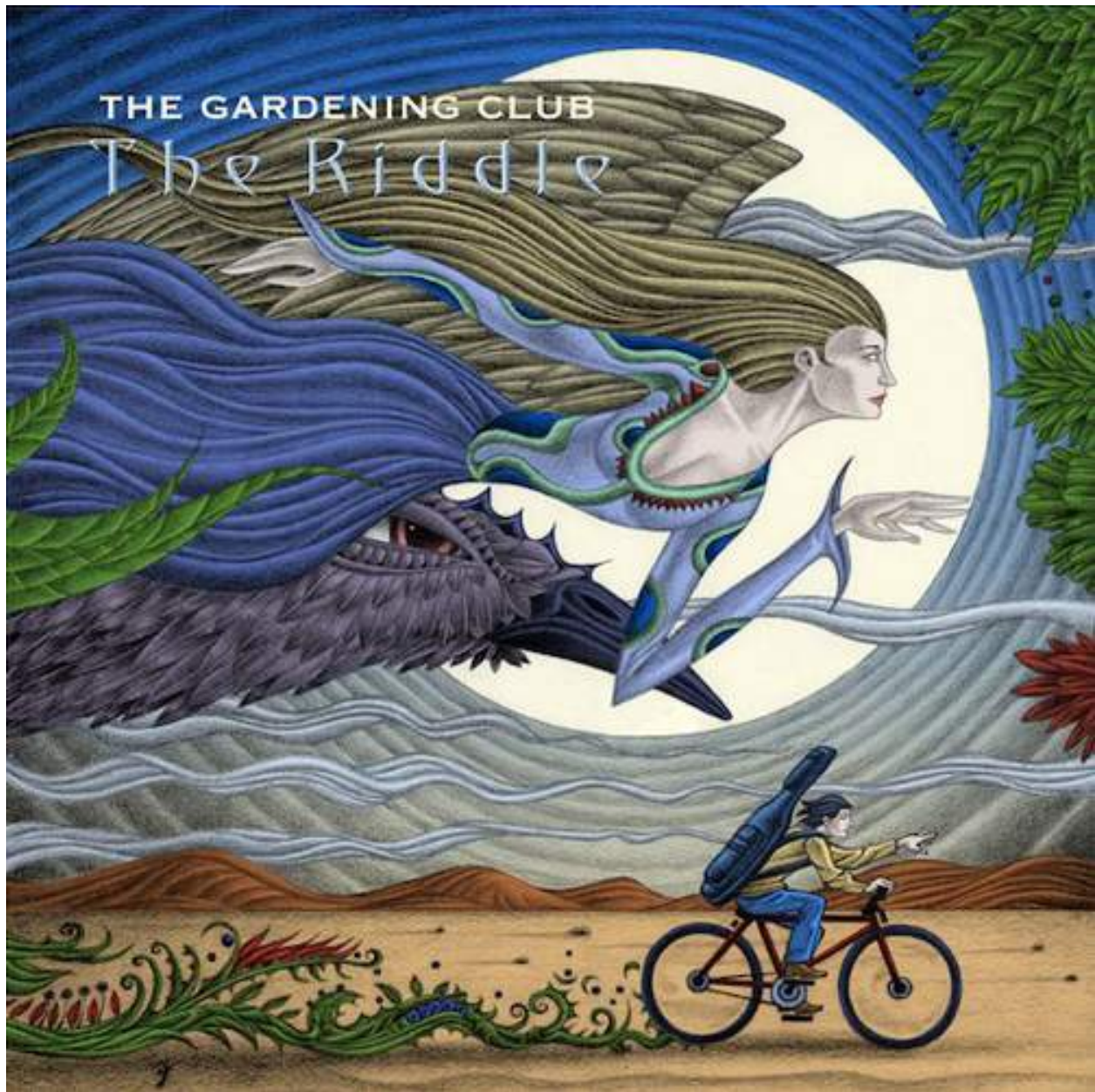


THE GARDENING CLUB – The Riddle

Martin Springett 2018



*THE GARDENING CLUB –
The Riddle*

Harvesting fruits of his illustrious past, Canadian artist serves up a long-overdue sequel to an almost apocryphal album.

It took Martin Springett three and a half decades to return to the mindscape he came into for "The Gardening Club" – a record which, recently prepared for rediscovery, lends its title to the veteran's new project now – and it was well worth the effort. Not that he ever stopped creating, be it drawing or making music, yet Martin's debut has remained special, in somewhat enigmatic way, and "The Riddle" may feel like Springett's own attempt to find the reason why. Musically, these numbers are different from the old ones – they're robust and fleshed out with arrangements not focusing on the composer's tender strum, but on quality storytelling which has a lot to do with modern escapism and is accompanied by his immersive artwork. With "Overture" ramping up the excitement with an exquisite weave of what sounds like insistent cello and relaxed slider roll, and the piece's acoustically driven reprise bringing the trip to a close, as ethereal ivories and six-string layers tap into cosmic consciousness, there's a lot of adventurous moments in this rucksack symphony where folk motifs unfurl into progressive ruminations on life – such as the album's title track. While "Whirled Away" has playful levity written all over its strings-drenched, ska-kissed tune housing Springett's down-to-earth voice, "Seven Year Old Poet" is a somberly cinematic account of some less celebratory events – laid out in an ever-shifting tempo, with orchestral lull and spoken word adding to delicious vertigo.

Secretly intrepid, the record also features fusion-minded instrumentals like "Blues For Richard" or "Waltz" and gentle flamenco-tinctured "Pauline" whose woodwind is wonderfully warm, as if preparing the listener to the sax-smear "Tears At The Matinee" that will see lachrymose delivery anchored with elastic bass lines. Further on, the listener must encounter languid, lethargic even, dirge of "The Original Sleep" which is lyrically rolling its two parts towards sweet, percussion-spiced psychedelia until Norm McPherson's guitars reveal slight rage behind this pastoral travel through space and time.

Whether the riddle is unraveled here would be a moot point, though, one giving hope for another sequel in the poetry-in-motion series of aural pictures.

Review of 'The Riddle' by The Gardening Club



As with many classical works, which start with an overture of pieces from the forthcoming major work, *The Riddle* presents a plethora of tantalising musical snippets in its opening track that indicate the melodic complexities and sonic delights that are to follow. This is not, however, a classical recording. It is a part of the new face of progressive rock that at once draws upon many tropes of the progressive genre that go back to the late 1960s but still offer the listener the conceptuality, irregular metre, strong melodies, instrumental variation, and instrumental virtuosity that have become the defining points that keep progressive rock

music contemporary and very much a part of the twenty first century identity of the genre.

Most tracks have rich textures of twelve string guitar underpinned by fretless bass parts, which are often reminiscent of Pastorius era Weather Report, and searing lead guitar lines. Layered vocal harmonies prevail throughout. The lyrics take one into a poetic world of whimsy that enable the listener's imagination to be transported into several sonic spaces and to be interpreted as the listener wishes. The addition of synthesisers and saxophone only add to the richness of the overall tonality. I would be loath to compare this album to any other from the fifty or so years of progressive rock but some parts have elements of early Yes and Genesis. Equally I would add that the Steven Wilson fans will enjoy this album.

Robert Burns

(author of *Experiencing Progressive Rock: A Listeners Companion* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2018))



One of the highlight reissues for me last year was 'The Gardening Club' by Martin Springett. It had been released in 1983, but last year was picked up and reissued by Gonzo Media, and I was fortunate enough to get a copy. I reviewed it at the beginning of 2018, and really thought that would be the end of it, as I knew that Martin had become a well-known and sought after artist.

What I didn't realise was that in the intervening years he had kept recording and writing songs, and he read my review on one site and tracked me down through another and got in touch. The result is I am now listening to the new album, which is now by a band named after the original release. Martin Springett still provides all vocals plus acoustic guitar, and he is joined by Sean Drabbit, Wayne Kozak, James MacPherson and Norm MacPherson.

As one would expect, the CD itself is visually very appealing with wonderful artwork throughout the booklet, tray card and even the CD itself. It fits perfectly with the music as well, which still has strong elements of 'Breathless' era Camel and Anthony Phillips (as did the earlier release), but here there are also strong elements of Roy Harper (particularly), Rog Patterson and the Strawbs. Nothing is rushed, and there is no feeling of constraint as the guys go where the music takes them, which is sometimes acoustic and sometimes electric, sometimes pastoral and at others more electric or driving. The result is yet another album that is full of melody and stylings that is more progressive in attitude than it is in sound. Although the version I have has been self-released, I am convinced that this will soon be picked up by a label which can provide the support it needs, as this needs to be heard by those who enjoy good music. There is a naivety within it that harkens back to the Seventies, a fretless bass that provides warmth with the dexterity, acoustic stringed instruments that all strive to be heard while over the top are Harper-esque vocals that are so perfectly in keeping with it all. These are songs, real songs, not extended workouts and the album is a total delight throughout. The Gardening Club are already recording new songs for their next release, yet this has only just come out. Martin is certainly making up for lost time.

<http://martinspringett.com/>

<http://www.musicinbelgium.net/pl/modules.php?name=Reviews&rop=showcontent&id=9272>

GARDENING CLUB (The) – The Riddle

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Where we talk again about **Martin Springett** and his project **The Gardening Club** , which is resurfacing these days on the occasion of the release of "*The Riddle*" , latest production of Canadian musician draftsman. We made the acquaintance - late - of The Gardening Club on the occasion of the reissue of "*The Gardening Club*" , first album of the same name of 1983 and true treasure forgotten of the Eighties, for the amateurs of progressive rock of very high holding. And here is Martin Springett reactivates his project with a brand new

album that will prove once again to be a real pleasure for the ears and the soul.

The making of this album is a delicate alchemy that brought together a number of people who met at specific times and places, as if fate had wanted to cause the conditions of a miracle, so as to create on this Earth a new manifestation of beauty. In modern times, beauty is not really popular and you should not miss an opportunity to enjoy it when it comes to you.

In this case, the conditions that led to "*The Riddle*" brought Martin Springett and **Norm McPherson together**, through Terry Findley, a music lover already friends with Springett and who fell by chance on his friend McPherson, lost for nearly forty years, during a concert given in a small club. Norm McPherson, an exceptional guitarist, was seen by Findley as one of the few people able to decipher the complex and incredibly imaginative musical universe of Martin Springett. In addition, McPherson owns a personal studio, which makes it possible not to count the hours of recording and to avoid paying huge bills. And even more, McPherson is the father of a young **James McPherson** who is a little prodigy of rhythm programming and keyboard.

Just find an off-the-wall bassist (which is done with the **Sean Drabbit**) and an inspired saxophonist (**Wayne Kozak**) and we have all the ingredients of what will make a great album. Martin Springett composes a complex, fresh and lunar music, transcribed on partition by Norm McPherson. A young poet by the name of **Cyril McColgan** provides the texts (sung by Springett) and Norm McPherson plays the wizards of the mixer in his studio, during recording sessions that are not tight by a demanding timing, a guarantee of calm and peace of mind for the creators. And, best of all, Martin Springett also draws sumptuous, magical illustrations that adorn the CD booklet admirably.

It does not take more - but it's already a lot - to end up with 45 minutes of progressive rock lined with a reassuring poetic silk, and embellished with melodies carefully unrolled in a series of fifteen rather short pieces (two to four minutes) but in close interaction with each other. The production subtly doses the sharing of the sound space between the vocals, the guitar, the bass and the drums (entirely artificial but it does not mean at all). The atmosphere is calm and soft, cradling our ears with a delicate and felted song and the whole thing lets itself be listened to with a reassured and soothing spirit.

The album "*The riddle*"("The Enigma") does not benefit from gigantic distribution currents on a global scale but it is worth to be found. In case of difficulties, we can always turn to Martin Springett's website, which includes a link to his Facebook page. And look at his drawings, it's beautiful.

François Becquart



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