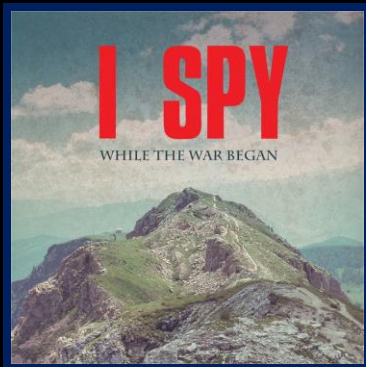




**Band:** I SPY  
**Album Title:** While The War Began  
**Label:** Top Hole Records  
**Genre:** Prog Rock, Art Rock



**Description:**  
 Double Album on Vinyl and on CD

**Influences for the album:**  
 King Crimson, Yes, Genesis (with Peter Gabriel), Jethro Tull, Pink Floyd, Steven Wilson

**Discography:**  
 I SPY - The Crystal Fire (1988)  
 I SPY - Kite (1991)

**Band Line-Up:**  
 Joost van Soest - Drums  
 Erik Westerhof - Guitars  
 Harry Poelman - Bass  
 Peter Duinkerken - Keyboards  
 Aernout Steegstra - Vocals

**CD Track Listing:**  
**Side 1 - Unforgotten**  
 1. Unforgotten  
 2. In Sight Of The Sun  
 3. Edge Of The World  
 4. Scars  
 5. Intensive Care

**Side 2 - Fearless**  
 1. The Blue Lab  
 2. Superstitious  
 3. Nightingale  
 4. Fearless  
 5. Dream Child  
 6. This

**Side 3 - War**  
 1. Robotnik  
 2. While The War Began  
 3. Wiper  
 4. Terminal One

**Side 4 - Odyssey**  
 1. Cyclops  
 2. Circe's Meadow  
 3. Heaven's Gate

4. Penelope  
 5. The End So Far

**Discography:**  
 I SPY - The Crystal Fire (1988)  
 I SPY - Kite (1991)  
 I SPY - While The War Began (2023)

**Side one** is *'Unforgotten'* which is called opens up with the mysterious atmospheric *'Unforgotten'*, this is a gentle melodic piece that starts off instrumental before the vocals kick in allowing the song to breathe, the sound here is outstanding as the song then moves over into *'In Sight Of The Sun'*, there is a slight Dream Theater feel to this track, its slick and melodic, yet technical and complex. *'Edge Of The World'* is a beautiful song with a touch of Spock's Beard textures running through, it is organic and progressive with a dynamic atmospheric melodic feel,

its technically complex with lots of gorgeous vocals from singer Aernout Steegstra, he really soars on this song and come over in the vein of ex Marillion singer Fish, whilst Peter Duinkerken gives the song and cinematic prog feel thanks to his wonderful synth work, this is quite a grand song, very earthy and organic.

The band then get heavy with the prog metallor **'Scars'**, this is a solid energetic song with lots of improv going down, it's quite groove based with fab bass work from Harry Poelman, again the synths are mighty party of the song given it a certain vintage prog metal vibe.

**'Intensive Care'** is another short atmospheric guitar instrumental with melodic synths, it's quite eerie and atmospheric with a cinematic sci-fi feel.

**'Side two'** is called **'Fearless'**, which starts off with the sci-fi spacey **'The Blue Lab'**, again this keyboard drenched and comes over a little like Vangelis circa 'Blade Runner' soundtrack complete with stirring church organs, maybe even a little gothical, quite progressive. This the builds right into the dynamic **'Superstitious'**. This is a huge heavier artistic composition, its catchy and one of the albums highlights, lots of synths drench the song and it comes over slightly eccentric in an Avantasia kinda vibe.

**'Nightingale'** is a beautiful soothing composition, its progressive and melodic with superb female vocals mid-way through. There is a lot of experimentation going on with the music, and is prog with a vintage synth vibe.

**'Fearless'** is more spacey instrumental stuff with more focus on the guitar

which here sound heavy and scary, but not in terms of fast playing, no Erik Westerhof is experimenting with just the guitar sound rather than melodies, when you hear the children towards the song the way it's done is fucking scary in a Nightmare On Elm Street kinda way.

**'Dream Child'** is slick and experimental, it's got a vintage vibe with earthy male and female vocals mid-way through, it's quite a spacey song, proggy and the way it pulls you is almost hypnotic, superb song. This part of the album ends with the vibrant and spacious **'This'**, superb musicianship throughout this song with has a slight Rush feel, the whole band and maybe guests are signing in unity during the chorus, the song then wonderfully, if not madly explores many other musical areas, and the sound is just wonderful, another fabulous song.

**'Side three'** is called **'War'** which starts off with **'Robotnik'**, a catchy cinematic soundscape with progressive elements. Next up is **'While The War Began'**, a softer melodic feel, this composition is beautifully performed with superb vocals, and has a classic melodic rock feel, but as it grows the experimental haunting progressive soundscapes come back into play. This moves into **'Wiper'**, this is one of the longest songs of the whole concept running it at over ten minutes long. It's heavier and more dynamic, to start with and is builds it drops into a spacey jazz fusion type prog vibe with synths and is quite stirring and classy.

**'Terminal One'**, starts off with deep piano work and silky saxophone, again this has a vocally Fish type of texture. I love the way this track builds, it gets quite

dramatic as it builds with sensational vocals, this is another of my favourite songs, beautifully performed.

**'Side four'** is called **'Odyssey'** which starts off with **'Cyclops'**, a shorty funky jazz fusion ditty that leads into **'Circe's Meadow'** has quite a big sound, reminds me a little of King Crimson, a lot going on with different experimental styles, the guitar work here from Erik is really cool. I love this song a lot going on that makes me think in some ways of Genesis as well, Aernout sounds great, and the whole song is catchy and progressive with a vintage seventies' vibe.



**'Heaven's Gate'** again is moody and experimental, whilst **'Penelope'** is a sensational progressive almost fairy-tale ballad. The vocals from Aernout are beautiful and the synths are superb taking on various styles, this is another album highlight. Ending side four and the album as a whole is **'The End So Far'**, this song breathes a more Celtic edge, its earthy and cinematic to start with before growing into a complex heavier progressive ditty, again showing off the eccentric side to the band, dynamic and powerful.

**H**ailing from The Netherlands, we find Progressive Art Rock quintet *I SPY*. They have an excellent new twenty track double album out now called 'While The War Began' which clocks in at around eight minutes long and is the bands third full length release, and also this album is their first release in thirty-two years. We 're in the home studio of I Spy, located in the St. Piter Pastorie in Grou, in the northern part of the Netherlands. It's Sunday afternoon and the sun shines outside and into the studio. It's early Autumn and the leaves in the garden are turning into a brownish red. We just had lunch, a pasta dish with fresh orange juice, served by Harriet, lady of the house. Two band members of I Spy, Peter Duinkerken (Keyboards) and Harry Poelman (Bass) are present, sitting in the monitor room of the studio, a cup of tea in their hands. Peter thinks that the main difference between I Spy and other bands consists of the huge time gap between their last album 'Kite' (1992) and the album they have just released, 'While The War Began'. After more than twenty years, in the Autumn of 2014, the guys discussed the possibility of making a new album, despite the awareness that they all had a 'regular' job and available time would be limited. "We just said to each other 'let's go for it.' Let's make an album like we wanted to do in the seventies. the decade where Prog Rock came of age to form a new mainstream in pop music. At first, we picked up some old themes of the eighties, which remained on the shelf, and got jammin' around with them. Very

soon we realised we could make a remarkable record without pressure from record companies. Nobody was waiting for us, so we could do anything we wanted to do in our own way. At that time we were all dreaming of not making one, but two vinyl-LP's, a real double album with a gatefolded sleeve and lyrics including. In that sense our album, I think, also differs from other bands," he enthuses. Peter has been playing the piano since he was four years old. "I considered going to the conservatory, but I discovered just in time that the pleasure I derive from making music mainly comes from writing music myself and improvising. That's why I started playing in bands when I was fifteen," he explains to me. Peter's first source of inspiration in pop music is undoubtedly the Beatles. "Later, symphonic rock bands such as Yes, early Genesis and Pink Floyd were added. But I also count CSNY's Deja Vu among my favourite albums. Nowadays I listen more to classical music. Prokofiev is one of my favourites. Peter unfortunately, cannot make a living from making music. "I have a job as a judge that I also enjoy. Furthermore, I have a fairly elaborate house and I enjoy a large group of friends," he smiles. When bassist Harry Poelman was a toddler in the early sixties, when he was around three years old, my dad borrowed a record player from the school, where he was a teacher. Together with the record player came an LP called 'Peter and the Wolf,' a delicious piece of music from the Russian composer Sergej Prokofjev. Classical music about a fairy tale of Peter and his encounter(s)

with a wolf. With a narrative storytelling overlaying this composition. I remember that David Bowie did this narrative in a special version of 'Peter and the Wolf' at the end of the seventies, after he completed his album 'Heroes.' Anyway, my parents noticed that I was listening to the album with special attention, like I was hypnotised by the music. I listened to this album over and over. Early in the morning my mom sat me down next to the record player and turned the record on. Then she had plenty of time to take care of householding duties without an annoying toddler around. My interest in classical music was sown at that time. A few years later my parents let me buy my first single record in the record store, '(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction' from the Rolling Stones. A few weeks later followed by 'She Loves You (Yeah, Yeah, yeah) ', a song from the Beatles. My interest for pop music was born at that time," he tells me. When he started playing bass guitar, the first riff that Harry practiced was the bassline of the song 'Little Green Bag' from the Dutch band George Baker Selection. "At that time, a big success in the Netherlands, later on this song became famous worldwide as the opening song of the Quentin Tarantino movie 'Reservoir Dogs.' In the beginning of the seventies, when I was a teenager, I admired Hard Rock bands like Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin. Especially the lead guitarists, Ritchie Blackmore, and Jimmy Page, made a big impression on me. I could turn their records Deep Purple 'In Rock' and Led Zeppelin 'II' over and over

again. Suddenly I discovered Yes, with the song 'Survival', on a compilation album by record company Atlantic. The unusual song structure, the fantastic lead voice of Jon Anderson and the astonishing bass playing of Chris Squire stroke me at first listen. That's where Prog Rock for the first time came into my musical mind. A few months later I heard a live recording on the radio of a band I've never heard before, Genesis. The soulful voice of Peter Gabriel, the length of their magical songs. I think that live recording had a big inspirational impact on me and my way of listening and making music," he expresses.

Away from music Harry likes playing games. "When I was ten years, I learned to play Chess, the most beautiful game in the world. At school we got time to learn and play the game often. Until now every game is so different and special compared to games I played before. And you can play chess all over the world. In the nineties I spend hours and hours playing the computer game 'Myst.' Solving riddles in a beautiful landscape of islands, all connected together. Accompanied by fantastic ambient music it felt as if you were wandering around in an 'unreal' world. So games are definitely 'my thing.' I also like travelling and all that's coming with it. Train- and bus stations, airport terminals, ticket trading in the Far East, they all contribute to a special state of mind I'm feeling comfortable with."

Drummer Joost van Soest started playing drums when he was eight years old, and he was inspired by his cousin who was already playing drums at the time.

"I thought he was the coolest guy, so I had to do that too," he tells me. He then got into the local music school and started his journey on the drums. When he was fourteen, he formed his first band and that was that he knew what he wanted to for the rest of his life. "I was really into metal and funk at the time, but migrated to jazz rock along the way. Luckily, I was accepted in the conservatory of Groningen, studying jazz as my main subject, but I never really was a bebopper, so I also studied fusion and more open rhythmically advanced forms of jazz, but also Zappa (can't pin him on one style...) and ethnic music. King Crimson and other forms of prog rock also entered my life when was twenty something but it took another fifteen years to finally meet up with Peter and Aernout, who asked me to join on this elaborate prog adventure, as they were looking for a drummer and the rest, as the saying goes, is history," he enthuses.

Joost's inspirations include Bill Bruford, King Crimson, Zappa, RATM, Sepultura, Living Colour, Pantera, AC/DC, Simon Phillips, Vinnie Colaiuta, Pat Metheny, all kinds of Scandinavian jazz (Esbjorn Svensson, Trio Tøykeät, Phronesis etc.), Pat Metheny, John Scofield, Aka Moon, Stephane Galland, tons of blues rock and southern rock, Little Feat, The Police, Tedeschi Trucks Band, most of his teachers (Ralph Peterson, Joost van Schaik, Wobbe Visser, among others) and of course his cousin Wouter Peeters. "And then the other ninety percent that I forgot, or as I'd like to put it: "any music as long as it's not from Volendam," he expresses. In his spare time Joost enjoys cycling,

soldering gear (although that's mostly musically related), hiking in the forest with the family and the dog. Singer Aernout Steegstra is the youngest of four children, and his parents listened to classical music: Renaissance and Baroque music mainly. His sisters listened to singer songwriters like Leonard Cohen, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan, the boys next door played The Beatles and the Who, whilst his big brother was completely crazy about Jethro Tull. "So, music was all around us. My first live concert was in 1972, I was fifteen years old en I hitchhiked to Rotterdam for a night concert by Tull, together with my brother. This was a live changing event," he points out. As mentioned, Aernout is inspired by Jethro Tull, and also Frank Zappa, The Who, King Crimson, the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band, Cockney Rebel, Pink Floyd... The Singing Detective 've stopped by, Ian Dury, Elvis Costello, George Formby, Japan, Talking Heads, Talk Talk, Frank Sinatra, Split Enz... too much to mention. "The idea of the album originated during the making process. The themes mainly come from Harry Poelman, he writes most of the lyrics," he adds.

Aernout earns his daily living taking pictures, portraits, group photos, weddings, and a lot of corporate photography. "I love watching movies and I operate the camera for my brother Eric who makes puppet movies with string-puppets. I have always drawn a lot. I look eagerly and curiously at the things around me," he smiles. Guitarist Erik Westerhof was about seven years old and listened to gramophone records with children's songs and fairy

tales. A cousin who was a few years older, who lived near him, had the latest singles from The Rolling Stones and The Beatles on his pick-up at the time. "It took some getting used to, but I was soon captivated by these new sounds. When I was ten, I got 'Sgt. Pepper' from my parents as a birthday present. That was my first LP. The seed was planned. This cousin played the guitar and my first introduction to the instrument was a fact. After a few years I started taking guitar lessons at the local music school. There I learned to play chords and improvise a bit, mainly in 'evergreens' and founded my first band," he tells me. His teacher advised him to go to the conservatory. At that time - the early 1970s - it was only possible to study classical guitar at the conservatory. "In two years I prepared myself for the entrance exam and was admitted to the Municipal Conservatory in Groningen. During that time I was asked by Peter and Harry to play in their band. The predecessor of I SPY. During my classical guitar training I always combined pop and classical, but after graduating in 1983 that became increasingly difficult. I had now formed a classical guitar duo with a fellow student and that kept me increasingly busy. Ultimately, I chose classical music and then stopped playing in I SPY. With the Groningen Guitar Duo I have given concerts all over the world for 30 years and have made 11 CDs with music from the Renaissance to the 20th century. I also became guitar teacher at the Groningen Conservatory. When my guitar duo ceased to exist in 2012, my old friends from I SPY came back into the picture.

With the well-known result," he smiles. Before Erik went to the conservatory, Django Reinhardt was an important source of inspiration. "During my guitar studies, classical guitarists Andres Segovia and Julian Bream (still to this day) and prog rockers Steve Howe and Steve Hackett. And later also Robert Fripp and John McLaughlin. And for the album the great prog rock bands of the early seventies: Yes, Genesis, King Crimson etc." In his spare time Erik as a few extra-musical activities/hobbies. "I'm a record junkie. I've been collecting records since I was a teenager. First LPs, then CDs and in recent years a lot of LPs again. Most classical. I also mainly listen to classical music. I also enjoy reading, but have hardly had time to do so in recent years. And astronomy is high on the list," he adds. It took a long time to complete this album, which the band started on in 2014 and finished it during the corona epidemic in 2021. "From then on we searched for a record label to release the album. I think we noticed a big difference between the record industry in the eighties and how it works nowadays. Corona, I think worldwide, had a big impact on the record industry and their eagerness to release records. So the old 'business-model' didn't work anymore for them," sighs Peter. "Instead they only contracted successful artists, the likes of Taylor Swift, Ed Sheeran, Coldplay and so on. The chances for new bands to get a record contract nearly diminished to zero. With this in mind we had to make a decision how to release the album. On our search for a record company we came in

contact with an organisation, Dutch Music Works, who we're willing to support new bands. In the production of the album, distribution to record stores and worldwide promotion activities. We then decided to release the album under own management and made a business deal with Top Hole Records." For Harry, the main difference between the albums is the era in which they were made. "In the beginning of the nineties our fans had specific thoughts about our music and the future. This created expectations which we had to take care of. At that time we still composed songs focused on these expectations, in the new-wave mode. When we started making our new album twenty years later, we realised that no one was waiting for us. We could, without restrictions, make anything we wanted. Being creative in a free world of thoughts," he expresses. "During the writing process of the album we became aware that we, more than ever, got back to the seventies. At that moment, the idea for a double vinyl album came in mind. With a gatefolded sleeve and special attention for the visual art-design. We also tried to make the songs connected to each other for each record side and give each side a different title. So there was a concept in our minds which helped in the creative process of making the album. For the lyricist in me a special challenge to create an emotional context to connect the lyrics in an intuitive way. Sides one and two (Unforgotten and Fearless) focused on an autobiographical base, sides three and four (War and Odyssey) focused on the social issues of today."

The album was recorded in Studio Spitsbergen (Zuidbroek, The Netherlands) and in the St. Piter Pastorie (Grou, the Netherlands). Church Organ was recorded in the Martini Church (Groningen, The Netherlands). Recording engineer was done by Bauke van der Laaken. The mixing of the tracks was done by Bauke van der Laaken (Sides 1 and 3) and studio engineer Wout de Kruif (Sides 2 and 4). Mastering was done by Darcy Proper (Proper Prent Sound) at the Valhalla Studios New York (Auburn, NY, USA). The album is produced, composed, and performed by I SPY. The recording process took a long time, for a period of totally seven years.

"I think the album has more than one highlight. The first highlight for me is the studio performance of the famous Dutch trumpet player Eric Vloeimans, who plays on ten songs on the album. His musicality and his skills to improvise on the spot are outstanding. In a one-day recording session he completed his contribution to the album. Amazing," smiles Harry.



"The second highlight for me is how the song Wiper, a ten-minute piece, was composed. Just with the intention that we had to work on a heavy piece of music, was enough to start a session, jamming with heaviness, which wouldn't stop for the whole afternoon, mainly improvising with keyboards and guitars which resulted in a movement of quietness in an ethereal context, as if we were in an Opera House. That's the amazing force of making music

together. The last highlight I remember are the recording of the lead vocals Inez Timmer, a Dutch singer/performer, delivered for the album. Her emotional interpretation of 'Nightingale' and 'Dream Child' was outstanding." The last live show that the band performed was in the St. Piter Church in Grou, back in June 2023. "This show was special, because we invited a lot of guest musicians to play with us on this gig. A total of nine guests contributed to this live show, including Eric Vloeimans, who I mentioned before. The show comprised only new songs from our new album. Because of the acoustics of the church we organised a silent disco performance, where every attendant was equipped with a personal headphone to listen to a balanced mix of the music, without the distortion and noise of the church. The whole concert was recorded on video to support the release of our new album. As we speak, we're busy with the mixing of the video footage and we hope the movie will be finished within a month. For now there are no further live shows on our agenda. We have to decide in which way we could prepare a future live show. The content of our new album make great demands on how we can manage a good live performance, especially in regard of the complexity of arrangements on our new album," enthuses Peter. The band by and large are all very curious about the reviews they will get for the new album. "Reviews in music magazines, in the papers, so forth. And airplay on radio stations will be important for us. Of course we aim for TV attendance, but the future will tell. We are also

targeting to gain attention for the album through social media. It will all become clear in the last part of 2023. I think that the result of this all will have impact on our future plans of making and recording music together as I SPY," concludes Harry, bringing an end to our conversation. 'While The War Began' is out now as a double vinyl album (2 LP) in a gate-folded sleeve, with an inlay sheet for the lyrics and the credits. It's also released as a double CD, and from all the usual digital platforms.

**Web and Social Media**

**Links:**

[www.ispyband.nl](http://www.ispyband.nl)

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