

On this page of the magazine, somewhat sinisterly labelled 'Jury's Verdict', we will do a multiple review of the (in our humble opinion) four most important or interesting recent albums. Controversy & discussion galore!



Antares - Choking The Stone

Ars Nova - Android Domina

Henry Fool - Henry Fool

Yes - Magnification



Wouter Bessels

This was a welcome surprise. Although the more contemporary prog is mixed with more progmetal-like passages, Antares have produced a wonderful record and I have to admit that I hadn't heard of them before. Guitars and vocals are mixed well and the drums sound straight and clear. The longer tracks are very ambitious - think of the slower material of bands like *Metallica*, *Iron Maiden* or *Dream Theater*, with the added progressive and melodic touch and you'll get an impression of what this great record is like.



Carsten Busch

A talented young band from the Northern part of Holland, pleasantly fusing progressive metal with symphonic or neoprogressive prog. Fine instrumental work without needless display of virtuosity - and a good (yet typically Dutch sounding) vocalist - make it a nice album.



Henri Strik

At first I didn't really know what to write about "Choking The Stone" by Antares. So this disc spent a lot of time in my CD player. Most of the other CD's just had to wait for their turn. Finally I realized that Antares made a very strong album indeed with a mix of progressive rock, metal and singer/songwriter style. A debut album to be proud of.



Maurice Dam

Another young aspiring Dutch band emerges with its debut album. Although investigating the heavier side of prog, they do so from a symphonic viewpoint. Of course the inevitable Dream Theater comparison is made although they stay away from the more technical playing. I also detect some *Gathering* and *Arena* in there or a heavier *Enchant*. A rather fine debut.

The new Ars Nova... Finally it's here. I've always found them very unique and a bit excentric too, but I guess that's what makes them special. Their music on the new CD is indeed from 'progressive neverlands and outlands'; they sound like pastoral fairytales with sometimes some musical harsh edges added to them. My advice is to listen very concentrated to their new CD, otherwise you'll miss the majority of the magic!

After the shocking opening (orgasmic moaning and whipping), Ars Nova release their usual fireworks of keyboards-loaded *ELP*-ish styled progressive rock. For the first time with (beautiful) vocals! Overall, I liked the new CD better than their last one. Still my favorite contemporary Nippon progsters!

When I saw the cover on the Net, I was a bit surprised. I already knew how Ars Nova sounded: *ELP* and *UK* at large, but how would we call this kind of music judging by the cover: Fetish prog? Leather prog? It once more shows that a cover has nothing to do with the music inside. Except for the first sounds on the opening track, which almost made me think otherwise. The rest of the music is in the style of the mentioned bands. Not bad at all, but don't play the album in one take because in the end it all sounds the same.

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With "Android Domina" Ars Nova return to the fold with one of their most successful albums. Ars Nova still drive heavily on classic(al) prog's past with rhythmic piano playing topped off with soaring organ sounds in it best *ELP* or *II Balleto Di Bronzo* style. Ars Nova managed to create a fine balance of upbeat and mellower moments throughout the whole album.

Tim Bowness (No-Man) has teamed up again with people like *Michael Bearpark* and *Peter Chilvers*, but this time for a more ambitious postrock project. Several eerie atmospheric pieces have been carefully mixed with some heavier stuff, in the league of *Gong* and some Seventies' Canterbury groups. And some of the fantastic climaxes in some tracks can even be associated with *Godspeed You Black Emperor*. A very exciting record screaming for a follow-up!

An interesting project with hints of 'postrock' prog bands, like *Godspeed You Black Emperor*, space rock, a bit of jazz (the weird, almost 'free' saxophone playing) and *Tim Bowness'* distinctive vocals. Rather untypical compared to the majority of *Cyclops'* releases, but certainly worth your while!

We know what happens when we put a couple of famous prog musicians in one studio. The result can be heard on two albums recorded by *Transatlantic*. Another example of putting some guys in one room and let them make some prog music is *Henry Fool*. Listening to it, it only shows that every combination is different. The album has some fine moments but they also did some things that not really is my kind of prog - no *Transatlantic* but certainly worth listening.

I must say I enjoy this album a lot and the wide scope of styles explored, especially the combination of classic prog with more experimental ingredients like *Radiohead* here, make for a varied listening.

A four-piece band with an orchestra on this new Yes-album would be the 'surprise of the year'. Alas, the arrangements of the songs are in most cases much better than the compositions themselves. "Magnification" would have been much stronger if Yes would have cared more about writing better songs. But, again, the way the material has been arranged in combination with the orchestra, is so beautiful, that this CD is a sort-of mixed bag in the end.

The combination with the orchestra works very well and - despite the absence of the keys - the music is still 100% Yes Music. The interaction between both is done perfectly. Very good!

When I heard this album for the first time it reminded me of the second Yes album. In the early days the band didn't use a lot of keyboards but they put some orchestra on tape behind the music. This time, the orchestra has a more prominent role. It's certainly nice to hear the combination of rock band and orchestra, but what *Kansas* did on "Always Never The Same" was more adventurous and more into my direction of how this combination should sound. But this does not mean that they made a bad album.

With "Magnification", Yes make a dream come true and release an album where an orchestra replaces the keyboards. There was a little prejudice towards the project but the result is one of their finest moments mixing the early days of "Time And A Word" with the "Keys To Ascension" studio material. The cinematic orchestral score is perfectly set against the performance of the band. Again Yes stay true to their heritage.