

Geographic is a fusion of electronic and world music. It is a fascinating mixture of Vangelis and Enigma type sound carried through with World Music and strong use of instruments and melody. This combination creates a superb experience which is quite powerful. Rather than being world music in the "modern sense", it brings a strong use of a wide range of instruments into a primarily electronic form, creating a strong story line with emotional impact. Geographic especially impresses me as it is not "just" electronica with instruments but shows a real mastery of both forms bringing them together to create a quite unique CD.

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Groove Unltd. keyboard artist Frank Van Bogaert's new release draws its inspiration from his having worked with various ethnic and world music artists throughout his career. His self-penned liner notes list Irish folkbands, Algerian Rai, African percussion bands, and Scottish pipers as musicians he has been associated with throughout his career. It's not hard to deduce that this recording will incorporate a mixture of Van Bogaert's Vangelis-like neo-symphonic keyboards and diverse world fusion elements. And that's exactly what Geographic is all about.

Every now and again I get a CD containing music which is absolutely stunning; Geographic is one of them. The first time I played this album I knew from the opening track that it was going to be something special.

Frank Van Bogaert has worked with various folk and ethnic bands during his career. This influence is noticeable on several tracks, it adds something special to the music and has led to some great fusions of synths and traditional instruments from around the world.

The music on this album varies from very upbeat rhythmic and melodic to easygoing mellow pieces. Throughout one gets the impression that Vangelis was an influence for Frank, he sure knows how to create some majestic sounds just as Vangelis does.

Highlights for me are the very rhythmic title track incorporating ethnic style chant; Deserts which is the longest track and has a brilliant melody played on synth; Highlands, High Hopes that makes excellent use of pipes (bagpipes I would guess) and piano to deliver a stirring theme.

If you haven't discovered Frank Van Bogaert yet then Geographic is a good place to start. Listen to this album with the volume cranked up somewhat and you're in for a superb and exciting listening experience.

2002© Dene Bebbington, Ambient Visions

The title song features keyboards that fluctuate between dramatic sweeping chords and more subtle melodies and combines it with a midtempo quasi-tribal/neo-urban beat, throwing in some native chanting of some kind. "Rain" the next song, opens with the sound of gentle rain and some very nice ambient music textures. As the

song develops, once again the specter of Vangelis emerges from the shadows, although Van Bogaert is more than enough of an original that this album is not some Vangelis knock-off. "Rain" develops into a nicely syncopated march-cadence number - warm, friendly, inviting. "Deserts" begins with a soft wind blowing and more drifting style ambient keyboards, but soon a Berlin school sequencer rhythm enters the fray and we're off into a high tempo driving number. Very nice! Again, Van Bogaert blends his keen melodic sensibility with the more sterile German synthesizer textures. When the song suddenly erupts in a crescendo of rhythm and keyboard overtures, with lush synth chorals as well, I realized that this recording was very much about the dramatic impact all these world musicians has had on Van Bogaert. Two caveats. If you're used to Groove Unltd. recordings that stress the German/sequencer style of EM, this CD is quite different from that (not that it doesn't have Berlin school elements to it). Two, there are some overt world music touches here and there. EM purists would be well-advised of this so that the chanting or ethnic rhythms will not send them into fits of wonderment or bewilderment!

As with all Groove Unltd. recordings I have heard, production values are high. There are twelve cuts in all on the CD, and sometimes the music is more subdued than on the opening cuts. But this is never really ambient in the usual sense.

It's melodic world fusion-influenced EM. Cuts like "Distant City" and "After the Rain" have drifting elements to them, but I was always aware of Van Bogaert's desire to anchor the album in a warm melodic groove. The final song, "Dreamworld" does approach the true ambient aesthetic, but at a tick above two minutes long, I wouldn't say it is representative of the rest of the album.

2000 © Bill Binkelman Editor and Webmaster WIND & WIRE

"Geographic" is the second CD by the experienced Belgium keyboardplayer, composer and producer Frank Van Bogaert. You can hear a clear difference if you compare this album with his first one, "Colours" from 1998. On his debut the influences from Enigma en Deep Forest are quite prominent, cooked in a great production. These days Indian chants over house-beats are a bit over-used but on the other hand it is quite popular and it gives electronic music a chance to get to wider audiences. Just look at the success of the "Erotic Dreams"-CD (or is that perhaps because of the show?).

On "Geographic" the modern rhythms are sometimes still present but Frank now gets his inspiration elsewhere, namely from Vangelis. As a Vangelis-fan I find every attempt to capture the magic of his music interesting because it is very difficult. There are not much artists who managed it: Symbian, Walter Christan Rothe, Olyam and Felicetti are good examples.

Sometimes, the music is very Vangelis. For instance take the CS80-like orchestral sounds in "Geographic". Also the sequences as in "Rain" and "Earth" are much like those of the grand master. Franks keyboardplaying is excellent, especially on the piano and his sounds fresh and interesting. As already stated in the review in "SMD": also the titles like "Rain", "After The Rain", "Earth" and "Sauvage" remind of Vangelis.

The CD ends with a piece that has a similarity to the somber soundtrack "Birdy" by Eeter Gabriel.

This is a perfect album which could be a commercial winner for Groove.

1999 © Paul Rijkens

This is the follow-up to Frank's excellent debut album 'Colours', which was released last year. While there are any number of bands trotting out fine examples of music in the Berlin School tradition, very few tackle the melodic territory occupied by Jean Michel Jarre or Vangelis. Frank is a notable exception to this rule, and 'Colours' demonstrated an attention to detail in the compositional department which promised great things. The main problem with 'Colours' in my view was that it tended to play safe too many times, hiding Frank's own style behind radio-friendly references to Deep Forest or Enigma. I was hoping that 'Geographic' would see that personal style coming more to the fore, and I've not been disappointed.

The show opens with the title track and here we find an example of a Native American vocal which I feel has become too cliched over the past couple of years. That aside, this is a nicely constructed piece with the same warmth and depth of production which ran throughout 'Colours'. The next track, 'Rain', is a stunner. A luscious, cinematic tour de force which could have been lifted straight out of Vangelis' 'Oceanic'.

'Deserts' is an altogether more uptempo affair, with strong rhythm and melody; If any track could ever break through as a hit single, it'd be this one. Think of Jarre circa 'Rendezvous'.

'Distant City' features more organic sounds and a slightly darker atmosphere, something along the lines of 'Brown' from 'Colours'. 'Highlands, High Hopes' features anthemic themes and, of course, a rousing bagpipe chorus. Before you write this track off, think of the track 'Magellan' from Mike Oldfield's 'Songs of Distant Earth'. Yes it CAN work, and it DOES work, here. 'After the Rain' sounds almost like a John Barry theme for a Bond movie set in exotic locations around the world. Another cinematic classic that I just can't stop playing. 'Earth' starts off sounding like it'll turn into a copy of 'Chariots of Fire' but in fact explodes into an uptempo workout in the style of Robert Miles' 'Children', bookended by a restatement of the intro. 'Sauvage' sees a funkier groove with some really great use of African vocal samples. 'Geographic pt II' sounds like it could be used for an airline's TV advert, and doesn't really do much for me, though the production is as huge as ever. 'Endless Fields' brings to mind nothing less than Popol Vuh's wonderful work on the OST to 'Fitzcaraldo', featuring minimalist piano motifs, plaintive wordless vocals and majestic tympani rolls. 'Savior' is much darker than any other track here, and features some very nice organic instrumentation. The album is rounded off by a floating ambient outing called 'Dreamworld'.

To sum up, I had 'High Hopes' for this album after hearing those tantalising snippets of Frank's style which shone out on 'Colours'. Here, you get the sense that he's let it all out, and it's a joy to behold. Some might find his style overpoweringly sweet, but I don't; I'm a sucker for albums like Oldfield's 'Songs of Distant Earth', Vangelis' 'Oceanic' and Yes' 'Going For The One', and this album features tracks on an equal

footing. A perfect pick-me-up of an album.
August 1999 © Grant Middleton

As Frank says, his music can be often described as a fusion of electronics and world-instruments. He is right, and you probably will also note that he is influenced by artists like Vangelis, Enigma or Deep Forest. However, after "Colours" (his previous album), his style has become more personal. The music is beautiful, the sounds are really spectacular. He is creating a unique sonic path for others to follow. As a sound-engineer and also as a composer he has had the opportunity to work with folk and ethnic bands. This knowledge has been perfectly incorporated into his music, giving strength and emotion to the melodies. To know more about his creative approach and his style, simply listen to tracks 1, 9 or 10. They are superb. Now distributed by Groove Unlimited, I'm sure his work will be much better known. He deserves it.

1999 © Manuel Montes (Amazing Sounds)

Deze Belgische EM-componist verraste ons een tweetal jaar geleden reeds met het uitstekende, licht etnisch getinte album 'Colours'. Op 'Geographic' werkt hij verder rond eenzelfde basis, alleen maken de kleuren nu plaats voor landschappen en natuurverschijnselen. De magistrale titeltrack brengt ons perfect aansluitend op het 'colours'-album een weemoedig chantende Indiaan op een bedje van moderne ritmes afgewerkt met een mix van Vangelisachtige en hedendaagse klanken. De andere nummers cirkelen in steeds grotere bogen rondom dit thema, zodat 'Geographic' een heel eigen karakter krijgt. Langzame indrukwekkende nummers wisselen af met goed gedoseerd uptempo-werk. Kenmerkend zijn goed in het oor liggende harmonieën, die gelukkig zelfs niet in de buurt van meligheid komen. Van Bogaert kiest zijn klanken met veel zorg, bouwt zijn nummers stevig op, met af en toe de nodige verrassingen en onverwachte tussenvoegsels die anticiperen op het steeds aanwezige gevaar van voorspelbaarheid. Frank Van Bogaert weet ook uitstekend hoe hij samples moet kiezen en verwerken, en dat mag hij voor mij gerust nog meer doen. Soms tapt hij een fractie teveel uit het 'nagalm'-vaatje, en ook over de mixing is soms enige discussie mogelijk, maar laten we vooral niet struikelen over details. Voor mij zou het album helemaal perfect zijn als er eens een echt trompetje of een echte doedelzak de plaats zou innemen van hun elektronische surrogaat, maar ja... \$\$\$... Vooral in de lichtjes jazz-getinte intro van 'Distant City' zou een met gevoel gespeelde trompet wat meer karakter geven (de intro heeft iets van de sfeer op Vangelis' album 'The city', dat kon ook moeilijk anders met zo'n titel...). En verder niets dan lof, want dit album is een hoogvlieger.

Lezers die op zoek zijn naar experiment en durf zullen het album op sommige plaatsen misschien een beetje te braaf vinden, maar talloze anderen zullen het net daarom leuk vinden. Bijzonder leuk is ook dat Van Bogaert dankzij het (nogal uitgebreide) thema 'Geographic' ook voor voldoende afwisseling kan zorgen. In 'Earth' lijkt alsof Vangelis en Wim Mertens even op bezoek waren in de studio, in 'Sauvage' krijgen we dan weer een sterk uitgevoerde -en let nu op- italo-disco georiënteerde, iets of wat tropisch klinkende regenwouddans voorgeschoteld (haalt allen tezamen uw steeldrums van de zolder en geef van katoen). Of zweeft u liever over eindeloze velden in het gezelschap van een nogal spraakzame Indiaan? Nog niet

overtuigd...? Dan bevalt het uitstekend verzorgde hoesje u misschien wel...
1999 © Koen Vervoort

There's no getting round it, musically this album is very like Vangelis but it is the best album in that style I have heard outside those by the great man himself.
1999 © Dave Law : Synth Music Direct, UK)

A strong album. Beautifully produced.
1999 © Mark Jenkins : Emix, UK

12 great tracks, always surprising and intriguing
1999 © Kees Aerts : Groove Unlimited , The Netherlands

I did not have to wait for 'Geographic' to grow on me.
It is one of those albums that I term majestic in presentation and inventive in composition. 'Geographic' is one of those rare compositions that can be classified as a "Classic" electronic composition. My words should not sell it , it will definitely sell it self on merit alone.
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