Taking Flight

*Music Inspired by the Snow Goose*, Camel (2CD/Blu-Ray, Esoteric/Cherry Red)

So, however good the first few Camel albums were (and they were), it is this release, the band's third, that really got people's attention. Despite not being allowed to title it as *The Snow Goose*, because author Paul Gallico's publisher declined permission (and also refused to let them quote from the novella on the sleeve), this instrumental concept album beautifully evokes the story of disabled artist Philip Rhayader, who lives in a lighthouse, local girl Fritha, and a wounded snow goose that Fritha has nursed back to health.

Set in the time of World War 2, with specific reference to Dunkirk, the rather sentimental book tells of lost love, healing, friendship, memory and the longevity of art. The music is suitably ethereal, flowing and of its time (the mid 70s), with lots of epic widdly-diddly keyboards, sting synthesizers, processed abstract choral singing, and fantastic guitar playing, all underpinned by a crisp rhythm section, with clever use of the London Symphony Orchestra, with David Bedford conducting. At times almost jiglike, at others proto-ambient, the highlight remains 'The Snow Goose' track where blues guitar soars into ecstatic flight.

I remember seeing both the whole album played through at London's Albert Hall, with an orchestra, an event recorded for and released as a live album, but also edited highlights – as performed on The Old Grey Whistle Test; see video below – remaining in their set for many tours.

For those inclined towards these things, there's a second CD here with a 2022 mix on, along with bonus tracks, one a genuinely new song, 'Riverman', the other two single edits from the main album. Unfortunately, these are tacked on after the original album, and totally destroy the mood and sense of completeness that the album works so hard to create. And I don't own a blu-ray player for the third disc, but never mind. Personally, I think this remains Camel's best work, and urge you to revisit it if you knew it back in the day, or get to know it if you didn't. It's a classic.

Rupert Loydell

EMBED: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWpjB7d\_LJE
Camel The Snow Goose Medley, The Old Grey Whistle Test 1975, Camel

[350 words]