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At War With Self - 2009 - "Passaggi"

(42:38, 'At War With Self')



TRACK LIST:

1. Reflections 5:56
2. Diseased State 3.12
3. A Familiar Path 9.35
4. The Ether Trail 2.28
5. Ourselves 6.29
6. Etude No-10 4.03
7. Concrete and Poison 8.01
8. Hope 2.44

LINEUP:

Glenn Snelwar - guitar, mandolin, bass; keyboards; vocals

Manfred Dikkers - drums, percussion

With:

Maggie Snelwar - vocals (5)

Prolusion. AT WAR WITH SELF is a creative vehicle for the considerable talents of multi-instrumentalist Glenn Snelwar, who played on the 1999 debut of ground-breaking, instrumental progressive metal outfit Gordian Knot. At War With Self's own debut album, "Torn Between Dimensions" (featuring two world-class musicians such as bassist Michael Manring and drummer Mark Zonder), was released in 2001, followed in 2007 by ["Acts of God"](#). "A Familiar Path", released in November 2009, sees the participation of drummer Manfred Dikkers, who had also contributed to "Acts of God".

Analysis. At a superficial glance, when looking at the credits, "A Familiar Path" may look like the stereotypical 'vanity project' by a gifted multi-instrumentalist – one of those albums that, in spite of the talent on display, all too often end up falling flat on their face. However, I am happy to report that this is not the case with this particular disc, which is one of the most interesting releases I have heard in these past few months, combining flawless musicianship with bouts of sheer creativity. Unlike many highly technical metal bands, who often sacrifice emotion in favour of dazzling displays of chops – resulting in ultimately soulless despite their formal perfection – At War With Self manage to produce a sense of warmth and beauty even when things get really heavy. In fact, the heaviness is kept to a minimum, used to impart a more intriguing texture to the music rather than overwhelm it. The presence of real drums lends an organic quality to the sound that sets it apart from many other similar, nearly-solo efforts. Rather unusually for this kind of music, vocals (mostly treated) are featured on two out of eight tracks, the *title-track* (at almost 10 minutes, the longest number on the album) and *Ourselves*, where Glenn's wife Maggie makes an appearance. Even though Glenn Snelwar began his musical career as a progressive

metal artist, he also studied classical guitar when at college, and his compositional approach is deeply permeated by this influence. His intriguing rendition of a piece by renowned Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos, *Etude No-10* is faithful to the original at first, before being injected with metal riffs and subtle post-rock touches. Snelwar's eclectic approach is introduced right from the start: his clean, restrained soloing on *Reflections* (originally featured on Gordian Knot's debut album) eschews the temptation of shredding, while going for a heady mélange of melodic arpeggios and metal riffs. Bands like [Canvas Solaris](#) or [Counter-World Experience](#) (as well as the most obvious reference, [Gordian Knot](#)) come to mind, though with a softer edge. The shorter *Diseased State* blends mandolin and atmospheric keyboard washes with fast and furious riffing, aptly described in the album's press release as "Slayer meets [King Crimson](#)": The juxtaposition between crushingly heavy riffs and lyrical acoustic parts amount to an instrumental equivalent of the so-called 'beauty and the beast' vocal style. In *Concrete and Poison* the metal side of Snelwar's inspiration also comes across most evidently, the riffing suggestive of Eighties thrash metal greats such as [Metallica](#) or [Megadeth](#), sharply contrasted with a gentle, haunting Chinese-inspired section. The progression and multilayered nature of the music on this number, as well as the hypnotic mid-tempo of both the *title-track* and *Ourselves*, have an almost post-metal feel, reminiscent of the likes of Isis and Pelican. While the snappy, dynamic *The Ether Trail* sounds more like shred-oriented, traditional metal than most of the other compositions, the dreamy classical guitar piece *Hope* closes the album on a beautiful, melancholy note. Though "A Familiar Path" misses on the coveted exclamation mark on account of a couple of minor imperfections (such as the use of treated vocals), it is nevertheless an outstanding release that can be enjoyed even by those who have reservations about anything even vaguely metal-related. It does not hurt either that the disc is accompanied by some equally outstanding, sophisticated cover art hinting at Escher's iconic work, and that its running time is kept to a wise 42 minutes. A top-notch effort from a very talented artist.

Conclusion. I would not hesitate to recommend this album even to those progressive rock fans who usually shy away from metal, since the actual metal content might be seen as a generous pinch of spice, rather than the main ingredient of the music on display. Flawlessly performed, yet imbued with a sense of warmth that is not often to be found in this kind of production, "A Familiar Path" is an excellent effort from a remarkably gifted musician and composer, and one that should appeal to every lover of genuinely progressive music.

RB=Raffaella Berry: *July 4, 2010*
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