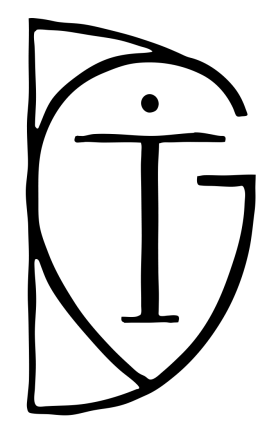
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**INTO THE GREAT DIVIDE**

**OVERTURE**

Everything hasn’t been done yet.

There are more peaks to summit. There’s still ground to break. There are uncharted territories to be trodden. The unknown beckons us to take leave of the norm and embark on journeys of all kinds. No matter how big or small these journeys may seem to the beholder, we personally discover what we’re made of by uncovering the unfamiliar. Sometimes, it’s thrilling, while other times it’s challenging--nevertheless, it’s always irrevocably life-changing.

The following is one of those kinds of stories…

**MAESTRO: I**

Zack Zalon wanted to tell a story… with music.

The co-founder of digital agency We See Dragons possessed a lifelong passion for instrumental progressive rock, inspired by everyone from Kansas and Rush to Dream Theater and Steve Vai. However, music took a backseat to a highly successful career designing and building digital businesses for some of the largest companies in the world: Virgin, National Geographic, Johnson & Johnson, and countless others.

Music still crossed paths with his entrepreneurship, as We See Dragons developed global platforms for Virgin Entertainment, developed the music streaming services for CBS Radio, built the first-ever mobile subscription music service Muve Music, and launched the artist platform Hello Music. However, the urge to tell a story with music finally overwhelmed him in 2016, and he quietly began working on what would become his self-titled debut: *Into The Great Divide*.

“I help people tell stories for a living,” he explains. “I do that with business, I do it with digital, and I’m doing it with music. That’s the connector between Into The Great Divide and what I do with my company. I don’t just build technology; I build products that help companies tell a story to consumers that really moves the needle for them, makes their businesses bigger, and bolsters engagement with what they’re doing in the digital domain. Now, I’m applying that to music. In a way, there’s really no difference between the two things.”

**VISION: II**

Working late at night, long after Los Angeles went to sleep, Zack took the first step on the journey towards Into The Great Divide. He plotted and planned a course for the album, slowly building up a structure for his vision. Rather than simply cut instrumentals, he looked to *innovate the medium* and introduce a new paradigm for recorded music--the “rock novel.”

“I love instrumental guitar music,” he continues. “However, most of these instrumental records don’t have any context. You’re only listening for virtuosity. You can’t tell what any of the tracks mean relative to each other. I wanted to do something different, to connect people to instrumental progressive rock by bringing them along on a journey. Each track is actually a chapter following a narrative, and each reflects that part of the story. A narrator guides this journey. I felt like this was an opportunity to do something new and tell a tale inside of music differently than what had been done before. I wouldn’t compromise on the kind of music I enjoy; I’d just change the way we present it, so that it connects with people on a more fundamental level.”

**THE HERO: III**

Rather than just spin a deliberate and definite fictional yarn, Into The Great Divide re-interprets Joseph Campbell’s classic and influential 1949 archetype The Hero’s Journey for the narrative. Voice actor Larry Davis chronicles each movement of this theme--a narrative theme which can be found everywhere from *Star Wars* to the lives of successful entrepreneurs and political figures. In this case, the Hero could very well be you…

“All hero stories have the same arc throughout time,” Zack elaborates. “Imagine yourself as the protagonist: you’re presented with an opportunity or challenge, and you rise boldly to meet it. However first you actually *fail* in attempting to meet the challenge. You’re beaten down and put it into a position where you can either give up, or dig deep to find the courage necessary to face your biggest challenge once again. When you ultimately win, which you will, you are personally changed forever. In many cases, the world is changed too.”



**ALLIES: IV**

Into The Great Divide is a singular vision, composed by Zack Zalon, who helms the guitars, piano, keyboards, and bass. It’s also a product of a dedicated team focused on bringing the vision to life with as much authority as possible. Enter producer Richard Chycki [Dream Theater, Rush]. Based in Toronto, Canada, he saw the opportunity to create a new kind of concept album, and to help deliver an experience that is equally as unique as it is respectful of its influences.

“The goal was to tell the story across 10 individual chapters, each constructed independently to evoke the specific characteristics of that part of the story,” explains Chycki. “But we wanted a sonic consistency across the album, to keep the experience glued together. And though we worked toward a lush, orchestrated sound, we also aimed for the essence of something a little more live – with raw guitars, real piano, big leslie-driven organ, and vintage synth sounds to bring together the best of 70s and 80s prog sounds with the tones that we love from today.”

Eventually, Chycki tapped the talents of drum legend Mike Mangini [Steve Vai, Dream Theater] to add the foundational rhythm layer, laying down the tracks at Dave Grohl’s 606 Studios and tracking through the legendary Sound City Neve console for a truly thunderous drum tone.

“Both Rich and Mike were incredibly dedicated partners,” Zack smiles. “It was an extremely cool process with Rich because we leveraged sophisticated technology and were able to maximize the ability to work remotely when necessary during the recording process. And as far Mike goes, he put down one of the most unbelievable and epic drum performances I have ever seen. He brought it to life in a much more dramatic way than I had even thought possible.”

Finally, the team added the orchestral-arrangement talents of Brendon Cassidy, the co-founder of We See Dragons and an incredible creative and compositional force in his own right.

**TESTS & ENEMIES: V**

Following the first narration, the gorgeous cinematic piano of “The Crossing” ushers the journey along. Guitars crescendo and entwine with propulsive bass lines as we heed “A Call To Adventure” before settling “Under A Bright Starry Sky.” The fourth chapter serves as the first single, “Tests & Enemies.” Its ominous pacing and rapturous instrumental catharsis represent a turning point for the record.

“You realize arrival is only the start of the journey,” he goes on. “There are a tremendous number of tests to be won and enemies to be vanquished. Just like in life, things aren’t as easy as you might hope when you first undertake a new challenge. But at some point, every hero will feel like they’ve passed enough personal tests to have built the strength to make the big swing. The big swing is really going for it.”

That first “big swing” comes in Challenge Accepted, where our hero is shocked to fail at the attempt. That starts the downturn pivot for the story, with “Dark Waters” and “Mist In The Sun” representing the deep impact of first-failure. But, as with many personal stories, our hero chooses to learn from past mistakes, and rises up to meet his fate for the final “big swing”. You can literally hear and feel the turn toward victory when Mangini’s drums coalesce into a virtuosic, bombastic and brash percussive storm during “A New Perspective.” Finally victorious, we see things as though born anew on “The World You Made,” an uplifting and energetic celebration before sending off the story with “And So It Ends.”

**A FINAL WORD: VI**

After all is said and done, you’re on a journey. Once you fall Into The Great Divide, you--and the world around you--may very well never be the same ever again.

“There are levels that I hope people experience with the story,” he leaves off. “Most importantly I want the story to connect with people at an emotional level. But I also want people to see progressive rock as a much more approachable musical form than they may have thought. And finally, I’d love them to see this as an entirely new way of telling a story. Into The Great Divide reflects an incredible amount of effort from a passionate and dedicated team. I truly hope that comes through with every listen.”

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