

**XAVIER BOSCHER**  
**Pentagramme**  
2016 (CD, 39:47)  
INDEPENDENT RELEASE  
PROGRESSIVE METAL/POP  
★★★

Xavier Boscher is a prolific French artist with nine solo albums to his credit since 1999 plus collaborative works with the likes of Nebuleyes, Misanthrope, Continuum, etc. His latest effort is *Pentagramme*, a varied work of eight tracks including sentimental melodic balladry (everything here is sung in French) and some dazzlingly fluid fretwork.

If an album that features aggressive guitars can be considered “wistful,” this is it. A factor is the unhurried, breezy nature of Xavier’s vocals juxtaposing mellifluous chopzilla, as on opener “Les Corps des Femmes,” “Geometrie Intime” and eight-minute closing track “Les Voyageurs du Temps.” Elsewhere, we have seductively restrained mood pieces featuring piano and electronic atmospherics (“Metronome Celeste,” “Volupte”) plus a couple dynamically arranged rockin’ workouts in “Quinacridone” and “La Lune Rouge.”

The album’s title reference and its author’s metal predilections should not be misconstrued; no devil worship afoot here. Boscher cites the pentagram as symbol of five basic human principles: love, wisdom, truth, justice and virtue, noting, “the pentagram harmonizes reason and the heart of man.” The five-pointed star also, of course, represents four earthly elements—fire, earth, air and water—its fifth branch symbolizing spirit. **John Collinge**

**TIM BOWNESS**  
**Lost in the Ghost Light**  
2017 (CD, 43:28)  
INSIDEOUT MUSIC  
PROGRESSIVE ROCK  
★★★★1/2

Tim Bowness channeling Bowie? For the first time in his expansive career, No-Man’s Tim Bowness has created a solo concept album; here, he explores the onstage and backstage reflections of a fictional classic-rock musician in the twilight of his career.

Bowness’s mesmerizing voice sounds as hypnotic as ever. And his exquisite backing band of Colin Edwin (Porcupine Tree), Bruce Soord (The Pineapple Thief), Hux Nettermalm (Paatos), Stephen Bennett (Henry Fool/No-Man) plus Andrew Booker (Sanguine Hum/No-Man) allows *Lost in the Ghost Light* to subtly draw from a wide-ranging palette.

Filled with rich, warm and classic prog-rock motifs (the pretty piano/flute opening to expansively orchestral “You’ll Be the Silence,” for example), the album also is notable for “Kill the Pain That’s Killing You”: a massive departure for Bowness dominated by heavy guitar that suits his sound surprisingly well.

*Lost in the Ghost Light* was mixed and mastered by his No-Man partner Steven Wilson, its stunning attention to detail enhancing sublime melodies. This clearly is Tim’s best, most diverse album. Likely one of 2017’s best, it is to be savored.

**Michael Popke**

**BRIDE OF CHAOTICA**  
**Ghosts on Television**  
2017 (CD, 47:25)  
LONGVIEW RECORDS LVR111  
INSTRUMENTAL ROCK  
★★★

Florida instrumental trio Bride of Chaotica offers 14 linearly accessible tunes, most in the three-minute range, on this second release. Bill Bechtel’s echo-saturated guitar maintains generally the same tone throughout with hints of distortion on most tracks. And while his playing is serviceable with basic bass/drums backing, the troupe’s retro-cheesy DIY garage-band ethos just might be endearing enough to merit consideration for the next Tarantino soundtrack.

The Mamas & the Papas’ “California Dreamin’” opens things, minus those exquisite vocals. Closer “While My Guitar Gently Weeps” (the Beatles) receives similar treatment. In between are original compositions favoring standard blues progressions with slight detours. Second cut “The Lathe of Heaven” is two repeated chords with embellishments. “Cleveland Kind of Way” and “Pagan Jeopardy” are The Cramps through a jazz-lite filter. “Alone in the Dark” shows promise but is basically a sketch while three other tunes add elementary electronic brass.

The standout is “The Science of Rust,” its overall Floydian feel executed with vim and vigor while using Bechtel’s style to its advantage. The piece begins with a cool bass figure and builds momentum toward cascades of cosmic bliss. More of this please! **Warren Barker**

**CARBON WORKS**  
**CarbonWorks**  
2016 (CD, 41:48)  
CLEAN CUTS/RCI RECORDS  
PROGRESSIVE/WORLD  
★★★★

When he knocks off from his day job as a mild-mannered dietitian,

Dr. Neal Barnard slips into a phone booth and, donning black khaki and white Les Paul Deluxe, is transformed into a wild-mannered composer of eclectic world-pop for disparate ensembles that include string trios, vocalists in several languages, exotic percussion, sax and violins.

Utilizing up to 17 musicians, this unique D.C. aggregation musically globetrots from Middle Eastern desert raga (“By the Window”), smoky after-hours trepidations (“Song for an Angel”), Zorn-approved scored punk (“Samurai”) and aspartame-free AOR pop in “Louder Than Words.”

The Maggie Reilly-esque vocals and violins are the constant unifying factors afoot here. They save the best for last in the form of four-movement “End of the World Suite,” where blues guitar, string quartet, happy jazz sax, and Southeast Asian dan tranh (a koto with a red star on its helmet) mesh languidly in a style that defies any tradition.

Carbon Works has fashioned a disc of exploratory music in the Goldilocks zone of the listening experience and it doesn’t get more indie-progressive than this.

**John Patrick**

**CELESTIAL VOYAGER**  
**Celestial Voyager**  
2016 (CD, 45:19)  
RUNNING MOOSE  
INSTRUMENTAL ROCK  
★★★

This Finnish quartet comprises Cristian Cifuentes on lead guitars and as the composer, Jukka Kunas on bass, Jan Hirvonen on drums and Kimmo Pitkanen on rhythm guitars. Their eponymous debut effort comprises 10 instrumentals in the four- to five-minute range, all well played and melodically upbeat with a rockin’ edge.

Opener “02-210” toys with some nice melodies, exuberantly developed. “Blueshifting” up next is a bit more contemplative in tone, less upbeat, but in the same vein. While “Drifting” assumes a slightly bluesy vibe, a more deliberate beat, the instrumental refrain returns to this work’s dependably celebratory mode. As in other pieces, there is a sweet little diversion toward its conclusion prefacing a return to the main theme.

From this point on the voyage feels more terrestrial than celestial, as Celestial Voyager hints at space-rock in name only. But it works well for what it is: compactly arranged ensemble rock that takes few chances, a great mood-setter for that breezy/sunny

summer road trip you’re looking forward to. So much talent is demonstrated here one hopes that next time Celestial Voyager takes a few more chances compositionally. **David Taylor**

**RANI CHATOORGOON**  
**Samsara**  
2016 (CD, 69:38)  
INDEPENDENT RELEASE  
SYMPHONIC ROCK/WORLD  
★★★★

Lush exoticism imbues *Samsara*, a collection of 12 beguilingly symphonic sojourns anchored by (female) vocalist/harmonium player/acoustic guitarist Rani Chatoorgoon. Assisted by 10 other players, this Canadian chanteuse of Indian heritage evokes Blackmore’s Night front-woman Candice Night—both in vocal style and her command of melodically ascendant tunesmithing bearing appreciable rock punch.

Here, Chatoorgoon trades Night’s medieval template for a broader, Eastern-leaning world-music emphasis textured by orchestral strings and Sandip Banerjee’s array of Asian/Indian instruments including sitar, tabla, etc. Electric guitar is strategically applied by Ruud Jolie (Within Temptation).

“Samsara” is a Sanskrit term referencing the cycle of birth, life and death—literally translated as “wandering through” multiple states of existence. That applies to the music here as well, as Rani’s flowing cinematic atmospheres spin webs of intrigue resolving in majestically orchestrated crescendos or, as with seven-minute “Lonely Witness,” a cosmically shattering guitar break.

With everything in the five- to eight-minute range there’s plenty here arrangement-wise to sink your teeth into along with bits of infectious pop-y ear candy (“Sweet Solace”). Elegant closer “Guardian of Souls” (7:38) is the sort of hypnotically mesmerizing crowning statement guaranteed to spirit you away. **John Collinge**

**RYCHE CHLANDA**  
**Ryche Chlanda & Flying Dreams**  
2016 (CD, 50:50)  
TRANSGLOBAL RECORDS 0027  
PROGRESSIVE ROCK  
★★★★1/2

Let us now sing the praises of unsung progressive rock guitarist Ryche Chlanda. You might not know him by name, but you’ve probably heard his work. In the

1970s, Chlanda helped found underappreciated prog outfit Fire-ballet, since playing with the likes of Renaissance, Ian MacDonald, Todd Rundgren and Nektar. Given his rich resume it's no surprise that Chlanda's latest vehicle dubbed Flying Dreams—with the legendary Larry Fast on synths and Ron Bienstock on bass—merges classic and contemporary prog motifs.

From metallic opener "Changer of Changes," Chlanda demonstrates a desire (and ability) to stake out previously unexplored musical territory. This track and two other standouts, "Flying Dreams and Other Phases" plus "Look Through Me," showcase his work on 12-string Gryphon Veillette guitar, whose unusual "celestial" timbres are pure ear candy. Elsewhere, Chlanda plays a wide-ranging arsenal of acoustic and electric guitars, and styles. His somewhat understated/breathy vocal delivery is nonetheless pleasant in service to the songs.

The upshot: *Flying Dreams* is an overdue and defining statement from one of the genre's most talented, criminally overlooked artists. **Nick Tate**

## CHURCH OF HED *Brandenburg Heights*

2016 (CD, 40:35)  
ETERNITY'S JEST EJ0069  
ELECTRONIC/PROGRESSIVE  
★★★★1/2

The titular reference to the vintage Berlin School of symphonic electronic progressive music is an obvious signpost. Ohio's Paul Williams pays homage to those knob-twisting Teutons whose work was for him a lifetime's inspiration. Here, he focuses on their mid-'70s zenith.

Paul bifurcates *Brandenburg Heights* into a pair of 20-minute segments as a winking nod to the classic LP format. Part 1 is a study of modal cadence inversions based on G and Dm, both as an expansive mixolydian I–v, and as a jazzier dorian i–IV. A sequencer softly taps out a five-time pattern before settling into an orbital jazz pastel. The progression in F#m that heralds Part 2 [Say what?—Ed.] indicates bleaker forces have intruded, unrelieved by the jauntier sequenced grooves arriving at the two-thirds mark.

Although referencing a certain regional period aesthetic, there is no slavish imitation of one's teenage heroes at play here. While the Berlin

School was often dark, nebulous, and spectral, the oeuvre of our American dude Williams is, even in treacherous waters, more overt and diurnal. **John Patrick**

## CRYSTAL BREED

### *Barriers*

2016 (CD, 58:36)  
INDEPENDENT RELEASE  
PROGRESSIVE ROCK  
★★★★

This eclectic second outing from Germany's Crystal Breed is ironically titled. Indeed, *Barriers* shatters every stylistic boundary you can imagine, blurring—no, *exploding*—the lines between rock, jazz, folk, and other musical genres. Like *The Place Unknown*, Crystal Breed's 2012 debut, *Barriers* is driven by the endlessly inventive talents of guitarist/vocalist Niklas Turmann and keyboardist Corvin Bahn (who co-write the band's music) and extraordinary musicianship of the assembled players.

A casual listen reveals important reference points, notably the regal rock vibe of early Queen, the pop sensibility of Beatles-era Paul McCartney and the complex melodic prog machinations of Yes, Genesis,

Echolyn, etc. ... perhaps hints of XTC. Highlights include rumbling Deep Purple-ish opener "The Brain Train," enigmatic Zappa-esque "Barrier of Ignorance" and the multilayered "No Escape," which bounces between acoustic-guitar balladry and crunchy prog-metal.

Keep an ear on these guys. Their boundless creativity, skilled chops and gift for swathing gorgeous melodies in lush arrangements mean more good things are to come for Turmann, Bahn and company.

**Nick Tate**

## CYRIL

### *Paralyzed*

2016 (CD, 59:13)  
PROGRESSIVE PROMOTION PPRCD042  
PROGRESSIVE ROCK  
★★★★1/2

As the follow-up to these German proggers' solid 2013 debut *Gone Through Years*, *Paralyzed* is even better. The performances by this sextet are spot-on: Ralf Dietsch's guitar work is always expressively Gilmouresque but with just a touch more flash, while Marek Arnold's keys and woodwinds (sax and clarinet appear occasionally) add colorful texturing.



## BIG BIG TRAIN

### *A Stone's Throw From the Line*

2016 (2CD, 125:55)  
ENGLISH ELECTRIC EERCD0018  
PROGRESSIVE ROCK  
★★★★★

As much as any "unsigned" progressive band out there, Britain's Big Big Train appears to have achieved independent self-realization. Its studio albums always are thoughtfully conceived, immaculately recorded and well received. The only thing left wanting is a diehard fan base eager but rarely able to catch the Train live. (The group doesn't perform often and never has played America in its 27 years, despite offers.)

Providing at least partial remedy is this wonderful two-disc concert document from August 2015, recorded over three sold-out shows at Kings Place, London—Big Big Train's first live gigs in 17 years. *A Stone's Throw From the Line* immediately affirms the group's mettle outside controlled studio environs, exhibiting equally polished perfectionism both in sound and performance.

Much more than a rock band doing its thing, this is an expanded ensemble presentation, the octet joined on these 12 sumptuous tracks by brass quintet. At the center of all is lead-singer/flautist Dave Longdon, whose Peter Gabriel-like tone/phrasing commands richly orchestrated tunes that unfold deliberately without sounding rushed, edgy, or obscured by gratuitous chopzilla. This is colorfully pastoral, eloquently poetic fare—as complexly wrought instrumentally as it is atmospherically grand—by added turns jazzy, bombastic and deeply intimate.

The set includes tracks drawn largely from the two *English Electric* volumes (2012-'13), *The Underfall Yard* (2009) plus then-forthcoming EP *Wassail*. The highlights are many, although epic tracks "The Underfall Yard" (21:57), "Victorian Brickwork" (13:39), "Kingmaker" (11:09) and "East Coast Racer" (16:32) showcase Big Big Train at its compositionally most elaborate.

As essential as Longdon's emotive singing are displays of instrumental prowess from the assemblage of Nick D'Virgilio (drums), Greg Spawton (acoustic guitar/bass), Andy Poole (acoustic guitar/mandolin/keyboards), Dave Gregory (guitars), Danny Manners (keyboards/double bass), multi-instrumentalist Rikard Sjoblom and strings player Rachel Hall. Of special note: D'Virgilio's drum solo opening "Judas Unrepentant," a jazzily rollicking piano solo (Manners?) and Hall's energetic violin lead both fueling "The Underfall Yard," plus the brass quintet's swining "Wassail" outro.

With new studio album *Grimspound: A Folklore Companion* due this spring, Big Big Train has scheduled three U.K. shows for early next fall. That would seem to allow plenty of time for planning additional gigs, perhaps even a couple overseas ... right, guys? **John Collinge**