

Allan Holdsworth was once a hugely admired jazz fusion guitarist, with some great albums such as 'Metal Fatigue.' Now what the hell went wrong with his album 'The Sixteen Men of Tain'? Those unfamiliar with atonality will likely assume the guitarist is playing any old random notes, just very fast. Actually he's playing deliberately weird notes very fast. And I don't mean a bit weird, I mean 'this can't be right' weird. An argument could be made that the guitarist simply stopped caring on the album in question, but so many mistakes? I don't buy it. As I'm typing this, it's very windy AND my dad is hoovering, so I can't hear the album very well at the moment. Big loss right? Having said that... I like it. :O A bit hard to get into, but so is cheese. Lots of people love the food despite the smell, and I like the album despite the metaphorical smell. According to Google, Tain is a small town in Scotland. Apparently the place has 3,590 residents, meaning 3,574 are women. Does Allan hate the thought of so many ladies? If so, it certainly shows in his music. Then again, it also suggests he's not too keen on the males there, either. If I was his psychiatrist, I'd tell him to let it go.

Luckily drummers can never play wrong notes, (unless they go out of their way to tune the snares etc. to various pitches which wouldn't surprise me in this case) so the percussionist is in luck there. I mean let's not take things too much further. Does the drummer sound like HE'S screwing up, not through tone choices, but by playing out of time? Nope. If he did... well, that would be even harder to defend. Even though there are saxophone parts which obviously do play pitches, they are actually very tonal. I'm imagining the sax player saying something like 'listen to how I'm playing... Give it a try' to the guitarist, but that's just speculation. Allan's playing of his synth guitar doesn't sound bad, but really I'd have preferred real synths. Him hogging all the glory is a form of megalomania, imo. When you combine that with his evidently bitter personality, you wonder how anyone could get along with him at all.

There was a time you had to spend around £100 to get a copy of the CD on Amazon second hand, now you can get it for about a tenth of that price, and new as well. Maybe that's because the guitarist is dead now, and the record company is trying to honour his memory. Personally, I'd like to be remembered in a better way, but then again, I'm not getting my hopes up. Actually TSMoT got four and a half stars on Allmusic.com, which certainly isn't something to be sniffed at. Then again, maybe it was windy and his dad was hoovering at the time of reviewing. You never know. Maybe the musicians were aware of how freakish their music was, and requested it to be evaluated in stormy weather, but I think that's retreating into fantasy. Maybe Allan was like 'the music represents storms, so listen to it in a storm.' But again, fantasy. More so even, as the music represents 16 men.

What kind of men? If you look at the sixteen men on the album cover, you'll find that they don't look at all normal, which COULD be the reason they stuck in his mind so much, but I do empathise with the guys on the artwork. They're just trying to go about their lives, then someone like Allan tries to suggest they're complete freaks through hard to tolerate music. Even so, let the solos and chord progressions grow on you and you may even come to the conclusion Mr. Holdsworth was actually COMPLIMENTING the sixteen men of Tain. Complex stuff. It's a bit sad the way a few thousand women were never even alluded to, but I guess if he made an album called 'The 3,574 Women of Tain' he could look like the world's biggest womaniser. What rating do I give the album? Hm. I mean, I don't LOVE it, but it is certainly trippy, you can't deny that. Let's say 8.5/10. Bye!