

Bio information: **YANG**
Title: **REJOICE!** (Cuneiform Rune 524)
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FILE UNDER: **ROCK / ART ROCK / PROGRESSIVE ROCK**

FREDERIC L'EPEE unleashes YANG, his guitar-centric quartet, to record a powerful album of Frippian, counterpoint-fueled compositions set further ablaze by the vocals of guest CARLA KIHLESTEDT (Sleepytime Gorilla Museum)

Composed in the wake of Covid and as Fascism, Wars and Climate crises globally rise, *REJOICE!* offers a healing response for surviving this New Dark Age. Yang reveals music's power to purge darkness from our souls. In *Rejoice!*, L'Epee reminds us to embrace whatever beauty and light the world retains, and to transform the darkness into art.

According to most professional journalists, comparisons are odious. And according to most professional musicians, critics are useless. But what happens when a critic makes a comparison that turns out to be useful and also transformative in the most positive way?

Look no further than *Rejoice!*, the fifth album—and third for **Cuneiform Records**—from the masterful French progressive-rock quartet **Yang**.

This, naturally, needs some explanation, and in fact there are two intertwined origin stories that can be applied to what is possibly Yang's most accessible yet most deeply felt full-length.

We'll get to the first later. But what primarily gave *Rejoice!* its sound and its shape came when an online reviewer compared Yang's previous album, *Designed for Disaster*, to the dark and psychologically disturbing work of the Bay Area band Sleepytime Gorilla Museum. And while there are similarities, for sure, the notion struck Yang guitarist and composer Frédéric L'Épée as odd, given that he had never heard—or even heard of—his American counterparts. Intrigued, he decided to listen, and found not just a team of kindred spirits, but the perfect singer to bring life to his songs.

“I didn't know them, so when I saw this review, I said ‘Okay, what is this band? Is it something that I've missed?’” L'Épée notes, laughing. “ And, yes, it really *was* something I'd missed.

“I don't like the sound of my own voice,” the bandleader continues, and so for most of its existence Yang has focused primarily on instrumental music. On *Designed for Disaster*, however, the German singer Ayse Cansu Tanrikulu added her jazz-inflected phrasing to five tracks, and now on *Rejoice!* Sleepytime violinist and singer Carla Kihlstedt has come on board for most of the album.

It's an ideal match, and one that wound up shaping *Rejoice!* far more than L'Épée had intended. In writing *Designed for Disaster*, he explains, he concerned himself with lyrics that were “meant to communicate an impression but not a meaning”. But after having discovered Kihlstedt, he opted to follow a different path. “It’s interesting,” he says now. “I started to write the words like I did with *Designed for Disaster*; not with apparent meaning, but through the sound more than anything. But as soon as Carla accepted, I started to have her voice in my mind. So as soon as I started to write, I heard her singing at the moment I was writing. This forced me to search for the reason inside, because I realized that I wanted her to understand what I was saying, to give all the expression that I wanted. So this is one of the many reasons I started to write things with meanings, because I wanted her to be driven by these meanings.”

At the same time, circumstances were giving L'Épée plenty to write about. The world was coming out of lockdown, new wars were starting, fascism was on the rise, and all of these things were having a profoundly negative effect on some of the musician's associates.

“In 2023, several of my friends had a kind of breakdown,” he reports. “They started to have dark thoughts, bad ideas, and they were really bad with themselves. And I wanted to help them, actually. I wanted to make them feel better. It was really with this idea, this mood, that I started to write *Rejoice!*”

It wasn't therapy for himself that he was after, he stresses. “I have had the chance to live an ideal life, I would say,” he notes. “I'm living with the love of my life and I'm making music all the time, so I am someone who's pretty happy. But I would also say that I'm empathic, so when I see someone or I hear someone that feels not right, I feel that suffering as well. So I want to help these people to get above whatever it is. And this is maybe why the album is named *Rejoice!*, because this is a dark time. It's a dark age for everyone.

“It's not a happy time, but we have to rejoice in what we have,” he adds. “Everything is wrong, nothing is going properly, but there are so many things to enjoy anyway, if you know what I mean.”

L'Épée considers *Rejoice!* to be “healing music”, but with its surging polyrhythms, intricately conjoined guitar parts, and Kihlstedt's fiercely committed singing, it's not like any music you'd hear in any spa on earth.

Consider the record's final track, “The Final Day”, which opens with fingerstyle guitars and breathy vocals that present a comforting, lullaby-like ambience. But once a powerful bass ostinato kicks in a darker mood emerges, and it becomes clear that L'Épée is describing some kind of mass extinction. “Over the land, fiery sand falls,” Kihlstedt sings. “Everyone's horizon burns.”

The intimation of a final, climate-change-induced “fire season” is clear. And yet it's impossible to encounter this performance without also feeling a sense of joyous release. The end is nigh—but the end is *always* nigh, and it's never really the end. In that light, “The Final Day” is a perfect finale to *Rejoice!*, because once it's over you'll want to return to Track One, “Step Inside”, and play the entire record again.