

## CERVELLO MELOS REVIEW (ENGLISH)

CERVELLO was one of countless bands from the early 70s Italian prog scene that only managed to squeak out one album before disappearing as quickly as they emerged on the scene, but like many others who contributed to the rich and diverse tapestry of sounds that constituted the jazzy symphonic soundscapes, managed to incorporate a local flavor into their musical mix. CERVELLO (Italian for “brain”) emerged from Naples and is closely related to Osanna as multi-instrumentalist and band leader Corrado Rustici was the younger brother of Osanna’s Danilo Rustici and much like the music of Osanna, the music deftly fortifies their complex punctilious prog arrangements with clever uses of local Neopolitan folk flavorings, jazzy touches and heavy outbursts of rock bombast. The band formed in 1970 and went through a few lineup changes before their ultimate demise in 1974.

The one and only album MELOS (released in 1973) is an English word borrowed from Greek that means a succession of tones that constitute a melody which signifies the overall emphasis on the seven tracks that could not be mistaken for anything but early 70s Italian prog with the romantic operatic vocal style of Gianluigi Di Franco, pastoral acoustic passages that sooth the soul accompanied by airy flute sounds, the jazzy touches of vibraphones and sax and an extraordinary vocal and instrumental interplay at which the Italian scene excelled. Despite the Osanna connection, CERVELLO is noticeably less rock oriented and the majority of MELOS is a light, airy musical journey on Mediterranean zephyrs with only occasional bursts into guitar oriented rock that clearly finds inspiration from early King Crimson in their incessantly intricate and complex time signature workouts.

One of the defining characteristics of CERVELLO was the complete absence of keyboards which was almost unheard of in the Italian prog scene. While related Osanna eschewed the predominant use of keys, they still implemented their atmospheric prowess for certain effects. Minus the keys, the atmospheric generating power of MELOS is derived from a heavy use of four flutes (played by three members), vibraphones and acoustic guitars. Bass pedals were implemented through a Binson Echorec which produced strange distorted cello effects which also give MELOS its own distinct flavor. Sizzling saxophone solos also point to a Van Der Graaf Generator connection, a band whose early years found them spending more time in Italy than their native UK because it was the Italians first and foremost connected to their ambitious eclectic sound before the rest of the world caught on.

MELOS is really one of the more complex albums i’ve heard from the Italian scene and despite the word implying “melody” which it does supply an ample supply of, much of the music is fortified in university level musical complexity that implements the full power of jazz to offer bizarre counterpoints and jittery time signature workouts. While Robert Fripp seems to have provided the blueprint for angular guitar riffs, Mahavishnu Orchestra type soloing a la John McLaughlin joins in during the most aggressive moments of MELOS. Much of the album however is heavy in atmospheric drifting via flute, vibes, acoustic guitar and Di Franco’s charismatic and operatic vocal style. MELOS is truly a musical journey, a summary of an entire career squeezed into a mere 36 minute

experience but one that has been mastered and executed in relative perfection. The album excels at an unpredictably zigzagging between various styles whether they be the sensual romantic softer sides or the jarring bombast and freneticism of the heavier rock segments.

MELOS is cited by many as being one of the pinnacles of the entire Italian prog scene and deemed a veritable masterpiece by many. This is not one of those instant warm and fuzzy albums much like the more pop infused albums that bands like Il Balletto Di Bronzo or Metamorphosi dished out, but rather a heavily fortified prog powerhouse reserved for only the big kids in the club. Such was the case with my own experience regarding CERVELLO's solo release, while initially expecting something more in the lines of Osanna's classic "Palepoli," what I got was a unique amalgamation of various prog styles which ultimately once experienced and fully digested, provides a quite satisfying experience and unique stamp within the greater realms of Italian prog. However, something about MELOS seems unfulfilling. Despite the excellence and technical workouts on par with the greats of PFM and Banco, somehow MELOS seems scattered and random in all its eccentricities and misses the mark at taking that final step into ultimate cohesion. Nevertheless, although not a top tier album of the Italian prog scene in my book, is a fastidious work of art that is guaranteed to please the truly adventurous proggers of the world.