



ALBUM REVIEW: Sananda Maitreya Radiates on Ambitious 'PROMETHEUS & PANDORA'



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Sananda Maitreya

PROMETHEUS & PANDORA

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Recalling a triple-disc album that's not a greatest hits package is fairly tough for a casual music fan. Identifying one that's a *great album* is practically unheard of. This is largely due to record companies' inclination to tame the maverick musician and shackle him or her with a schedule and limitations for prospective releases, in a bid to maximize exposure and profit.

This boxing in and imposing limits on artistic endeavors works for some, but others reject its motives and methods, seeking a new way. [Sananda Maitreya](#) is a prime example. Having surrendered his previous incarnation as [Terence Trent D'Arby](#) in 2001, Maitreya (from his home in Italy) embarked on a life outside the label system, sharing and selling his music direct to his fans.

Maitreya's albums came adorned with titles such as *Nigor Mortis: A Critical Mass* (2009), *Return To Zooathlon* (2013) and *The Rise of the Zugebrian Timelords* (2015), making them

exceptionally easy to almost immediately dismiss as the work of a man who had disappeared to a place few others wanted to accompany him to. But to take the piss was utterly pointless. Here was a man who had handled his business to ensure that the hit albums of his past continued to provide for his future. A man who was able to follow whatever creative path he chose, free from giving a single solitary fuck about what anyone wanted to say about his work.



Which brings us back to thoughts of triple-disc albums and his new project—a three-volume set entitled *PROMETHEUS & PANDORA* that promises “post-millennium rock” across its mammoth 178-minute running time. For those who abandoned Terence when he became Sananda or even earlier, it is worth noting two things. Firstly that aged 55, his voice is still a majestic thing to be marveled at. Precious little range has been lost to the ravages of a life lived well. And secondly, if you're expecting “Sign Your Name” style soul songs, you'd best be prepared for the fact that this is—for the most part—guitar-



driven rock music.

Alongside the epic running time runs a supposed theme of [Prometheus](#) and [Pandora](#) and their different approaches to life, love and, therefore, their sound—a musical yin and yang if you will. For [Prometheus](#), Gibson guitars dominate with their thick, chunky sound, while [Pandora](#)'s sensitive, ruminative side is handled by Fender guitars.

And so regarding the album itself and perhaps the least surprising news of all time for a 53-song collection—some of the album scintillates, while other parts are less satisfying. Meaning it all comes down to the balance between the two. Yet the reality is that the three volumes are padded to those proportions by alternate versions (sometimes instrumental) and refrains of already-heard songs, a fact that sometimes infuriates to the point of distraction.

That grumble notwithstanding, there is some high quality material here enhanced by his charisma, crunchy guitar work, and utterly unique and incomparable voice. Volume 1 (*PROMETHEUS*) contains the most powerful songs and by dint of coming first, there are none of the misgivings about repetition of material.

The exultant, euphoric optimism of “New World Forming” comes as soothing balm in these troubled times and is the first evidence that his cherubic voice is as joyous as it ever was. Whilst the skipping, jazzy swing of “Glad She’s Gone” serves to frame his faultless falsetto with fluttering flutes. Elsewhere, “Limp Dick Blues” is loose-limbed and witty, “Assisted Living” and “Country Changes” share a jolly country shuffle, and “Hiawatha” has a stately strangeness that beguiles and mystifies in equal measure.



Volume 2 (*PEGASUS*) is where the repetition begins to surface though. Once the charmingly whimsical “Rhinoceros” has departed the listener’s ears, what follows is at times a confounding collection of instrumental versions of songs already heard on *PROMETHEUS* including the second of three versions of the Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice song from Jesus Christ Superstar, “I Don’t Know How To Love Him.”

However great a song may be, surely there’s no need for three versions to appear on the same collection?

Volume 3 (*PANDORA*) begins in the same vein – the third version of “I Don’t Know How to Love” is followed by a second version of the ear-worm lead single “It’s Been A Long Time,” stretching listener patience to its limits. Then, just as that patience threatens to break, “Take Good Care Of My Heart” pops up to remind you that there are fewer better sounds in this world than the combination of Maitreya’s voice and a piano in perfect unison, whilst the zephyr-light, carefree “Windows” reflects the exact same angelic qualities in his voice.



So, at the end of this mammoth undertaking, where does the balance lie? It’s quite simple really. When he doesn’t baffle with his idiosyncratic choices and nearly nonsensical wordplay (sample: “She told me she was an Aztec queen / And I’m an Aztec-nician / If you know what I mean”), he radiates such irrepressible magnetism and musical quality that it overwhelms many of the more outlandish decisions.

As for the high-falutin’, overarching concept of the album? Perhaps best not to over-analyze it, in favor of reveling in his amazing voice and marvelous songwriting ability, while treasuring the fact he seems to be embracing a wider audience.

But there could yet be a twist in the tail, for back when CD and vinyl releases ruled the day, it’s doubtful if such a vast work would find much traction. But now, in the age of streaming and selective downloading, the chances increase of a wider cross-section discovering—or *rediscovering*—Maitreya’s artistry and that can only be a good thing.

Notable Tracks: “Assisted Living” | “New World Forming” | “Rhinoceros” | “Take Good Care of My Heart”