

Review:

Camera Obscura | Steve Adams

PROGRESSOR

Prolusion. In the course of his rather long musical career, American guitarist and composer Steve ADAMS worked with Kit Watkins (Happy The Man, Camel), Andy Ward (Camel), Billy Cobham (Mahavishnu Orchestra), Steve Lukather (Toto), Pye Hastings (Caravan), Mick Fleetwood (Fleetwood Mac) and some other renowned musicians. Most of all, however, he is probably known as former member of Pete Bardens' Mirage (Pete's primary project after he quit Camel) and as a solo performer. Steve has three solo albums to his credit: "Maiden Voyage", "Vertigo" and "Camera Obscura", which was released last November.

Analysis. Steve Hackett, Steve Vai and Joe Satriani are mentioned in the CD press kit as the best points of comparisons with regard to Steve Adams's creation, while in my view, the latter two aren't that appropriate, at least judging by this album. Steve isn't much about to accentuate his guitar technique, appearing above all as a thinking composer and arranger, which I value much higher than some particular skills in performance. Besides, he also plays keyboards, preferring the ARP string ensemble and the Mellotron, both of which are much to my taste as well. Generally, traditional synthesizers weren't used here as widely as the vintage keys, organ and piano included, which is another positive addition to the piggy bank of this material's virtues. Considering the album on the whole, it can be said that the sound is drawn from numerous styles: both, guitar and symphonic, kinds of Art-Rock, Hard Rock, Prog-Metal, Blues, quasi Jazz-Fusion, but all from within superb compositions featuring plenty of changes and fresh ideas. Some of the music comes with the features that point Mr. Hackett out as Mr. Adams's teacher in absentia, so it's no surprise to hear the rendering of Jacuzzi on this album, with solos of guitar, ARP and flute sharing the lead in most cases. One more instrumental, Seven Four, and also two of the three songs present, Wisteria and Silent Divide, can also be referred to that kind of guitar / symphonic Art-Rock, which is typical only for such Hackett's albums as "Spectral Mornings", "Defector" and "Highly Strung". (These are notable for keyboardist Nick Magnus's noteworthy contribution to the arrangements.) Wisteria is simply a magical song, very inspired, with colorful patterns painted by guitar, flute, piano and the Mellotron. Silent Divide is the one with brilliant solos of acoustic guitar, as if dancing around the central themes all through the piece, and such a novelty could have not remained unnoticed. The instrumentals Quicksand and Perelandra are kindred compositions. Somewhat of a symphonic Blues Rock, with very

memorable solos of electric guitar, Hammond and ARP, is the essence of Fragile, which is the remaining song in the set and is very intriguing. Something barely imperceptible in the music makes it akin to In the Evening or even Carouselambra from Led Zeppelin's most symphonic (and probably most underrated) "In Through the Out Door". The rockier Car 333, and also Perelandra, are a bit more straightforward than the other tracks, but are hardly less impressive. The only piece that I have some problems with is The Door Stays Open. It seems to me it was advisedly restrained within the framework of classic Blues or, perhaps, Steve too scrupulously followed the traditions of the genre when he worked on it. The remaining three instrumental compositions: In a World With No Sky, Gnomes Uncombed and Diminished Capacity are probably most diverse and innovative. As a last resort, I am more than certain that they best of all suit my personal taste:-) The music is Art-Rock meets Cathedral Metal with real heavy, meaty and mesmerizing guitar riffs, two dueling guitar solos and lush passages of string ensemble (except Diminished Capacity).

Conclusion. Unlike some other artists operating in this territory, Mr. Adams knows when enough is enough, which is part of what makes "Camera Obscura" interesting for me, and I'm above all a progressive music lover. Steve is a true artist and is definitely an artist worthy of further investigation. Highly recommended, especially if you have kept in mind the said period of ex-Genesis man with whom our man shares the same first name.

VM: January 29, 2004