

## SACD & Other Hi-Res Reviews

# The Alan Parsons Project – The Turn Of a Friendly Card – Arista

Concept album delivers pop artistry.



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**The Alan Parsons Project – The Turn Of a Friendly Card – Arista Records/Speakers Corner Records (180 gram audiophile vinyl) AL 9518, 40:28 \*\*\*\*1/2:**

(Alan Parsons – keyboards, vocals; Eric Woolfson – keyboards, vocals; Ian Bairnson – guitar; David Paton – bass; Stuart Elliot – drums, percussion; Elmer Gantry – vocals; Lenny Zakatek – vocals; Chris Rainbow – vocals; Sandor Farcas – Leader of the Orchestra Of The Munich Chamber Opera care of Eberhard Schoener)

Despite his musical background (vocalist, keyboardist, guitarist, bassist and flutist), Alan Parsons' celebrity emerged as an engineer on The Beatles *Abbey Road* and Pink Floyd's *Dark Side Of The Moon*. After declining an invitation to work on the next Pink Floyd project, he formed The Alan Parsons Project. That decision would yield ten studio albums. The group was renowned for their glossy production and engineering (not unlike The Moody Blues, Yes and Emerson Lake And Palmer). Like many of the rock bands of this era, a thematic narrative was employed. British rock/pop structure was supplemented by grandiose arrangements.

*Turn Of A Friendly Card* is a complicated album, both musically and conceptually. Layered synthesizers, keyboards, vocals and orchestral accents frame a progressive rock format of discerning listenable material. In the context of a "concept album", Parsons and writing partner Eric Woolfson (also a veteran of Abbey Road Studios) delve into the sinister culture of gambling.

The album opens with orchestral, British fanfare, before it settles into the steady rock rhythm of "May Be A Price To Pay". Lead singer (one of four) Elmer Gantry belts out the ominous lyrics ("...Something's wrong in this house today..."). The music reflects the early eighties rock scene with the keyboard influences and funky underlying guitar licks. The following two songs represent well crafted songs that saw airplay. With its pulsating, synthesizer introduction, "Games People Play" segues into Lenny Zakatek's forceful vocal. This cut has a cohesive percussive vibe and includes an explosive electric guitar break. Woolfson (doing lead vocals for

the first time) cultivates an emotional vocal on “Time”. The use of strings builds a classical, lush resonance to the elegiac melody. The sentiment builds to a subtle crescendo as violins and a falsetto voice converge. Zakatek returns on “I Don’t Wanna Go Home”. Following a drifting piano, the song erupts into a groove centered rock opus with rhythmic keyboard riffs and numerous guitar hooks that animate the foreboding imagery (“...monkey on your back...”).

Side Two is sequenced differently. After a cinematic instrumental that may draw comparisons to Pink Floyd (especially with the saxophone solo), a five part suite unfolds. “The Turn Of A Friendly Card (Part One)” draws on classical influences with acoustic guitar and piano. Singer Chris Rainbow contributes a fluid tenor to the Celtic-like melody. Pure rock grooves (Rainbow also on vocal) permeate a gambler’s chant on “Snake Eyes”. A second instrumental, “The Ace Of Swords” is pulsating with symphonic pretense. Woolfson returns on the lush, dream-like “Nothing Left to Lose”. Deft touches like an accordion (synthesized), ska break, theme repeat (undertone) and climactic finish elevate the suite. A final verse and chorus, entitled “The Turn Of A Friendly Card (Part 2)” bring the album to a fulfilling close.

Alan Parsons’ attention to engineering detail and multi-level instrumentals is captured by the audiophile virgin vinyl. The luxurious tones of the synthesizers are contrasted with the jagged electric guitars. The mix levels are balanced delicately. Whether it’s the power of the string sections or delicacy of the lithe vocalists, the quality is superior. *The Turn Of A Friendly Card* is a discerning combination of intriguing pop music and eminent studio technology.

#### **TrackList:**

Side One: May Be A Price To Pay; Games People Play; Time; I Don’t Wanna Go Home

Side Two: The Gold Bug; The Turn Of A Friendly Card (The Turn Of A Friendly Card (Part One), Snake Eyes, The Ace Of Swords, Nothing Left To Lose, The Turn Of A Friendly Card (Part Two)

—Robbie Gerson

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