



COMMUNICATIONS

CLASSIC ROCK PROG
APRIL 2011

Sun King

Phil Manzanera/Quiet Sun

Diamond Head/Mainstream
(Collectors Edition) EXPRESSION

They say that if you want something done then ask a busy person to do it. In the mid-70s Phil Manzanera not only had his hands full with Roxy Music, but he'd been upping the avant-garde ante with Nico on her mercurial, bleak essay, *The End*, as well as locking horns with John Cale on *Fear*. So in the wake of Roxy's success when asked if he'd like to record a solo album, he naturally grabbed the opportunity with both hands.

For one hectic month between December '74 and January '75 he worked with a stellar cast that included all of Roxy Music (minus Ferry), John Wetton, Robert Wyatt, Brian Eno, and all of his pre-Roxy band, Quiet Sun.

By day, the team worked on the official recording, *Diamond Head*. However, during studio down-time in the evenings, Manzanera and Quiet Sun taped an entirely different record without the knowledge or approval of management or label. These two contrasting albums that emerged from having burnt the candle at both ends provide an absorbing inventory of the guitarist's enthusiasms that hadn't always found an obvious outlet in Roxy.

Diamond Head is a beautifully judged collection, sensitively designed and liberally laced with tangy, exotic flavours.



Predominately light and airy, his collaborations with

Eno on *Big Day* and *Miss Shapiro* are guaranteed to make you smile. *Frontera*, on which Robert Wyatt sings nonsense lyrics gleaned from a Spanish phrase book, hurtles forward like the iconic train that leaps out from the cover.

Given this is a guitarist's solo album, Manzanera is a generous and unassuming host, often allow other contributors to bask in the limelight. Even on the instrumental numbers, replete with ornate arrangements and intriguing mood shifts, Manzanera is a tasteful presence rather than a dominant force. Only on the stately pomp of *Alma* does he let his inner rock god properly off the leash.

If *Diamond Head* shows the lighter side of Manzanera's musical personality, *Mainstream* is an altogether darker, harder place. Wearing their love of Soft Machine on their sleeves, Quiet Sun broke up in the early 70s with only a couple of demos to their name. Using the recording of *Diamond Head* as cover, they really

Quiet Sun:
about to feel
the noise.



make up for lost time. Bassist Bill MacCormick (ex-Matching Mole), drummer Charles Hayward (later of This Heat) and the brilliantly wacky Dave Jarrett on keys together with Manzanera (plus a little Eno magic) produce a powerful, and still fresh-sounding record.

Far removed from any superfluous noodling, it bristles with tightly-drilled compositions such as *Mummy Was An Asteroid*, *Daddy Was A Small Non-Stick Kitchen Utensil*. Delivered with punch and gusto, there's also finesse, dexterity and outbursts of ecstatic, rapturous playing to be found across the disc.

Both albums come remastered with expanded packaging and content. However, *Mainstream* is a true labour of love. Presented in a lavish hardback book with extensive interviews, clippings, and previously unreleased material, it's wonderful to see such care and attention.

Sid Smith