

## Concrete web

QOPH: "Pyrola" (Nasoni Records)

"Pyrola" from the Swedish prog rock quartet QOPH is an entirely wonderful album that ranks among my personal favorites and was released on double vinyl on the German psych label Nasoni Records last year.

"Korea" is the first gem in the repertoire, with a lovely Asian dan tranh melody by superb guitarist Filip Norman keeping a watchful eye on the beginning of the track. The lengthy jamming part of "Korea" is a smorgasbord of all the best elements from the 70's psychedelic, progressive rock era. Patrik Persson sneaks in a ton of subtle bass lines that enhance the overall quality of the songs. "Woodrose" is cosy, gentle and fierce cruising on jazzy drum beats by Frederick Da Costa. The breathtaking instrumental "Travel candy" begins in oceanic mode before waves of incredible guitar solos drag you off into a maelstrom of an addicting one-way rhythm, synchronising slowly with the theremin. Reeking of the latin heavy rock rhythms of the 70s, "Stand my ground" is a furious mix of Mashmakan (find their album with the unforgettable "Days when we are free"), Captain Beyond, Chango and Gracious (my favorite 70's prog band). "Moon tripper" is one hell of a clap happy number, just refuses to get out of your head with the vibrant and clear Robin Kvist vocals which sound as Rod Evans (Deep Purple/Captain Beyond) which is a big dose of adrenalin straight to the heart and lyrics that bring to mind distant places and my lonely planet guides of South East Asia, South-America and India. "Fractions" is, arguably, the most compelling of all the songs on this record; rising above the fourteen minute-mark. There are sounds from Yes' early works and also King Crimson from the "Red" and "In the court of the crimson king"-era. Psychedelic bits from The Doors and Electric Prunes are sprinkled in too. An awe inspiring end to an awe inspiring album. It really doesn't get much better than this. QOPH have taken a number of influences and managed to come up with a sound that is theirs by blending those influences into a wonderful retro sound. All of the songs are memorable even the more simple Zeppelin-esque "Half of everything" .. You'll find it growing on you with each listen and soon you'll be humming a bit from this chorus or that melody.

If you've got the double album, Side D features some bonus material by the band. "Resh", "Will the sun be back tomorrow" and "Anticipations" are written and recorded in the late 90's and are more bluesy, but still contain plenty of time changes and a constant drive.

There are simple pleasures in life and this record is definitely one of them. This is an essential, profound and moving release.

99/100  
Cosmicmasseur.

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## Let it Rock

QOPH - Pyrola

Kaleidophone 2004

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Scandinavian cool. Be cautious: it's boiling under.

Prepare to get drown into this album, it's a slow but relentless process not rendered easier by the fact this time the Swedes sing in English - that just adds to the deep impression. There's quite a time to be taken to cut through the contemporary feel of opening "Woodrose", and fall for its mighty swing. The Frippian progressiveness of "Kalejdoskopiska Aktiviteter" is concealed now under a hard surface blinking with classy Moog in a delicious rhythm-and-blues of "Stand My Ground" and sprinkled with bluesy harmonica in the "Half Of Everything" tongue-in-cheek treble. And if the pastiche of heavy-weight "Korea" sounds a bit over-the-top with no sign of ironic glam in it, Eastern guitar part and the

groove win the day, yet even it pales before the acoustic drones, sitar splinters and vocal chorus that spawl "Fractions" into the Universal: an epic masterpiece, this piece - if only there'd be less Belewisms in it... A glorious record anyway.

Dmitry Epstein

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## **LOWCUT Magazine**

June 2004

QOPH - Pyrola (Nasoni Records 026)

QOPH is a difficult band to describe. It is some sort of progressive-psychedelic rock. This was released on CD on the bands own label but I am reviewing the double LP version which has 3 additional tracks and a slightly different song order. One major change you will notice, if you had heard the bands debut from 1998, is that the band now sings in English and not Swedish. The LP begins with a long 10 min track about the drummer's trip to North Korea. This song is a long crazy journey and harkens back to tracks like Gentle Giant used to make but this band does not have a vocal approach like that. The mid section of this and most songs on the LP, the band experiment and often freakout with great jams of guitars and moog or mellotron on some tracks. The singer reminds me of Sting on this first track when he sings in the high register. Amazing song. Half of Everything goes back to the blues roots of the band and reminds me a bit of a stranger Jethro Tull.

Side B begins with Woodrose (the song that starts the CD version). It begins with a rumbling bass and mysterious feeling with flute and vocals. The heavy part soon kicks in and the band is off for another unique musical workout! Travel Candy is a stripped down instrumental tune with a guest Theremin player, making those scary ghost like sounds mixing in with the spacey guitar. Fantastic playing by the whole band. Stand my Ground, according to the biography is influenced by Santana and the Allman Brothers. I could not really hear this except in the very cool jam in the middle of the track and the great moog synth solo. I wish this track was expanded, perhaps in the live setting. Side C begins with Moontripper, again featuring Nicklas Barker (Anekdoten) on mellotron (as on Korea) and is built on a heavy bluesy riff. The band really plays some cool stuff in the mid section of this song. Fractions is a 14 minute epic with guest moog and sitar players.

Side D features the unreleased material by the band. Resh is from 1998 and probably from the debut CD sessions. It also features guest slide guitar player, Jimmy Wahlsteen. This is a pretty psychedelic song with effected vocals and hard rocking. Will the Sun be back Tomorrow goes all the way back to 1996 and also features Jimmy on guitar and mandolin. A very cool psychedelic blues rocker. The LP ends with Anticipations, a very cool song with a ska like riff on the mandolin. You have to check out this band. A really unique sound they create with strange dynamics and arrangements and the will to experiment. A rewarding experience!



Scott Heller

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## **METALREVIEW.COM**

Qoph is a somewhat new breed of progressive rock. At the same time that their music is plainly rooted in the 70's, there are often odd moments that couldn't ever have made their way into prog of that era and can only be described as truly forward thinking. With contributions made by alumni from such bands as Anekdoten and Mats & Morgan, it's hard not to expect something at the very least unique,

and something unique is certainly delivered. The basslines are groovy and the time signatures are more often than not anything but 4/4, which makes lumping the band in with the new wave of King Crimson worship entirely possible, although what sets them apart from much of that scene is the quirky charm. I hate to say it, but towards the end of the first track, I found myself likening them to System of a Down, of all bands, though clearly far more musically talented and easier on the ears. Possibly a kinder sounding comparison with equal accuracy would be to the most recent Ephel Duath album, though far less aggressive. Rarely does a press release give a straightforward and accurate idea of what's to be found on the album, but I feel I have to quote Qoph's for Pyrola: "...Qoph combines daring excursions of (such acts of today) as Trans Am and Mars Volta, whilst always keeping lookout in the rearview mirror." The point is, this isn't a combination of styles that I've ever encountered before, but it works very well.

The songs are relatively large in scope and always compositionally coherent. It never seems like they wrote cool riffs and threw them together into the best fit possible, but instead, as though they came up with a main theme for each song and designed everything around it. Since they're all stylistically pretty similar, besides the final track, this method of songwriting made certain that each song maintained its own identity and stayed entirely distinguishable from the others. With seven songs spanning just less than 53 minutes, most of the tracks have plenty of time for musical exploration on top of the more song oriented verse/chorus portions and during these moments of exploration, Qoph is at their best. Nearly every song features at least some kind of arrangements that prove quite compelling, most notably the fun and spaced out synth section on "Stand Your Ground." The final song, a fourteen-minute epic entitled "Fractions," provides both a nice change of pace from and a suitable ending to the somewhat spastic preceding forty minutes. It's a mellower and slower paced song with heavy ethnic Middle Eastern influences. The build up over its lengthy duration is completely appropriate and yet not what many listeners would probably expect. More than a drastic change in pace or energy level, "Fractions" features a notable change in tone. It spends ten minutes with a somewhat dark and sorrowful demeanor but progresses into a hopeful sounding instrumental conclusion.

In addition to being musically sound, Pyrola is one of the most cleanly produced records to come out this year. The bass sound is somewhat unusual for this style of music in that it's always very crisp, but somehow it manages to retain the groove that it evidently requires. The guitars are very dynamic; quiet and soothing when necessary, raunchy and aggressive during the more energetic moments. The most vintage sound to be found on Pyrola comes from the drums. They're quite warm and expressive, not too dissimilar to those on Opeth's Damnation, and it's really nice to hear them used for more than simply to keep time.

I would wholeheartedly recommend this to anyone who's ever even remotely enjoyed bands like Anekdoten, Landberk, or Paatos but wanted to hear a bit more of a modernization of the sound. This is a true progressive rock record in that takes influences from the past and expands upon them immensely. That alone is not really enough for a successful album, but considering the fact that Pyrola sounds great expanding upon past ideas, it's entirely successful.

Ian Dreiling

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## **Chaos Realm**

QOPH - "Pyrola" CD '04 (Kaleidophone, Swe)

Sweden's (yes, like Norway, a land of Godliness to everything musical!) QOPH put out an album a few years ago on the Record Heaven label and it was hella-cool stuff. They've now issued a new one themselves, "Pyrola," and it's even better, embellishing & elevating their style. What style, you say, Mr. Ray?! How's about crossing Wishbone Ash with Zappa? Maybe you could try having Poobah ("Let Me In" version) chase Anekdoten around a dark alley? Obscurely, suppose you threw Cargo & Ixt Adux in a blender?!! So, you catching my drift? Manic dolces of '70's hard rock coalescing wildly with jazzy/prog/even-Canterbury-strains make cuts like "Woodrose," "Korea"& "Fractions" stand out in ways that make most so-called adventurous music sound like a dinosaur-ship sinking under it's own

pretension. This stuff is WAY different, weaving together strands of heavy guitars, analog keys/mellotron & passionate, native-tongue vocals into an organic stew that's as vital as it's progressive as it's dense & heavy. QOPH is cool, baby, and don't you forget it!

Ray Dorsey

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Qoph: Pyrola (2004; Kaleidophone KALCD1) 53m

Summary of history:

This album was recorded at the UAE Magnetophone Studios in Sweden, and features Simon Steensland.

The album:

The guitars on this album are rather prominent and clear. The sound is a bit retro, with heavy sounding drums and bass. The rhythms remind of American seventies heavy rock groups such as Led Zeppelin, revived in stoner rock. Yet the vocals and some other style elements remind me of Seattle grunge. And then there is something that fits in with the current wave of progressive groups from Sweden and Norway. Okay, so now you probably haven't the faintest idea what this sounds like. And I'm not sure that's going to get better, but anyway.

As the album progresses the stoner overtones become stronger, and the progressive influences less, especially in Stand My Ground. Moontripper has some very heavy guitars, but the mellotron in the mid section returns the progressive feel.

The long track Korea has a longish mid section that breathes the atmosphere of live rock improvisation, including some odd and off key experimenting. Travel Candy is an instrumental track with relaxed bass in the back, excited drums, experimenting guitar and Steensland's theramin across. A track with a feel between dreamy, spacy and jammy. And then the final semblance: closer Fractions has the feel of one of those longer Doors tracks. Not as morbid or as vocally explicit, but the slow build up combined with Kvist's vocal timbre conjures up the image. The longish closing section featuring somewhat eastern percussion further assists in doing so.

Reading through the thank you's I noted a name that came to mind while listening to the disc's first track Woodrose: Anekdoten, if only for brief glimpses of likeness.

Conclusion:

There are a lot of ghosts from the past, some more recent than others. But they are just that: ghosts. Qoph is what is here and now, and with Pyrola they came up with quite a record. Good compositions performed in a strong and emotionally charged way. Those into the more emotionally charged Led Zeppelin or Doors oriented material should find this a treat, but so will those into more strong progressive material.

Roberto Lambooy

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Qoph  
"Pyrola" (2004)  
Kaleidophone Records

Reviewed by Jerry Lucky  
October 12, 2004

The second release for any band can be a tough one. In many cases, the band has utilized their best stuff on the first release and sometimes not enough time has transpired to put together new material. That's why it's gratifying to the listener when the band not only makes some dramatic changes but also has not run short of quality material. Consider that my preamble to set the stage for the new release from Swedish psych-prog band Qoph entitled Pyrola.

Qoph is a band that came together in Sweden in 1995. Originally, they hit the boards as an instrumental trio consisting of Filip Norman (guitar), Patrik Persson (bass) and Federico de Costa (drums). In the early days their musical style consisted of a heavy blues influence that was manifested in their on-stage head-on jamming style. Robin Kvist soon joined them on vocals sung originally in Swedish and now in English.

The psychedelic style and influence is readily apparent on Pyrola but there is also a distinct progressive rock influence as well. Take for example the 10-minute cut "Korea" written to convey the emotions of Norman's holiday in North Korea. The song starts out with straightforward blues influenced introduction that incorporates vocals before descending into a rolling off-kilter prog jam, which incorporates a Mellotron and builds in intensity to a climactic finish. The next track, the almost six minute instrumental "Travel Candy" slows everything down and lays a mournful wah-wah guitar lead line over a slow moving menacing rhythm bed. Pyrola's last track, the fourteen-minute "Fractions" starts out with a moody rhythm, which incorporates some neat sitar and ethnic string sounds and then half way through the song morphs into more of an atmospheric acoustic feel. Great stuff.

Perhaps some reference points in describing Qoph's musical style would be early Ozric Tentacles crossed with some Hawkwind and maybe a dash of the Allman Brothers. That last influence is more than apparent while listening to the six-minute "Stand My Ground" not only in the musicianship but in Kvist's vocal style. Speaking of which, I'm a little torn over the change to English. It's not that Kvist does a bad job or that there's any kind of unusual accent, in fact Kvist is a great vocalist. It's just that the band doesn't sound as exotic anymore. But then I'm guessing the change was made to open the band up to a wider audience and that's understandable.

Qoph have made quite a compositional leap with this second release. Pyrola easily displays enough of their early sound but adds a more mature musicianship and compositional style to draw more fans. Granted not all prog listeners will be attracted to their psychedelic jamming style but I find it a great listen to hear that sixties influence. Admittedly, Qoph is not always the first CD I reach for but I have to say that every time it has been played it's been an enjoyable and satisfying listening experience.