



CENTIPEDE

SEPTEMBER ENERGY

(NEON, 1971)

Keith Tippett is best known to progressive music fans for his work on King Crimson's early 1970s albums, but when the pianist released the epic double album, *September Energy*, he was already hot property on the European jazz scene. Bristol-born Tippett had not only wowed critics and the public with his lightning-fast technique, but also with his qualities as a composer with two highly-rated albums recorded for Polydor and Vertigo. When he came up with the idea of writing a large-scale piece that would bring together more than 50 musicians from jazz, rock and classical music, RCA's progressive boutique label, Neon, jumped at the chance to sign him up.

During 1970, the massed ranks of Centipede played several high-profile gigs at home and abroad with RCA chartering a jetliner to ferry the musicians, gear and crew to Europe. Cited by a young Mike Oldfield (who saw them perform) as an influence in his thinking for *Tubular Bells*, Centipede boasted five vocalists, including Tippett's wife, Julie Driscoll, three drummers, and legions of brass and string players drawn from the very best contemporary music circles of the day. Featuring members of Nucleus, Soft Machine, King Crimson, Blossom Toes, and Patto, Tippett's magnum opus was informed by a utopian impulse that regardless of genre, music was a uniting force for good.

In June 1971, with Robert Fripp at the controls in Wessex Studios, players were ushered in groups to overdub their parts. The combination of a complex score coupled with its improvised passages added up to not only a high-pressure environment but an expensive one that allowed just three days in which to get everything done. Everything, that is, apart from Fripp's own guitar solo as they simply ran out of time. Beginning with ambiguous percussive sounds, ominous drones and ethereal vocal harmonies unfurl as though stretching in the morning sun, until the air is filled with skittering notes and fleeting encounters between brass and strings. Spread across four side-long movements, Tippett's tone poem breaks into strident themes that march firmly along to rock grooves which are springboards into jazzy excursions. The pianist's writing for such an extended ensemble focuses attention on the unconventional dynamics of the line-up but never loses sight of melodic and harmonic opportunities. Sing-a-long chants, gothic strings, turbulent arrangements and acerbic soloing makes for a formidable and sometimes challenging listen. The critical acclaim the album received upon its release didn't translate to sales and RCA dropped Tippett after his next, more introspective improv album, *Blueprint*. Nevertheless, *September Energy* remains a magnificent testament to Keith Tippett's ambitious and visionary enterprise.

SID SMITH



ALL AROUND THE WORLD

Our far-out trip to far-flung prog



Sixth Sense: Victim Of Illusion's Paolo Gurlino, Peter Hamer and Luca Imerito.

VICTIM OF ILLUSION

Musician and composer **Peter Hamer** on inspiration, hope and Italy's prog scene.

Pasta, pizza and... prog? Italy has a rosy relationship with experimental music, from Goblin and PFM to newer torch-bearers such as Kingcrow and Barock Project. Better add Victim Of Illusion to that list. The group, led by guitarist and composer Peter Hamer (aka Piero Giaccone), have channelled the likes of Porcupine Tree on their recently released third album, *Invisible Light*, and it's pretty potent stuff.

"Italy had a lot of famous prog rock bands, mainly in the 70s and the 80s," Hamer explains. "And then prog rock seemed to disappear in Italy. It's still alive, but it's just minor bands – not bands that are known in the world."

Victim Of Illusion – completed by vocalist Paolo Gurlino and Luca Imerito on bass – formed in Turin in 2010, releasing their debut *What Senses Blow Away* a year later. It's been a steady, organic growth for a group who prioritise honing their craft over live shows – but the stage lives set to beckon again in the coming months.

"At the moment we are mostly a studio band," Hamer explains. "We played at different contests a couple of years ago, after our second

album. Then we focused on writing, arranging and composing our third album. Now we are contacting some booking agencies for playing live."

And what about the latest record? *Invisible Light* is an engrossing cocktail of prog rock and metallic, spiky flourishes, with its main theme pointing towards finding "hope in the darkness of our days".

"We're surrounded by a lot of messages and fake things," Hamer says, "and [our] message is to be yourself in a sea of fake sentiments and emotions."

Grabbing further inspiration from the likes of Haken and Tool, but still exuding their own personality, there's a tangible international appeal to Victim Of Illusion. Meanwhile, the internet has allowed them cast their gaze further than Italy – and that reach is only set to expand.

"It's a big, big way for bands like us to be known not only in our own country but outside," Hamer says. "Our listeners are mainly concentrated in the US and the UK – more than Italy. That's the power of the internet." CC

For more, visit: <http://bit.ly/VictimOf>



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PROG IN BRIEF

Mike Portnoy's new supergroup **Sons Of Apollo** (right) and **Pain Of Salvation** have been confirmed for next year's Be Prog! Festival. The Prog award-winning event will take place at Poble Espanyol in Barcelona on June 29-30.



Elbow have announced they'll be touring the UK next year. They play Glasgow on March 2, Birmingham (3), Manchester (4), Leeds (6) and London (7). The British band have recently released a new recording of *Kindling* from current album *Little Fictions*.