



*The Dutch progressive rock pag*

**reviews cd: "74 Giorni"**

The Italian progressive scene is incredibly fertile; as a result, it is not surprising that even the most ardent of aficionados can fail to keep abreast of all the new bands arising. Even so, when I was sent this CD for review, I was fairly taken aback to realise that Conqueror were on their third CD release and yet remained completely unknown to me. I have usually at least heard mention of any Italian prog band, even if I have not managed to check them all out (not enough hours in the day!). To give a brief history, Conqueror is from Sicily and was formed way back in 1994. Many line-up changes ensued, and this state of flux continued even after the release of their first CD *Istinto* in 2003. For the sophomore release *Storie Fuori Dal Tempo*, a more stable line-up appeared, still centred on the duo of Simona Rigano (keyboards & vocals) and Natale Russo (drums), they were joined by Sabrina Rigano (sax & flute), Tino Nastasi (guitar) and Fabio Uchino (bass). For the current outing, Uchino has been replaced by Daniele Bambino. On the strength of this CD, I hope they manage to stay together and produce many more works of this calibre.

For album No. 3, the group have set themselves the almost inevitable challenge of that prog staple – a concept album. Unfortunately, as the vocals are in Italian throughout, I can tell you little about the story, save from what I gathered from the (poorly done) translations on their website; namely that this is based on the true story of two Italian adventurers who were adrift on a small raft for the 74 Days of the title. To tell this story of extreme adversity and endurance, Conqueror conjure up 13 slices of refined and richly melodic prog with a symphonic aura that manages to straddle the classic and neo prog genres in a comfortable, easy-to-like style. By utilising short instrumentals alongside longer vocal numbers (themselves often not averse to including long instrumental passages), the group skilfully create a smoothly flowing work which entrances almost from the start.

The first track, it must be said, is a fairly straight commercial tune; my insightful 9 year old son said "you wouldn't like this if it wasn't sung in Italian". He has a point. I do favour quirky, unusual music, and this is pretty straight – though it is given added interest by some tasteful flute and sax in its later stages; also, the vocal performance is quite enchanting.

The rest of the album, though, is much more interesting, with many tracks featuring plenty of time and tempo shifts, with moods ranging from the plaintive (*Cormorani*) to the more dynamic and up-tempo (*L'ora Del Palare & Master Stefanos*).

With instrumental textures including crystal clear piano, strident Hammond and swirling synths, as well as warm sax tones, mellifluous flutes and skilful and mature guitar leads, the stage is set for an affecting and stylish vocal performance from the graceful Simona, which is sure to delight many. Choc full of interesting guitar/keys and sax/synth juxtapositions, and awash with beautiful flute melodies, the album works as a unified whole, but perhaps lacks the killer standout track or two which would lift it from good to great status. Nevertheless, it should appeal to fans of Camel and Pendragon as much as to Italprog aficionados.

Unlike the dreadful journey it recounts, this is a delightful aural excursion, one which you will want to take again and again.

Conclusion: 7 out of 10

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[www.conqueror.it](http://www.conqueror.it)