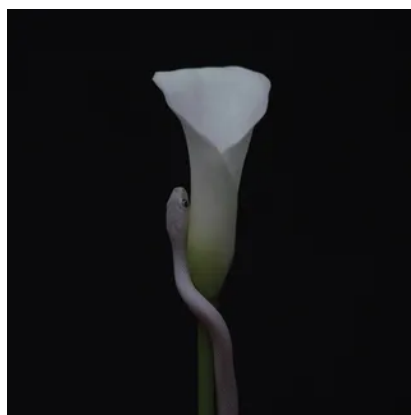


ALBUMS

Parrhesia

Animals as Leaders

2022



7.3

By Dylan Green

GENRE: Metal

LABEL: Sumerian

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On their third album as a trio, the prog metal band refines their interplay and finds a sweet spot between technical precision and human flourish.



SAVE

Animals as Leaders began after the disbandment of guitarist Tosin Abasi's prior band Reflux in 2006, when he was approached by heavy metal label Prosthetic about creating a solo project. A mostly self-trained guitarist—he picked up early skills by watching old hair metal instructional videos—Abasi only agreed to the proposal after taking a year to study at the Atlanta Institute of Music. When he was ready, he returned to the label with one condition: He wanted to include other perspectives besides his own. While Abasi recorded guitar and bass for Animals as Leaders' self-titled 2009 debut, Misha Mansoor—engineer and founding member of prog metal band Periphery—programmed drums and synths. From the beginning, collaboration was key.

Animals as Leaders developed a reputation for mixing the precise rhythms and hi-fi crunch of djent metal with subtle flourishes of jazz and classical. Guitarist and engineer Javier Reyes joined shortly after the first album's release, followed by drummer Matt Garstka in 2012, fulfilling Abasi and Mansoor's initial vision for a trio (Mansoor, who occasionally still produces for the group, has been dubbed their "silent fourth member"). *Parrhesia* is their third album together since 2014, and their most unified work since that year's *The Joy of Motion*. Their music is at its best when the trio taps into the soul and feeling within the exacting precision of their compositions, and if 2016's *The Madness of Many* occasionally tipped the balance too far toward robotic technicality, *Parrhesia* readjusts its footing, finding a sweet spot between technical precision and human flourish.

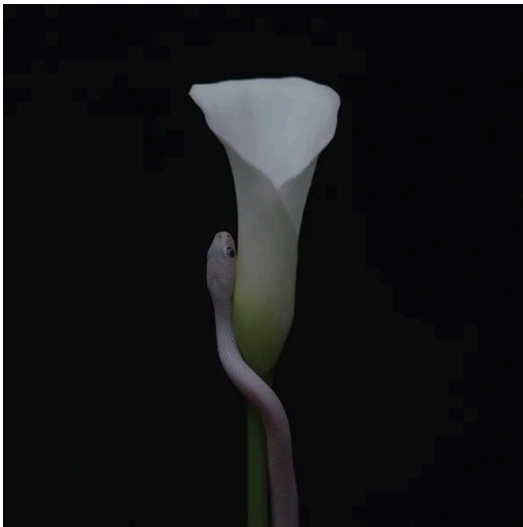
The average Animals song can feel like hearing the soundtrack to a grungy sci-fi epic before you see the movie: waves of synthetic and organic sounds crash against each other with post-apocalyptic flair. Occasionally, the totality of the sound can overwhelm—the sheer amount of textures generated by just three musicians is as impressive and exhausting as a trip to the quantum realm. *Parrhesia* is still an assault on the senses, but Abasi, Reyes, and Garstka have refined their triple act so that their interplay pops in beguiling ways. Garstka's drum patterns form a lattice with Abasi and Reyes' hammered fretwork on standout "Gestaltzerfall" and "The Problem of Other Minds," and all three streak across the twinkling synth arrangements on lead single "Monomyth." Their dynamic sounds comfortable without feeling stale. On *Parrhesia*, the trio's decade's worth of camaraderie allows them to subtly prod at the foundations of djent with jazzy ("Red Miso") and industrial ("Micro-Aggressions") flourishes while still providing rhythms to keep necks bouncing.

Abasi and Reyes' guitar work continues to be a marvel. Their 8-stringed arrangements are as flashy and technical as ever, but their relationship morphs from song to song. On

“Monomyth” and closing track “Gordian Naught,” they’re dueling dragons jockeying for position in open skies; in the first third of “The Problem of Other Minds,” they play call-and-response with gossamer chords and rhythm. This kind of intricate highwire act is the group’s bread and butter, but it’s rarely been so unpredictable. That foundation is solidified by Garstka’s awe-inspiring work on the drumkit. One minute, his double-kick drum shots rattle like cannon fire across “Gestaltzerfall”; the next, snare and cymbal crashes accentuate the smooth notes of “Thoughts and Prayers.”

A sense of freedom and curiosity courses through *Parrhesia*. Animals as Leaders aren’t redefining the formula they’ve spent the last 13 years perfecting, but there’s a buzz to every distorted guitar lick and machine-gun drum roll that proves the trio is still pushing each other to new ground. The subtle markings of their growing bond—of their trust in each other’s skill and imagination—help to unearth the soul of their synthetic wonderland.

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Animals as Leaders: Parrhesia

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