

‘Secrets And Lies’ is the first solo album from Jakko Jakszyk since he joined King Crimson in 2013.

As might be expected from a musician of his calibre, the album contains both dazzling performances from a guest list that includes King Crimson’s Gavin Harrison, Robert Fripp, Tony Levin and Mel Collins, as well as progressive rock legend, Peter Hammill, bassist John Giblin and Level 42’s Mark King.

However, Secrets And Lies is no mere platform for virtuoso workouts or grandstanding. It’s a carefully considered collection of songs and pieces, possessing emotional depth and subtlety, exploring the psychology of relationships, betrayal, politics but doesn’t turn its back on the possibility of hope and redemption in unlikely places.

The result is an unexpectedly accessible album whose beautifully crafted, radiant choruses are served by a rich musicality and sumptuous production values.

Opening with a barbed, cross-picking palindromic guitar motif that wouldn’t sound out of place in King Crimson, ‘Before I Met You’ bursts out at a galloping pace driven by Gavin Harrison’s propulsive drumming and Mark King’s athletic bass lines. With lyrics inspired after reading novelist Julian Barnes’ 1982 black comedy about sexual jealousy, ‘Before She Met Me’, the piece contains Jakko’s trademark fast-moving, jagged soloing.

Tony Levin’s distinctive bass is sinuously folded around the bitter-sweet ballad, ‘The Trouble with Angels’ whose cautionary words and languorous tune shares a reflective callback of sorts to his acclaimed 2006 solo album, The Bruised Romantic Glee Club.

Emerging from an arid and haunting soundscape, the acerbic ‘Fools Mandate’ offers a bleak assessment of politicians’ failure to learn from the mistakes of the past. A student of history, Jakko co-wrote this contemplation of the Balfour declaration on 1917 with Van Der Graaf Generator’s Peter Hammill, who’s striking vocals add to the force of the piece eventually subsiding with Hammill’s impressionistic guitar in the song’s coda.

Jakko’s long association with the Canterbury scene is given voice on his poignant tribute to the passing of his friend, drummer Pip Pyle on ‘The Rotter’s Club Is Club Is Closing Down’. Pyle, who was best known for his work with Gong and Hatfield And The North, passed away on tour in 2006. With drumming by comedian and prog-rock lover, Al Murray, Jakszyk’s affection for Pip and the regret-tinged whimsy of the Hatfield’s music is lovingly invoked throughout the song but is especially evident in the piece’s delightful wistful, meandering coda.

With its thunderous drums, surging Mellotron, and scrabbling guitar soloing against convulsive rhythmic shifts, ‘Uncertain Times’ featuring Jakko’s teenage son, Django on bass, was originally written for King Crimson in 2016. Although it was written in direct response to racist graffiti left on a Polish community centre in the wake of the UK’s 2016 Referendum to leave the European Union, its appearance here railing against the moral and political corruption of the body politic makes Uncertain Times very much a song for our age.

‘It Would All Make Sense’, featuring Simple Minds/Kate Bush bassist, John Gilbin is a showcase for Jakko’s white-hot guitar breaks as a soaring counterpoint to a song whose simmering undertow of dark thoughts and deep betrayal coalesce into one sharply pointed observation on human nature.

Though well-respected and admired for his technical abilities as a player it's very rare for Jakko in King Crimson to step into the spotlight as soloist. Here, on 'Secrets, Lies And Stolen Memories', he makes a towering appearance against a backdrop of sweeping strings, luscious orchestral flourishes in a decidedly majestic, cinematic setting that places his yearning guitar firmly centre stage.

A gentler aspect of Jakko's work comes with 'Under Lock And Key'. Co-written with Robert Fripp, the introduction is wreathed in the guitarist's vintage Frippertronics from the late 1970s repurposed here amidst drifting Mellotron and lilting drums, to form an intensely atmospheric examination of one person's emotional ebb and flow.

The human voice is a powerful and emotional instrument. Jakko's a cappella setting for 'The Borders We Traded', a song that deals with the complex and conflicted relationship with his birth mother is especially resonant. Close familial ties are further explored in the plaintive, Celtic-tinged tune 'Trading Borders'. Written by Jakszyk's teenage daughter, Amber, who can be heard playing piano on the concourse of London's Euston Station, wreathed in the hum of the passing public, it builds a touching generational connection between these two songs, from mother to son, father to daughter.

The album closes with the blistering 'Separation'. Originally written for King Crimson with Robert Fripp, a short excerpt from the piece first appeared on the band's 2014 Tour Box. Heard here in full for the very first time, featuring Mel Collins' caustic sax, Peter Hammill's backing vocals, and Jakko's quicksilver soloing, King Crimson biographer, Sid Smith, once described this as "The best song King Crimson never did." Driving, uncompromising, and powerful it brings Secrets And Lies to a shuddering dynamic halt.