

ProgPower Europe 2015, 2-4 October Baarlo

The annual pilgrimage to Baarlo this year represented a statement. I guess not on purpose, but many of the bands this year came from countries that if making our news this usually means bad news. ProgPower Europe showed that music transcends politics and the world would be a better place if we would live by Progpower rules. I loved to see bands from Russia, Greece, Tunesia, USA and Belarus, next to the usual Scandinavian/Polish/Dutch base with this year some focus on Spain to complete the line-up. Apart from the usual 75% of familiar faces this year some more people showed up it seemed, which was a pleasant surprise. On driving distance we had competition from EuroBlast Festival, Cynic in Limburg and Steve Hackett two nights in de Boerderij all fishing in the same pond.



Friday started with Danish band Vola. Earlier this year I asked them if their album *Inmazes* would be available on CD as well, to which they replied that the number of downloads sold would tell. A few weeks later their target was passed and I could order my copy. Nice album and great live performance. For me Vola showed that we can easily blend some djent into PPE.

Headliners on Friday were Myrath from Tunesia. Their power metal with some arabic melodies is not fully my thing, but they make more than a bit up by their enthusiastic presentation. Bringing a bellydancer along resulted at least in many extra pictures taken. Good atmosphere and a nice opening evening.



Saturday I arrived a bit later, so I missed half of Armed Cloud's show. As they are Dutch I shall catch them again on tour and they surprised me positively. No shocking new ways, but easily accesible melodic prog metal. Next up were Karma Rassa from Russia. They cranked up the volume a bit and gave me mixed feelings. When at parts their guitar wall sounded impressive enough, they did not have great melodies that would stick, nor a great voice. Still they did keep my attention and I had some sort of approving nodding going on for sixty minutes. Next up

Exxasens deserves an apology from my side. First I missed their opening catching up with friends and when entering I was immediately distracted by the keyboardist appearance. Due to his similarity with a famous comedy show star from the seventies I was waiting for Basil Fawlty to join the stage and hit him on the head with a book. Hey, they are from Barcelona to make matters worse. In order to make up a bit I can say that what I saw was probably the second best band of the day. Nice instrumental cosmic stuff, which is better explained in this month's Prog magazine.



Dinner came upon us and as it followed beers I missed the next band fully. Luckily Schizoid Lloyd are Dutch, so I saw them before and shall see them again. The buzz was positive from what I heard. Then it was time for Soen to play Progpower and they impressed. It became clear that this is a band who are as headliner touring Europe. The stage presence, show and confidence were from a different level. Good songs to match and Andrew is trying to find out what the Black Flag waiving was about and shall let me know later.

Saturday was closed by Festival headliner Pagan's Mind. Looking at the T-shirts around a pretty popular act this year. I do like their music as such, but somewhere around the one hour mark I have had enough in general. This happened some years ago on the Friday night and happened again this year. Their Power Prog brought Ok-ish, but to me too little variation for a two hour show. Even now that they opened instrumentally for 15-20? minutes it still became more of the same after awhile. The different looks from their vocalist remains even arriving 20 minutes late a sight to be seen. Still not enough to keep me two hours on my feet at the end of a long day.



Sunday was the day I was looking forward to most when line-ups were decided. Even after the sad loss of Abnormal Thought Patterns of the program, the day promised lots of variation and most bands I knew in advance. Opening band Until Rain was unknown to me. I appreciated their Vandenplas like metal, but what drew most attention was the slightly uncomfortable feeling backup vocals dressed in white. And then came Serdce from

Belarus. Usually I do leave some bands to surprise me on progpower, not checking out clips or streamngs. When Serdce was announced last year I did look them up and was sold immediately, with their album Timelessness making it into my top 14 of 2014. As this is complicated music it still could go several directions live on stage. This turned out to be for me the standout show of the festival. Memories of the impact of Riverside 2004 came up, with sheer class at display. Amazing domination of instruments, beautiful soft-heavy variation and a voice that was more present than on CD. Their tech Metal with grunts did split the audience into two parts. Those who hate grunts and want easier accesible metal and those who got it and absolutely loved this performance. I do not know if there is a metal scene in Belarus and they can play often, but they looked experienced on stage. Driving up for two days in a van, at least was made up by being my favorite band of the weekend and not just mine. Pity they did not bring merchandise, as I would like to hear their older albums or get a T-shirt with the last cover on it. After this impact the downstairs bar was the place to regain energy. This at the cost of Polish band Animations. The short bit I did see was very energetic and they became a typical case of unfortunate timing for me.



As time always seems to fly in Baarlo the last evening was there faster than expected, but the closing trio promised good things. First up were second Barcelona band Obsidian Kingdom and they were the next big surprise. I have their debut album, but did not recall so much metal. This was one show with band members jumping all over the place playing a tight metal, with mainly extreme bits broken with Anathemic quiet bits and surprisingly good clean vocals. Sunday already gave more than I hoped for and then the two famous names were still to come. Enchant were a bit of the light band on this metal Sunday. This did not disturb them too much and they played an entertaining show passing through their career. Their music is carried by the great voice of Ted Leonard. I wondered if his T-shirt was a message to the former vocalist of his other band, but even with a cold he sounded great. Instrumentally there is also nothing to moan about so we had a professional good show. One moan I can make is that they did not play their best song Break, but these things happen with bands of so many albums. Closing the festival this year were Leprous. Five years ago they played on the Friday and I absolutely loved them. At the time their album Bilateral was just released and this has been my favorite. Their last two albums are not as good in my view and their Coal tour was somewhat disappointing after what I saw of them before. As I was unsure what to expect I counted on a possible early run for a bit of fresh air. This did not happen as I quite liked the show from start to finish. In the beginning there was some alarming overdose on the harmony ahahaha they like to add to their songs, but the balance light/dark or heavy/soft was in good order and their show with 4 screens was entertaining enough. A good closer of another great ProgPower festival.

