

## **Interview with Carl Baldassarre of Syzygy (May 6, 2014)**

**How are you doing, where are you at the moment and how is the weather over there?**

Doing fine! We're slowly emerging from a very cold and snowy winter here in Cleveland, Ohio USA.

**Can you tell us something about the name Syzygy; how the band came up with the name and does it have any meaning?**

I liked the look and meaning of the word. A "Syzygy" is an alignment of three celestial bodies in a gravitational pull. It made a lot of sense when we were a trio (Baldassarre, Giunta, Mihacevich). Now that we've been a quartet/quintet for over 10 years it doesn't quite have the relevance, but it is fairly well established so we continue to use it.

**Is the band for you and the other band members a full-time job, or do you guys have a normal regular job(s)?**

It's a mixture. Sam Giunta and I (as well as Mark Boals) are full time composer-performers. Paul Mihacevich (in part running our distribution and promotion arm) and Al Rolik flex their time with other occupations.

**Can you tell us (briefly) how the band got started and how you found each other?**

We're all from Euclid, Ohio, USA. We were one year apart in high school but didn't start playing together until just after high school. Al Rolik and I started playing together first in 1978; Sam Giunta joined in 1979 when the band Abraxas began concertizing. In a separate configuration, Paul Mihacevich joined Sam and I in the Witsend Trio during the mid-to-late 1980's which ultimately became Syzygy (trio). That line up turned into a quartet when Al Rolik re-joined as a permanent member for Realms of Eternity. Mark Boals (another Ohioan) completes us as a quintet for concerts.

**In 1993 the band released the first album: Cosmos and Chaos. How was that album received by the press and was it released on a private record label?**

It was received extremely well. There wasn't very much new going on in progressive rock genre during that moment in time. It was heralded as being "hopeful" for refreshing the repertoire. It was an independent release. I must mention that we are about to release a 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of Cosmos & Chaos any day now. It's called the Cosmos & Chaos Compendium (2014). The album is totally re-mastered with some new performances as well as several rare tracks from the vault. We also have stunning new artwork. I'm very excited about this project.

**Did the band ever get any interest from record labels like: ProgRock Records, Musea, Inside Out Music etc. to release your albums?**

A little sniffing around here and there, but nothing has ever developed. We would be very open to any label that could do more for us than what we do ourselves as an independent artist.

**The first album: Cosmos and Chaos was released in 1993, the second album: Allegory of Light (2003) and Realms of Eternity was released in 2009. What is the reason why it's taken so many years to release another album?**

It's sort of our signature! We are absolutely committed to making the best music we can measure by measure. No fluff, no filler, no "good enough". We are very demanding of ourselves. Also, the nature of our compositional style is very "vertical." That is to say we write very deep throughout each measure versus "horizontally" by just adding unexamined measures for "quantity" at the expense of harmonic and contrapuntal depth and quality. If you look at all the music within each measure of our music, it's quite extensive.

**Can you tell us something about the albums: Allegory of Light and Realms of Eternity? The production; how it was received by press and fans..?**

They were radically different production, but received identical responses from the press and fans. The Allegory of Light started by us retrieving some unused tracks from the Cosmos & Chaos sessions. Between 1993 and 2003, technology took off and we were able to revive the magnetic tapes from the old sessions and build on those great compositions. That album had a lot of production effects and overdubs. Sort of experimental – I just had my new studio built so we threw everything we could into it.

On the other hand, Realms of Eternity was a more controlled and elegant production. It is very lean, clean but fulsome; both in composition and production. The sound of the band solidified with Al Rolik on electric bass (vs. synth bass from Witsend) and Mark Boals on lead vocals. Realms of Eternity pointed toward the band's true compositional voice, while Allegory was a youthful search.

Both albums received incredible critical acclaim from around the world and still sell extremely well. Our fans really love to hear this music.

**Throughout the years, the band received a lot of attention in Progressive Rock magazines like: IO Pages, Background, ProgArchives etc. Did it have any positive effect for the band?**

It's huge! If not for these devoted editors and readers, it would be almost impossible to survive – especially as an independent artist. I can't stress enough how critical these magazines have been to our success and reputation.

**Do you have a distribution deal for your albums in Europe?**

No, we handle it all as an independent artist.

**What are your own favorite bands and favorite albums (to name a few)?**

I loved all the great progressive bands of the 1970's. I can't even begin to name them, but you can definitely imagine the influences as you listen to our early offerings. Over the last couple of years, I haven't listen to too much progressive rock because I've been so immersed in my conservatory studies and preparing to bring a fresh and ground breaking approach to the progressive repertoire in the coming years.

**What is most important to you as a musician? Are you in a band just to play music, to use your talent(s), to have fun or has it also to do something with the lyrics, or maybe better to say, is it important to have a message, what is your idea about this?**

That's an awesome question. For me, it's primarily about the creative process and composing. My goal is to one day compose imperishable musical masterpiece(s). I'd be pleased to have expanded the boundaries of what is possible by harnessing the knowledge of what has come before to create relevant repertoire for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I continue to pursue knowledge and mastery of the three elements which all the greatest composers of history possess: *pitch*, *pulse* and above all, *purpose*.

**How is the Progressive Rock scene in your area or the USA in general and are there any Christian or Gospel Prog bands you know about which we might not have heard of in Holland?**

The Cleveland progressive rock scene is pretty glum. It's not much different throughout the USA. I don't have any secrets or sleepers to share unfortunately.

**Can you tell us the story about Steve Hackett (Genesis) he was very pleased about the music from Syzygy?**

Yeah, he reached out to us when he heard our Realms of Eternity release with a very personal note. To be told that our music was the "best" independent release he's "ever heard" and to call it a "masterpiece" was unbelievably gratifying. He is a legend and that meant the world to us. I'm still smiling just thinking about his support. It's awesome.

**People in the Prog/Rock scene compare your music to some of the really great bands in music history; Spock's Beard, IQ, Yes, King Crimson, Asia, Deep Purple. What do you think when people compare Syzygy with these great bands/musicians?**

You can't feel anything other than pride! To be mentioned with the greats is flattering and humbling. I think we get more comparisons than pretty much anyone I know. I think in part it's because our compositional voice is so wide but built on solid footing. Eventually our sound will coalesce into a distinctive atavistic amalgam that will only be called "ours". The next step will be to have people say another band sounds like Syzygy!

**Can you tell us about the great CD/DVD Box set Digipack that was released in 2012? Syzygy - A Glorious Disturbance (Live DVD/CD & Bonus DVD)?**

It really is a capstone to the first 30 years of our career. It most accurately captures the band in all its facets. It has a retrospective feel in both repertoire and bonus material. Ironically, it is the "end of the beginning" in that it wraps up the discovery phase of our career. What is about to come will be set in high relief compared to that testament.

**What are the future plans of Syzygy?**

We are about to head into the studio to start recording our new music. We have two albums. They are tentatively titled: Syzygy III (Dialects) and The Picciotti Variations. We're flirting with this being a double album with Syzygy on one side and a new band name on the other to accurately demark the next phase of maturation.

**Where can people order your records and other merchandise?**

Go to [www.syzygymusic.com](http://www.syzygymusic.com)

You can watch us at our YouTube channel: syzygymusic1

**Do you have any last word to the readers of Rocklife Magazine?**

First, thank you for supporting this magazine! And, if you're already familiar with our music, thank you for your encouragement and support. We promise to never give you any music that is not a complete emptying of ourselves. On the other hand, if you haven't heard our music yet, I hope this interview has put a stone in your shoe and inspires you to try us out. In either case, I wish you all a life filled with joyful music and good health!