

Leah - Kings & Queens (2015)

Written by bluesever

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01. *Arcadia* 02. *Save the World* 03. *Angel Fell* 04. *Enter the Highlands* 05. *In the Palm of Your Hands* 06. *Alpha et Omega* 07. *Heart of Poison* 08. *Hourglass* 09. *Palace of Dreams* 10. *This Present Darkness* 11. *The Crown* 12. *Remnant* 13. *There Is No Farewell* 14. *Siúil a Rún (Acoustic Version)* 15. *Siúil a Rún (Bonus Rock Version)* Leah McHenry (vocals) Timo Somers: (guitars, arrangement) Barend Courbois (bass) Sander Zoer (drums, percussion) + Brent McHenry (orchestration) Oliver Philipps (orchestration, pianos)

Canadian symphonic metal songstress Leah McHenry has put the finishing touches on *Kings & Queens* – her second full-length studio release. Leah continues to blend Celtic, world music, and progressive metal influences into European-style symphonic metal, resulting in a unique and interesting sound. Leah's superb vocals are backed by an excellent band – many of whom will be immediately familiar to fans of European symphonic metal.

Leah released her debut CD *Of Earth & Angels* in 2012, and 2 EPs since (*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence* in December 2012 and *Otherworld* in late 2013). She has built up a decent sized fan base thanks to her good use of social media and grass-roots publicity. Leah's music in many ways is a blend of *Leaves' Eyes*, *Lana Lane*, and *Blackmore's Night* – with more of a metal influence. Celtic melodies and mythology bump into new age concepts and symphonic / progressive metal tones, and Leah and her friends deliver it with passion. The band consists of guitarist Timo Somers and drummer Sander Zoer – both members of *Delain*, and bassist Barend Courbois (*Blind Guardian*, *Vengeance*). Also contributing are Brent McHenry (orchestration) and Oliver Philipps (keyboards, orchestration). While being heavier and more metal than her prior efforts, Leah does not abandon the diversity of tone and tempo, the strong lyrics, and folk overtones that made her earlier releases so popular.

“*Arcadia*” starts off as brutally heavy track with massive bass and drums, but immediately

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softens to become a haunting and flowing mid to slow tempo rocker that highlights the diverse tone and atmosphere that characterize the rest of the album. "Save The World" is a rollicking folk metal track with lush orchestration and cool vocals, while "Angel Fell" is a sweeping medieval ballad built around driving bass and ethereal vocals. Leah's Irish/Scottish blood runs high on the epic "Enter The Highlands," a tightly performed track with many tempo changes and symphonic elements. The technical performances on this spirited song are near perfection, making it the true apex of the album. Leah's vocal performance ranges from soft and sweet to smokey and sensuous on the slow rocker "In the Palm of Your Hands" and the guitars of Timo Somers are at their most expressive.

Celtic and Middle Eastern influences abound on the progressive "Alpha et Omega," while "Heart of Poison" displays the veteran status and fine teamwork of drum and bass. The flowing guitar opening of "Hourglass" and soft vocals will immediately bring a number of Blackmore's Night tunes to mind. The near 8 minute "Palace of Dreams" ramps up the energy and clearly displays Leah's love for the more mystical side of symphonic metal, and some very strong guitar and keyboard work. "This Present Darkness" follows the same road, although this track is built more around Leah's amazing voice.

"The Crown" is a triumphant ballad that builds in intensity as more and more layers of music are added as the song progresses. "Remnant" is powered by some precise and energetic bass and drum work. Choral vocals, a neat blend of acoustic instruments, intriguing bass work, and a flowing rhythm line make "There Is No Farewell" an epic folk metal track. Leah wraps the album in fine Celtic style with a beautiful acoustic version of the traditional Irish tune "Siúil A Rún"

Leah's Kings & Queens will appeal to fans of symphonic metal, folk metal, and female-fronted rock. There is enough variety and diversity to please even the pickiest of listeners, and the sheer breadth of performance talents and songwriting skills set Leah apart from the crowd. Whether delivering symphonic bombast or delicate melody, Leah proves that she is an up-and-coming force not only in the symphonic genres, but in almost every melodic metal class. Kings and Queens is very highly recommended. ---Joe Mis, hardrockhaven.net

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