

Named after a little town in England (it straddles the border between Kent and Sussex), the band Groombridge began life in 2001 and consists of Dyle on vocals, guitar, synth effects; Hessty on guitar, synth & backing vocals; Fibe on guitar and synth; Sili on bass & distortion and Sky on drums & electronic drums. Thus far, Groombridge have released an EP (2004), two albums (2007 and 2010) and its performing resume includes a seven-month caravan tour through Europe (2008/09) and a short tour in China (2011). The new album apparently was inspired by paranoia and anxiety, after appearing to hit writer's block after the completion of previous album - "Customers From Hell" - and thus, birthed out of necessity, the band rebooted its musical approach and exploited this fortuitous creative panic attack to produce a multi-faceted work that might well be its strongest musical statement to date. It's safe to say that this inventive collection of wondrous songs would not have been possible without the impetus of fear and pressure to outdo its previous achievements and to attempt a change in direction.

There is little doubt that "Panic: We Are Hanging Here!" is one of the more intriguing releases in 2013, amidst the hackneyed, copy and paste efforts of the post-punk revivalists, it is totally refreshing to come across rock music that is not afraid to experiment with diverse (and sometimes conflicting) styles and tones to achieve a unique sound. Which makes the album particularly challenging from a reviewer's perspective. The closest one can get to pigeonholing "Panic: We Are Hanging Here!" is to suggest that the music is a post-millennial version of progressive rock - where genres are mixed and mashed up to create something new - if that word even means anything in the contemporary rock context. So it's virtually impossible to single out fully-blown references to particular influences which is par for the course in the average review. Instead, all one can do is to highlight certain passages that recall certain styles - for example, the prog rock leanings of "At Dawn: We Betray the Liars" (think: Genesis, Yes and Jethro Tull) or the chronic psychedelia of "There Are Trees", where the ghost of Syd Barrett's The Pink Floyd haunts every nuance. But lest you mistake Groombridge for your run-of-the-mill neo-proggers, there is enough arcane steel and jangly dynamism in tracks like "Follower", "Lacking Hope" and "The King" to imagine a delicious melding of Byrds and Velvet Underground into a seamless whole.

As much as the music soars and transports the listener to a different plane, the lyrics are often strongly rooted on terra firma and the harsh realities of our modern times. On the visceral "Bad With Names", sentiments like *"you took it from the poor/you didn't ask, you didn't care/who is the last in line/all that matters are shares"* reflect concerns regarding the income gap. Yet on the industrial-strength metallic "Let the Clowns Moan", there is a defiant romantic slant (in the face of opposition) in lines like *"if I ever gonna find an answer/you, my girl, are the trigger/you, my girl, are the reason/they vetoed/they always do/they say it's dangerous/to act as we do"*. On the enthralling "If That Is All That Love Is", Groombridge demonstrates the eclecticism of its lyrical concepts as well with the religiosity of stanzas like *"I found hope in you/I lost it there too/in the dark night/I couldn't find your glory"*.

So much to savour on this amazing set - from almost every perspective, the work shines.  
Recommend listening for 2013.

Artist: Groombridge

Album Title: *Panic: We Are Hanging Here!*

Review by Kevin Mathews

Rating: 4.5 Stars (out of 5)