Riff Monster vs The Wigout

*Catching A Fire*, Elephant9 with Terje Rypdal (Rune Grammafon)

Terje Rypdal was one of the early artistes on the ECM record label, a musician who launched beautiful, sustained and overdriven electric guitar over restless, shifting backdrops of propulsive jazz, jazz-rock or orchestral music. He has mellowed over the years, as indeed to some extent have the prolific and exploratory electronic jazz-rock (with a hint of prog) ensemble Elephant9.

*Catching A Fire* is a live recording from 2017, which opens with textural keyboards, crisp bass and drum interplay, which burbles along for several minutes before Rypdal lets rip, soaring above busy doubletime musical noise. The second track 'Dodovoodoo' reminds me of 1980s King Crimson, with clipped muiscal layers offset against each other, all underpinned by busy drums and bass. Both of these are intriguing and well-paced 20 minute pieces.

'Psychedelic Backfire' is neither psychedelic not a backfire, it's a riff monster that wades through slow passages of carefully curated sonic sludge – dense sustained tones and crashing cymbals – to emerge unscathed ready for some heavy metal action. It's loud, clever, macho music, which gradually makes its way over 12 minutes to an exciting finish, with the audience whooping in appreciation.

'John Tinnick' (no, I don't know who he is either) is possibly the dud here, a brief track that sounds like the worst of Deep Purple's self-indulgent guitar rock. One to skip, perhaps, especially as the CD seems carefully curated to just go over the 80 minutes that CDRs allow.

'Fugi Fønnix' has a skittering, awkward introduction before settling down into a busy groove that anchors Rypdal's achingly beautiful guitar and exploratory counterpoint keyboards. It's really a showcase for the drums though, which propel and dance throughout – and I say that as someone who pretty much dislikes most drumming.

It's left to 'Skink' to bring proceedings to a close, ramping up the noise and energy for 8 minutes in another keyboard and guitar duel that gradually descends into a massive wigout before coalescing again as a triumphant keyboard finale.

It's a massive sounding album, and hard to believe Rypdal was almost 70 at the time of the concert. He's still busy composing, playing, improvising and exploring what electric guitar can do, solo and with various jazz, rock and jazz-rock ensembles. As well as new work like this, I recommend investigating early albums of his such as *Odyssey*, *After the Rain* and – my favourite – *Whenever I Seem to be Far Away*, which features not only the glorious 'Silver Bird is Heading for the Sun', guitar underpinned by mellotron and electric piano, but also the title track, written for 'electric guitar, strings, oboe and clarinet'. Rypdal also features on an astonishing number of albums by other artists as well as work released under his own name.

Rupert Loydell

(470 words)

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Elephant9 with Terje Rypdal: Fugi Fønix