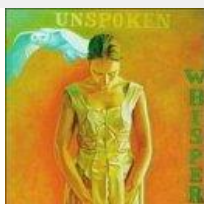


## Collaborators/Experts Reviews

Review by [Tarcisio Moura](#)  
**PROG REVIEWER**



★★★★★ Wubbo Johannes Ockels was a Dutch physicist, astronaut, pilot and professor. On October 30, 1985, he was the first Dutchman in space when he participated in a flight on the space shuttle Challenger, STS-61-A. This experience affected him deeply and when he came back he put a lot of effort into safe ways of preserving the Earth and methods of producing safe energy. Until his death in 2014, he was Professor of Aerospace for Sustainable Science and Technology at the TU Delft Faculty of Aerospace Engineering. Ockels died in 2014 of an aggressive form of kidney cancer. Until his very last day of his life - some say with his last breath - he spoke of our responsibilities: Save the earth, well now!

Dutch prog outfit Plackband, who always had a very strong socially involved projects like Plastic Soup (2010, about the pollution of the Oceans) and 1000 Wishes (2013, with the topic of child cancer), decided to write a rock opera about Ockels and his vision, both during and after his flight into space. Well, I must say I'm not very fond of rock operas in general: usually the music suffers when it has to carry primarily the message of the words. Only a handful of bands could come up with a really good work that is musically as strong as the idea within the lyrics. And I'm glad to say that Rocket is one of them. The band has a long and complicated history at the Netherlands prog scene, being active, on and off, with various line up changes, since the mid 70's. Nowadays the core members of Tom van der Meulen (drums), Ronald Brautigam (guitars) and Michel van Wasseem (keyboards) are joined by singer Ruud Slakhorst and bass player Alex van Elswijk. Also on board is soprano and backing singer Natalie Mees.

The results are stunning: a great mix of neo and symphonic prog, where the band delivers an hour of continuous great music (all tracks are linked in way or another) that takes the listener to the amazing experiences of Wubbo Ockels in an a roller coaster of sounds that is always varied, melodic and creative, with not a single moment of boredom all the way through. In fact this is one of the most interesting concept albums I have heard in a long time. A rare case where the words and music combine successfully in equal terms in a rock opera. Slakhorst voice may annoy some people with his vocal lines very similar to Jon Anderson. Unlike most of Anderson's imitators, who sound forced, Slakhorst voice comes across as natural and smooth, a simple coincidence of timbres. The band delivers a tapestry of sounds that takes some time to get into, but that will provide the listener with a great deal of pleasure if you listen carefully. This is definitely a grower that reveals more and more fine details with each spin, like any great prog record does. This is a real team work with all the instruments appearing and leaving according to the what the song demands. So don't expect any explicit display of virtuosity here. This is music for art's sake. Still, I do have to point out those fine, emotional guitar solos by Brautigam, a guy that has his own style of playing.

Rocket has a very good production and tasteful arrangements that include a string quartet to enhance the sound of some passages. Nad Sylvan (Unifaun, Agents Of Mercy. Steve Hackett) sings on one track too.

Conclusion: One of the best records of 2017. Those guys took a quite risky project and came up with an excellent work that will please anyone who likes good melodic prog rock, even if they don't get the storyline. With no weak parts and a very original approach for such "political correct" theme, Plackband gives us both a masterpiece of good music and very good food for thought. Not many artists can accomplish that. Kudos to them.

Special thanks to Erik Neuteboom, my good friend and long time PA collaborator, who was at PB's 40 year celebration and sent me the promo CD of this great work of art. Somewhere out there Wubbo Ockels might be smiling upon this beautiful homage.

Final rating: 5 stars with honors.