

TRIFECTA **THE NEW NORMAL** (Kscope)

It is often said that the greatest musical groups are the ones with the right mixture of ideas, talent and chemistry. These are things **Trifecta** have in abundance. It is, of course, no secret that the three members – keyboardist Adam Holzman, bassist/Chapman Stick mastermind Nick Beggs and drummer Craig Blundell – have spent their most recent years touring some of the world's biggest stages as part of many bands including with **Steven Wilson**. So when they decide to form a largely instrumental offshoot as a trio, eventually writing and releasing 2021's **Fragments** debut, they were already off to a head start, with a tangible sense of creative familiarity that had been stunning audiences in every corner of the globe.

Trifecta will be releasing their second musical observation in the form of **The New Normal**, building upon the innovative ambition and genre-hopping skulduggery they so fearlessly introduced themselves to the world with. This time, however, instead of writing at soundchecks and forming little pieces into an electrifyingly cohesive body of work, they've approached the music very much from a band standpoint...

"Myself and Nick have been playing with Steven Wilson for a very long time, since pretty much the beginning," says Holzman, who has also worked with artists as revered as Miles Davis and Grover Washington Jr. *"Once it became a live band, we were in it from the jump. The chemistry wasn't forced or even a conscious thing. We just started rehearsing and playing. The jamming for Trifecta started at soundchecks, though it's hard to remember exactly when."*

For Beggs, someone with a musical CV as varied as John Paul Jones, Gary Numan and Emma Bunton, it was that same organic process of gelling which made him realise just how well they worked together, one which resulted in a borderline telepathic connection that many dream of but very few are able to achieve... *"It's been a great honour and privilege getting to know each other, building up our friendship professionally and within collaboration,"* smiles Beggs. *"You know, you can put a bunch of musicians together but it doesn't always work. When it does, it's a particularly magical thing."*

And as for Blundell, who was recruited into Wilson's band a little later and has also played with progressive rock luminaries such like Fish and Steve Hackett, it's been both an escapade into the creative unknown and a steep learning curve – with the initial ground work inspiring a wonderfully expansive musical partnership unlike anything he'd ever experienced before. *"I came in on leg two of the Hand Cannot Erase tour, May 2015,"* says the drummer. *"I was a little bit wet behind the ears when I joined. So the chemistry came a little later for me after some hard work... because you can't just force chemistry. It takes time – tours, road miles, hotels, and sessions. You have to understand each other on and off the stage."*

These words ring with a profound sense of truth when you hear **The New Normal**. There's a palpable sense of camaraderie encased within their most recent recordings, where you can feel just how many collective hours the three members have spent in each other's company and the sixth senses their shared experiences have inspired. It's made for a creative confidence like no other, and this is apparent from the effervescent fusion of the very first track **Beck And Call** right through to the bold finale that is **On The Spectrum**. And if the opener sounds like

it could be a salute to the jazz-rock odysseys explored on Jeff Beck's early albums, where the much-missed guitarist was striking musical conversations, that's precisely what its creators were going for...

*"It's totally our tribute to those early solo Jeff Beck albums," says Holzman. "We all wrote different things, but for this track in particular I wanted to do something in that Beck zone, vibing off records like Wired and There & Back. Jan's playing on the latter is quite possibly my favourite Jan Hammer! Sadly Jeff passed away around the same time as it was written, so we decided to name it **Beck And Call**."*

The New Normal could easily have carried on in that same direction and comfortably delighted fans of all three musicians, as well as their associated projects. But if there's anything we know about Holzman, Beggs and Blundell, it's that they are bursting with ideas of every kind. Which explains why this album is guided by an uncontainable brilliance and bravado that packs in so many twists and turns, practically laughing at any notion of genre or boundary. The mid-70s fusion of **Beck And Call** cascades into the jazz noir brilliance of **Dot Are You Wooing** without a flicker of hesitation, venturing far beyond the introductory nuances into something truly dazzling and unexpected, telling another chapter of a rapidly evolving story. It's almost as if this band take delight in ignoring the stylistic stop signs that provoke fear in the less adventurous...

*"I think we all felt it was important to not fit too heavily into one idiom," admits Beggs. "There was a lot we wanted to say and we couldn't really compact it all into one predetermined sound. I'm especially proud of **Dot Are You Wooing** and **Chinese Fire Drill**. We wanted to take listeners on a journey they won't forget. The roots of every song is representative of one person in this band. Adam would come up with something like **Wacky Tobacco**, mapping out the sonics, and then we would expand on it together, changing things up wherever it suited the music. Craig came up with the song **Ornamental Lettuce** and then Adam and I added our parts on top. There's plenty more to come!"*

"Maybe it's a little Zappa-ish, in that regard," agrees Holzman. "I guess we're taking cues from him, because he would often change genres and styles within the same song. There's a component of 'anything goes' and that ends up becoming the genre... it's everything everywhere all at once. I would say this record is a little bit more preconceived than the first. I guess some of it might even feel more like 'normal' songwriting (laughs)!"

Such terms, however, could not be used to describe songs like **Sibling Rivalry**, in which Beggs challenges himself to a didgeridoo duel in glorious stereo with some truly miraculous results. It's these kinds of ideas that make **Trifecta** a law unto themselves, taking seed from the seemingly arbitrary and braving new worlds of zany splendour that few would be able pull off convincingly. It's no worry for this trio of seasoned professionals, who are able to keep the dialogue flowing no matter the musical language being used.

*"There's a funny story behind **Sibling Rivalry**," laughs Beggs. "I got a message from John Paul Jones, who was cleaning out his music room and wanted my address. A few days later a 1979 vintage Chapman Stick in pristine condition arrived. It was very kind of him. So I played around with the idea of two brothers arguing over who was more talented. I sent the song back to John saying 'Look what I did with your Stick!' His response was, 'That's too silly!'"*

As well as these unaccompanied spoken-word dialogues, Beggs also contributed some vocals to the record and, perhaps unsurprisingly to anyone familiar with his no-holds-barred approach to the arts, these parts cover a swathe of contrasting styles and approaches, from the faux rap of **Stroboscopic Fennel** to the warm sincerity of **Once Around The Sun With You**. *“I wanted more spoken-word ideas and avant-garde aspects to this album. We experimented more with atonality and irregular rhythmical ideas plus improvisational stuff. When you have a surrealist approach to music, it’s much easier to get away with being so intensely abstract. I think what we’ve done is create a new canvas for us to work on, which will become very interesting as things move forward.”*

The canvas is especially meaningful to Blundell, who as a well-seasoned drummer-for-hire tends to work to whatever brief he is given. In **Trifecta**, however, he is as much a part of the creative process as anyone else...

“That’s why this band feels so important to me,” he reasons. “Because I’m being creatively tested to the max, asking myself where I can let my bandmates breathe or provide a different kind of backbone, rather than being told what I’m needed to play. It’s a fun project in that sense, because we are all invited to push the limits of abstract.”

So with two mind-bogglingly brilliant albums behind them and a growing army of loyal fans the world over, are there any plans for **Trifecta** to make their long-awaited live debut? Good things, after all, come to those who wait...

“It’s mainly down to logistics,” says Holzman. “If I lived in England, we would probably have played by now. But we have to figure it out. The plan is to get there sooner rather than later. We’d love to get out and play this music for people... we’re dying to break the ice on that front. Translating this music to a live situation will take a little bit of figuring out but it will be a lot of fun!”

So, in other words, watch this space. And in any case, with one of the most thrillingly eclectic and astonishingly curious monuments the three musicians have put their name to now under their collective belts, keep an eye out for **Trifecta** in 2024.