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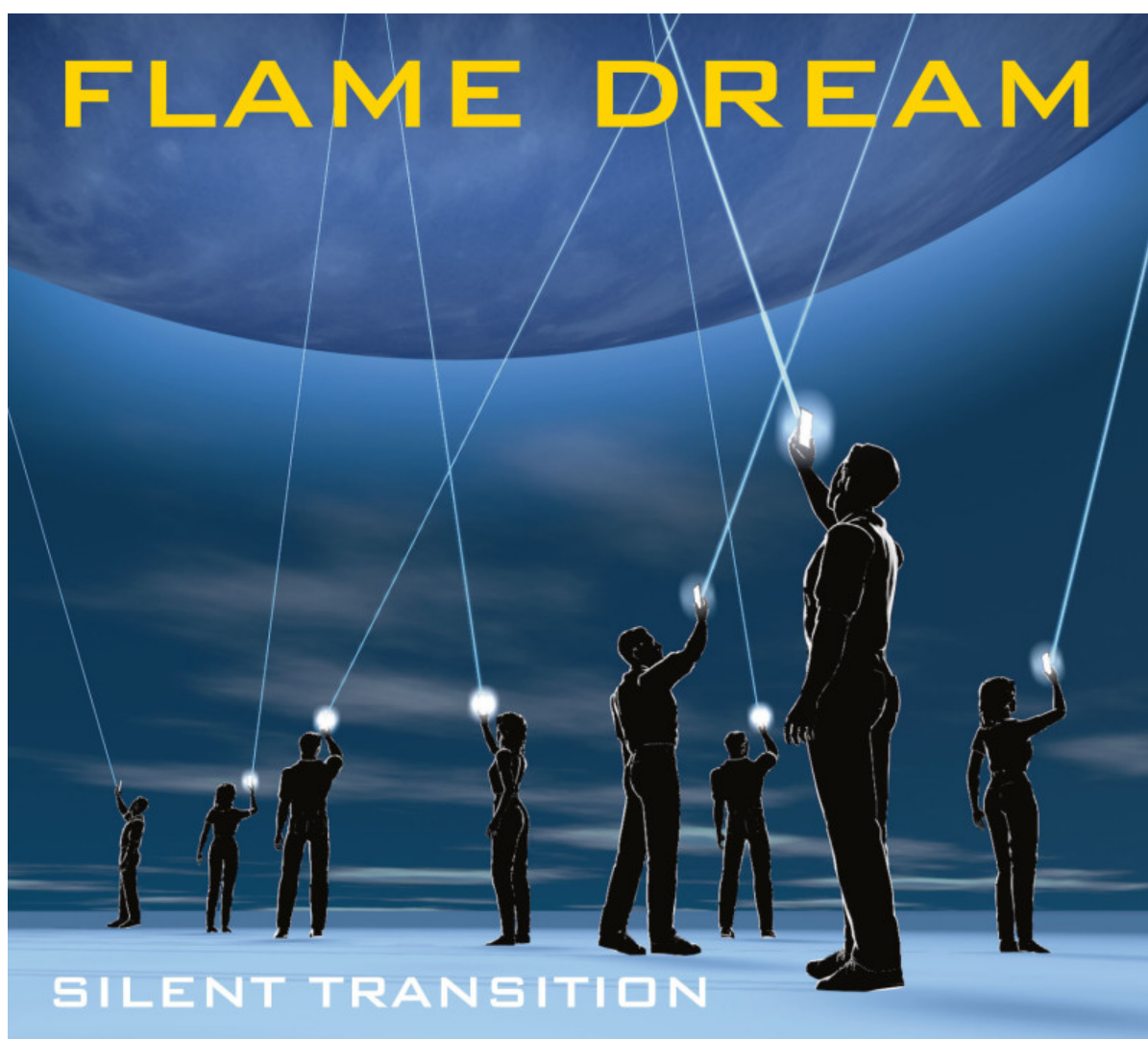
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Flame Dream — Silent Transition

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Jan Buddenberg

Consisting out of original founding members Ruckstuhl, Wolf, Hochuli and Furrer, completed in line-up by Alex Hutchings on guitars, the first aspect noticed on *Silent Transition* is the length of the songs. Ranging from six to fifteen minutes, this is not the only element *Silent Transition* shares with Flame Dream's earlier albums. Complemented by thoughtful reflective lyrics by Wolf, the music also showcases a wonderful return to true progressive songsmithery by composer/arranger Ruckstuhl, that is once again delectably oriented in jazz-fusion. And I mustn't forget to mention the authentic familiarity the music expresses through the marvellously time-unaffected voice of Wolf. He sounds just as emotional, melancholic and uplifting as I remember him to be from all those years ago.

A touch of synth-pop can also still be made out at times. Like in *No Comfort Zone*, which ominously opens the album in a distinctly refreshing 80s sound. Familiar Flame Dream sounds emerge, with an uplifting pop-melodic feel of *Genesis* and *Victor Go*. Around the fifth minute, the song however elegantly shifts towards an ambient passage that develops into rich proggy momentum. Intricate arrangements and luxurious synths shine brightly with *UK*. The punchy snare drum does take away a tiny bit of warmth for me. But when after a daunting movement the composition's melodies return for a concluding segment of *A.B.W.H.* textures with fine guitar work added by Hutchings, I feel perfectly at ease in the zone.

Silent Transition which opens with rocking guitar, follows a similar compositional path. At first, it shares synth-driven melodies that resonate with *Saga*. The sadness in Wolf's voice and the elegant melodies of the song envision *Barclay James Harvest* melancholy. This is followed by a delightful bossa nova samba à la *Santana*, highlighted by jazzy *Alan Holdsworth* guitar work by Hutchings, and classical piano by Ruckstuhl. This rekindles memories of Steve Negus' *Economy Of Motion*. Seguing back with restrained interplay onto its vibrantly Brazilian theme, the song finally returns to its rocking beginning. After multiple *Saga*-ish deliveries, it ends quietly with tenderly transporting transient flute that softly whispers with *Genesis* allure.

Following an entrance of desolate ice-cold atmospheres, album highlight *Velvet Clouds* also at first blends sparkling multilayered pop-melodics akin to Jon Anderson and *Victor Go*. It drifts ashore in ambient surroundings and, energised by piano, ultimately yields captivating *Holdsworth* fusion, thriving on odd time signatures and harmonic interplay. Ruckstuhl adds rich layers of virtuous synth. Together with the delightful bass-driven melodies, the second incarnation of *UK* shines again, beyond belief. *Gerard*, *Deja Vu*, *Andrew Roussak*, and *E.L.P.* enthusiasts please take note as well!

Emotionally charged with a tangible burden of melancholy, *Out From The Sky* follows this with intricate and sensitively subdued melodies that ripple comfortably onwards while subtlety of orchestral arrangements and Wolf's expressive voice in compliance to its lyrical statement offer a divine sense of hopeful relieve. An aspect the instrumental *Signal On The*

Shores provides in spades as it wades from a pool of solitude surrounded by hymning voices into a great big ocean of attractive melodies awash with diversity and dynamics. Hutchings' wonderful transporting guitar motifs deliver a grand beacon of hope lit by *Camel*.

Expertly saving the best for last, *Winding Paths* once again offers progressive fusion with opulently inventive rhythms and lots of creative musical ideas. This time through sizzling synths, percussion and bright melodies. These firmly remind of previous ABWH explorations to which Hutchings inserts another fabulous touch of Holdsworth gymnastics. A surprising combination of orchestral violin arrangements, the distinctive drum sound / rhythms, and Wolf's vocal delivery generates tempting memories of *FM's City Of Fear*. Perfectly in sync and harmony during the song's promenading instrumental work-out, this excellent song finally unwinds in a gracious orchestral lengthy coda that provides a serene ambient reflection that deeply satisfies.

Deep satisfaction is the same conclusion I can draw for the album *Silent Transition*. Independently released in digipak and accompanied by a 20-page booklet, I rate the album to be their most adventurous and consistently mature effort to date. As such it can easily compete with the best of their albums. For me, it almost effortlessly does and frankly surpasses every single one of these finer efforts.

From what I gather this is merely the beginning of something excitingly new. Work on a follow-up is already in its early stages. Probably no need to say this after so many words, but I am looking forward to this with great anticipation. A statement I also need to make for the long overdue official digital /CD issues that the band soon plan to release, at last. Hopefully all of them, because each on their own way these albums fully deserve artistic recognition, IMHO. Welcome back!