewart when he played with them in the Donnie Munro band (ex-Runrig), while

Kaela was involved in a Scottish band called **Mouth Music**. There's a third female vocalist, Lorna Bannon, that takes care of some backing vocals. As far as I'm concerned it was an excellent choice to use multiple singers since it gives the songs very different sounds and personalities, with Paul (*No Superman*, *Answers*) adding the aggressive rocking sound and Holly (*Gravity*, *Adore*) and Kaela (*Long Gone*) being the emotional, gentle side.

No Superman is a powerful rock opener with a catchy guitar riff following a drum computer intro. There's a nice variation between sections where there's just vocals and the rhythm section, full blown multiple guitar bits and even a great **Porcupine Tree**-like acoustic breakdown and wah-wah guitar! My only complaint is that during the heavier sections the lyrics become extremely hard to make out. I haven't got a clue what Paul's singing about during these bits and the booklet does not have any lyrics to help me out. After a killer guitar solo in *No Superman* it's time to chill down with Kaela in *Long Gone*, a lovely ballad about walking away from a bad relationship. I especially like the cynical 'if I could be with you ... I wouldn't do it'. The dreamy song is largely carried by acoustic guitars and synths. Towards the end percussion is changed to drums and a guitar solo and echoing vocals finish the song. Things get even more dreamy with Holly in *Gravity*. Stylistically it's not too far removed from the previous song, once again leaning on acoustic guitars and percussion. There's some tasteful orchestration by Irvin and of course a guitar solo towards the end.

Time for a change with Paul's performance in *Answers*, once again a more rocking piece and the longest one on the album. Unfortunately, once the guitars get louder and Paul's voice rawer once again I can't make out what he's singing anymore. The second half of the song features a very nice atmospheric section before picking up for a multi-layered guitar attack. After a false climax the song continues for two minutes more with strumming of acoustic and electric guitars and backing vocals. A shame about the rather abrupt ending ... The album closer, *Adore*, reminds me a lot of **Massive Attack**. A slow and atmospheric composition, it mesmerizes and enchants with Holly's celestial voice, percussion, synths and fretless bass. The song changes to a more powerful style after four minutes and plays out for another couple of minutes. Although I normally hate fade-outs it might have actually worked better for this song, ending the album, than another abrupt ending we actually get here.

Tilt's debut EP contains excellent material leaving me wanting more. Besides the EP length of the album, the production of Paul's vocals and some song endings that could have been done a bit more tastefully, I can't find much else to complain about (although these made me decide to give a rating just below DPRP recommended). I'd like to urge everybody to visit the band's **MySpace** page where samples of all songs can be heard. And in all honesty, despite my nagging, the EP is more than worth it's price, all the more since amazing musicians like these need our full support. I definitely know what my choice for 'best newcomer' in the DPRPoll will be this year ...

Bob Mulvey's Review

I must admit to having a greater curiosity for music from new or newer bands than perhaps the more established protagonists within our genre. Not that I ignore these releases, it's just that you have a rough inkling of what to expect and that there is always plenty of time to go and buy the album. A band, however, with no track record or a new venture by proven artists potentially holds a far greater interest. Following this premise in recent years I have discovered a wealth of great music. So when Ed mentioned participating in a duo review of this new venture from Tilt I opted in straight away.

Now Tilt fall into both categories mentioned above, ie a new venture from musicians I have come across in the past, but also with some names that are unfamiliar to me. As Ed has covered much of the background in his review I'll move swiftly on to the music.

The opening track is fairly straight ahead radio friendly rocker featuring vocalist Paul Dourley, who as I discovered also plays with Scot's quartet **The Asps**. The pounding rhythm and riff hungry guitar arrangement (ala **King's X**) suits Dourley's voice and kicks the CD off in fine style. The fairly standard verse chorus format is nicely broken by a mellower acoustic middle section before a raunchy guitar solo takes us to the outro.

In complete contrast the acoustic, country blues tinged *Long Gone* serves as different side to Tilt. Layered acoustic guitars laying on bed of subtle atmospheric sounds introduces to the distinct and clear voice of Kaela Rowan. Again a fairly straightforward verse chorus arrangement is employed although this time around the track builds into the solo section. Multi-layered vocals rise from the solo whilst the track itself gradually unwinds.

Gravity, the first of two tracks on the EP to feature Holly Tomás on vocals, continuing the acoustic vibe the track has similarities to its predecessor and although Holly's voice is quite different, the two tracks sit comfortably together. Again there are subtle layers underneath the guitar and voice that add warmth and depth to the sound. A similar format sees the track build gradually, climaxing in crescendo of guitars and layered vocals, before the acoustic guitar plays us out.

Paul Dourley returns for his second outing on *Million Dollar Wound* with another rocker, this time in the shape of *Answers*. The song opens with analogue(y) synths, sound effects and gradually building distorted guitars - there's a bit of an early **PT** thing going on here. Melody wise, this is the most immediate of all the tracks with the vocal line sticking in the head from the outset. I like this guy's voice and again the track fits well with his delivery. *Answers* briefly picks up the pace around the three minute mark, which I liked. We then move into an instrumental version of the track to close - a fairly dense layering of instruments that works very well. Again the track fades to acoustic guitar, this time with multi-tracked vocals and effects...

Final track is another "ballad" and featuring Holly Tomás on vocals, although this time around there is a wispy airiness to her voice that brought to mind **Enya** and **Massive Attack**. The spacial instrumentation also helped immensely in this comparison. Acoustic guitar picks up the tempo around the four minute mark, gradually dissolving into something akin to a *Dark Side*... vocal workout from Holly.

I've made greater reference to the vocal element of this CD rather than the musical side - mainly because I feel the album leans that way. There is, however, much in the arrangements to appeal to the more instrumentally minded, not by the way of odd metering or flashy soloing, but rather the subtle blending of the numerous parts that go to make a satisfactory whole.

So all in all a fairly impressive opening statement from Tilt. Like Ed I have a few reservations, and personally I found the EP to have a bit of a two band feel, although both worked well, perhaps not necessarily together. Had the female voices been used to backup Dourley and vice versa then perhaps it would have given a more satisfactory and cohesive end result. I also felt the proggy elements were fairly minimal, although not altogether missing from the material. As is the problem with many EPs, although there is enough here to whet the appetite, there's not quite enough to fill the hunger. So I hope fuelled by the response from this debut EP the band follow this up with a full length release, even if it incorporated re-mixed versions of the tracks here.

In conclusion I would say that if any of the major female fronted folky, acoustic "progrock" bands (from the last decade or so) feature in your CD collection then certainly this release from Tilt should be well worth checking

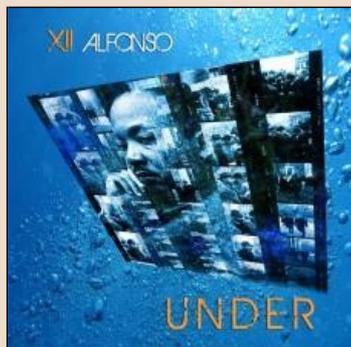
out. If they also feature a male counterpart then you could well be onto a winner!

Conclusions:

ED SANDER : 7.5 out of 10

BOB MULVEY : 7 out of 10

XII Alfonso – Under



Country of Origin:	France
Format:	CD
Record Label:	Musea Records
Catalogue #:	FGBG 4814
Year of Release:	2009
Time:	62:49
Info:	XII Alfonso
Samples:	Click here

Tracklist: *Underlifetime* (5:16), *Underevolution* (3:11), *Underknowledge* (2:51), *Underprogress* (6:28), *Undermemories* (3:06), *Underknowledge* (4:06), *Underbark* (2:43), *Underatom* (7:18), *Undersky* (5:28), *Underbark* (3:33), *Underlifetime* (4:18), *Understones* (4:50), *Underdream Part 1* (5:10), *Underdream Part 2* (4:25)

XII Alfonso is one of those names in prog not everyone will know. The French brothers Philippe and François Claerhout have recorded and contributed to several albums from the mid nineties onwards. Their trademark is prog with a 'folk' touch and a positive vibe of originality.

After a sort of movie-fragment, there are echoing keyboards and a trumpet (sample), then bass, drums and electric guitars join in and we have a really instrumental prog-piece with a touch of jazz in it. The classical guitar takes over, playing keyboards and fretless bass being the sole accompaniment and near the end it's mainly the electric guitar. More jazz influences in track three, with an electric piano and the melodies played by a lead-guitar almost sounding like a distorted human voice. Then the classical guitar takes the lead again.

The first part of *Underprogress* is mainly keyboards with some percussion - the music is in the vein of the instrumental tracks by the **Alan Parsons Project**, but a bit more jazzy. Some bubbling sounds and again some fragment of a old movie and then it's the second part, like in the second track, a classical guitar and mainly keyboards. In *Undermemories* we hear a conversation between a young boy and someone claiming to be an FBI agent, while in the background we hear some nice music by the brothers Claerhout, almost ambient. *Underknowledge* starts with an original recording of part of lecture from one of the worlds greater scientists (due to my lack of knowledge I can't tell you which one). The music is a bit jazzy again, featuring the same theme as in track three, but this time keyboards, percussion, bass and the electric guitar alternate the parts of keyboards, percussion and classical guitar. Superb bass playing by Dominique Caubet. A fiddle, a classical guitar and a bouzouki play melodies and solo's on themes somewhere between folk music and Chinese traditional music.

Fragments of an American broadcast breaking the news of the bomb on Hiroshima and describe its consequences against a background of more powerful music in *Underatom*. The second part features a more jazzy sounding ensemble with tasteful soloing of Philippe on his organ, followed by an almost New Age piece, slowly getting more powerful when the guitars and bass join in. A beautiful piece is *Undersky*, again instrumental and the fundaments of progressive music blended with some jazz as well as Latin influences. The second *Underbark* shows the same characteristics as the first, while in *Underlifetime*, the trumpet samples from the beginning of this album on a theme showing some similarities with the *Jan Hammer* Miami Vice theme. The next bit is built around the electric guitar of François, while his brother masters the keyboards and we can hear a bass and some percussion too.

Xylophone samples and a classical guitar dominate the piece called *Understones* with interludes by the brothers Claerhout playing electric guitar and orchestral keyboard sounds. Martin Luther King can be heard in *Underdream Part 1* in his speech where he proclaims 'all men are created equal', the music being a refuge of tranquillity in almost New Age style again. The last piece of this impressive but 'not quite easy to listen to' album, is a symphonic piece with now and then King stating 'I have a dream'. The album finishes with an American advertisement from the fifties. The artwork and the booklet are as good and intriguing as the whole album.

Not just an ordinary yet very interesting album. For all who like a bit of a challenge in prog-music or love the more 'intellectual' progressive instrumental music, this album is definitely worth checking out.

Conclusion: 7.5 out of 10

MENNO VON BRUCKEN FOCK

Daniel Gauthier – The Wish





Country of Origin:	Canada
Format:	CD
Record Label:	Independent
Catalogue #:	110468
Year of Release:	2008
Time:	58:35
Info:	Daniel Gauthier
Samples:	Click here

Tracklist: *The Wish [Part I]* (2:53), *The Clock* (6:42), *Just For A While* (8:24), *Broken Wings* (5:09), *Axis Of Men* (7:34), *Once In Time* (3:22), *Song For Them* (21:21), *The Wish [Part II]* (3:34)

Much of the promotional literature that comes with the CDs DPRP receives for review mention musical influences on the recording artists, such as "touches of Dominici-era Dream Theater interspersed with late period Genesis". Then when the DPRP reviewer listens to the CD, none of these influences are evident. The reverse of this situation seems to have happened with my receipt of *The Wish*, the third full-length release from Canadian multi-instrumentalist Daniel Gauthier. The letter that came with the CD does not mention Gauthier's obvious influence, *Close to the Edge*-era Yes! Perhaps Gauthier does not want to pigeonhole himself, which is a good thing.

Gauthier plays acoustic, electric and bass guitars; keyboards; sings and is responsible as well for programming the drumming and percussion elements on the CD. Ostensibly he composed the music and lyrics, with Katherine Akerly credited as "lyrics advisor". The CD was clearly and professionally mixed and mastered by Larry O'Malley. Yvette Dumais is credited with "financial backing and positive thinking".

The **Yes** influence is immediately evident on opening track *The Wish [Part I]*, a brief instrumental new age rollick that features some bass from Gauthier that could have come from the picked Rickenbacker of **Chris Squire**. On other sections of the CD we get electric guitar dubbed over acoustic guitar a la **Steve Howe**, and on the 21 minute plus epic *Song For Them* the expansive track breaks into an overdubbed a cappella vocal section reminiscent of some of the vocal experiments **Jon Anderson** has done. Gauthier's drum programming on the CD is varied and well-paced.

Don't get me wrong; Gauthier is not a Yes rip-off to the obvious extreme a band like Starcastle is. Aside from Yes, influences such as **David Gilmour** and **IQ** are evident on *The Wish*. In fact, Gauthier's voice is not unlike that of IQ vocalist **Peter Nicholls**. A folksiness evoking Gauthier's Canadian roots is evident on the groovy flourish of *Just For A While*. Some surf guitar, dark synths, and militant drum programming accent other parts of the CD's music.

The CD package is in three-way gatefold format and features on the cover an abstract image of a cactus shaped like a hand with fingers crossed against a dark sky. A rectangular four page booklet of lyrics is included. The colourful artwork was designed and laid out by David Therriault. Photographs were taken by Gauthier's partner Lucie Roy.

When I was a kid, my family and I would often take trips to Trois-Rivières, Quebec to visit relatives. "Three Rivers", as we used to call it. Those relatives have since either moved elsewhere or passed away. I took sentimental delight in perusing Gauthier's website, and discovering that his CDs can be purchased at a store in Trois-Rivières!

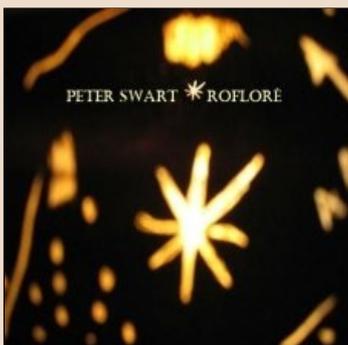
For his next CD, an area of opportunity for Gauthier would be to tone down on the Yes references. This could be achieved by going for an edgier, riff-based sound in places, to give his music more variety. This is not to say that *The Wish* may not grow on you after a few listens.

This CD will most likely appeal to fans of Yes. If you are seeking tighter, Ipod friendly three minute singles, you won't find them here.

Conclusion: 7.5 out of 10

JIM CORCORAN

Peter Swart - Rofloré



Country of Origin:	Netherlands
Format:	CD
Record Label:	Independent
Year of Release:	2009
Time:	40:42
Info:	Peter Swart
Samples:	Click here

Tracklist: *The Dawning Of Nylyo - Roflorés Creation* (4:49), *Juvenis - Yascath's Question - First Signs Of The Arädany* (4:27), *The Pontha - Eternal Doubt - Constantly Growing Knowledge* (3:27), *Mysterious Allurement - Loneliness - Strangeness Though Deep Charm* (4:18), *The Dream - The Symphonic Muse* (4:50), *Impression - Feelings Of Affection - Misdeed* (5:28), *Electrhythm Of Joy - The Everlasting Unification* (2:24), *Descriptions Of Ymyty - The Edhazherä* (4:18), *Dhaedra - Return - Master Of Aräda* (6:41)

Rofloré is the fifth solo album by Dutch musician and professional psychologist **Peter Swart**, although the first album we have reviewed at DPRP. The album is a concept about the minstrel *Rofloré* who sets off on a voyage through all the souls in the planetary system in which he resides to experience their *artistic expressions* and experience self-realisation and personal growth. After 200 years he returns to his home planet and becomes the Master of Aräda. Or something like that. The story, lyrics and narration is by Peter van der Laan, who was the singer in Morphosis a band that Swart was also a member of. The only other musician on the album is drummer Koos van Reeveen.

Some, like me, may be a bit sceptical about the presence of a narrator, being under the impression that such inclusions are only really justified when the speaker has the gravitas of Richard Burton on *War Of The Worlds*. And my worst fears were realised when at the end of the first track, *The Dawning Of Nylyo - Roflorés Creation* van der Laan starts his narration. However, it is very brief, setting the scene of the tale and only making a reappearance at the conclusion of the album. The bulk of the album is instrumental although when Swart does sing it is with a pleasant and somewhat plaintive voice. The music is quite symphonic in nature with lots of light and shade, mixing acoustic and electric guitars with piano and 70's style synths to very good effect. Generally, the style is fairly laid back which makes the heavier, electric sections appear that more intense.

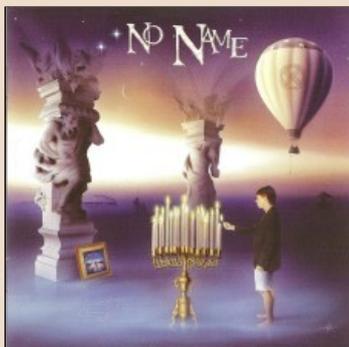
The playing throughout is very good, with the acoustic sections in particular showing that Swart is a fine technician. The classical guitar work on *Impression - Feelings Of Affection - Misdeed* is of particular note, which mutates into a lovely melody. There are plenty of cascading melodies and it has to be said that Swart is also a fine composer, particularly in the way that he intermingles themes and effortlessly moves between different tempos both within and between tracks. The electric guitar is used to good effect drawing on a sonic palette that enhances the variety of keyboards that are used. Apparently the album was originally going to close with a big ending but Swart decided to simply revisit the theme of *Roflorés Creation* in an acoustic setting because, in Swart's own words: "*Whatever the course of personal growth, the core is always preserved*". If I hadn't already mentioned that Swart was a psychologist, you could probably have guessed it from such a sentiment!

Casting aside such flippancies, *Rofloré* is one of those albums that has the ability to get under the skin and in the right environment is a positive joy to listen to. Certainly not an album for listening to whilst driving but in those more relaxed moments of peace, quiet and solitude, it makes a pretty fine accompaniment.

Conclusion: 7 out of 10

MARK HUGHES

No Name – 20 Candles



Country of Origin:	Luxembourg
Format:	CD
Record Label:	Musea Records
Catalogue #:	FGBG 4824
Year of Release:	2009
Time:	71:07
Info:	No Name
Samples:	Click here

Tracklist: *First Night* (6:27), *The Summer's Already Gone* (5:35), *Mat Enger Tréin* (4:45), *The Man* (4:48), *Merry-Go-Round* (3:32), *Orient Express* (12:04), *Broken Heart* (5:30), *Strange Decisions*(6:34), *Dolphins, Sharks And A Flood Of Sunshine* (5:38), *Thoughts Pay No Toll* (6:17), *Battlefield* (5:35), *Uncompromising* (4:29)

The name of **No Name** stands for melodic symphonic music from Luxembourg and is to my knowledge the only band in the genre known outside of their own country. In celebration of 20 years of No Name, the members of the band ultimately decided that they would rather re-record the majority of the songs for this album, creating a sort of 'best of', than compose a whole new album. The album would feature one new track as well as the first piece No Name ever composed. Adding their live experiences and a more modern sound the result is an album well worth listening to.

Singer Patrick Kiefer's always has and still reminds me of Alphaville's **Marion Gold** but surely also of RPWL's **Yogi Lang**, and the music too certainly shows influences of that band next to influences from **Genesis** (late eighties) as well as bands like **Novalis** from Germany. Definitely we can hear traces of Alphaville in the first (previously unreleased) track *First Night* and more progressive elements by bands like **IQ** in the second track. The third track, in their native tongue could have been a Novalis song for my perception, and a good one, furthermore we recognize some Genesis in there too! A bit of **Arena** at the beginning of *The Man*, followed by a sort of alternative "*Turn it On Again*", whereas the chorus sounds more like Arena again. Partly a waltz tempo in a song with characteristics similar to the hit *Golden Brown* by the Stranglers, is *Merry-Go-Round*, a song ending with lustrous keyboards, before the waltz returns once more.

The lengthiest track on this album is *Orient Express* blending traces of **Kraftwerk** (voices) with Genesis and IQ. Melodic slow symphonic music in *Broken Heart* in the vein of a gentle **Pink Floyd** is followed by a more up tempo piece featuring the saxophone of guest musician Fred Hormain, then the Floydian (or maybe **RPWL** is even better as reference) sounds returns. As far as there is something like 'typical neo-prog', *Strange Decisions*, might fulfil all requirements needed, with influences of early **Marillion**. The song with the longest title is in the

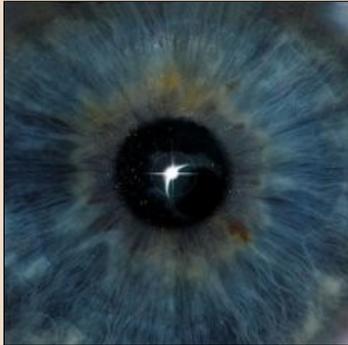
vein of RPWL, whilst more like early Marillion is the sound in *Thoughts Pay No Toll*, a mid tempo melodic song with orchestral keyboards. In *Battlefield* we find a mix between RPWL and Arena with an unexpected contribution by Jonathan Tilly's bagpipe. The final song on this delightful melodic prog album is called *Uncompromising*, which is a previously unreleased, pleasant mid tempo song in the vein of RPWL.

Of course it's a pity that Luxembourg's prog-pride couldn't come up with a whole new album, but these reworked songs are a pretty decent alternative. *20 Candles* is an excellent way of getting to know this band and even if one owns the existing albums, this would still be a valuable addition.

Conclusion: 7.5 out of 10

MENNO VON BRUCKEN FOCK

Ahkmed - Distance



Country of Origin:	Australia
Format:	CD
Record Label:	Electrohasch
Catalogue #:	EH 130
Year of Release:	2009
Time:	59:08
Info:	Ahkmed
Samples:	Click here

Tracklist: *Strega* (9:07), *Saltwater* (10:24), *Iemanja* (7:49), *Soma* (2:15), *Caldera* (8:39), *Temple* (9:10), *Distance* (11:46)

Ahkmed are a trio from Melbourne, Australia, who despite having formed in 1998 and released four independent EP's, have only now got round to issuing their full length debut. The Electrohasch promotional blurb lists the styles the band should be filed under as 'psychedelic/stoner/fuzz/space', which is fine as far as it goes, but misses out the style I'd say best describes the band - 'post rock'. Of the influences listed by their label, I'd agree with the likes of **Hawkwind**, **Pink Floyd**, **Mogwai** and even (to an extent) desert stoner rock kings **Kyuss**; although The Stooges and Mudhoney is perhaps stretching things, you can at least see where there coming from.

Ahkmed's songs are generally lengthy affairs, and follow much of the post rock blueprint, albeit with one or two twists in places. Opener *Strega* sets the scene of what's to follow - big tribal drums open things up before a chiming, shimmering wall of guitars puts us firmly in territory occupied by the likes of **Red Sparowes**. From here the music journeys through various peaks and troughs, with the intensity fading in and out, and plenty of power coming from the fuzzed-up guitar sound and the rumbling, almost distorted bass guitar. There's some spoken word stuff and vaguely menacing chanting in the mid section, which along with plenty of feedback and spacey sound effects does give the material that psychedelic/ space rock vibe.

The remaining songs tend to follow in a similar vein, with some variations on the theme - both *Iemanja* and *Caldera* have (fairly short) vocal sections; drummer John-Paul Caligiuri handles these in the style of **Roger Waters'** efforts on *Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun* - plenty of references to deserts and the solar system, as you might expect. Temple perhaps comes closest to attaining the sort of 'jamming in the desert under the moon and stars' vibe Ahkmed seem to be aiming for, with the tribal rhythm section, sitar-like guitar work and juxtaposition of sparse 'verse' and more rocking 'chorus' working to provide an atmospheric nine or so minutes. The album ends strongly with the title track, which seems to combine all the best elements of the previous songs.

The album's raw feel is both a positive and a negative - it gives the material an edgy, powerful sound, but also means that at times the musicianship appears a bit sloppy, and some of the mellower sections would perhaps have benefited from a slightly slicker sound. There are also several points where matters seem to drift and some editing might have improved things, whilst some of the more straightforward post rock stuff does tend to sound a little anonymous at times. Balancing this however is the fact that when the band get the combination of post, psychedelic and space rock right the effect is impressive, and they do get close to creating a unique sound all of their own. Overall a promising debut album, and it will hopefully not be another decade before a follow-up appears.

Conclusion: 7 out of 10

TOM DE VAL

26 - Solipsissimus



Country of Origin:	Germany
Format:	CD



Record Label:	Independent/ Just For Kicks
Catalogue #:	110468
Year of Release:	2009
Time:	41:07
Info:	26
Samples:	Click here

Tracklist: *Gun Above Her Bed (4:44), Ocean (4:11), Coma (5:17), Love Who (4:22), Ten Minutes of Truth (3:26), Back To (6:08), The Mountain (0:57), Sliderocks (5:58), Goodbye Laugh (4:04)*

Quite a number of years ago, I recall listening to an early King's X album with my brother-in-law Bruce. We were both enjoying it very much and commenting on this or that feature of the music. At one point, I observed that guitarist Ty Tabor relied a lot on arpeggios played on heavily distorted guitar. "Of course he does," Bruce said – "it's a power trio." That might seem like an obvious observation and comment, but it's stuck with me through the years and has reminded me always to take into account what a band does with what it has. Iron Maiden now has three guitarists; we can expect from them (and, hoo boy, do they deliver) some fairly complex guitar interplay. But much of what a trio does, certainly on stage but also on record, will be determined by how many, or rather how few, musicians the band comprises.

26 (now that's one catchy band name!) is made up of guitarist/bassist Andy Kodiwein, drummer Marco Minnemann, and singer Joe Valdarno. And my mention of King's X wasn't meant to refer only to this band's instrumentation. Ty Tabor himself gets thanked in this CD credits, and **King's X's** influence is certainly audible on 26's debut album, though I don't mean to imply that they "sound like" King's X. There are songs, especially the slower ones, that make one think irresistibly of that venerable power trio, but for the most part this album is unique.

I'll begin with my main criticisms. In fact, those two criticisms intersect: they have to do with the arrangements and the production. The former are, in my opinion, too often too busy. In my old age, I've come to appreciate the virtue of space, of silences, in music, and to my ears, most of the songs on this album err on the side of over-busyness. The arrangements are crammed with guitar parts, often when a little space would let the songs breathe. And those busy arrangements aren't well served by the slightly murky production. In fact, much of the time I can hardly hear the bass, and the kick drum certainly doesn't have much depth – both bass and drums are buried in the mix. Even Valdarno's voice has a hard time rising above the instrumental tracks at times. So I find the album a bit unsatisfying on those two levels.

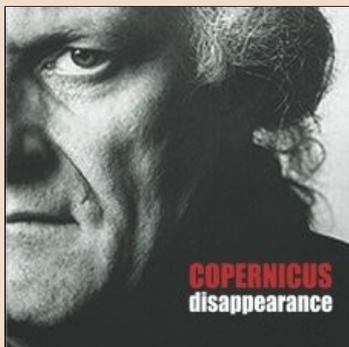
The compositions themselves are pretty interesting. For my taste, there might be a few too many self-consciously (or they sound self-consciously to me, anyway) twists and turns and dynamics – check out Sliderocks, which contains some truly wacky stops, starts, instrumental breaks, and changes of mood. And I have to confess that I don't quite understand what's going on lyrically in some of the songs. Back To, for example, contains several Beatles quotations (actually ending with the words "I read the news today oh boy"! – but it begins with the lines "I move your air with a man on a pie/Who needs an answer for a lullaby." Okay, it's more beguiling than, oh, I don't know, "I'm a hoochie koochie man" – but that's about all I can say for it.

Overall, I can't say that this album particularly grabs me, though I've given it a lot of playings to make sure it had enough chances to do so. I think its density (the crowded arrangements that I mentioned) is the main problem for me; the band is throwing too much into the songs, not trusting to the melodies. But it's far from a bad album, and it may well be that future efforts will strip down the songs and let them speak for themselves; if so, I'll be interested to hear the results.

Conclusion: 6 out of 10

GERALD WANDIO

Copernicus - Disappearance



Country of Origin:	USA
Format:	CD
Record Label:	MoonJune Records
Catalogue #:	NCD2091
Year of Release:	2009
Time:	73:04
Info:	Copernicus
Samples:	Click here

Tracklist: *12 Subatomic Particles (9:52), The Quark Gluon Plasma (7:42), The Blind Zombies (8:54), Humanity Created The Illusion Of Itself (7:09), Atomic New Orleans (5:30), Poor Homo Sapiens (13:57), REVOLUTION!! (21:05)*

Where to start with this one! Having read the sleeve notes and accompanying blurb I was apprehensive to say the least as it has been a long, long time since I read such self-aggrandizing, pretentious cobblers. **Copernicus** (or Joseph Smalkowski as his mum knows him) is a strange man. Or men as he seems to spend a lot of time

arguing with himself, Copernicus not being much of a fan of Mr. Smalkowski. Young Joseph seems to have grown up looking for answers to the great questions and fighting against his Catholic upbringing. After graduating from university he developed his alter ego to put his philosophies and beliefs into the public arena and became a regular on the New York poetry and performance art scene of the 1970s and '80s. The name of the Renaissance scholar and scientist was well chosen as he flies in the face of accepted thoughts and beliefs and coming up with something new. I am not going to even try and pin down exactly what Copernicus' philosophy is but Nothingness is a big part of it and the sub-atomic particles that make up the universe are where it appears to be at.

So what would it sound like to have a spoken word performance artist with the presence and booming voice of a Richard Burton but part beat poet and part fire-and-brimstone preacher (whose God is physics rather than religion), get together for a day in the recording studio with a dozen quality musicians to recite, rant and project his poetry over improvised music made up on the spot in real time? The short answer is better than you'd expect. Thanks for this must surely go to Copernicus' long term partner-in-crime and musical director Pierce Turner. Irish born Turner has been very highly regarded in singer songwriter circles for many years, the likes of Christy Moore are admirers, and his contribution here is as important as that of his scary poetic friend, if not more so. The band includes keyboards, four guitarists, percussionists, trombone, violin, bass, two drummers and vocals, all of whom have to be very well drilled to stop this monstrous ensemble tumbling into a broiling pit of its own dissonance. The fact that it doesn't is to Turner's eternal credit. Copernicus has recorded half a dozen albums this way over the last twenty plus years, I can't compare this to the others as this is the first time I've come across his work but I hear that they are all different. This is live music in the truest sense - set up the mikes, play, use your ears and hopefully all will be well but, no matter, it'll be a hell of a ride!

I decided immediately that I wasn't going to like this but I do. I'm not sure why and I probably shouldn't, but I do. Copernicus recites, screams and declaims his prose in a very theatrical way which would fall into a parody of ham cinema villains of yesteryear were it not for the music which often has real direction and holds the interest. Improvisations often seem most fun for those playing, the audience having to bide their time and stick it out before the tunes return. Here, small riffs and themes vacillate and evolve throughout each piece with extraneous noises and effects adding to a spaciness that is quite enjoyable.

Different styles come and go from Delta Blues, marching bands, Electronica, free jazz, folky acoustic bits and psychedelic rock with Hammond B3 from Turner and lots of trombone. There's some funk in there too! Some parts of it are better than others but when it works it is actually really good! None of it is particularly bad even if you might sometimes get the feeling that you're listening to someone who is a few electrons short of an atom. Luckily the music matches the words surprisingly well and the disc is very well recorded. There isn't much else I can say about this except that it is a unique listening experience and possibly a work of genius. Or madness. Or both. From where Copernicus swims you can clearly make out the shores of Clever and Stupid but you can never be certain which he is leading you towards.

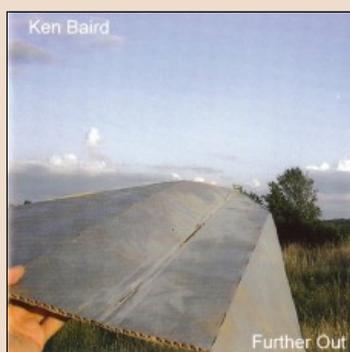
Hear this and be amazed, shocked, disturbed or just plain bored - all are completely valid responses. But be very careful if you are considering buying this as you really need to be aware of what you're getting yourself into. That said, I'm glad I had the chance to hear it.

File under 'W' for 'Weeiiiiirrrddd!' Mu-Hahahahaha!

Conclusion: Unrateable?

JEZ ROWDEN

Ken Baird – Further Out



Country of Origin:	Canada
Format:	CD
Record Label:	Independent
Catalogue #:	KBCD005
Year of Release:	2008
Time:	43:09
Info:	Ken Baird
Samples:	Click here

Tracklist: *Spinning Wheels (5:57), A Thousand Years (2:59), The Sound Of Rain (3:43), Stainless Skies (4:25), Where I Came From (3:18), As The Highway Greet A Friend (4:35), Reflections In The Lake (3:24), Everything To Lose (5:39), Further Out (10:02)*

Canadian **Ken Baird** is a multit talented musician without much notoriety. I have never heard his name before his latest work came to me for review and finding information is difficult. Further Out is his fifth release and comes as a well orchestrated and thought out album.

Ken's recording style brings out the many fine details and intricate moments within each song, which are well put together as individual units. There is a lot to hear where each song includes different instruments, which are incorporated into many different and fairly good melodies.

My primary complaint for this disc is that it isn't dynamic. There is no "wow" factor. The songs don't have rising tension, climax, or dramatic transition. It is a compilation of carefully metered trotting along tunes that are good enough to listen to without changing to a different disc - but almost not.

At times this disc reminds me of the mellow side of **Glass Hammer**, especially with the compositional styling and orchestration, but it is missing the organic grace of **Yes**. And then with the lyrics and delicate melodies

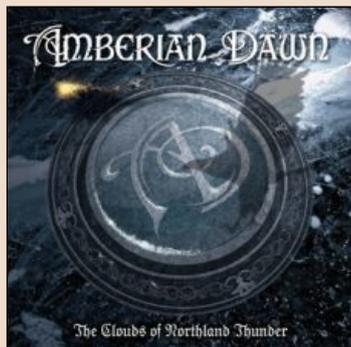
intertwined within the flow of the music I hear what I can only describe as a mix of **Timothy Pure** with **The Mamas and the Papas**. The flower child tilt works well with his earthy mix of the "light" instruments and lilting female vocals layered within.

In the music business we often find musicians who are not well known despite being talented. We also get talented musicians that deliver a bit of "cheese factor" among an otherwise good piece of music and there is some of that here. It doesn't ruin the overall work, but this doesn't stand out among today's quality progressive rock releases either. Personally, without a contrast from quiet to crescendo or even drama in the drums, I am not likely to make this one a repeat in the playlist.

Conclusion: 6 out of 10

BRENDAN BOWEN

Amberian Dawn – The Clouds Of Northland Thunder



Country of Origin:	Finland
Format:	CD
Record Label:	Ascendance Records
Catalogue #:	ASC23011CD
Year of Release:	2009
Time:	47:05
Info:	Amberian Dawn
Samples:	Click here

Tracklist: *He Sleeps In A Grove* (3:20), *Incubus* (5:03), *Kokko – Eagle Of Fire* (3:17), *Willow Of Tears* (4:10), *Shallow Waters* (3:38), *Lost Soul* (3:43), *Sons Of Seven Stars* (3:45), *Saga* (4:08), *Snowmaiden* (3:45), *Lionheart* (3:43), *Morning Star* (4:31), *Birth Of The Harp* (4:05)

Amberian Dawn's bombastic take on symphonic-metal is matched by the bluster of their record company: "... [*The Clouds Of Northland Thunder*] is sure to be heralded as a future classic by fans of the genre." Well, that's as maybe, but what *is* certain is that they are not yet doing enough to cross over the genre barrier and win many fans of other genres or of progressive rock in general.

The Finnish band's second album is an improvement on their first, *River Of Tuoni*, mainly by virtue of slightly increased musicality overall. The band bring increased pace to the proceedings, making for a more energetic experience but what they will now need to do, for me, in order to poach music fans in general is to increase the musicality of their playing even more, even at the faster pace. Currently, this music too often relies on the pace and intensity of the beat (as distinct from rhythm) and on **Heidi Parviainen's** high soprano singing. Both are a mixed blessing: the beat is up near the 200 bpm on occasion, with machine-gun drumming to match, but pace without interesting rhythm can become tiresome to most music fans. Heidi's vocal is clearly seen as a big selling point for the band, her coloratura soprano displays out-performing most other female singers in this and gothic rock genres, but its effect again tires as the pace limits her ability to display a melodic sensibility (does she have the range for it?): although perhaps this is more a criticism of the musical writing than of Heidi herself.

The music writer in the band is keyboardist and guitarist **Tuomas Seppälä**; Heidi writes the English lyrics. Also featuring on the album are **Kasper Heikkinen** (guitar), **Tommi Kuri** (bass) and **Joonas Pykälä-aho** (drums). Subsequent to the album's recording the band have added yet another guitarist, **Emil Pohjalainen**, so that **Tuomas** can concentrate on the keyboards during live shows. You may well have seen **Amberian Dawn** on tour last year promoting the *River Of Tuoni* album by supporting Dutch band **Epica**.

He Sleeps In A Grove begins at a sprint and the combination with Heidi's singing is immediately disconcerting: no time here for sustained notes, no time for melody – just pace and high pitched vocal. It's an impressive sound, but not very pretty music. Interestingly, the second track, *Incubus*, is probably the best of the album virtue of some added interest brought in, for the only time, by a duo-lead vocal with a male (sorry, my promo disc and other info have failed to reveal his name!) and greater musicality. *Willow Of Tears*, quite a slow number by this standard, makes use of the temporal space by developing a melodic sense and some sustained-note singing: it's ok but the melodic phrasing could be prettier. *Lost Soul* manages to combine an interesting rhythm with the fast beat and there is an interesting melody too – it's the pick of this crop.

Too often elsewhere though, it's just down to how furiously the drummer can lay down a beat and how well the others keep up. There is insufficient variety between the songs to maintain the interest of someone other than a metal-head. It's a shame, because I sense that there is potential here for this band to develop musically, perhaps progressively, and win fans across a broader range of genres. As it is, they are good, but limited by what they (choose to) do.

Conclusion: 5 out of 10

ALEX TORRES

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