

★★★★★ Challenging music from that most sublime of genres.

One of the most elegantly complex and fully realized of the "difficult" Italian classics, Melos is for fans of the Osanna, Balletto di Bronzi, RRR, and Semiramis styles. I have a hunch that fans of Crimson, VDDG, and Gentle Giant will also approve. It will probably be less appreciated by fans of the gentler and more accessible bands like Celeste and Locanda delle Fate. The musical approach and the sound are very sophisticated and unique. A combination of primarily guitars, flutes and saxes are tightly woven into a very dense, often dark, unsettling, and just plain eerie feel. Some sources say there are no (or very little) keyboards used to create this sound palette which is certainly unusual. Sometimes I think I hear some but I can't be sure the way the other instruments are employed. It took me many plays to really get past the rather exhausting outer shell and discover the melodies hiding inside and now I just cannot get enough of this excellent material. This band from Naples was related to the Osanna band via the Rustici brothers, the younger one in Cervello was another example of how the very young were leaders in the Italian scene back then. Corrado Rustici was but a teenager when the band recorded Melos in Milan back in 1973. While Osanna's big album "Palepoli" generally gets the most attention my personal view is that "Melos" is a better album. While not as trippy as the wildly freaky "Palepoli" I feel that Melos is more overtly musical and more genuinely satisfying in the long run.

Juan at ItalianProg describes the Cervello sound like this: "There is great deal of excellent acoustic guitar work and mellotron-like sounds created by the saxophones. The vocals coupled with the acoustic guitar and flutes hypnotize the listener into a technical yet fluid atmosphere so the music then breaks into a frenzy full of sax and adventurous guitar playing. The tempo and mood change from calm and melodic to violent and bizarre (interweaving between scales). No keyboards present, but they are not needed due to the "cerebral" arrangements these musicians have created for us on this album." [Juan Carlos Lopez] In another great review Warren Nelson sums up the sound perfectly: ".with soaring and complex melodies, compelling and angular instrumental passages culminating in some aggressive individual performances, all weaved together in a tapestry of beautiful and emotional musical syncopation. One of the few Italian prog releases without a prominent keyboard arsenal, the rich sound of this band is achieved with powerful drumming, multiple woodwinds, and intelligent scalar runs on guitar. But not least of all are the typically emotionally powerful vocals. Dynamic change-ups and exquisite group interaction complete another example of one of the finest Italian progressive albums you will ever hear." [Warren Nelson]

My own take on the specific tracks: "Canto Del Capro" begins with layers of flutes over what sounds like a foghorn and cymbal splashes moving left to right in the stereo spectrum. Soon an acoustic guitar precedes delightfully freaky operatic style vocals like only the Italians can do. A thrilling opening. Suddenly the drums kick in and you think it might be "normal" for a bit but soon these ungodly compressed vocals rattle your eardrums. Strange acoustic and electric guitar flares round out the rest of this unsettling start. "Trittico" is an enchanting initially with sentimental flute melody, acoustic and vocal. Eventually a crazy sax and percussion crash the party for a bit before the soft opening style returns with additional guitar noodlings. After a brief fade the end section is a bizarre cacophony of choral voices. My one complaint is wishing the bass were a bit more clear and upfront, sometimes it is distant and muddy but it's a minor nitpick. "Euterpe" begins with acoustic and flutes again in a warm and inviting mood. This eventually leads into the full band jamming with a real e-guitar and saxophone workout. "Scinsicne" begins with guitar that sounds like it came from an outtake of "Astronomy Domine!" In comes great flute and bass interplay and then vocals which are another strong point on this album. As the band comes on full the saxes jump into the fray and the sound gets brutal. At 3:48 is one of my favorite parts of the album, these mutant bizarre sounds and drums that mimic some sinister funeral dirge. This is followed by a maniacal e-guitar solo. "Melos" features great flute and sax workouts again with another Rustici axe thrashing at the end. "Galassia" is a feast of inventive vocal interludes over beautifully played acoustic guitars. Dabbles of flute precede a full blown e-guitar freakout challenged by pursuing sax and percussion attacks. You'll need a shower after this track. "Affresco" is a rather traditional sounding closer piece, very short and there just to bring you gently back to Earth after your cerebral pummeling.

I guess the reason I light up the magic star 5 would be this: Even when listening to most good albums it is evident that I am doing just that. I'm listening to a collection of songs that are just too structured and I know

what is coming. They might light up my pleasure center and my brain says "oh that's a good song, let me listen to more of the same!" Melos does not allow me to stagnate. It's more like eavesdropping on someone's thoughts (presented musically) than listening to the next "killer song, dude." Their thoughts or perhaps their nightmares in this case with everything being so strange, the album starts and it's like this bizarre trip occurs. Even some of my favorite albums are relatively predictable but not Melos. With each play I still wonder what the hell is going on. It still pushes my buttons and challenges me, my definition of a genuinely progressive album. That's not the only way an album can get 5 stars from me but it is one way.

This is one of the Italian albums you hear people describe as "harsh" and you might hate it the first several times you listen. Don't get discouraged. Put it away and spin it every other month..like many of the best prog albums you may end up loving it a year from now. That's how it was for me-a real grower. But while many of us are thrilled by this album it is not universally loved in the way that PFM is. It's rather confrontational sonic style does have its detractors so read plenty of reviews before you take the plunge. In my book this is essential for Italian fans and recommended for fans of stuff like "Red" era Crimson. Try to find the Japanese mini-lp sleeve edition which features decent sound and a high quality reproduction of the cool artwork. I love the cover of this album..fantastic stuff!