U.K. – Danger Money (1979)

1-Danger money 2-Rendez-Vous 3-The only thing she needs 4-Caesar's Palace Blues 5-Nothing to lose 6-Carryng no cross Musicians: Eddie Jobson - keyboards, electric violin John Wetton - lead vocals, bass, guitar Terry Bozzio - drums, percussion

After being together for only a few years, this excellent 1979 release was to be only the second studio album before U.K.'s last gasp (the live Night after Night - 1979) and ultimate dissolution in late 1979. Of the original U.K. lineup, only keyboardist Eddie Jobson (synthesizers, Hammond organ, piano, and violin) and ex-Family/King Crimson bassist and vocalist John Wetton remained. Joining them on drums/percussion was virtuoso drummer Terry Bozzio, who had previously played with Frank Zappa amongst others. Terry's style is much heavier than Bill Bruford's but in no way, shape, or form less technically excellent. The Danger Money album did not feature a replacement for previous guitarist Alan Holdsworth, and many of the parts that would have been played on a guitar are played by Eddie on (tons of) synthesizers, the Hammond organ, and electric violin. In fact, Danger Money might be considered an Eddie Jobson "showcase" album and he certainly shines throughout.

The six tracks on the album include a mix of shorter, alternately melodic and thunderous proggy pieces: Rendezvous 602 (4'58"); Caesar's Palace Blues (4'44"); and Nothing to Lose (3'58"); and longer pieces including Danger Money (8'11"); The Only Thing She Needs (7'54"); and the incredible prog extravaganza Carrying No Cross (12'20"). With regard to the haunting/electrifying Carrying No Cross, it is vaguely reminiscent (structurally at any rate) of the track "Starless" (King Crimson, 1974), and is quite possibly the best piece U.K. ever wrote. At the very least, it is certainly Eddie Jobson's finest recorded performance and his Hammond organ work during the earth-shaking instrumental rave-up towards the end of the composition is simply unbelievable.

My general impression of Danger Money is that it is vastly more musically interesting than the 1978 debut (U.K.) and the performances by all band members are simply incredible, even on the shorter pieces. There is much less in the way of ambient synth washes and the pieces feature excellent ensemble work, great use of counterpoint and individual virtuosity, with Carrying No Cross boasting some mind-numbingly intricate passages that would give National Health a run for their money. In fact, there are times when the complexity and instrumental virtuosity can get overwhelming, but as a progger I absolutely love it. Melodies and harmonies are also utilized quite effectively, and dynamic contrasts are more pronounced - there is a nice balance between heavier, proggier passages and quieter, melodic sections. My hunch is that because Jobson/Wetton wrote all of the material, more time was spend on writing for an ensemble, rather than individual soloists. Speculation aside, it worked very well.

All in all, this is an incredible album of prog rock and an excellent late-period album - it certainly blows all other late 1970's works by the English prog giants out of the water. Highly recommended. --- Jeffrey J.Park, amazon.com

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