

Review:

Camera Obscura | Steve Adams

HAIRLESS HEART

<http://www.hairlessheartherald.co.uk/adamsco.htm>

The third solo album from Steve Adams, Camera Obscura (released 2004), welcomes two guest musicians and another change in line-up from his previous album, Vertigo. Desha Dunnahoe remains the main keyboard player and also takes responsibility for bass. Karen Teperberg takes over on drums and percussion, whilst Steve, naturally, is on guitars and, wait for it... Mellotron! Camera Obscura literally means 'dark room' when translated from the Latin. It is not often wise to read too much into album titles but in this instance, either by chance or deliberation, Camera Obscura fits rather well. Some tracks are on the dark side, whilst others create an image, not always upside down.

Having recently listened to Steve's first two solo albums, I was a little disappointed when I heard Camera Obscura for the first time. Clearly it was good but I was expecting more. I decided to give my ears a rest and come back to it the next day when, as if by magic, my expectations were met, which goes to show that perseverance can reap rewards. In fact, there are some brilliant tracks on this one. The opener, instrumental In A World With No Sky, is a barnstormer, great melody, slightly distorted electric guitar (do I really hear the 'Pearl & Dean' riff in there at one point??) along Satriani lines. A slightly dark opening riff to Car 333 (a track dedicated to his father who used to race cars at a speedway) progresses in a style reminiscent of Martin Barre to a degree, in ZZ Top mode minus the beards. Whether it is the use of Mellotron in Quicksand that makes me think of Hackett initially, I'm not sure, but the pounding beat adds a touch of menace to this heavy track. Karen Teperberg is, without doubt, a class drummer. Desha captures that Dave Sinclair keyboard sound on Seven Four, a track with some nice chord changes and motoring guitar.

The Door Stays Open, dedicated to the late Peter Bardens, has a delightful bluesy flavour, Steve Mattern, Adams's new keyboard player, doing some nice things with his Hammond organ. Silent Divide steps into the Camel/Hackett camp and is the first of three songs with vocals. There's no mistaking the Hackett influence on the next track as it is one of Hackett's tunes, Jacuzzi. Guest musician, Mary Dagani, a classical flautist and Hackett fan, fills John Hackett's shoes admirably as Steve does Steve's (God this is confusing!). Excellent version.

Perelandra (not to be confused with Glass Hammer's Perelandra - this one

was written by Steve Adams) in one of those 'spine tingling' instrumentals which are both beautiful yet eerie. Only the most insensitive of folk would be able to maintain a dry eye when this is performed live. A classic track for sure. Gnomes Uncombed sees Steve return to his Satriani style and is good driving music assuming you like to drive fast. Fragile (not to be confused by Yes' Fragile!) has a slight Caravan feel about it bar the twiddley guitar pieces. The second of the vocal tracks sees Desha add some emphasis on flute here and there. Belgian guitarist, Philippe Thibaut, 'duels' with Steve on Diminished Capacity, which will delight any guitar fan.

Camera Obscura has many highlights but a personal favourite has to be Wisteria. As you may have guessed, there is more than a hint of Camel in this one in both composition style and Steve's vocals, helped once again by Desha on flute. The main guitar riff just lodges in the mind so that days later you are left wondering where you heard it. Or is that just old age creeping up on me? At just under five minutes, Wisteria is too short in my opinion and I hope that Steve will one day re-visit it and come up with an extended version.

Camera Obscura disappointing? Absolutely not!

Jem Jedrzejewski