

= Pawn Hearts =

Pawn Hearts is the fourth album by English progressive rock band Van der Graaf Generator , released in October 1971 on Charisma Records . The original album features just three tracks , including the side @-@ long suite " A Plague of Lighthouse Keepers " . The album was not commercially successful in the UK , but reached number one in Italy . It has since seen retrospective critical praise and was reissued on CD in 2005 with extra material .

The songs for the album were worked out while on tour in 1971 , with further development and arranging at manager Tony Stratton @-@ Smith 's house in Crowborough , Sussex over a two @-@ month period . The original plan had been to release more material , making up a double album , but Charisma vetoed the idea . A non @-@ album single , " Theme One " was included on some releases in the US and Canada . The album 's strong commercial showing in Italy resulted in a number of lucrative promotional tours there , but the resulting pressure led to the band 's split in August 1972 .

= = Background = =

By 1971 , Van der Graaf Generator 's line @-@ up had stabilised as frontman and songwriter Peter Hammill , saxophonist David Jackson , organist and bassist Hugh Banton and drummer Guy Evans . The group had been gigging extensively and became close friends after a particularly gruelling tour of Germany . Hammill wrote " A Plague of Lighthouse Keepers " during the tour , and the group began performing " Man @-@ Erg " towards its end . To alleviate the tedium of touring , the group invented games including " Crowborough Tennis " which involved bouncing a ball off a table , a photograph of which was eventually used as the inner sleeve for the album .

Following the tour and in preparation for the album , Hammill invited producer John Anthony to his home , where Hammill played songs intended for the album unaccompanied on acoustic guitar and piano , allowing Anthony to take recording notes . " Man Erg " was written about the conflict between good and evil , represented as " angels " and " killers " in the song . " A Plague of Lighthouse Keepers " was inspired by Hammill 's fascination with the sea , and the narrative is about a lighthouse keeper who keeps seeing people die offshore . He feels guilty about not being able to help , and the song 's ending is left open , leaving the listener to decide if the keeper has committed suicide or rationalised events to live in peace . Banton was against putting " A Plague of Lighthouse Keepers " on the album , wanting more commercial material such as the previous album H to He , Who Am the Only One 's " Killer " , but after a band meeting he agreed to rehearse the song and worked out an arrangement . The group moved to manager Tony Stratton @-@ Smith 's house , Luxford House , Crowborough , Sussex for two months in summer 1971 to rehearse material .

= = Recording = =

Recording ran from July to September 1971 in Trident Studios . In addition to the band and Anthony , Robin Cable , David Hentschel and Ken Scott helped with engineering . The first tracks to be recorded were " Theme One " , a cover of the George Martin composition used as the original closing theme to BBC Radio 1 , and " W " , which was ultimately left off the album . The music , particularly " A Plague of Lighthouse Keepers " was recorded in short sections between two and five minutes , which were later edited together . In addition to Hammill 's original suite , Banton contributed the " Pictures / Lighthouse " section , an Olivier Messiaen @-@ influenced organ piece , Evans wrote " Kosmos Tours " around a short piano riff , and Jackson wrote the music to the closing theme , " We Go Now " . The piece was edited together by Banton and Anthony towards the end of the session . Banton used an effect called a " psychedelic razor " , a customised tape recorder that could rewind and record simultaneously . The device appealed to the band 's sense of humour . At one stage , every tape machine in the studio had to be used for mixing .

The album was originally conceived as a double album similar to Pink Floyd 's Ummagumma . The first half was made up of the album as released , while the second was to be divided between

personal projects and live @-@ in @-@ studio versions of older Van der Graaf Generator songs such as " Killer " and " Octopus " . Evans contributed an avant @-@ garde piece , " Angle of Incidents " which featured drums being recorded backwards and the sound of a fluorescent lighting tube being dropped down the studio 's stairs . Jackson recorded " Ponker 's Theme ' " , a short jazz piece , and a longer piece , " Archimedes Agnostic " , with Latin lyrics written by Hammill . Charisma ultimately felt that the group should simply release a single album , and vetoed the live and solo recordings .

The album 's title came from a spoonerism by Jackson , who once said , " I 'll go down to the studio and dub on some more porn harts " , meaning " horn parts " . The cover was designed by regular Charisma album artist Paul Whitehead , who was told by Hammill , " no matter if you 're a king , a pauper or whatever ? you 're a pawn " which led to a design containing the earth and a curtain . The inner gatefold picture was taken by Keith Morris and featured the band playing Crowborough Tennis while appearing to give Nazi salutes to each other , though Banton later said this was simply the band attempting to look ridiculous in the vein of Monty Python .

= = Release = =

The album was originally released in October 1971 on Charisma Records . In the US and Canada , the album was distributed via Buddah Records and contained " Theme One " as an extra track between " Lemmings " and " Man @-@ Erg " , which was done without the band 's approval . In Europe , where Pawn Hearts only contained the three tracks , " Theme One " was released as a single in February 1972 , with " W " as its B @-@ side .

When the Van der Graaf Generator catalogue was remastered for reissue in 2005 , several of the tracks from the missing half of the album were found and added as bonus tracks . A live , in @-@ studio version of " Squid / Octopus " was added to the H to He , Who Am the Only One reissue , while the Pawn Hearts reissue added " Angle of Incidents " , " Ponker 's Theme " , and " Diminutions " . The CD also contained the original mix of " Theme One " , which is different to the one released as a single , and an earlier take of " W " . " Theme One " was also released on the 2003 compilation CD The Best Prog Rock Album in the World ... Ever .

= = Reception = =

The album was not commercially successful in the UK . A Record Mirror review said " I have to confess complete ignorance of precisely what Van der Graaf Generator are trying to achieve " , though Melody Maker were more enthusiastic , saying " A Plague of Lighthouse Keepers " is one of the most fascinating and dramatic items I 've ever heard " . However , the album reached number one on the Italian album charts . The group toured Italy to promote the album , where they were treated like superstars and surrounded by army vehicles and riot police . They followed this with a short European tour , during which they filmed a live version of " A Plague of Lighthouse Keepers " for Belgian television . The production took two hours to film as the band had not intended to perform the song live and had forgotten it . The resulting film shows Hammill singing the song while reading a lyric sheet . Regular tours of Europe followed over the next four months , but the strain of the workload became too much for the band , and they split up in August 1972 .

Retrospective reviews have been favourable . Q magazine called the album a " misunderstood masterpiece " while Mojo said it was " one of the most extraordinary albums of its era " . Singer @-@ songwriter Fish is a fan of the album , particularly of " A Plague of Lighthouse Keepers " . Julian Cope has called the album " a masterpiece " . Hammill has said , " although a fairly extreme musical statement , [the album] contains some of our most cohesive work " .

Though " Theme One " did not chart as a single in the UK , John Peel replaced Martin 's original orchestral version with the group 's before closing down Radio 1 each night . The BBC subsequently carried on using Van der Graaf Generator 's version . Martin enjoyed the group 's cover , calling it " a powerful recording that respected the original " .

= = Track listing = =

All songs written and composed by Peter Hammill , except where indicated .
Tracks on 2005 reissue

= = Personnel = =

Hugh Banton ? Hammond E & C , Farfisa Professional organs , piano , mellotron , ARP synthesizer
, bass pedals , bass guitar , psychedelic razor , vocals

Guy Evans ? drums , tympani , percussion , piano

Peter Hammill ? lead vocals , acoustic and slide guitar , electric piano , piano

David Jackson ? tenor , alto , and soprano saxophones , flute , vocals

Additional personnel

Robert Fripp ? electric guitar

John Anthony ? production

Robin Cable , David Hentschel , Ken Scott ? engineering

Mike and Dave C ? tape op

Howard ? brightest hope

Paul Whitehead ? sleeve design

Keith Morris ? inner sleeve photography