

Qoph - Kalejdoskopiska Aktiviteter

Sweden's Qoph effectively merge crazy psychedelia and progressive songwriting...oh, and they also have a flair for the bizarre. "Vansinnet," the opening piece on 'Kalejdoskopiska Aktiviteter' (RHCD11) has some of the same characteristics as the UK free-festival psych, especially the blaring drone of the guitars and some freaky bits sprinkled on top, but the presence of violin and the Swedish lyrics (you gotta love those rrrrolled r's) change the whole perspective. Bubbly guitar licks and a touch of sax make an appearance in "Ta Farväl", kinda Gongish. The three-part "Nadir" is heavier psychedelic rock, and is thickly layered in parts with winding, interwoven melodies. Quite appealing in fact, and something that would seem to be really amazing live. I like this band alot - they're heavy enough, strange enough, and spacey enough to satisfy my every need.

Keith Hendersson ([Aural Innovations](#))

QOPH - Kalejdoskopiska Aktiviteter (Record Heaven RHCD 11) (Sweden)

Swedish experimental rock group QOPH breath new life into the early 70s avant garde rock format with their release titled Kalejdoskopiska Aktiviteter. The opening track "Vansinnet" begins as a simple vocal pop shuffle and it's not until the middle of this first track that we discover the complex versatility of the bands writing and performance talents. All of the lyrics and liner notes are in Swedish so it's a bit difficult for non-Swedish speaking listeners to reap the total benefits of the groups complete package.

The sound and feel of the majority of the material is reminiscent of the various eras of King Crimson and Yes as vocalist Robin Kvist sounds at times like Adrian Belew and other times the harmonic direction of Yes vocalist Jon Anderson is felt. The music falls in line with early 70s rock related Crimson / Yes compositions except for the final track that sounds like ZZ Top meets King Crimson. The groups compositions share a format that is part structured rock and part free form experimental which they handle well. Guitarists Filip Norman and Jimmy Wahlsteen display quality chops as does bassist Patrik Persson (bass) and Federico de Costa(drums).

Fuse magazine

QOPH - Kalejdoskopiska Aktiviteter

++++

Frankly saying, never thought that anyone's able to breed CRIMSO with MAC. Can you imagine two things more different than cold abstract Fripp's musing and Green's hot-coal boogie? Never in your wildest dreams? Try this one.

It's time to catch the music not the words because, I guess, not many of us speak Swedish. And it sounds really good along with the music the quintet plays. In the beginning, "Vansinnet", with the first sounds of progressive-coloured blues one can help but think of Steve Hackett - who else off art rock musicians dared to play pure blues in his own unmistakable style? QOPH work in different way, playing much heavier and with some KINKS-like catchy harmonies. Music has a little Arabic feel throbbing and talking, adorned by violin. Sometimes it's almost cross between hard rock and jazz. Jazzy is "Ta farval", the new "Red". Frantic sax wailing around guitars. Time changes every now and then. Now music tights and seconds later it breaks loose.

If KING CRIMSON is the blueprint for QOPH it's CRIMSO from 1973-74, the most unleashed. One easily recognises Frippian attack and Wetton's raw vocals in "An Lyser Manen". OK, I agree, if there's "Red" why not continue with "One More Red Nightmare"? Very familiar signs and hooks, guitar lines more melodic though. And now back to blues field. Instrumental "Manvarn" kicks off as "Albatross" soaring higher and higher to spread its wings into a great guitar solo supplied with quite funny sound effects. Drum solo is not something to enjoy on the studio albums but it helps to set a live mood. Moreover, "En Mane Som Ler" appears to be short but frolicking and boogying R'n'B.

Time to be relaxed a little bit comes with "Aldrig Tillbaks", soft and more folky and experimental tune interspersed here and there with heavy riffing. "Herr Qophs Villfarelser" is again progressive blues but this time it's sparse and atmospheric reminding of "Crazy Diamond". Slide guitar is very good. And, to the end, two-part mighty boogie-down of "Forfarande Radsla", raw but fresh and making you run to buy all the SAVOY BROWN, GROUNDHOGS and early MAC albums. What's around the bend is up to the band. Promising, very much so.

Dmitry M Epstein (DME Music Site)

Kalejdoskopiska Aktiviteter

Kalejdoskopiska Aktiviteter (in English, "Kaleidoscopic Activities") is the debut CD from Qoph. Guitarist Filip Norman described it to me as "psych/prog", and that's not bad for starters, but doesn't begin to define the rich and varied sound of this Swedish band.

When I asked him about the meaning of the band's name, Norman replied, "Qoph is a name we have regretted choosing many times. No one can spell or pronounce it - or even remembers it! Anyhow, it's a term used in Tarot for the card with the moon, symbolising illusion. The word itself is Hebrew and the name for a letter equal to the western Q."

As I listen to Kalejdoskopiska Aktiviteter, I'm transported back to the early '70's, or sometimes even the late '60's. There are two guitarists in the band and no synthesizers, and as a synthesizer player myself, I usually find this to be a sign that I won't be that enthused by a band. Not so in this case! It's true that there are no keyboards on this release, but the studio treatments and strange effects on the guitars make them sound as weird as any synthesizer ever could. I'm frequently reminded of Camembert Electrique or even Continental Circus-era Gong (i.e. pre-Tim Blake), with tape effects, Allenesque psychedelic wah-wah or echoed guitar solos, and a guest sax player that sounds like Didier Malherbe. All they need is a female vocalist breathily moaning the names of goddesses and they would really sound like Gong.

Speaking of vocals, the band sings in Swedish, though they were debating whether to do their lyrics in English before deciding on their native tongue. Once again, from Filip Norman, "We tried to translate them [to English] before we released it in Swedish but it sounded ridiculous to us. It's difficult to keep the originality of the lyrics when translating and it's the same problem when translating a song from English to Swedish - or from any language at all." Returning to the musical styles, there's even a few guitar parts that remind of Steve Hillage to further the Gong impression (yes, I know that Hillage didn't join Gong until long after this era, but there are Hillage-like passages here anyway). Qoph's music may sound like Gong in many ways, but since they are basically playing psychedelic blues guitar oriented music, you'll also be reminded occasionally of other famous bands who have worked in this genre, including not-so-progressive bands like Z. Z. Topp or even Leon Redbone.

But not to worry, the moment you think it's getting too pedestrian, it will veer off into some cataleptic odd meter, a spacey guitar or flute solo, some warped vocals, or a batch of lysergic studio effects. In summary, this is a wonderful album, and I can hardly wait to hear their next offering, which (as of this writing) is completed and mixed, and is just awaiting mastering ... and a record label, since the label which released Kalejdoskopiska Aktiviteter has changed their "musical profile" and will not release it. Their next album has English lyrics, which they hope will increase their appeal outside of Sweden.

Fred Trafton (Gibraltar Encyclopedia of Progressive Rock)

Qoph - Kalejdoskopiska Aktiviteter
+++

It appears I have to review another odd-one out. Qoph is a hard progressive band from Sweden who delves into the world of guitar crafted epic psychedelic prog. The material on this album ranges from simple blues like songs to epic psychedelic outings. What comes to mind is a mixture of early Yes, Blue Cheer, Led Zeppelin and even The Grateful Dead. This is not bad at all though steers far away from your modern day high tech synthy stuff.

Maurice Dam (Background Magazine)

Qoph - "Kalejdoskopiska Aktiviteter"
(**Record Heaven** RHCD11, 1998, CD)

I don't know if Qoph is Sweden's answer to Finland's Five Fifteen, but there are at least superficial similarities (perhaps augmented by the fact that I received this disc on the same day I got Five Fifteen's latest).

Like the Finns, Qoph play a flavour of hard rock spiced with psychedelic and progressive elements; unlike them, they sing in their native language and do not have a female vocalist. The basic element that recurs in most of the songs is a hard shuffling blues riff, but the band will vary it in unexpected ways, like going to an unexpected note or varying the time signature. For example, the initial section of the near-fourteen minute closer "Förförande rädsla" uses a riff very like ZZ Top's version of "La Grange" with an extra beat added to the end of every other bar. All of the songs are comprised of numerous sections, often in different time signatures, keys and tempos.

The centerpiece of the album is the three track "Nadir" suite. (My Swedish dictionary fails me miserably in translating Qoph, but I think all the parts have something to do with the moon.) The playing throughout is very tight, the musicians sticking together through all the abrupt changes of the arrangements. While the elements of Qoph's music (blues riffs, multi-part compositions, and so on) are not uncommon, somehow their combination of those elements ends up sounding unique. Or maybe it's just that they're singing in Swedish.

I've wracked my brain trying to think of valid comparisons for their sound, and the best I've come up with is what might have happened if early bluesy Jethro Tull had gone jazzy instead of folksy. Picture "New Day Yesterday" faster with a hyperactive jazz drummer and higher vocals.

Jon Davis (Exposé)

QOPH - "Kalejdoskopiska Aktiviteter" - (**Record Heaven**)

I reviewed this one in CR # 36, but to be honest, I think I sold it a bit short. True, it hadn't really grabbed by in my first few listenings, but on further consideration, I have to say that this has been finding itself in my player more and more.

QOPH is Swedish prog, with a fairly heavy rhythm-base, but I must say that it is virtually indescribable! I think that means the originality factor here is extremely high. The thing with these guys is that they remind me of the first time I heard stuff like King Crimson and Zappa back in the '70's. At the beginning of my experience with them, it was such unusual stuff that I didn't know whether I liked it or not. Now, like with those artists, the more I listen, the more I like.

QOPH are true artists, intent on making their own music without any quarter given to people's expectations, and that's freaking great! If you're adventurous, buy this and give it a chance to grow on you. You may end up liking it a helluva lot, as I now do! An added note is that QOPH do not sing in English, but in their native Swedish. I think this only adds to the vibe!

Ray Dorsey (Chaos Realm)

QOPH

Excellent psychedelic neo-prog fusion reminiscent of November and Mahavishnu Orchestra. A fantastic live band as well, Qoph has started to make their mark in the prog community with their appearance at last year's progressive rock festival in Gothenburg. Their debut album, Kalejdoskopiska

Aktiviteter, is available on Record Heaven (RHCD11) and distributed by Musea in other parts of the world. A double vinyl version will soon be released, featuring live material and some new stuff.
Personnel: Robin Kvist - vocals, Filip Norman - guitar, Jimmy Wahlsteen - guitar & mandolin, Patrik Persson - bass, Federico de Costa - drums & percussion.

Prog-o-rama

QOPH - Kalejdoskopiska Aktiviteter

Years ago Federico de Costa had sent me some demo tapes on which I found a unique blend of current sounds and the 'feel' of the seventies. I did try to land his band Qoph a deal with Musea, but the label was not convinced. The band battled with the idea of either releasing their album in Swedish or in English. For some time the band thought of releasing two versions of the album, but in the end Kalejdoskopiska Aktiviteter smiles in all Swedish euphoria. Most of the songs were written a long time ago, which is why the freshness of the music is no longer there.

Through the band's music I constantly hear sort of a Led Zeppelin shining through without becoming a pure rip off of Plant and Co. It will probably be due to the 'hidden' amount of hard blues. In the opening song "Vansinnet" I note the fabulous guitar solo of Filip Norman, whilst the well-balanced violin of guest musician Ola de Freitas delivers a nice complimentary asset to the whole. Often the wah-wah pedal is used, the flanger is dusted off, whilst various voices form a nice counterpoint.

An element, which is constantly apparent in Qoph's music, is the psychedelic approach to hard blues so that we sort of listen to the Swedish answer to Blue Cheer. There are plenty of good ideas out there but none of them are used to the fullest. The intro for "Manvarv" makes me think of the Allman Brothers whilst Lynyrd Skynyrd comes to life in "En Mane Som Ler". If you add the Swedish singing you come to the conclusion that this is not an evident recording. At the moment the band should be working on an English album and I'm convinced that this will be THE way to finally score.

John Bollenberg (Progressive World)