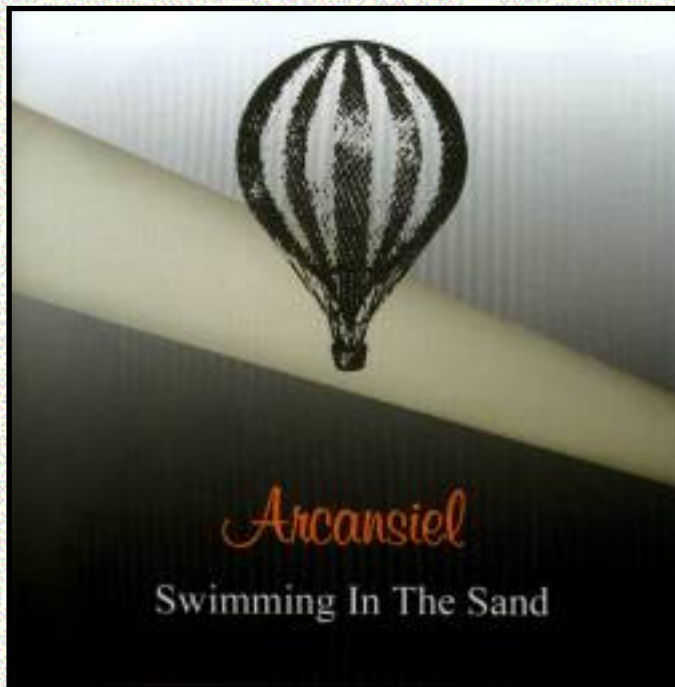




## Arcansiel - Swimming In The Sand



It has been ten years since Italian band Arcansiel released an album and that was *Normality Of Perversion* in 1994. 2004 sees the release of *Swimming In The Sand*, which is a sort of 'best of' compilation. I say 'sort of' because five of the six tracks here have appeared on past studio albums but, for this release, the band returned to the studio in 2003 to re-record the songs.

With so much progressive rock to choose from these days, those of us with limited time (and finances) can not be expected to be familiar with everything out there so tend to stick with music from bands we know. A compilation such as this makes a lot of sense, giving those you have yet to hear the band a selection of the best tracks and for the existing fans

of Arcansiel, a new version of these tracks.

The band personnel has changed once again but original guitarist Gianni Opezzo is still there, Sandro Marinoni (tenor sax, flute) is back and Paolo Baltaro (vocals, bass, drums, keyboards, bagpipes) who joined the band for *Normality*, remains.

Arcansiel came onto the scene at the time when Fish period Marillion was coming to an end and

inevitably they got labelled as neo prog with seventies influences from Genesis to PFM and Banco. Perhaps the neo prog tag fitted at the beginning of the band's career but it was polished neo prog, lacking the harshness of typical neo prog of the time. Take the track *Evelyn* (numbered 5 on the CD cover but actually track 4) from the first album *Four Daisies*; yes, it features the neo flourish of keys and guitar but on this re-recording, guitar and sax adds a touch of classic Camel.

New track, *Swimmer In The Sand*, touches on Genesis in their later period not least due to Paolo's Gabrielesque vocals (though nowhere near as Gabrielesque as Citizen Cain) and also Floyd (female chorus) and unobtrusive Mel Collins style sax - laid back and contemporary.

*Angel Of March* from second album, *Stillsearching*, has elements of IQ, It Bites, Tull and Eris Pluvia and stretches of Latimer style guitar over Pink Floyd-ish hypnotic background. I cannot immediately recall the original version but this one is a cracker.

*Holy Wolf Suite* off *Normality Of Perversion* from 1994 is another great song, something I could imagine It Bites doing (was It Bites ever labelled neo prog?). There again, Arcansiel took a slight change of direction for *Normality* which was not universally popular with fans of the first two albums. *I'm Still Searching* (listed as track 4 but actually track 5) from *Stillsearching* continues in the It Bites vein at the start but develops a stronger prog presence with a nod towards Banco and PFM touching on Genesis around the halfway mark.

Last but by no means least is *The End*, another from *Normality of Perversions*, which features jazzy free-form style saxophone, cool and laid back if you like that sort of thing though perhaps irritating if you don't.

Arcansiel appear to be gigging once again and the release of this fine re-recording of six of their best is perhaps a sign that more recordings could be on the cards. The music may not be groundbreaking but it is definitely worth hearing and should appeal to fans of any of the aforementioned bands and artistes. Time for *Angel of March* again I think.

**Jem Jedrzejewski**

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