

# Rock Guitar Daily with Tony Conley

What's Great In The World Of Rock And Roll Guitar

Thursday, November 29, 2012

## [Dave Kilminster - Scarlet - The Director's Cut: The View From The Fellow Atop Water's Wall](#)

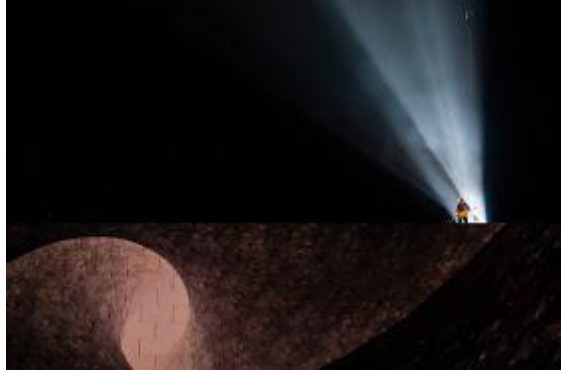


Dave Kilminster - his brilliant musicianship has been experienced by millions in relative anonymity as the bloke who's perched atop Roger Water's Wall for the last few years tossing off incredible guitar solos. What most of these millions haven't experienced is the equal wonder of Scarlet, his 2007 solo release that has just been re-released in a remixed/remastered version by Cherry Red Records. It may be almost six years old, but it is one of 2012's most stellar records.

Joined by former Keith Emerson bandmates Pete Riley (drums), Phil Williams (bass), and vocalist Anne-Marie Helder, Kilminster has succeeded in creating one of those great documents that leaves you in wonder - not in just the songs and their performances, but in the fact that as you listen, you come away with the impression that this is his soul speaking. I doubt that he could have created any other album - it's as if the music pours out of his body like a visceral entity, his life blood mixing with the ethers.



Kilminster is mainly known as a hot guitarist, and there are a million thrills to be had here, guitaristically speaking. His tones, phrasing, and note choices are immaculate - whether he is fingerpicking an acoustic interlude, strumming slinky rhythmic stratospheric Strat stabs of clean electric, or playing picture perfect leads that range from the tasty to the shredding, this is a textbook guitar lesson of the first rate. However, having read that last lengthy sentence, now forget it. Just listen to it, and dig the musicality - these are great songs that just happen to be made of absurdly brilliant technical proficiency. Whether you are a guitar aficionado, or a casual listener, you will adore the sublime beauty of this album.



**Scarlet - The Director's Cut** is a solo album, but in name only. Granted, the songs, guitars, and the lion's share of the singing are Kilminster, but his band is a monster. Pete Riley's drum work is consistently amazing, maybe as good as I've heard contextually, in the same league as Neil Peart, Stewart Copeland, and Mike Portnoy. For non-musicians, let me explain. His drum playing is perfect for each song - at times he's hammering out a straight beat and supporting the song, other times, it is his flashy fills, and unexpected accents that keep things so very interesting. Phil Williams creates similar magic with his bass - any listener will love the music, find themselves moving with the music, and not caring or wondering why, while we indulgent musos will be mystified by his subtly, incredible tone, and chops. You can pick any song on this album and literally write a decent bit of scholarly appreciation for the astounding musicianship on tap here, or you can just sit back and listen to an amazingly melodic set of tunes. Everyone should have a chance to hear the song, **Rain...(On Another Planet)** - it's one of those perfect pop songs that you listen to, love, and only later realize that it is almost ten minutes of fantastically sophisticated music - this, is magic.

**Silent Scream** starts off with some heady atmosphericics that make the case for Kilminster being Waters's current Gilmour, but soon enough the songs grows into an ethereal groove with a languid vocal and the band kicks a little harder with each subsequent section - a falsetto driven bridge pulsates with a pulsing bass line before the guitars take over and the band brews up a sonic storm under Kilminster's vocal outro.



Kilminster and company crank things up for **Static**, with Riley's drums excitably pushing the guitar/bass groove into hyperdrive. Vocally Kilminster pushes himself, not allowing himself to ever sound like a guitarist singing an album. When he goes for loud, high notes he hits them confidently, and his phrasing is varied and his vibrato is assured. The song's solo section is a three ringed firestorm that is all to brief, but manages to identify the huge talents of the trio, and it does a great job of making you want more, instead of wearing you out early.

One of the wonders of the album is Kilminster's songwriting - Just Crazy could easily fit into any playlist of rock power ballads, and you'd assume it was a huge hit that you happened to miss. However, even in spinning out a melodic pop number, the band still manages to provide subtle touches, and sonic segues that expose their mastery. I love the production of this entire album - it's in

perfect time, tone, and texture. In an age of rushed, cut and pasted Pro Tools production, this sounds like a great record. I'm listening to it on a forty year old system, and it sounds like heaven. My system is set to supply as close a sound as I can afford to having musicians sitting in the room with me, and Kilminster's production is incredibly beautiful, detailed, and lush.



Like the string quartet that gently rings in *Angel* - Kilminster could have gotten his pal Keith Emerson in to do the piano work, but he chose instead to do the work itself, and it marries with the strings and guitars as sweetly as you could wish. Every squeak of his fingers on the strings of his guitar ring through, and even Riley's drums and Williams bass sound majestic. Stuff like this is why I don't bother writing about mediocre music - life is too short, and this is too good.

Some of this record sounds like what I imagine Steely Dan might have sounded like if Fagen had ever woke up in a good mood. Kilminster sounds like a guy who has a pretty good grip on this human existence - ***Chance*** is as jazzy as the album gets, and its smooth fusion will suck you in, and the silky harmonies of Kilminster and Helder will enthrall. Again, Riley's stick work is sublime, and his playful pattering is the perfect foil for a bit of scating between guitar and voice.



***Big Blue*** is a genre jumping poppy number that would be almost too saccharin if it weren't done so damned well. With a less skilled crew this would come come of as schmaltzy, but this mainly makes me simply wish that Brad Delp were still with us - soaring vocals are something that very few can pull off and still sound sincere, but Kilminster does a great job here. It never hurts that his guitars sound so damned perfect - from the tones to the notes, I keep saying, "Damn, I wish I had played that." Even his rhythm chops are well thought out and executed. Crazy good, he is.

***Brightest Star*** is an acoustic number of the ilk that great Brit troubadours have been doing so well for so long - names like Greg Lake, Townshend, Gilmour, and others come to mind as I listen to this one. It's just Kilminster, a guitar (OK, maybe two), some strings, and a great song.



I love that when Kilminster rocks out, I have a hard time comparing it to another electric rock act - he's eclectic in a beautiful way. Not obtuse, or complicated for complicated's sake, but rather just unique and extremely musical. **Liar** is a scorcher that never grates, and features some guitar playing that will have you shaking your head, and muttering, "Damn...."

**Rain... (On Another Planet)** may have been recorded back in '07, but it's one of the finest new tunes to cross my path this year. Epic. Iconic. Classic. All those words you hate to read, but damn if they aren't all apt here. Even at nine and a half minutes, he can't tire us out, and again we hit repeat. Where, and how has this song remained hidden? I love a great song about the rain (just ask Johnny Hickman), and this is a very, very nice one to add to my list. The guitar solo here is Kilminster's lengthiest on the album, and it's fan-fucking-tastic. Like the big, final payoff we've been promised - don't get me wrong, the guy couldn't find a wrong note if he tried, but this one takes off and just keeps going.



This album often suggests the p-word, but I've tried not to utilize it to describe the proceedings, but the final tune, **Harken**, is pretty (as in gorgeous) prog. It's a gorgeous piano and cello ballad that gives way to some more of the band's brilliant ensemble playing - while all the way. Kilminster sings and plays his proverbial ass off. He also lyrically asks the question that haunts him in every interview since - "If this was the last day of your life, what would you do to make things right?"

My only hope would be that his answer would include releasing some more solo material. **Scarlet - The Director's Cut** is a brilliant piece of work. I don't know how many copies Dave Kilminster has managed to sell from his website, or at Roger Waters's merch booth, but it isn't enough. I'm thrilled that Cherry Red has released this properly, and I would suggest that you buy a copy immediately. This will be on my top 10 records list for 2012, no matter when it was recorded.

Tony Conley at 12:30 PM