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At War With Self Torn Between Dimensions

Rating: 10

Reviewed by Deathshred King on 14th July 2005.

At War With Self is a new addition to the progressive fold, a trio consisting of guitarist Glenn Snelwar, Michael Manring of fretless bass, and Fates Warning's Mark Zonder on drums/percussion.

I had a few reservations about reviewing At War With Self's debut here, as this is a metal website. While Torn Between Dimensions has many metal elements, it is no more a metal album than it is an album of world music or fusion, prog rock, and ambient. Metal however, especially the prog side of it is a genre of music that has little, if any, rules. One cannot really define metal by the scales and chord progressions that are used in it, unlike blues or jazz; metal can be a melting pot of different creative ideas. Therefore I think the nature of metal is in attitude. And this album, featuring beautiful cover art by Travis Smith certainly has it.

Snelwar, the mastermind behind this project is a multi-instrumentalist, playing acoustic and electric guitars, mandolin and keys. Some of the melodies found here might sound familiar to prog/fusion fans. That isn't surprising considering that Snelwar contributed guitar tracks and helped pen three songs on Gordian Knot's debut album. In fact, after a thorough listen to Torn Between Dimensions, one might draw the conclusion that Snelwar had more to do with the creative process of Gordian Knot than Sean Malone and Snelwar himself give him credit for.

That is not to say that AWS is a Gordian Knot clone. Snelwar just has a very distinct style that shines through in all his musical ventures. This album is a journey into Snelwar's creative conceptions and as such is a joy to listen to. Self-admittedly, Snelwar is a perfectionist — he views songwriting as a never-ending process, with every new version of a song being a different facet of an artist's creative vision. Hopefully Snelwar will now be known for his own band rather than for playing with Gordian Knot.

I will not do any thorough track analysis in this review for it would be a trite undertaking. It is something that must be heard to be believed and I feel that a dissection of the devices that make it work would take the charm out of it. Snelwar manages to mix ugly, down-tuned palm muted metal riffs with intricate, exotic melodies, layers of ambience and fluid, restrained lead playing. Here you will find beautiful guitar solos, great acoustic passages, stacked atmospheric textures, and a good measure of heavy riffs that create a contrast against the super-mellow parts. Metalheads will certainly enjoy at least one track on the album: Run, which has an almost Slayer-like energy to it. This just might be the first review that mentions Slayer in conjunction with progressive music.

Grammy-nominated Michael Manring (who played with the late acoustic guitar legend Michael Hedges among dozens of other artists) provides moody, smooth fretless bass lines. Mark Zonder, playing mid-tempo throughout the album, shows great taste and skill (his cymbal work on Coming Home is stunning), being a servant of the song and varying his rhythm work.

I always cringe when people tell me that instrumental music is either boring or lacking in emotion. Torn Between Dimensions is living proof that these claims are misguided and just plain wrong! Each track has a story to tell, with absolutely no need for words to advance the plot. The strange and wonderful music takes the listener on a journey that is full of twists and turns. I've found that Torn Between Dimensions is enjoyable to listen to analytically, taking in and reflecting on every note as well as enjoyable for unfocused listening where one lets go of focus and surrenders into a state of trance induced by the ambience. Snelwar, Manring and Zonder have crafted a masterpiece that is without a doubt the strongest prog-metal release of 2005.

You can hear sample tracks of Torn Between Dimensions [here](#)

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