

# Stephen Schmitt

## *Modern Explorations in Pagan Rock*

LP / Digital – Early 2026 Release



**Stephen Schmitt**, guitarist for Seattle avant-rock titans **Diminished Men**, releases ***Modern Explorations In Pagan Rock***—the strangest imaginary soundtrack to an unimaginable film. For two decades, Schmitt has been one of Seattle's most distinctive guitarists and composers. His sinuous, left-handed riffs and strange melodies have helped define the long-running trio **Diminished Men**, who've reigned among the Pacific Northwest's most adventurous rock groups since 2004. Now Schmitt presents his first proper solo album, ***Modern Explorations In Pagan Rock***, a kaleidoscopic work that expands upon the subterranean eclecticism of his main band.

Using Moog and Prophet synths, bass, percussion, and toy drums, in addition to guitar, Schmitt has sculpted a tenebrous, suspenseful score to a movie that's far too esoteric and eldritch to be playing in a theater near you. Even when channeling the flamboyant funkiness of blaxploitation-flick soundtracks, Schmitt and his talented cohorts maintain a layer of strange intrigue. He loves this genre because “it expresses something totally different from my experience. It's authentic in its expression of the plight of the musicians. It has fantastic orchestration and use of voices and multiple vocal harmonies and loads of studio and spring reverb. It makes you move when you hear it.”

Recording for *Modern Explorations* began slightly before the pandemic, with Schmitt doing all the instrumentation at his home studio. Solo sessions involving classical guitar and a Moog synthesizer evolved into pieces that hinted at a phantasmagorical soundtrack formed from memories of horror films watched in his youth. Schmitt then booked multiple days with some of Seattle's most adventurous musicians, starting with drummer Dave Abramson, who's also played with Secret Chiefs 3, Master Musicians Of Bukkake, and Eyvind Kang. They fleshed out the sketches of these songs with saxophone by Skerik (Roger Waters, Les Claypool) and Neil Welch (Wally Shoup, Bad Luck, Chris Icasiano), violin and viola by Alex Guy (Angel Olsen), piano by Paul Moore (Tucker Martine, Tim Young), cello and bass by Keith Lowe (Harold Budd, Bill Frisell), and Sun City Girls legend Alan Bishop, who spits hilariously absurd freestyle verses about Hollywood's dark underbelly and dietary habits on the spectral and sprightly bop song “Dieta Delle Streghe: Darkness In The Valley” (recorded at Studio Kubbara in Egypt).

More out-jazz moves animate “Toy Ominous,” featuring Ornette-like sax skronk by Skerik, augmenting the song's menacing drones and horror-film atmospheres. “Atlantic Casualty” is a majestic orchestral composition bolstered by Guy's violin and viola, with stealthy jazz undertones. “Impromptu Argento” comes off like a baroque giallo soundtrack, its eeriness and turbulence curdling blood in the vein of the best Goblin material. On “Charlie Don't Surf,” Schmitt's irradiated Prophet 08 and Moog Matriarch drones offer timbral chiaroscuro to an invigorating dirge. “Black Forest” is a pensive march through a dark, arboreal realm, with Schmitt's guitar emitting glistening beauty. With Dave Abramson on drums and Keith Lowe on bass, “Lord Of Misrule” ends the album on an enigmatic, ambiguous note, as Schmitt's prickly guitar and astringent toy violin contrast with abyssal synth drones. – Dave Segal

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