

As always, the new Ayreon album 'The Theory of Everything' is a stark contrast to the previous Ayreon album, in this case '01011001'. For starters, 'The Theory of Everything' features only 7 singers, while '01011001' had no fewer than 17. As a result, 'The Theory of Everything' has far more instrumental passages than its predecessor. Additionally, while '01011001' was quite dark, heavy and even industrial in places, the new album is more proggy and transparent. Musically it returns to the more organic production of 'Into The Electric Castle' (1998), while lyrically it harks back to the style of 'The Human Equation' (2004).

This album features only singers that Arjen has never worked with before -- an eclectic cast of singers from different metal genres. Representing the symphonic metal camp are Marko Hietala (Nightwish) and Tommy Karevik (Kamelot). On the metal side there is Cristina Scabbia (Lacuna Coil) and Grand Magus (JB). The album also showcases two upcoming talents, Michael Mills (Toehider) and Sara Squadrani (Ancient Bards). As always, Arjen's trusty sidekick Ed Warby applied his hard-hitting, technical-yet-tasteful style to the drums. Arjen managed to enlist legendary guest-musicians from four of the biggest UK prog-acts of the 1970's: Yes, Emerson Lake and Palmer, Genesis and King Crimson. On keyboards Rick Wakeman and Keith Emerson, Steve Hackett on guitar and John Wetton on vocals. As icing on the cake Jordan Rudess (Dream Theater) played a keyboard solo and Troy Donockley (Nightwish) played Uilleann pipes and Low Flutes. Although this album, like all Ayreon albums, again features an array of many different styles like prog, rock, folk, electronic, classical and metal, this is a more consistent album than Arjen's previous releases. It's the first time he wrote four long 20-plus minute epics, sub divided into 42 (!) tracks.

The mammoth sci-fi narrative that spanned the first 6 Ayreon albums was wrapped up on the 2009 Ayreon compilation album 'Timeline'. It was a daunting undertaking for Arjen to begin a whole new story, and an even greater challenge to stay away from his beloved sci-fi and fantasy genres. At the center of the story is an autistic savant, The Prodigy (Tommy Karevik), whose emotional deficits are counterbalanced by breathtaking mathematical genius. His Father (Michael Mills) is a brilliant but emotionally unavailable scientist who is determined find THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING, the equation that will explain and tie together all known physical phenomena. He designs to use his son's mathematical talents to achieve his own ends. The Prodigy's Mother (Cristina Scabbia) is torn between protecting her son, supporting her husband, and having her own emotional needs met. The cast of characters also includes the Prodigy's Teacher (JB), his Psychiatrist (John Wetton), his girlfriend (Sara Squadrani), and his rival (Marco Hietala), who all play important roles in helping the drama unfold. In short, THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING explores the fine line between genius and madness, focusing on the conflicting desires of the characters and the consequences of following their passions. So Arjen has indeed managed to avoid science fiction, and instead created an eminently human story set in the context of science.

ADDITIONAL INFO

Vocalists (in order of appearance):

JB as The Teacher

Sara Squadrani as The Girl

Michael Mills as The Father

Cristina Scabbia as The Mother

Tommy Karevik as The Prodigy

Marko Hietala as The Rival

John Wetton as The Psychiatrist

Instrumentalists:

Ed Warby –drums

Rick Wakeman – keyboards

Keith Emerson – keyboards

Jordan Rudess – keyboards

Steve Hackett – lead guitar

Troy Donockley – Uilleann pipes and low flute

Arjen Anthony Lucassen –electric and acoustic guitars, bass guitar, mandolin and keyboards.

(Ben Mathot –violins, Maaïke Peterse –cellos, Jeroen Goossens – flute , bass flute, piccolo, bamboo flute and contrabass flute, Siddharta Barnhoorn – orchestrations, Michael Mills – Irish Bouzouki)

Some additional info taking from Arjen's narrative in the 'making of':

The story on this album looks at what happens when people are driven by an irresistible passion. In this case, it's a scientist who is obsessed with finding the theory of everything -- the equation that will explain and tie together all known physical phenomena. He's so focused on solving the theory that he risks losing everything, including his family. But he is not alone -- all of the characters are driven to fill some kind of emotional need no matter what the consequences. If I had to sum it up in one sentence, I would say that the story deals with the drive to succeed and the emotional costs that come with treading the fine line between genius and madness.

The storytelling was also challenging because I wanted to write a very clear story that everybody would understand. But writing lyrics that tell a clear story without being too simple or cheesy is actually REALLY HARD.. You have to find a balance between being lyrical and trying to move the story forward. Luckily I got a lot of help again from Lori, we basically came up with this story together, talking about it for weeks. When we had a basic story outline, I then wrote the lyrics....and she completely changed them :-). For the better of course!

This time the whole composing and recording process was completely different from previous times. In the past I used to first record all my ideas on a little cassette player and after a few months I would have about 50 ideas, picked out the best ones, put them in some kind of order and then start recording. This time however I just entered the studio and just started recording spontaneously. So every idea I had just led to the next idea, it

was all written and recorded chronologically. So...that's how I ended up with 4 long epics of more than 20 minutes, that was a first for me.

There are also lots of tempo changes within the tracks themselves, something I haven't done much in the past. I think this all started with a 10 minute track called Lost in the New Real on my last solo album, which was built up of many little parts that somehow flowed into each other without following any rules. I was happy with how that turned out, and people were quite positive about it, so it encouraged me to try further experiments in that direction. It's certainly been an adventure! So yeah...this is a true prog album in every sense I guess :-)

This time I made an album with hardly any choruses and hardly any lyrics being repeated. Which at first listen will probably come over as a lot of information, but which will – I hope - stay interesting after repeated listens. Maybe not so clever in these fast days of YouTube, but I followed my heart here and I'm sure there are still people who want to sit down, relax – headphones on - and be taken on a musical adventure.

I think of the Belgian painter Jef Bertels as my own personal Roger Dean or Hipgnosis. He has been painting most Ayreon front-covers ever since The Electric Castle back in '98. And although this is a completely new story, I still wanted Jef to do the front cover painting again, and I think the fans also really want and expect Jef with an Ayreon release. His beautiful painting represents the lighthouse where the prodigy finds the Theory of Everything. You could see the lighthouse as a metaphor for science lighting the way through the darkness of ignorance to the solid ground of knowledge.