

Arcansiel (Italy) - 2004 - "Swimming in the Sand"
(64 min, Musea)

★★★★★

TRACK LIST:

1. *Swimmer in the Sand* 4:50
2. *Angel of March* 10:34
3. *Holy Wolf Suite* 13:52
4. *I'm Still Searching* 6:55
5. *Evelyn* 21:02
6. *The End* 6:57

All tracks: by Baltaro & M. Galetti.

LINE-UP:

Paolo Baltaro - vocals; bass; drums; keyboards; guitars; bagpipes

Barbara Rubin - violin; backing vocals

Sandro Marinoni - sax & flute

Gianni Opezzo - guitars

Kristian Hansen - guitars

With:

Diego Marzi - drums

Marco Fantin - keyboards

Enrico Caruso - piano

Alberto Mandarinini - trumpet

Liana Attimonelli - backing vocals

Produced & engineered by Baltaro.

Prolusion. ARCANSIEL is an Italian band whose peak of activity falls on the second half of the '80s. "Swimming in the Sand" is their first output since the ten years standing "Normality of Perversion". It includes the band's five favorite songs from their previous three albums, all of which have been rearranged and re-played especially for this release. Anyhow, the album's title track is the only new composition in this set.

Synopsis. I haven't heard "Normality of Perversion", but I can draw parallels between the new and the first two albums by them: "Four Daises" (1988) and "Still Searching" (1990). In this respect, I must say that "Swimming in the Sand" sounds extremely unexpected. Not only are most of the principal components of the music, such as arrangement and performance, have been changed - even the band's stylistic orientation has become different, and it would be pointless now to search for the Neo heroes, Marillion and IQ, among the band's benefactors. But well, I'd better describe all the things step by step. The new song *Swimmer in the Sand* (1) turned out to be the most accessible and derivative track, which, nevertheless, in many ways determines the stylistic trend of the album. The lead and backing, female, vocals and the music as such are heavily influenced by Pink Floyd and arouse immediate associations with "A Momentary Lapse of Reason" or "The Division Bell". The first half of the other 'boundary' track of the album, *The End*, can be described just the same way, while in the second half of the song rules a tenor saxophone, solos of which are much jazzier than those on *Swimmer in the Sand*, as well as those in Pink Floyd, and are original actually. *Angel of March* (2) is better, but not that much. The sound is also distinctive and immediately recognizable. It's Eloy, and most of the vocal and instrumental parts on the song resemble those on "Ocean-II - The Answer" (1998). Some traces of influences of both Eloy and Pink Floyd appear on the remaining three tracks, too, but only episodically. Each of these: *Holy Wolf Suite*, *I am Still Searching*, and especially the 21-minute *Evelyn*, is largely instrumental with mostly eclectic arrangements where the parts of Rock instruments often interact with those of chamber ones: piano, violin, flute and bagpipe, and also saxophone and acoustic guitar in places. Although there is still nothing experimental, the music possesses some real freshness and is captivatingly intricate. Stylistically, this is a blend of classic Symphonic Art-Rock and Space Rock with the slight prevalence of the former genre and with some excursions to Space Metal and Jazz-Fusion. Very surprisingly, Paolo sings also in a different way on these - with a rather hoarse voice, which doesn't resemble anyone. Taken together, the three core tracks run more than 40 minutes. This is a very good stuff proving that the band is presently in the better form than ever before.

Conclusion. Arcansiel's unexpected comeback many years after they quit the scene has resulted in a rather satisfying album, which might change the widespread opinion on the band and its creation. This concerns especially those who are disappointed with their earlier production. I am almost certain that this effort will get many new fans for the band, so we can expect the appearance of another album in their discography.

VM: *September 13, 2004*

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