

Desert Island Disk #2

CAMEL
DUST AND DREAMS



Camel is a band that can release anything and I will buy it. Yes, they are that good. Some people refer to their music as progressive rock, but they are not as complex as Yes or Emerson, Lake and Palmer. A more apt label is probably ‘art rock,’ reminiscent of Jethro Tull or early Genesis.

Formed in the early 1970s, the band had a definite psychedelic influence on their early albums, including cosmic lyrics and extended solos for guitar and keyboards. Later albums saw a shift to a more focused song writing approach, though this is a band that never had a hit single.

I discovered Camel around 1990. Spending many hours in the university music library reading incredibly dense articles on music theory was taxing. To give my brain a rest, I’d reach for old issues of *Musician*, *Keyboard*, *Guitar Player*, etc. In *Musician*, I found an article on progressive rock (there’s that term again) and Camel was briefly mentioned. I don’t recall what was said, but my curiosity was piqued enough that I went to the local used record store and found a few of their albums. I was hooked immediately.

Around this same time, guitarist/vocalist/songwriter Andrew Latimer and his wife, Susan Hoover, moved from England to northern California. They started a record company and released *Dust and Dreams*. Based on the John Steinbeck novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, the album has all the trademarks of a Camel album: emotional melodies, dramatic musical passages, and superb musicianship.

One of my favorite aspects of Camel’s albums is they do a lot of instrumentals. This is not a band that records three ten-minute singles in hope that one or two of them will chart. Latimer follows his muse, even if it means writing either an instrumental interlude that lasts less than a

minute or a lengthy instrumental, full-blown song. If the album requires it, that's all that matters. There are plenty of instrumentals on *Dust and Dreams*.

Softer songs such as "Go West" and "Rose of Sharon," are balanced by "Mother Road" and "Hopeless Anger," which show the band in full rock mode. "Rose of Sharon" features the twin lead vocals of Latimer and bassist Colin Bass, enabling the singers to effectively portray specific characters. Speaking of the theatrical component, Latimer said that at one point *Dust and Dreams* was going to be performed as a musical, but for whatever reason it didn't work out.

Listening to this music, it is easy to hear how it could be played by an orchestra as so much of it is based firmly in the art rock genre. It is an album that should be heard uninterrupted and without distraction for maximum effect.

www.camelproductions.com