

***Weirdos and freaks,
scientists and philosophers,
libertines and mavericks of metal music!***

It's time for the second issue of our Avant-garde Metal Magazine. Much has happened since the first issue. Three new writers have joined our crew: mang tsze from the underground, C. L. Edwards from California and Martin Cermak from the Czech Republic who also writes for the Spark mag. (the leading Czech/Slovak hard & heavy magazine), the more alternative side project Spike mag and the sci-fi & fantasy mag Ikarie. A fine selection of his interviews with some of the most sparkling brains of the scene can be read here.

Another change has happened. Since mommy and daddy of agm.com have moved to another city and are without internet for quite a time, aVoid and Bernd are taking care of the weekly updates now. We are very proud that they are doing this so well in close, engaged and amical symbiosis with our great team. We'd like to thank each single one of you for keeping the spirit up so well!

We hope you'll enjoy travelling through this mag. Your thoughts, comments and suggestions are always warmly welcome in our forum "The Freak Zone" or per email. We thank you for reading –

Always stay avantgarde!

*Katja & Chrystof
4th of May 2008*



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MARKUS STOCK (EMPYRIUM, TVB, NOEKK,...)

Der Knabe Im Moor

By Ulv

To the reader: while preparing for this interview I kept in mind the fact I worried more about other interviews- sometimes they were to plastic and emphasized only some lines of ones personality or rather repeated some facts all over again. I decided to execute the interview in a more natural form, closer to a real dialogue, rather than following the question-answer-question-answer cliché. It seems that it went down that road, but it's for you to judge. Thank you for understanding my attempt.



Markus Stock, a figure known for a number of bands linked to nature and Prophecy Productions, somehow ended up, while touring with his band THE VISION BLEAK as a backup for Therion, in my country's capital Zagreb. The day was quite rainy, the grey clouds were hanging low in the sky, not letting the dusk penetrate them and grant us one of the last colored sunsets before the "wintry grey". As my train, a great accomplishment of civilization, was rolling towards the capital, I was looking at the overgrown flatland, flooded with water and wrapped into a slight veil of mist that usually covers the area at dusk. The crows were sitting on their branches not minding the "civilized" noise of the train. I received a message on my cell-phone: "It seems that we will be having dinner from 17-18. So could we do the interview after the performance?". It was from Markus.

Everything would have been fine if I didn't have some exams the next day. We managed to compromise around the subject, so the interview was due to at 18 o'clock. In order to apologize for disturbing the man's plans, I bought him a black wine, frankly I don't remember which.

We met a few minutes before 6 at the venue. We decided to do the interview there instead of the bus, I don't like "small" spaces. We sat down and I offered him the wine, which he thankfully accepted. Instead of the "god nectar" we cracked open two beers, Slovenian beers and started.

"So, I've seen you on Wacken this year", I started, "and it was quite weird for me, because you really or never preformed with EMPYRIUM..." "Never actually", he interrupted. "Ok, so it was a "surprise" to see you on tour now. Is it just because EMPYRIUM's music is more individual, and THE VISION BLEAK is more "moving" or...", I continued. "Exactly", he went on, "THE VISION BLEAK's music works on stage and it works with a normal band, as with EMPYRIUM you have to get the music properly, and you need a lot of musicians to perform it properly. I've always thought of doing an EMPYRIUM gig, but the thing is I wanted to have all the things right, real string, real mellotron, all the things we've used for the record, but it has always been an issue of time and the right setting, because we couldn't afford investing like 15 000 € for one gig...", "It's too much, it wouldn't pay off", "Yeah that's right, haha!". "How Old were you anyway when you started EMPYRIUM? I mean, you seem quite young in the "Wintersunset" booklet." "Yeah, I was 17 then, I guess when we recorded the demo I was just 16. I'm 29 now." "And have you had any bands before you started with EMPYRIUM?" "Yeah, but it was the usual in the garage stuff..." "The highschool thing ;)" "Well, we actually played black metal, or some sort of BM, like a mixture of Samael and slower Darkthrone...no one was able to play drums so fast." "Yeah, the blasts....and have you learned to play drums yourself, or?" "No, no, drums are the only instrument I was taught, the only one I took lessons in...But it was more in the orchestral

style, only snare drums, and then I quit because I wanted to play Iron Maiden and stuff like that." "Haha, now that you've mentioned Iron Maiden, what do you listen usually?!"

Most people seem to think that musicians like Markus adore exclusively melancholic music, wouldn't it be a surprise for some to see what music actually formed this artist, where do all THE VISION BLEAK's thrashy riffs come from?!

"Well among a lot of stuff I like Iron Maiden, they're one of my favorite bands, and Metallica and Slayer, because that's the stuff I've grown up with. I also really enjoy the Norwegian black metal stuff, the early stuff..and yeah, speaking of avant-garde metal, stuff like Arcturus and Ulver, one of my all time favs. as well...". I was waiting for the last one. "Yeah, because somehow I've got the idea that you've got a bit of influence..." "Definitely...", "...especially on "Where at night...", "Definitely, I was a very big fan of Ulver back then, because I admired the thing that they did everything in full consequence; you know; first they did the "Kvledssanger" album, only acoustic which was very unusual at that time, and then they did "Nattens Madrigal which was very ferocious and raw, and that was what I really admired about them. That's what I wanted to do with Empyrium too. If you really want to be consequent in doing atmospherical music and if you really want to do it right, if you don't want it to suffer from electric guitars - I thought it was a really good idea." "And speaking about your influences, I remember SUN OF THE SLEEPLESS, a great band of yours. You did a Burzum cover (Dunkelheit) and a reinterpretation of Darkthrone's "En As i Dype Skogen"..."

"Yes, yes right, those were probably my two favorite BM-bands, a big inspiration, especially "Transylvanian Hunger". It's still one of my favorite albums. I mean I really listen to it, because it's not an album for every day, but once in a while I really get in the mood for listening to it. It has such a unique atmosphere, no other black metal album has ever captured such an atmosphere like Dark did

on that album...." "But, what would you like to listen to on a day like this; rainy, cloudy...does the day influence what you listen to, because it sometimes works for me..." "Yeah, well, usually for days like this, and when I'm away from home (I'm always a little homesick), and my wife is pregnant"..."Congratulations", I interrupted him. Here is another good reason for my wine, I thought, "...so on days like this I listen to music like Dead can Dance, calming and beautiful music...", "And you covered them (with Noekk)", I remembered, "Yeah, also one of my favorite bands", he concluded.

"Anyway, when you reinterpreted Darkthrone, you used a drum machine, I mean, an electronic beat, quite an unusual idea for covering DT...", I started "Well, it was actually a beat I played myself, then I slowed it down so I got that strange sound with a lot of reverb on it and then looped it..." "Yeah", I was starting to get a bit enthusiastic, " because, almost all of the beats I've listened to tend to be moving, and this one is...", I was trying to find the word, "moody?"



"Yeah, yeah, precisely, when I started doing the cover version, I really wanted to totally concentrate on the atmosphere of that particular song. I started with that beat and I thought it really works well. Because, as you said, it was very atmospheric, it was a good foundation for that track..." "And "Spring 99"...why that title?!", it could be obvious, but I had to inquire. "Because..ha-ha... I didn't have a title for the song, and I composed in spring of '99, very obvious one!", he laughed. "Yeah...", really obvious, "well, I remember that year as one of the last normal ones, with a normal spring, summer, winter, not this global warming shit...and concerning TVB, how did you come to the idea to start with that?" "Well it was because I know EMPYRIUM was pretty much...not dead,

but I wanted to quit with it after doing the "Weiland" album...and I always wanted to come back to playing guitars, electric guitars, getting a bit more energy..." "The new TVB album seems a bit thrashy..." "Yeah, definitely, you know that's what we've been listening to in our youth, the oldschool thrash...like everybody used to listen to Testament, Slayer, Metallica and so on. In a certain period of my life, when I was around thirteen 'till sixteen I listened a lot to such music, I never did music myself that wasn't at least a little bit like that and sooner or later it wants to get out of you. That's how TVB started although it wasn't so thrashy from the beginning. The horror thing I planned to even do with SOTS back den, I even had the idea of doing a maybe a more trip-hop based stuff."



"That's a great idea, because I personally like the trip-hop stuff you did for SOTS, like "Neunter November" for example..." "That thing..", he started enthusiastically, "...is one of the best things I have ever done for Sun of the Sleepless. But most people don't care about it. I think that song is pitch dark, maybe it's too simple for some, I don't know..." "Did you record the "by gods will, let churches burn" sample yourself or?!" "No, it's actually from Transylvanian Hunger. On the second last song there is a backwards thing going on at the end, so I took that and turned it back- there it was...and a funny thing about that song is...well the song speaks of terror, because the ninth of November is the Kristallnacht in Germany. And I've always been terribly frightened of terror of any form..so the funny thing is that I first wanted to name the song 9.11. (9/11), that's almost prophetic, isn't it?!" "9/11 (the ninth of September) is actually my birth date...", I had to add this, I always do! Now came the time to ask the question that interested me the most. "Is SUN OF THE SLEEPLESS dead, or...?". I grew a great fascination towards that band, I was even a bit unwilling to know the real answer at that moment....

"I've always had at the back of my mind", he uses his right arm to gesture the location, "... that I would like to do it again one day sooner or later. But you know now for me TVB is the top priority. I want to put all the ideas in that band now. But if we say we'd have a break for a year or two then I would maybe have time to do a new SUN OF THE SLEEPLESS record."

He lights up a cigarette...Maybe I was surprised by the action, but suddenly I remembered a photo of him from the mid nineties holding a cigarette...it wasn't a real surprise, but again some people keep forgetting that the persons behind all the god-like music are just like us, so does it mater if the man

smokes, or does it matter if Therion are eating somewhere behind my back?! You people should get rid of your illusions...

A funny thing is that SOTS did a split with NACHTMAHR, another band of yours...", this was interrupted by laughs, "...only with Helm this time, right?" "Yes, Helm is writing all the music and I'm just playing on it and making arrangements, so it's not really like it's the same band you know." "I like both bands, in my eyes they're quite similar, only that SUNOF THE SLEEPLESS has a more hmmm...blurry sound, and NACHTMAHR is more intense and raw..." "I think NACHTMAHR is a lot more... yeah, raw than SOTS, but also not as obviously atmospheric...", "yeah never mind the clean guitar parts", I finished.

Quite a lot of similarities with Markus' projects I found in the poetry of Georg Trakl, when I first discovered his writings a year ago. I managed to get my hands on a collection of his works in German. So I had the best possible basis to compare the lyrics and the poetry, as the expressionist motives of fear and being lost are quite often in Markus' poetry as well. Although not copying his texts or even his style certain poetic images evoke similar atmosphere and pictures,

for example "the blue mist of the night" and Trakl's nocturnal poetry. Lyrics are one of the important elements for music like the one Markus creates. So I felt this topic around which thousands artists bled and devoted their life's to achieve pure perfection, must not be discarded. Imagine the world without decent poets: no one is there to intensify your feelings during a sunset, or a tempest, no one to describe your anger, your fears....except you are a poet yourself. But...what does it mean...being a poet?



"And I see you like Georg Trakl", this was the first time I managed to start a conversation with someone about Trakl (save our webmaster Chrystof). I knew Markus liked Trakl, but I wanted to know more about his connection with him... "Oh, yes! One of the most talented German writers ever, but very underrated..." "I like him...when I was in Vienna this summer I bought a collection of his writings. So when I started to read I noticed a lot of similarities...even a thing that may be a coincidence...", I really don't think Markus wouldn't go copying poets as some artist shamelessly tend to do"... a line in his poem "Die Sonne", begins with "Schoen ist der Wald"..." "Yeah well, sometimes it's funny because I read a lot of poetry when I want to relax. So it's sometimes hidden in the back of your mind, so you don't even recognize it. Then two years after you read it again and think "shit, I used it in my lyric"..." "Well yeah, German is a language in which some things and constructions may sound very similar, I know it from my school writings...", and really the 4 words have nothing to do with "Die Sonne", as the images and the atmosphere are completely different, like day and night! "And you "covered", let say, Trakl's "Romanze zur Nacht"... for SUN OF THE SLEEPLESS..." "Yes, yes, that's one of my favorite poems by Trakl, ever. Do you understand every word

written..("no..").. because he uses a very unusual German. There is one line that is so brilliant in that poem. For me that poem has focus on the bad things of humanity and how he was disappointed, because it's praise for the pureness of the child, against all the wrong with man..." "And what is the line you like so much in that poem?" "It's the:

*Sehr friedlich schaut zur Nacht das Kind
Mit Augen, die ganz wahrhaft sind ..."*

"Yeah, I think you even sang it twice! I just asked myself the question today why did you sing it twice, now I know. I've always thought you might be influenced by such poets, like maybe Rilke and..." "Well, not him very much. He has also great stuff, but I've always really enjoyed, it's obvious, Goethe. I mean, he could write a poem with, I don't know, four lines and it would be much better than the ones whose writing goes on for ages." "While talking about poets, you used the poem "Der Knabe im Moor" in the "Songs of Moors.." booklet...". It's another very picturesque poem, a ballad, I recommend you to read it, especially if you know German. "It's another funny thing, because in the region I've been born in and raised we have this landscape district called the black moor, up in the highlands, and when I was there for the first time I was blown away by the beauty of it. There were signs explaining how the wildlife in the moor functions, and on one of them there was this poem written on it. I read it there for the first time and it was just brilliant."

"It's a strong impression to read something like that on the very place..." "Yeah because it totally brings the mood of the moorland: the boy getting lost, it's like a nightmare, and if you still perceive things like a child it's a very strong impression." "And concerning getting lost, "Waldpoesie" is also about it..." "Yes, and "heimwaerts" too, I seem to be very afraid of getting lost." "What happened to me once is that I was in a forest at night, and I suddenly saw this creature from Slavic mythology (a Lesnik) I read about a few weeks before. I had been laughing then, how could people be afraid of such a small treelike crea-

ture...", I lifted my hand a meter, above the floor, gesturing the word "such" to show the height of that creature "...but when you find yourself in that forest it's all different, and frightening...I mean...he was following me!"

"I had a very similar experience once...half a year ago I had drunk a little bit and decided to go into the forest. It's directly there where I live, and I went some five hundred meters in, and suddenly something was in front of me. It had some eyes, it could have been a boar or a deer or whatever. But I was so scared, and then I noticed, because it was so dark, that your mind is playing tricks on you...and that is maybe one of the strongest emotions that you can experience."



*It is now known that not only the beautiful and slender, but also the ugly is a great inspiration to arts. The fear of getting lost and being overwhelmed by nature is one of man's ancient, primal fears. Some have lost that notion, thus it leads us to ruin nature, and by ruining nature one runs himself. How can someone not feel fear and respect towards nature when he experiences such a failure of human senses and instincts in a forest at night...o pity man, go crawl into a hole! I continue the **conversation with Markus Stock** after only a few seconds of silence, which lasted a week for most of you"*

"Have you ever wanted to live in another period of history?!" "I'm really two-minded, because I really enjoy technology. I have an iPhone, two laptops, so I'm very much into technology. But I think it would be very interesting to live in a time when there was no industry and such technology, no matter when, just to experience for a few days, this life where you can't go to the supermarket and buy meat, but you have to go to the forest and pick mushrooms..." "...and hunt your meat.." "yeah, hunt, or whatever" "Do you eat meat" "Yeah, I eat meat. I love animals, I really love animals." "Yeah me too, I always sign all

the petitions and stuff but..." "Are you vegetarian?", he asked me

"No, no I'm not" "I never buy meat in the supermarket when it's all packed and so, I go to a butcher and I buy my meat there!" "Yeah, once when I was in Norway my friend bought some heavily spiced meat in the supermarket, and later on it was not the best for my guts, if you know what I mean ;)...and do you travel a lot when not touring?!" "No, to

be honest, I'm very homesick, tied to the place where my family and wife are. Always when we go on tour, I mean, I really enjoy playing live but hanging around no-

where the whole day- you think you could be as well home with your wife and have a nice day. I only travel to places where I am safe. I'm not the adventurous guy, who goes to I don't know Afghanistan, or whatever, I only go to Austria to hike in the mountains twice a year. I don't need to go to foreign places." "Yeah well, I personally love traveling. For example I love to go to Prague, but being in the streets there at night is sometimes dangerous...and then again, Berlin seems quite a safe town!

"Well depends on the part of the city, in Kreuzberg, for example, you shouldn't be in the wrong streets at night!" Kreuzberg- the first association were the Turkish people living there. "And what do you think of NS black metal?!" "That's so stupid, that I can't comment it.." "I think you can't combine something like BM with politics..." "That's the first reason, and then the whole NS idea is dumb. Even combining politics with music is a dumb idea. I think music should be for your soul and not for the rational part of your mind" "And when you listen to some music, is it important for you who makes it!" "No, no, it's one thing I emphasized a lot of times in interviews. That's why I have the artist name, to make difference between my person and

the art. And I don't care, because Lovecraft for example is said to have been a racist but it doesn't change his writ-



ings..." "Burzum also...." "Precisely...a lot of people have been associated with stuff I don't understand!"

"Even Guenther Grass was in Hitlerjugend..." "Yeah, he confessed it a couple of years ago." "And was it on Transylvanian Hunger the..." "Yes, the "Norsk Arisk Svart Metal" ..." "Do you speak Norwegian?" "Well only from translating the lyrics back then. I know a couple of words." "Oh, and by the way have you walked through Zagreb?!" "We walked a little bit around today, but I think the center's a bit too far", he motioned with his hand to his right.. "The centre is actually there", I motioned to his left. "That was our mistake because we went there...we walked for like three or four hours, then we went to a big thing in the underground..it was called something like "Center Importante" or.." "Aaaah, "Importane Center", that's a shopping mall"...laughs..."the centre is just above it!" "But we've seen some quite nice buildings while walking...." "OK, I don't know that part very well...but then tomorrow you're going to Belgrade which is said to be a nice city.." "Hmm..well I'm a bit nervous because of the political thing happening right now (the Kosovo issue)..maybe I'm just a bit paranoid" "Well concerning where Kosovo is, nothing could happen in Belgrade on such a short notice. But even I am afraid of another war happening. I remember the last time so....then I think of bands mentioning war, the glory of war in their songs..." "It's a stupid idea, because if war was going on they would shut up

and run away. I think I have a very good sense of humor, but there are things that are not funny at all. And they are not very inspirational. I can find no inspiration in war." "War is another manifestation of human stupidity", this was quite cheesy of me. "Definitely, yeah". "Are you religious", I wondered. "In a way I am.....but sometimes I'm very two minded...sometimes I have moments...hmm...I've been raised Catholic...and sometimes when that comes out..my heart says it's right, but my mind says it's wrong." "I personally think religion is a very ticklish subject, if you understand", I always discuss this topic with people, "...the idea is OK,..". "Yeah, in some religions gods are some..parts of nature", he continued. "Like certain manifestations of nature, yes..." "But the idea of one god sitting and...well, for example the thing we do with THE VISION BLEAK, when we sing about Kathulu, is even a bit of a religious thing...we don't believe in that being, but it's an archetype for evil...what most people think is evil is not really evil, I think there is definitely some negative energy inside our brains" "Yeah, because I personally think that nature doesn't know evil, because when a wolf eats a lamb (simply said) you cannot perceive it as evil, but only a part of the natural cycle.

Humanity seems to have invented evil as a result of its over-selfishness." "The bad thing about it is what the catholic religion sees as evil is mostly not evil..." "It's actually more like hedonism", I bumped in... "It's something I'm particularly.." "What's good for your body is good for your soul!" "What did you study...I mean...what kind of education do you have?" "That's a good question, because I went to a lot of schools. In my youth I was a very wild character. I even went from home for a couple of days and shit like that. I didn't study much. I wanted to do my Abitur (German for graduation), but I didn't do that, I quit it. I went to four different schools but I've been kicked out. I have the, what we call "Mittlere Reife". It's when you have 10 grades of school, it's the second level of school, but I didn't finish it for my Abi-

tur." "So you finished the school, but you didn't get the Abitur?" "That's correct." "How did you start your own studio anyway?" "It's totally connected with the money I got from the EMPYRIUM records. They sold good back in that days, and from the money I always bought equipment. I never bought anything that didn't have to do with the band. When I finished school I just wanted to do my mother a favor and start earning my own money. So I got a job, but after half a year I realized that was not for me. Then I had all this equipment at home where I recorded my friend's demos and stuff so I thought to try out how a studio would work." "Yeah I have a quite long list of bands you worked with here, and looking at it I remember the fact that most people name you as one of the best German producers..." "Maybe not the best, but one of the biggest..." "Yeah, because this list is quite long...and what about your connection with Prophecy Productions?! They released the first EMPYRIUM album."



"Martin wanted to start the label back then. I didn't know him before, but he wrote me that he wanted to start it, and he really wanted to release it. Nowadays Martin is a very good friend of mine.." "They have some really great bands: all of your bands, then Tenhi, Elend..." "And Arcturus...", he bumped in, "even if it was the worst album they did." "Sham Mirrors, isn't it? What about the new one?" "Ok that one and The Sham Mirrors I don't like....I rather prefer TSM to

the new one, because Garm sings on it." "My favorite one is "La Masquerade Infernale"..maybe one of my favorite albums of all time (no offence ha-ha)" "Yeah, well not my favorite, but it is among my top ten definitely." "I also love "Written in Waters" by Ved Buens Ende" "It's a great record as well, it's very, very avant-garde with their weird harmonies...", "It's very dissonant", I jumped in, "...yeah, when you listen to it for the first time it's very surprising."

At this point we started talking about musical talent, mostly me talking to be as talented for music as a frog.

"I read an interview on your site where a guy asked you why you enjoyed melancholy so much, and you replied "Why do you like Hamburgers so much?" I think it was a great comparison....it seems that quite a lot of persons imagine bands like EMPYRIUM or ULVER sitting in a forest and I don't know, writing music or whatever." "It's a question I can't answer,

why I like such music, atmospheric and melancholic...I don't know, it just attracts me...maybe because you must have a very sane mind, if you understand...you can go to a mental hospital where you would expect they sing sad songs and such, but they're singing "Hallelujah" and fun stuff. But if your a sane mind it's more normal to find a good balance between such feelings. I have a very good sense of humor. I like to enjoy, but I have to find a balance within myself. I think it's good to allow yourself to have those "negative" emotions. Melancholy is

a very inspiring mood...", "Yes, it's true, I tend to write a lot then, but later it turns out like shit to me...", I snapped in, being yet again a bit frustrated by that fact. "But such things happen to me as well... I awake when I can't sleep at night and then I have a great line in my head. It seems like the best thing I've ever written. Then I wake up and read it, but it seems like shit then." "I'm never satisfied with my writings, and I write quite a lot. Even when some people say

my reviews are good I'm still not satisfied...maybe it's a problem with me....so you mentioned before you are a fun person..." "Yeah, well, but when I'm away from home I can be very moody, from the whole band I'm the most *makes a very sad and disappointed face*, but when I'm home I'm quite a cheerful person!" "So do you like some funny music like..." "No, no, I don't like fun music..maybe if I'd drink one bottle of Vodka I might enjoy it..." "Yeah bands like Municipal Waste and such, they're fun to watch, but I could never listen to it to relax or something..." "It's fun, then you drink beer and laugh about it..that's cool, but at home I would never go and put on Onkel Tom or whatever...", a few seconds of laughter.



The conversation here went a bit astray for a minute or two while talking about two sides of one personality liking fun stuff and being inspired by melancholy at the same time.

"For a musician, for an artist the most important thing is that you have to save the mood for sometime later, and then just rebuild it..." "Yeah, because you don't go out to the forest dragging a piano or whatever.." "Exactly, that's why you have to capture those moods for later!" "Maybe that's why I like photography...but it's very hard sometimes to capture the right picture and the right mood...if you want someone to feel that atmosphere you should bring him there and show it to him." "Yes but, I took Stefan, who wrote the biography for the "A Retrospective", to the black moor and I've shown him all the things that inspired me, and when he was there I had the impression he was very overwhelmed. In my world it's just the most beautiful place...and it depends how

you've seen it for the first time. For example I've been to Italy, in the mountain area, with my parents when I was a little child and back it was dead boring then. Two years ago I drove there with my wife and realized that I have a lot of beautiful memories and pictures of that place, and I was totally overwhelmed then." "And why did you choose to recreate "Fraconian woods in wintersilence" for the retrospective album?" "Because I think it's the prototype of a perfect EMPYRIUM song...back then it wasn't perfect, even now it isn't perfect. It was the prototype of all that we did later."

"It's a great song...its lyrics are one of my personal EMPYRIUM favorites!" "So, very simple..." "Yes very simple, but again...like Trakl, he has a relatively simple style, but the impression is so strong." "Not much words, but everything's brought so precisely to the point" "How much time do we have left?" "Hmmm, maybe some ten minutes or so...is it OK with you?" "Oh, no problem...you have a concert to do." "Yeah, we have to do the soundcheck now. When I hear the first sounds I'll go down..." "What about Thomas Helm! Where did you get to know him?!" "Funny story again - at the place where I tried to work! So we talked there, we loved the same stuff and from there it went on..." "And why are the songs on the last NOEKK albums so ...polarized?! I mean, some parts are very silent, and some are loud." "We wanted to make a big contrast...just like it would be in a more natural context, just as if someone played a piano and sung and then a rock band started playing - there would be a huge difference in volume. And we didn't want people to listen to it in the car!" "Hahaa, why?" "It's not driving music or whatever...."

"And you've been a guest for SECRETS OF THE MOON on their "The Exhibitions" EP, on the "Under a Funereal Moon" cover..." "They finished the cover version and they asked me if I wanted to sing on it. I just said "yes". I already knew the lyrics by heart so it wasn't a problem." "Do you like romantic arts, paintings?" "Of course, there is the Norwegian artist Theodor Kittelsen, then the German painter Caspar David Friedrich..." "And on the contrary what do you think about

modern art?" "Well, I really can't understand it. Maybe there are people who really understand a blue dot on a white wall..." "Well I think it doesn't need to have any meaning. Everyone in the world wants to find a meaning for something, even if it's very simple...just like when I asked you where the title for "Spring '99" came from!" Tobias Schoenemann suddenly pops in and speak to Markus....I don't want to transcribe the stuff about the soundcheck. "Where did you meet him?", I was just curious. "I met him back in '99 when he was recording with his previous band Nox Mortis in my studio. The first thing I thought was "Wow, what a brilliant drummer he is"...now he's my best friend." "So it's time to end now..." "Yeah, if it's OK with you..." "Ok, let me do a corny conclusion then....back to Trak! Are you a hunter or a shepherd (From Trakl's "Die Sonne" :

"Der Mensch- Jaeger oder Hirt")?

"It depends what mood I'm in. I'm the hunter when I'm in some kind of moods..when I feel...hmm.." "When you're on the stage?" "Yes, precisely... then I'm more the shepherd when I'm yearning for tranquility." "Ok, I think this was all I think....thnx very much!!!" "Thank you for the interview!" The chit-chat goes on for a minute or two, while taking photos and having a few laughs.. Having done the interview I started walking to the train station, thinking of going home and start writing down the conversation. It was nighttime, but no stars were to be seen on the sky above Zagreb.

Some rain was dripping very slowly, and the sky was of a sick grey-yellow color, the hue of rain and the dim city lights. Then I remembered a question I forgot to ask him, not one of big importance, but never mind...I took out my cellphone and started typing: "What do you think about the new Darkthrone albums?" The reply came a few minutes afterwards, just when I was passing through the mentioned "Importane Center" to get to the train station. "I don't care about them at all", he wrote.

I came back to the surface...
the sick sky
stopped raining.

*Noch mal bin ich einsam
unter dem sterbenden Himmel.....*



AGHORA

*The Acoustic Release
Of Energy Cultivation*

By Trident

My very first interview for ag-m.com and hopefully the first in a long series of interesting stories for you, our reader, to read. There is no beating around the bush with Santiago Dobles, mastermind behind Florida-based prog genius Aghora whose albums I reviewed a couple of weeks ago. Learn about the way of the monk, how to cultivate your body energy flow and what he thinks of the fans that thought Aghora was supposed to be a Cynic clone.



A look on a list of free time activities of the regular metal guitar player doesn't always reveal things like yoga, qi gong, pencak silat and the many other things you do. To what extent do they help you in the creative process? And how did you come in touch with the music?

Well I have always, since little, believed in the way of a monk. So I always wanted to learn a good martial art, internal energy work (meditation, yoga/qi gong, tenaga dalam, healing) and then music of course. I do a little of everything daily, but I will have one that I do a lot throughout the day or for whatever

time frame I am focusing on to get better. Energy work is the base of everything; for me without energy there is NOTHING, and you need it to learn, grow, heal improve - no matter what you do in life.

In which ways is music a very important element in the way of the monk?

All shaolin/buddhist or taoist monks train the Yang and the Yin. Music and playing an instrument falls under learning the Yin side of art.

Do you think that a fan in the crowd can access the same level of spiritual ecstasy and ascension as the musicians on stage or the practitioner of any sort of meditation by just going completely crazy on the music. Is the enjoyment of music just as much a spiritual art as the making?

I think the listener will get as well. Everyone will use Aghora and its music to uplift them somehow whether it be on their quests as a musician or to help to express better their personal art or path. Aghora is the catalyst to make others better no matter what they do. I think the music attracts a certain type of person. Usually it's someone involved in the arts or likes to think. It is music that stimulates on a deep mental and emotional primal level.

How and when did you discover your affinity for oriental philosophy and the physical/mental exercises connected to it?

Sixteen, after reading Siddhartha.

A post in your forum revealed to me that you are familiar with the work of Dr. Masaru Emoto who has conducted some interesting experiments on water. The water that received a blessing from a Zen Master i.e. consisted of nice and regular looking water crystals. The water submitted to rock and metal music however took a shape that wouldn't cause a positive reaction with most people. I was wondering what you thought about the overall effect

metal music has on the body and soul of a regular person, taking into account that we consist to 70% of water.

Well it all depends on the INTENT or energy behind something. A real master can make a piece of shit something beautiful. It's all about integration, sublimation, and transmutation...ALCHEMY. When I play live I am pumping the room with reiki and chi as I perform. I do the same thing when I train or teach martial arts, or qi gong or guitar lesson.

Is the reiki and the chi you pump into your surrounding during your performance something that can be caught on a recording and redistributed in a completely different place on earth?

Chi = Bio energy

Reiki = is also energy but a focused energy for healing. It means universal life force.

Both are one in the same, but you can have many different types of energy. Yes it has been proven in China that CHI projected from a practitioners hand is a sub harmonic frequency roughly about 14 - 16 hz sometimes even MUCH lower. Energy is vibration or subtle movement of air molecules and light. So even though you would not "hear" it with human ears it is still being caught on tape or video. Energy can permeate time and space in a flash of a moment. I have done reiki on people all over the world from my bedroom and they have noticed and stated that their ailments and troubles seem to fade away. So yes energy can be recorded, stored and used for a later date anywhere on earth. When I do reiki daily I send energy to the Earth's core, to friends and family, to various folks who are in need (on a global scale), people in power to help influence their choices so they will hopefully make choices for the greater good. The cleaner and more energized our fish tank is the longer we will all live.

When will your European fans be submitted to a reiki and chi induced performance?

As soon as our promoter and booking agent makes it happen. We are working on it.

Do you find it hard to focus your mind and ease the temper with the present political situation in your country? ;-)

HAHA My answer is... My reiki and chi permeates the walls and hallways of those that are in control on a daily basis. So hopefully it might one day make someone change for the better. I have a big list of people in power that I send healing daily. So they are reminded to do better for Mother Earth and humanity. Eventually Karma will catch up with the assholes in charge that fuck things up for the good folks who work hard every day.

Unless it is a secret to your recording you do not wish to reveal: are there actual techniques with which you can truly summon and transfer energy to the listener?

Yes of course. Your mind is a very powerful thing. It can permeate anything, it can be in to places at once (your brain and body can't, but YOUR MIND and IMAGINATION CAN!). What you believe and have foundation in will ultimately manifest in the real time or real world. The first most basic method of energizing something is as follows:

You focus on your crown chakra (**note from writer: situated at your head**) as you inhale with the belly, hold the breath slightly as you form and intent as to where you want that cosmic/divine universal energy to go. Then put your palm out and imagine the target (person, place or thing) you would like to send the energy to. Now it's like anything else: the more you do it the more you get better at it.

This is the basic premise of reiki and other forms of Qi Gong Healing. Instead of using your own energy that will deplete your energy structure you draw from the universe and its abundance. As you get better you learn to cultivate more energy for your self and for healing others. Then you also learn to draw specific energies from



the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, void), the earth, cosmic powers (Planetary Logos, Deities, etc.) to work at a finer level. One experiment to do is the simple water one: Take two glasses of water from the tap or faucet. Taste them both. Then give only one of the glasses of water energy from your crown center as I showed before for 10 min straight asking the universe to bless, enhance, sweeten and turn the water in one of the glasses into an elixir (make sure you do long deep breathing). After the 10 minutes taste both waters, see and feel the difference. With more and more practice you will be amazed at what you can do and as you cultivate more the universe and higher forces that are begin to work more through you. When I play guitar I project energy from my fingers and guitar with each breath. I draw from the raw healing cosmic energies that inspire me and I pump them out through me.

There are more specific ways but just the technique above alone can really make things happen. The most important thing is to learn to develop your dainties and to improve your energy cultivation.

Personally I think there is a growing stalemate in "mainstream" metal and was wondering if that is because the material sources of inspiration reach depletion. Do you believe that the general quality of creative output would improve if more musicians spent time on their body energy flow?

Absolutely. If we flow like the universe we find that we have abundance and never run out. However I notice that the people in power and decision makers want to make sure the individual does not have such power. Not even in their art etc. Most bands and musicians are asleep, they are not aware of what or who is making their music.

Occasionally a band will come around that taps into a real source of power and all of a sudden they create a movement. Take Tool for example. They know EXACTLY how to channel such power. Energy is neutral it is the intent that makes it good or bad etc.

To what extent does the rest of the band share your lifestyle or the exercises you do?

Giann (**drums**) is hardcore into his physical training. He trains his body hard by running and body weight exercises. I have taught him the basics of Reiki, and qi gong energy circulations. He has noticed a huge improvement of involving his energy work into his drumming and performance. It really changes things when you add mind intent and juice (chi) to whatever you are doing. Diana (**vocals**) and Alan (**bass**) are always asking me to do reiki on them cause it really relieves physical pains, and disturbances of energy etc. They cultivate their instrument. That in itself is a spiritual art.

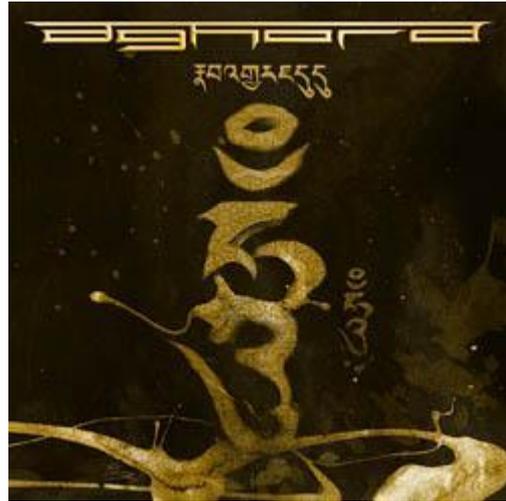


To my ears, "Aghora" sounded a little more progressive than the follow up. The songs on "Formless" have a stronger live edge. Would you agree with that statement? If yes, was it a natural process and what happened over those seven years that drove your sound in that direction.

No.
Formless has more complexity to it. It's just more subtle and takes analyzing. There is a lot more poly rhythms, poly meters, odd time etc. At first glance no one notices... That is the TANTRIC in me.

You recorded your debut with one of the most recognized rhythm section in the metal genre. Did you choose

to replace Sean Reinert and Sean Malone because they were too busy with the Cynic reunion? How do Alan and Giann live with/up to the legacy since I presume that a notable amount of your fans must have been a little disappointed when they saw that Sean Malone wasn't and Sean Reinert just to some extent involved in the recording of "Formless"?



Both Seans are great musicians. Sean Reinert and I are very close friends. He has always been involved in the Aghora family since day one. Malone was just work for hire. Frankly I am over the bullshit that I disappointed fans by not having Malone. Malone is a one dimensional bassist. He is great at that dimension and that is about it. I am tired of hearing "oh they don't sound like CYNIC"... EXACTLY we were never meant to! Giann can certainly hold his own and is for a 21 year old way ahead of the game. And Alan is a real monster on bass. Alan, hands down, has more chops, soul and better performance skills than most pro bass players. So I personally was not disappointed.

Aghora is not about the chops its just music. Can I square off with a metronome and play 32 notes at 100 bpm? Sure but is that the point?

NO!
Can Giann play 16th notes at 300bpm on his snare? Sure but is that the point?

NO!
People in "Prog" need to grow up and realize that the "technical" means nothing with out soul and seasoning.

Play from your heart: that is what matters!

Do you plan on making the Ag-horafans wait for another 7 years until your next output?

No maybe 3 at the most ;-)

You practice Pencak Silat if I am rightly informed. All I personally know about it is that it's probably the most direct and effective self defense there is and quite brutal as well. Not quite what someone would expect from someone seemingly spending every free minute of his day to balance his qi and chakras. Is the exertion of such seemingly contradictory activities something you try to reflect in your music, I mean themewise or what is the driving energy behind the alternations between soft and hard in your songs?

Yoga was a warrior art before it became a "peace and love" thing. Buddha was a warrior trained in the warrior caste. You can't have balance without yin and yang. Martial arts keeps you grounded. Combat can teach you much faster about breath control, meditation, enlightenment than sitting at an ashram, blissed out, incapable of paying your bills and living a normal life in society.

Believe me I have done both paths. I prefer the path of a warrior. It's not to say the other path is not valid. It just takes longer. The warrior path to enlightenment HAS TO WORK OR YOU DIE! What was passed on throughout the ages is the stuff that actually worked. What didn't work was thrown by the waste side. You will be surprised how fast your kundalini can open or your chakras can open when you train your energy AND martial arts! In the ancient days the warriors were the priests as well and the healers. That is what a Pendekar is in silat: a true PROTECTOR of his village and tribe.

You mentioned yin & yang. Does that mean you believe in the duality of things or them just being the constituting parts of singularity? I am asking because the Hindu don't believe in duality and the aghori are a sub

branch of the Hindu which is where your band name is inspired from no?

The Hindus do believe in duality... SHIVA/SHAKTI.

The ultimate reality is that there is no duality. But in the raw physical world or plane we exist in, in order to get to the singularity, you have to understand the duality otherwise you would cease to exist on this plane of reality.

Your body contains both yin and yang, shiva and shakti. You have to learn to take these two polarities and flow them together in order to have one magnetic force.

Have you had any experiences with drugs? Do you believe that in long term they can help the mind transcend the conscious and the unconscious and lead to enlightenment or to a state similar to it or do you believe that only meditation and other techniques can lead to it?

I stay away from all of them. I believe all you need is in your body and the air you breathe. I tried pot and mushrooms once and I didn't care for it. It reminded me slightly of what I could already do in meditation or with qi gong. So I was not impressed. It can certainly be a tool but eventually you do not need any tools.

Any book suggestions for our readers that got interested in the yoga, qi gong, pencak silat, reiki and so on?

For Silat check out Guru Cliff Stewart or Guru Stevan Plinck.

For Qi Gong/Kundalini: Dr. Glenn Morris's books "Path Notes" and "Shadow Strategies", umaatantra.com. Also look into "Mantak Chia", "Qi Gong Empowerment" by Shou Yu Liang.

For yoga "The Complete Yoga Book" by James Hewitt... This book was recommended to me by Steve Vai once backstage. For reiki "The Complete Reiki Book" by Daniel Stein.

Santiago, thank you very much for your time and answers!

Thanks brother, best wishes to you for the holidays!

DÄLEK

Apocalyptic Hip Hop: The Beginning Of The End

By James Slone

New Jersey's Dälek have been marketed as the "sound of the urban apocalypse," and for once the hype matches the content. A hip-hop outfit that channels both disparate musical forms (political hip hop, industrial, shoegaze, metal, grind noise, kraut and jazz) and the old spirits of forgotten history, especially the fragmented and lost history of African America, Dälek meld violent, angry dissonance with a sad, elegiac dirge. When the bombast and discord finally falter, all that is left is a lingering sigh of resignation.

MC Dälek fronts the group, with a voice that can attack with intense urgency or linger despondent in the background, a dry throaty sound that suggests the cigarettes and smokestacks of the north-eastern rustbelt. His voice is never too dull or deadened, but always suggests deep sadness or hostile indignation. At times he sounds like a beaten down and nearly broken man lashing out one last time, at others, he's measured, soft, didactic-wise.

MC Dälek's lyrics are inseparable from his voice, possessing both the hypercritical severity of Crass or Napalm Death and the righteous incredulousness of the Coup or Public Enemy. There is also a creeping esoteric spirituality, Caribbean religion, lost black history and plenty of pan-African ideology, but the idealism is always muted by a feeling of dread and an all too real sense of failure, as though the wisdom of the past can barely breathe in the rotten corruption of the present.

The sound is provided by Oktopus, who draws heavily on industrial and shoegaze, combining layers of noisy guitar feedback, jazz and hip hop bass loops, pounding beats, and samples. The sound can be extremely loud, rivaling industrial noise, grindcore, and shoegaze for pure noise output (Einzurzende Neubauten, Godflesh, and My Bloody Valentine are

often used as points of reference); but the volume never diminishes the form.

The sound is mostly musical, tied down by tight rhythms and given to lilting melody, often in the quasi-Oriental style pioneered by jazz artists (John and Alice Coltrane) and more popularly, 1960s psychedelic rock. It's important to note at this point that Dälek does not have a live band; the sound, like most hip hop, is meticulously constructed out of samples; some are recorded by Oktopus, but all of it is mixed and processed, and even scratched out on the turntable. The technique works, making the band's music uncommonly dense and powerful.

Together, the two artists have produced a great body of work, discovering a new musical language by welding together genres that have generally ignored each other. Dälek marry the paranoid alienation long associated with industrial and metal with the righteous indignation of political hip hop, and have the decency to serve it to the masses with healthy lump of psychedelic transcendence, a subtle sense of melody and dope beats. Below is a short summary of their work:

Negro Necro Nekros (1998)

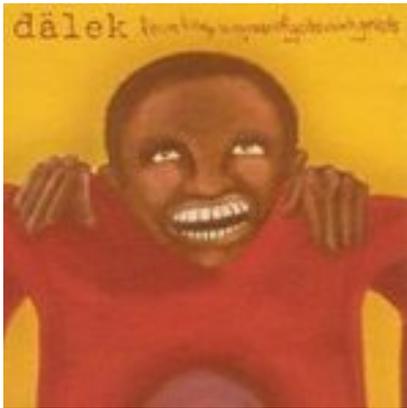
Experimental and heady, the first album doesn't have the production or subtlety of future releases, but already stands head and shoulders above most of what passes for experimental music, bridging the gap between hip hop song craft and turbulent noise. Unusually rock oriented.



From Filthy Tongue of Gods and Griots (2002)

Dälek hit their stride early with an album that's both amply caustic and beautifully melodic. Pan-African spiritualism and black nihilism collide in an album that is as much kraut as it is hardcore political hip hop. Fans of Swervedriver, Neu!, Paris, and Emperor will all find something to enjoy here. Long "instrumental"

passages and dense lyrics presage what is to come next.



Derbe Respect, Adler (2004)

After touring Europe, Dälek hook up with kraut rock legends Faust. The music is mostly provided by Faust, reflecting that band's proclivity for strange, snakelike melodies and industrial grade power drill rhythms. Despite the sound and fury, the album is unusually organic and, dare I say, pretty for Dälek. Mature stuff.

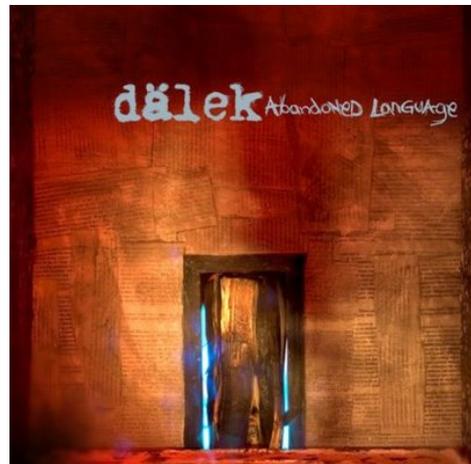


Absence (2005)

Their angriest album, it's also their loudest. Brutally heavy beats and machine calibrated guitar feedback rain down upon the listener, while hypnotic jazz bass lines writhe, churning their way in and around the music like a snake on a treadmill. This is the sound of the urban apocalypse: unremitting, pummeling, and as bleak as rust red puddles in the ruins of a steel mill. These are the last days of American power.



Abandoned Language (2007)



The latest and some would say the greatest. Lyrically more introverted and didactic, the music is considerably less heavy and a lot more melodic- very polished. Still, the sound is robust and deeply textured, if perhaps more atmospheric than aggro, tending to linger in the mind instead of blowing it. It's progress. Not because it's quieter, but because it's more subtle and thoughtful, with the kind of melodic musicality unusual both in experimental music and hardcore rap. It bodes well for the future.

THE OCEAN

Lulled By The Stormy Ocean

by Martin Cermak

There is a big bang of young European bands that are a kind of answer to the Isis/Neurosis style on one hand, The Dillinger Escape Plan discursiveness on the other, also a bit linked to Meshuggah's unique path, but of course developing their own way. Bands like Textures, Gojira, Hacride, Kruger, Cult of Luna... and The Ocean – a multifaceted project from German capital city Berlin.

Their new concept "Precambrian / Hadean / Archaean" became an important musical event of the 2007/2008 break. As I follow this band carefully yet for some years, I really looked forward to their new effort and the subsequent interview with Robin Staps – a thoughtful leader of this multimember collective...



You have a collectivistic way of band's functioning. Can you tell about the advantages, disadvantages and limits of this artistic collectivism?

The good thing about working as a collective is the wide variety of ideas that we can draw from. Album artwork, live concept, videos, t-shirt designs... all those creative processes involve several people in changing constellations working on things and thus reflect more than just the ever-same ideas of just one individual. This is something you won't get in a classic four-piece band. A bad thing about being a collective is that logistically, things become pretty difficult. We'd love to go on tour with reeds, brass and string section plus a few more singers but there's just no way we could afford renting a van for like 15 people. Also, when it comes to make

appointments for, say, shooting photos, it's hard to find one date that's suitable for everyone who wants to be on the pictures. It sure is difficult, but that's part of the challenge. Apparently, there are a lot of problems co-ordinating things, planning tours and gigs, even rehearsing. But then again, not necessary that everyone is always there. That's part of the idea of the collective, that there is a (limited) core of people that are essential for the functioning of the band, and an (unlimited) number of people that are loosely associated to this core -- they come in whenever they want to and whenever we need them. There's a number of classical musicians that we call upon for recordings, or sometimes for selected live-appearances in Berlin. There are graphic and web-designers, visual artists, all types of people who contribute in one way or another.

Do you observe/follow another "collectivistic" bands (like Laibach, Disillusion or Residents) that are connected with a large circle of artists of all kinds...? I mean follow not only music wise, but also the whole creative side...

Not really, to be honest. My day just doesn't have enough hours to do that, I have not even been listening to much music apart from my own in the last few months, because I was so busy with this album... and when you come home after a 10 hours studio day, some silence is much appreciated, you don't want pop in another record really... I spend way too many hours in front of a computer screen anyway so I try to keep everything that doesn't have to do with the ocean at a minimum...

Although you are a collective, you are the "one", creative boss, responsible for song writing and musical direction. Isn't it a little paradox?

I don't think it is. The term "collective" refers to our organizational structure. We have a core-lineup of fix members that are always there, that keep the band functioning. Apart from that, we have a number of loosely associated people who we call upon when we need them – there are violin, cello, clarinet and trombone

players, for example. Also, there are video and web designers in the Ocean collective; all of them work for free because they affiliate themselves with the band and the collective idea. So everyone has his task, and my task happens to be writing the songs... it has been like that from the beginning and I have specifically looked for people who were willing to play in a band where the songwriting is in the hands of one person.

I also enjoy jamming out with friends and I have another band where I do that, where everybody takes part in the writing - but with The Ocean it's a different approach, and we all know that if it wasn't like that, if we were a jam band as well, an album like 'Precambrian' would simply never have come together. There are 26 people playing on the album, you have to have someone to coordinate that and plan it, otherwise it would just end up as a big mess. So in a creative aspect, The Ocean is 100% composed music, but in a work and organization aspect, we are collective where many people partake and where everyone has his specific job.



It is interesting that this tendency to the collective creativity is typical for Germanic art (we can name Bauhaus in architecture or some expressionist painters). What is the reason in your opinion?

I don't know man. I think you find it anywhere. I don't think collectivism is particularly a part of German culture or history, it has existed and is still existing everywhere in the Western world where people try to work together in an autonomous microcosm to achieve their common artistic or political goals.

German art gave to the world a term "Gesamtkunstwerk" (I guess since Wagner's operas). Do you feel you are linked to this "multimedial" or multiartistic approach directly?

In a way, what we're trying to offer is a Gesamtkunstwerk... according to the Wagnerian definition this term subsumes any attempt to unite different forms of and approaches to art and put all of them under a common cause.

The Ocean, as a whole, is a multimedia experience that functions on many different artistic levels: apparently there is the audio-level at the core, but there is also a strong visual component to it, both on album, where we pay great attention to album artwork and packaging, which also includes working with different materials and printing techniques to create something unique, and in a live environment as well, where we work with visuals and a conceptual, MIDI-triggered light-show that is synchronized to the music. Each realm demands a lot of time and work in itself. I would never use this term myself though because it has such a pompous, pretentious connotation nowadays...

You are from Berlin, a town that is known by a very extensive alternative and underground culture, connected with such bands as Einstürzende Neubauten. How is the nowadays Berlin artistic life – still same as we can read in some books, biographies, memories etc (very diverse, with a lot of chances and strange interesting people)?

The whole squat scene that was so huge in the 80s is still here, but not as strong anymore. Still, it's quite easy to find a cheap place to live, food is ridiculously cheap everywhere, so you don't have to work so many hours to sustain yourself, and I think that's the main reason why so many artists and musicians move here. The scene for heavy music is really divided though, just like in almost any bigger city. There's a classic metal scene that we don't really care much about, there's a fairly big hardcore community, metalcore is still getting bigger, there's also a lot of DIY hardcore things and

there's still a good squatter / punk scene here.

In general, how do you feel the changes, metamorphoses and evolution in Berlin during the last years, after the fall of the wall and reuniting? Is it possible to describe the atmosphere of Berlin today? What is most typical (or exceptional) for this town, what do you like there?



This city has been intriguing for me from the beginning, that's why i moved here in the first place. it wasn't so much the metal scene that attracted me, but that whole vibe of run-down, decrepit old-eastern buildings, and people making use of the fact that investors were turning a blind eye on large parts of the city, which spawned the evolution of a vibrant art scene and countless pubs, bars and small, illegal venues and happening places. for a couple of years it felt like NYC must have been like in the thirties.

Berlin does not have such an urban feel to it at all, and that's one thing i love about it. you don't have a city centre with a CBD that is dead at night time, and suburbs. Berlin is more like a few different villages, all with their own distinct identity, thrown together. it is huge in spatial dimensions and even after 7 years of living here i still discover cool places where I've never been before.

The Ocean would probably not exist without Berlin. We are rehearsing in a huge former aluminium factory where they produced panels for submarines in WW2. When we moved in there, no one had been down there for 50 years. we spent a good 3 months making this place accessible, it was tough. But we basically get it for free now, being able to rehearse in a +120 square meters subterranean factory hall, where we established our own studio, with sleeping rooms, storage rooms, control and rehearsal rooms... this whole, threatening ambience down there with all the tubes and nooks and corners has largely influenced our sound. We would have probably never come up with the idea to use junk percussion if it wasn't for this place, with all its old metal bars and panels...

Are there in Germany still so deeply perceived differences between east and west? Do you have an idea what could help to reduce this rupture?

Not so much anymore. Especially in Berlin, nowadays many of the former Eastern parts of town are really hip, rents are rising fast and people from the West start moving to the East because there's more going on. I've been living in the Eastern part of town ever since I moved here, and apart from Kreuzberg, I think I've been in the Western part of the city only 4 or 5 times in 7 years...

So the image of the East has changed a lot, but of course the further out of town you get and the more rural it gets, there's still a large discrepancy in terms of life standards, wages, etc as compared to western Germany. They have pumped billions of euro into building up the East and it has helped certain regions but others were completely left in the dark for years, and there are parts like the Lausitz where the population is declining rapidly, because every young person moves away from there as soon as he can because of unemployment and no perspectives, so only the old people remain and they are dying away quickly... in the end this is an intriguing thought, but there will soon be ghost cities in certain parts of eastern Germany, nature will eventually reclaim the land...

In poetry decadents like Poe and Rimbaud inspire you. In visual art surrealists like Dali and Magritte are amongst your favourites. What is for you so close and attractive right in these artistic directions? And although you are German, do you have a strong affinity for example to the Francophone culture, which is very different from yours?

When it comes to art, I don't think much in terms of origin, nationality or heritage. I have been digging into musicians, artists and writers from about any European culture and I go with what I like, with what touches and inspires me, and that includes French writers as much as Czech writers or German writers. It is by chance that I ended up employing a lot of French poets and writers with the ocean, but it's not just that, Nietzsche's "Untimely Meditations". It' have left their mark on the song "Rhyacian", and the song "Ectasian / De Profundis" is a poem by Georg Trakl. We are generally in great favour of plagiarism.

I think it is totally legitimate to take from long-gone artists, poets and writers and make them shine again by putting their work into an entirely new context. There is nothing genuinely new under the sun anyway, so anything new is to be a new combination of known elements. And when there are so many brilliant poems and texts out there, free to use, forgotten by most, why would I always come up with my own mental effusions then?

The last album was influenced by comte de Lautreaumont and his "Chants de Maldoror". Which aspects of this exceptional literary work attracted you the most? And how did you work with his words, ideas and feelings in the framework of your band?

Lautreaumont is certainly the biggest lyrical influence on this album. His "Chants of Maldoror" is probably the most striking and relentless war with words I have ever dipped my nose into. It is so full of spite, passion, dark irony and profound hatred of man and his virtues, so to speak, that it appeared to me at one point that this album that I was making here seemed like a soundtrack to the Chants... so it was only natural to try and fit some of those blasphemous words onto the music, and I ended up having 2 songs exclusively employing entire passages of the "Chants":

"Mesoarchaeon / Legions of Winged Octopi" and "Neoarchaeon / To Burn The Duck of Doubt", both on "Hadean / Archaeon". There are more parts here and there and in addition, the booklet of "Proterozoic" is interspersed with quotes from the "Chants", some of them using great oceanic metaphor: "You will not in my last hours, find me surrounded by priests. I want to die lulled by the waves of the stormy sea."

Do you work intensively with surreal view, dreams and fantasies in the level of music and lyrics during the creative process?

Not so much as I used to anymore... Sometimes when I write lyrics, I follow that scheme that surrealists used to call "psychic automatism", which basically describes a process where your thoughts and associations roam freely without boundaries and you write down whatever comes to mind, ideally under heavy drug influence, to end up at a completely different place than where you were origi-



nally heading for... this can be very exciting. Our lyrics are introvert and abstract at times, but very outspoken and clear at other times. Generally I think it is more interesting to preserve some sort of room for interpretation. That way everyone who reads them has the chance to discover something in them that applies to his own life and experience, and this is the point where lyrics become really meaningful. There is a lot of political comment in them, but not in the typical, obvious, fingerpointing way – a line can be so much more powerful and striking if it is delivered with the bitterness of sarcasm. There is also a lot of dark irony in what I write.

All the mentioned artists were bright individualists, opposite to collectivism. Is it for you an interesting tension?

Individualism and collectivism are not opponents, as frequently claimed. It is true that collectivism attributes more importance to the interest of the community than to that of the individual, but every community consists of individuals in a utilitarian sense. In consequentialist ethics and according to utilitarianism, collective fulfillment can be understood as the aggregation of individual fulfillment. Art is always more than anything a form of individual expression. When you see an outstanding band, you see individual musicians on stage that play together in the context of the great whole, but still maintain their individuality and their individual expression. It is no different in our case, the ever-changing line-up brings with it completely different live-experiences due to the difference between the individual characters. I write my music and everyone else is interpreting what I write – but there is so much room for expression in interpretation, if you look at classical music for example, the only room for



creative display here lies in interpretation, since everything is composed... most classical musicians that I know do not understand that as a limitation, but as a vast and exiting universe..

Seems you work a lot with "natural" and "elemental" themes or symbols. Yet the album titles: Aeolian (derived from winds...), Precambrian (as the primal period of Earth geological evolution)... Can you develop it more and tell me? Is there inside some hyperconcept?

It is true that there's a meta-concept behind all our albums that is linked to the 4 elements. "Fogdiver" was our earth-album, "Fluxion" was our water-album, "Aeolian" was our wind-album and "Precambrian" is essentially our fire-album... just look at the individual artworks and packaging and you will see. Now that we've covered that, we will venture into different territories with the next album.

With no doubt you are conceptual band that has a very elaborated multimedia expression and well considered topics of songs/albums that overstep a banal rock or metal works. But on the other hand, in metal music there is still quite a lot of conceptual bands, so I would like to ask, what differs you (in your eyes) and your concept from the others "metal concepts"? How do you define and search for your own way in this conceptual field?

There have been many interesting concept albums in recent times, Mastodon's "Leviathan", Meshuggah's "Catch 33" and Thrice's latest 4xEP album being some of the most interesting ones... We don't think so much about what others are doing though; we just do what feels good to us. The idea of a concept album is nothing new at all, the concept album evolved in the 60's and 70's, in a rock

context, and all of these bands, including us, draw from that time. We are trying to offer something more than just a loose array of songs, we believe in the idea of the album and try to offer an album that musically airs this aura of inevitability, that makes you as a listener not want to skip a single track, but listen through the album from the beginning to the end. To support that, we offer a lyrical and an overall artistic concept, for those people who want to dig a little deeper – but at the same time it is of great importance to us that the music speaks for itself, you can still pick certain songs and enjoy their own specific musical qualities, without knowing anything about the Precambrian or geological eons... So what we offer is something that comes on top of the music, for everyone who is interested, but it is not crucial for understanding and / or appreciat-



ing the music itself.

Seems that in the last years bands like Neurosis or Isis are very popular. Would you say it's a nowadays-leading style of the metal alternative? Don't you have a fear that soon the scene will be overloaded by such bands/music?

I don't know and I don't care. The mentioned bands are great in what they do and there is an abundance of cheap copies, just like anywhere else in music. I listen to all different kinds of music, from arab pop to Aethiopian Jazz / Fusion stuff like Mulatu Astatke, to a lot of classical music to contemporary progressive

metal and rock... been listening to a lot of 70's prog lately, and I think you can hear that on "Proterozoic".

About this whole post-rock / post-hardcore thing, I do like a lot of bands that get stigmatized with that silly term (Cult of Luna, Capricorns, Taint.. for example). For me, what these bands, and ourselves as well, are doing, is essentially just another word for "prog". No one wanted to label themselves "prog" for a good many years, but in more recent times the term is having sort of a renaissance I think... it's funny when bands like Opeth say they are not "prog", I think they are and they'd be better off accepting it, and claiming it!

The "post-" part in "postrock" or "post-hardcore" should be also connected with postmodern era and its art. Don't you think bands like The Ocean could be named as fine representatives of postmodern music?

Then I am even more sceptical about it: since postmodernism, with its claims for diversity rather than unity, is exactly what is so rampant in the music world of today, and this is exactly what we take a stance against: the philosophical base and justification of the

MySpace generation, with its focus on billions of random songs, rather than albums, and an average attention span of about 10 seconds, before a mouse-click takes you on to another site... if Lyotard, with his exquisite taste of music, had known that his muttering would initiate the end of the album, maybe he would had thought twice!

And finally, the kind of composed music that we do is more construction than deconstruction, I think... we are not "post-" or "pre-" something, we are just here, right now, in the present tense...

Some of your songs are an "analyse" of the modern society, its consumerism etc. What offends, annoys and worries you in the world around you mostly – what are for you the key "problems"?

We're living in a society based on commodities, wage-work, material success and control, leading outlined lives for the sake of career and affluence... we go to kindergarten, to school, to university, to work, and by the time we get out of the sweep through the institutions we're old and tired. We're being passed on from one institution to the next and we never actually pause and live life in the present tense, in a rewarding way.

A lot of times we don't even seem to know what is rewarding to us, our desires have been crippled so much by the permanent exposure to the billboards and commercials of companies that take great pains to tell us what our desires are (how fucking absurd!) that we don't even know what is ours and what is external, what is real and what is not, that we don't know what we want anymore. And thus it's easy to convince us that we want anything and everything, and of course, everything comes at a price, and here, the cycle closes. The strategy of promise and refusal of fulfillment brings about that we don't even know what we want anymore. Hence we are content with almost everything -- working shitty jobs doing things we don't enjoy in order of earning money to buy things we don't need.

Bands like The Ocean contribute to the "intellectualisation" and cultivation of the metal music and scene, often perceived as something "primitive"... Is it (almost subconsciously) some of your goals? Do you have an experience that someone "upbraided" you for being to intellectual in metal? Btw, how do your studies or work occupation project into the topics elaborated and expressed artistically through The Ocean?

Apparently when you look at the typical metal themes or the Hatebreed-style "Can't-hold-me-down" kind of thing,

we're different from that. Stuff like that just bores me stiff, personally, I am beyond that phase in my life when I'm constantly fighting against my environment and people who try to hold me down... I still am, at times, but I don't feel any desire to write about that. So I'm trying to focus on the things that make me tick, and that is generally broader, more philosophical reflections on life, death and certain experiences I have made in my life.

I do see the danger in intellectualizing emotional matter, which can result in those emotions not being transferred and the thinking subject running in circles and ending up miserable and knowing actually less than before... Music, our music, is essentially emotional matter, more than everything else, so it is a danger we must face and be aware of. I don't think we have succumbed to that danger though, because as I said before, the concept that we offer is something that comes on top of the music, in a way. It is not necessary for understanding and appreciating the music. You can pick out any song and it is an entity of its own. In the content of the hole, it might gain a new meaning, but it will also work stand-alone.

Every time I listen to you or see you on stage, I can see there is a lot of hard work hidden behind the band and its performance or expression. If you sum it up, what did you need to sacrifice on behalf of band's functioning and growth or developing? What is for you the "sign" that all this really "pays off", what is the biggest satisfaction?

I had to sacrifice my life for this band. I'm not doing much else apart from this band, just working some jobs here and there. The band pretty much eats up all my free time, but I'm not complaining about that, I chose this way of living and I love it, I wouldn't want do anything else at this point. I love touring, I love writing and recording music, and when you see that it reaches people around the globe, that a lot of people find something in my music that they can relate to and that speaks to them, that's great and gives me the strength to carry on, to

lock myself up in my basement and stare at a computer screen for fucking 14 hours a day...

How is the position of The Ocean in Germany (traditionally much more oriented to power metal or gothic)? How the audience there "bears up" your experiments and artistic attitude? Did you hear yet the opinion that you are surprisingly talented and quality when compared to the standard German metal output?

enough mostly a scene of "listeners", not of "partakers". Germany has not really spawned any good bands playing this type of music, so we feel a bit isolated in our own country... German media are very conservative. They don't support local bands a lot; it's not like in the UK or in Scandinavia, for example. They don't appreciate bands that try to reinvent themselves with every record; this is confusing to many of them. It is strange but true that in the beginning, we were getting a lot more attention



Yeah there's a lot of prejudice about the German metal scene, and I can totally see where it's coming from. Honestly, I don't give a fuck about the German metal scene. We're not a power-metal band; we're not a metalcore band either. I don't have strong ties to any of these scenes and there are few German bands that I care about. We actually come from a more noise/hardcore type of background, bands that I've been growing up with were Unbroken, Groundwork, Starkweather, Neurosis, and later I got really interested in more experimental hardcore/metal types of bands such as Botch, Converge, The Dillinger Escape Plan. There has always been a scene for this type of music here, but strangely

from British, French or Scandinavian (and Greek!) media than from German. Right now, this is changing a lot, and a lot of magazines and writers pretend like they had supported us from the beginning, when they really didn't give a shit for years...

Many thx for your answers on this so long intie, if I forgot to ask for something important, here is your place...

You covered more than everything man...

CONTROL HUMAN DELETE

The Band At The End Of The Universe

by Martin Cermak

CONTROL HUMAN DELETE is a fresh blood of the avant-garde extreme scene. Their extravagant combination of the contemporary technical post-black/death metal with industrial apocalypse is musically very impressive. Not less interesting is the knot of ideas behind (or in the base) of the whole project. The band is a monstrous monolith or organism living on its own and offering a lot of inspiration and stimulation to think and listen.

Let's have a talk about the freezing, raw, but beautifully aberrant album "Terminal World Perspective" and about all the perspectives that can be seen in the world of CHD with the speculative and reflective singer and lyricist Void...



Your lyrics describe a complex cycle of genesis, evolution, destruction, reshaping etc. Your music is a perfect soundtrack for this. And your artwork is a perfect illustration of all the ideas and feelings coming out of your songs. Do you take your way of creation as conceptual? I mean not a "standard" concept album, but an overwhelming concept penetrating and pervading all that you are doing.

I see our, or I would rather say CHD's way of creation, indeed as a conceptual one. The individuals who work for CHD share their passion for the dark sides of history, myths, science and art. Those themes have formed and will always form the backbone of CHD's concepts that are indeed penetrating and pervading everything that she is doing.

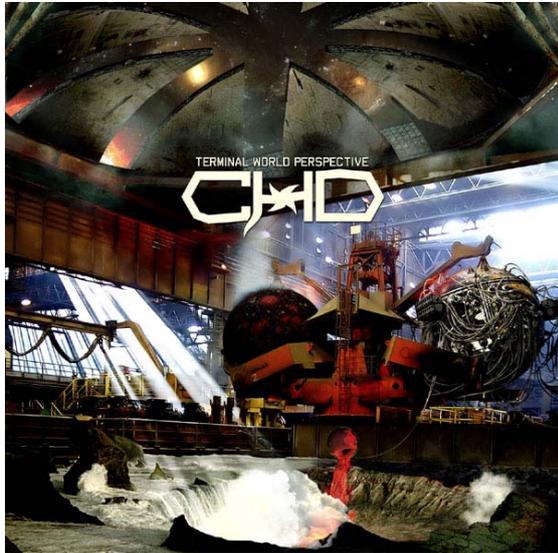
Therefore I would rather speak of CHD as an organism on itself, fed by everything that is surrounding her. The translation and machinery is respectively done and made by us; the human characters employed by CHD.

If I take your album, your lyrics and its time axis (also represented in your website) as a basic scale, we can say that just now we are in the middle of this evolution. Do you think it is a "one-way" process? We have yet overstepped the point of no return? Or we have still some possibilities of choice and different scenarios?

I think there is always plenty of choice for every single one of us. Nothing is already doomed nor determined. Although I must admit that I like the idea, fact is that we've got pretty much rid of it thanks to quantum physics. The idea of the time axis is that we, as humans, are just a little life cycle with patterns emerging again and again, surrounded by this vast universe. Birth and dead, build and demolished; There are enough metaphors that can be found in it, which is the beauty of it in my opinion. As for the storyboard as a whole I feel the need to say a bit more about CHD's points of view; To begin with the storyboard describes several stages that the inhabitants of the earth undergo on their planet, subdivided into the 9 soundtracks that the listener will undergo.

Through those stages of "development" (which could or maybe should be redefined in this context) mankind wonders about the nature of their own existence and the wonders of what they call "reality". It represents mankind's timeline from beginning to end according to a somewhat altered world view, adopted by CHD and inspired by philosophies and ideas that treat some subjects from out a different perspective... a different world perspective, terminal if you like. Now, this would be one of the most important and underlying motives behind the "TWP" concept: It is not meant to destroy believes of any nature whatsoever or to convince people of some other. On the contrary it shows how important and fascinating all those religions are, that have been altered and/or evolved during the whole process, and moreover how they relate to each other. It is about looking at things using a different perspective and to open minds represented by the storyboard given to

you. This is just one scenario. Containing more scenarios? As for it, I think there is an infinite amount of scenarios, maybe already here or somewhere out there, who knows.



Do you believe that there is a possibility to understand and recognize our reality, world and truth? From your lyrics I feel a bit a touch of agnosticism and relativism, maybe even nihilism. Do you believe in something (I mean belief not only in metaphysical or transcendental sense)?

Understand or recognize our reality? Interesting indeed, but then we first have to determine for us what reality means to us, which is a subject in itself. But to take it more general, I don't think it is possible for us to understand reality, we can get close but never reach it. As the universe is expanding, our reality is getting more complex as well, which is quite an ambitious thing for us humans to get grip on. Therefore I think you come pretty close with the three philosophical strands you mention there. I'm not religious in classical terms and reject all forms of institutionalised religion. Though I feel strongly attracted to science, philosophy and everything that is trying to explain things through reasoning.

Do you take your conception also in a relative way – as one of products of post-modern way of thinking? Do

you take your ideas, imprinted in your lyrics, more as an art, or as science, as philosophy, divination or so...?

Yes, I think our concept should be taken relative as I explained previously. As for the art/science/philosophy, above everything we take our creations as art. But because of our great interest in both science and philosophy (those two strands are twins btw in my opinion) they both have great influence on our work as well. I think the best way to look at it is like reading a novel from writers like Asimov, who used to play with fiction, scientific reasoning and other philosophies.

If I am not mistaken, one of the basic themes is the incompatibility of mankind and nature. What is the reason, in your opinion? I mean the basic reason, basic mistake of this incompatibility? Is not the mankind a part of nature? Of the whole creation around? Or a wrong element? How do you imagine the aftermath of all this mess?

In a somewhat negative way we like to play with the idea of incompatibility of mankind. I mean some things that happened on this planet are so fucked up and still are; wars, religious doctrine, wars, racism, intolerance, coca cola, oil, more oil and more wars!! It makes me feel really uncomfortable and then I really think we suffer from incompetence. We are already in the aftermath, the aftermath of the mess and confusion from our ancestors. We will have to deal with it and the generations after us have to clean up the mess that WE have created. In the process of it we get a bit closer in understanding our reality. Till a point it all is going to collapse? Don't know hard to tell; sometimes you might think we truly deserve it.

Another big theme for your concept is the theory about the supernatural and extraterrestrial intelligence, controlling and intervening in the "deal" of mankind. Is it? Do you take (in this theory) the "divine" and the "extraterrestrial" (alien) as one and the same? How do you imagine this

control and influence? And what do you find attractive and credible in these theories?

Yes it is. Taking the divine and extraterrestrial as one is inspired on theories from amongst others Zecharia Sitchin and Erich von Däniken. I think it is quite interesting to think about those possibilities because they study ancient cultures, religions and myths and connect them together along with our increasing knowledge about space travel. I like the idea of a god-entity of flesh and blood so to speak, which is nothing to really belief in but something to take into consideration. Along with the mystery surrounding it, it makes it quite tempting to use.

An important source for your "studies" are also the myths, divine texts and others ancient stories. Which answers do you find there, which moments or coincidences did attract your attention?

I find the similarities between several religions and above all the ancient ones with there cultures like the Maya's, Sumerians and of course Egyptians very interesting. One coincidences if you like is the Deluge or great flood, as part of

the TWP concept as well, which is described in several ancient writings and seemed to had a great impact on the earth and its inhabitants. To move further I think modern science and its reasoning had a great deal of influence.

Which scenarios for the "end of the world" do you consider as probable?

A collapsing universe would be quite wicked ;) omega point energy... all that kind of stuff, awesome!

How did you invent your name Control Human Delete? Was it a difficult and wise process, or by chance? Was it for you intentional that (beside "ctrl+al+del allusion") there is also CHD as common abbreviation for Coronary Heart Disease? It offers interesting parallels with your concept...

Spectre came up with it one day if I remember correctly. We were at the starting point of forming and creating CHD as it is right now and we found the name Control Human Delete quite fitting for how our ideas and musical directions where evolving. The Coronary Heart Disease is mere coincidence as far as I



know, but it does offer interesting parallels indeed... then again so do a lot of other things.

I have read in some biographical notes, that in the beginning you had different opinions about your style and direction, so it was a reason of some delay in releasing music. How did you reach this result? What did help you to accord on something and to create all this complex and complicated musical and ideological "building"?

I think it is purely a logical process for a band, or the creation that CHD is. A process is taking you somewhere it is willing to go and with it you will have the work out some issues. That is what is making CHD what it is and what makes the music and intentions really strong. We constantly criticize everything what happens around CHD and the music that is emerging, which is typically for CHD and a really important quality.

How and where do you want to push the borders of music? Do you take yourself as extreme in extreme? (Not only in the sense of heaviness of course...) Which kinds of experiments do you like and try in your musical laboratory? Do you want also to provoke or shock a bit?

CHD is all about pushing musical borders and provocation: Extreme in a sense of using more non-traditional metal influences to achieve a stronger atmosphere that is so typical for the roots of black metal. We like to experiment with everything that comes to mind when composing for CHD, from jazz, trip-hop, electronic and new age to breakcore, death and black metal.

How do you see the role and position of this post-black wave on the extreme scene? I mean the evolution started by bands like Dodheimsgard, Thorns and Satyricon, continued by Aborym, Axis Of Perdition, Blut Aus Nord or Spektr etc.? And what is in your opinion your personal contribution to this genre?

I think it is a highly interesting musical

evolution where CHD did start off. It is interesting to see how from a really minimalist kind of music, what black metal is essentially, an exponent like post-black is emerging with more complex arrangements and modern influences. That is for me the most interesting part of music in general, no matter what kind of music. Dodheimsgard, Thorns and Satyricon are all important influences for CHD and we are aware of the fact that we sometimes sound alike. In our opinion it is a starting point for CHD from which she will evolve according her own will.

Do you feel strongly connected to



the Dutch metal tradition? Your scene always offered some interesting and unclassifiable bands, like Phlebotomized, Pestilence, Gorefest, Orphanage or Textures. Which kind of spirit provides this amount of creativity and forward thinking?

Not really to be honest. I always felt to be a bit of an outcast in the Dutch metal scene when we first started off, some are a bit conservative in a way, which I regret sometimes. I don't think the bands you mention have had influence on CHD, as in being creative or such. Maybe I can identify a bit more with something like The Gathering, also emerged from the Dutch metal scene.

Which non-metal influences were for you crucial? Some of the sounds re-

mind me "Spiral" from Vangelis, or the atmosphere of "Blade Runner", maybe also older J. M. Jarre. What do you prefer from the nowadays ambient and industrial scene?

This part is always my favourite, thank you. Vangelis and Jarre as well as Mike Oldfield and Alan Parsons have influenced our music, especially the ambient and electronic parts, Spectre listens to their music a lot. As for other non-metal influences, things like Biosphere, Godspeed You Black Emperor, Massive Attack, Venetian Snares (and other break-core), maybe things like VNV Nation and Apoptygma Berzerk. Other music for me personally would be old Jazz stuff, raw rock 'n roll and actually everything which is honest, raw, pure and intense.

Would you like to try it once again with the "living" drummer? Or you are yet so used on software drums that you cannot imagine a normal drum kit in your music? How would you describe the special touch and feeling given by the artificial drumming?

Not at this point. We are quite happy with our artificial drum kit from hell. And I think it fits us very well, it delivers that extra vibe the music wants to express, cold, harsh, and indeed inhuman.

Isn't this also a mark of your tendency to the "inhuman" view on the world – a little piece of misanthropy? What is your relation to humans – pro-social, or anti-social?

My relation to humans is quite pro-social, I try to haha, but sometimes it is a bit difficult as I explained previously, which makes me want to scream. I guess that is why I ended up in CHD in the first place.

Despite all this machinery and artificialism, your music is also full of strong and extreme feelings and emotions. Which ones are for you and your art the most important and how are they executed or expressed?

I think there has to be a connection to

the mood and temperament of the creators and the music they create. If we were feeling happy all time, we would make happy music. There is something in every member of CHD that has the urge to create music with strong dark, hateful and other twisted emotions. Maybe there is some kind of bitterness in the way we look at things and end up in something that is called Control Human Delete.

Many thanx for your answers, if I forgot to ask to something important, here is your place...

Thank you very much as well. It was a pleasure answering your highly interesting questions, maybe we can discuss it a bit more one day, who knows!



VINTERSORG

The World Is Not A Simple Thing

by Martin Cermak

After the tricky album "The Focusing Blur" (a luscious dessert for all the lovers of metal extravaganza) Swedish mastermind Vintersorg came with its follower "Solens Rotter". Being maybe a more acceptable material for a larger circle of listeners. The recording (all sung in Swedish) offers enough uncommon and clever moments, in the same time we can hear there a bit of creative modulation and calming. The traditional approaches and roots of Scandinavian art are mixed with black metal atmosphere in one hand and progressive feeling on the other. All in all, Andreas Hedlund aka Vintersorg still have a fancy to release a pleasant stuff. But my main goal for this interview was to talk a bit about his remarkable and sophisticated way of seeing and cognition of our world, projected into his art...

Beside musician you're also a university-educated pedagogue. What pushes you into this sphere of occupation (which impulses and motivations) and what do you like about teaching and educating?

I'll teach in all subjects, as I'll work with quite young children from 1st to 5th grade. Why I've choose this path is that I'm very curious how we learn things and on what conditions we do it, what terms that drives us towards or against a specific target of knowledge. I'm also very interested on how didactics makes the taught subject meaning or not, what kind of methodology is the most effective... and then the use of mind and



body interaction. I'm also very amazed how you people have an open mind regarding the world.

Once you said: "When you see people still fighting and killing each other for really minor things, that's fucking Stone Age thinking." A majority of teachers (almost in a younger age) are idealists. Do you believe in men, in some possibility of spiritual and moral renaissance, driven also by education and formation?

The moral evolution is very much possible. I mean, if you learn how to behave in a group from a young age, you understand that your own progression can't be done to the expense of others feeling, physical being or mental health. It's very simple from my perspective actually – a civilised community is based on the right to express your self but also to respect others.



How does the fact that you teach and study teaching influence your music and lyrics (more generally your way of doing art, your creative process)? And as we speak about reaching some knowledge and cognition, do you think that music can be some kind of "cognitive artefact" (beside its aesthetic function)?

I don't think that my studies have that huge impact on my art; of course if I feel inspired in my studying, I feel inspired in my life and also in my art. I've always studied the subject that I'm interested in, as science, nature, human nature etc., so my music has in that scenario always been inspired by my studies. Music can have a cognitive aspect, though it is still a lot about emotions. But to understand what you're feeling is a cognitive process in a way, so I feel there's a connection. I like music combined with lyrics that has a conscious approach and not just created from formalistic angle. Some substance must be there to make me interested.

It is well known that your lyrics are very complex trials or endeavours to handle the world around us. Could you please try to shortly explain your methods of exploration, your main views of our space and man's position inside it?

This matter is huge and I can talk about for hours and pages... I find myself that I always write about the relation between man and nature, but dig into it from a different kind of angle each time. We, as human, think of ourselves as the lords of the universe, even if we're just a tiny grain of sand in the cosmological desert of planets – that's quite pathetic from my view. We also have the knowledge to understand that we have dependency of the nature on Earth, still we exploit it the fastest we can – which is even more pathetic and terrifying. Nature also comes in many form, from the cosmological to the close in our surroundings, we're a product of it and therefore can never overcome or overrule this system. Space is a beautiful playground for thoughts to dwell within and also a chaotic and infernal battleground for nuclear events, so it has all the components to be interesting.

In your lyrics you ask a lot of questions about let's said (both literally and scientifically) "theory of everything". Are you successful in finding the answers?

I'm not finding the answers and I guess my intention isn't really to do that. I like

to think about it and that helps me a lot to form my life and world. I just feel a necessity to ponder about it as it helps me to structure my set of thought and feed my inspiration. The more I learn, the more I kind of slips away from simple answers, it's so complex and so enchanting that it just keeps me continuing with it.



Is it possible that this effort to understand the world around us with all his complexity and universality is deeply connected with the traditional Nordic/Scandinavian way of thinking (mirrored for example in the mythology of this region)?

I guess you can find that connection. Many mythologies have space issues incorporated in them, but mainly through a romantic vista. Watching skywards has always been a part of man's exploration I think. Personally I've been interested in cosmic themes since childhood, right from where I got my first telescope to stargaze (I think I was like 7–8 years old). Of course it has been many different sides of it that has occupied my interest throughout different periods in my life. I don't ever get bored with it, as it's so diverse...

Where are in your opinion the limits of cognition? Do you believe we will one day discover the secret of space, mind, brain etc.?

I guess it will always be some form of mystery for us to wonder about, as when you discover one process or "riddle", it leads to yet another crossroad of matters to be discovered. I think that's just wonderful, I don't want to know everything. It is the progression of knowledge and ideas that's interesting from my per-

spective. Still our cognitive potential is much unexplored, so we don't have to worry about finding out too much... The only risk I see is that we use the knowledge in a destructive way, so we have at some degree to be modest with it.



Are you familiar with the theory of fractals? Do you think that it is a good way how to describe the structure of world?

Well it depends how you look the world – If you see it as endless repetition with chaos as only disturbing element, I guess it is a "simple" way to ease you mind. But if you look upon every single event as a new process, working under certain rules, of course it gets more complicated. I don't expect the universe to be simple, so I have a hard time to accept some of the fractal theory based propositions.

What do you think about depth psychology theories who try to explore the role of subconscious and non-conscious processes of mind? Is the man connected through some collective non-consciousness with the larger array, do you believe in something like cosmic conscience and a possibility to transcend this way?

I think Jung's theory about a collective consciousness is interesting, but in the same time it's quite unlike to be true. Of course we can't understand our own mind, as we can't access the uncon-

scious (then it wouldn't be unconscious). At some degree we may open up for a more transcending frequency, but still we're limited to be humans... It's hard to really understand what's conscious and unconscious, if we start to think that we can reach unconscious areas, anyway.



Your views of the world are often very theoretical and abstract. Do you try to make some practical applications, derived from these theories?

Even if I like to philosophise about stuff, I still live as a human on this planet. But I'm very careful with how I live my life and what kind of effect it has on the surrounding, cause I'm a nature freak. I don't try to spread propaganda though, as I think we can close in on these subjects leaving politics aside.

In the past, it was very common that an inventive philosopher was in the same time an excellent mathematician, physicist, biologist... sometimes also an artist. Now we see that the human and biological (exact) sciences are mutually isolated a lot and taken as "opposite" domains, the same goes for the art and science. It is interesting that through your art I feel a will to reunite these perspectives in one.

I don't have such high goals... (Laughs)
I think the split is because of the complexity we see nowadays in science. When we were watching flowers through a microscope and thought that we had discovered it all, it was much simpler to have a wider range in your research. But when stuff goes into molecular level, it's very hard to be specialized in every genre.



I think a term, which is in an explicit or implicit way omnipresent in your art, is a "harmony". What helps you to reach it (as a person, but also an artist, scientist...)? Do you consider yourself to be harmonic?

Yes and No. I try to live in harmony with nature and my surroundings, but of course I run into conflicts as well as every other human being. Conflict, if treated properly, is a good source to actually learn stuff, but of course I reject every form of conflict that involves violence. I'm talking about a collision of theories here, when the outcome is richer than the pieces involved. The sum is larger than the parts.

Is for you important that people understand your lyrics, or you write it more for yourself, without thinking about the accessibility for the others? Some of the poetic images, metaphors and ideas hidden inside are very hard to access and understand, due to their abstractness...

I write mainly for my own pleasure to philosophise and ponder about stuff that I meet and see. If people like it, that's a great bonus.

Evidently you like the musical and lyrical extravagance in metal. What is the reason of this taste – are you also an extravagant person?

I'm a nonconformist in many aspects, but still I can socialize with people that are labeled "mainstream". Actually I think it is many time more interesting to talk with the mainstream guy and try to stir his/her world with depth and meaning.

The only other permanent member of Vintersorg is Mattias Marklund, your best friend. How would you describe his role in the band? Didn't you have a fear that running a band together could influence your relationship in a negative way?

We've got a strong relationship that goes much deeper than the music we create together. His role is to support and come up with ideas regarding arrangements etc., but we understand each other so well that we don't ever run into conflict... It is a perfect balance between us.

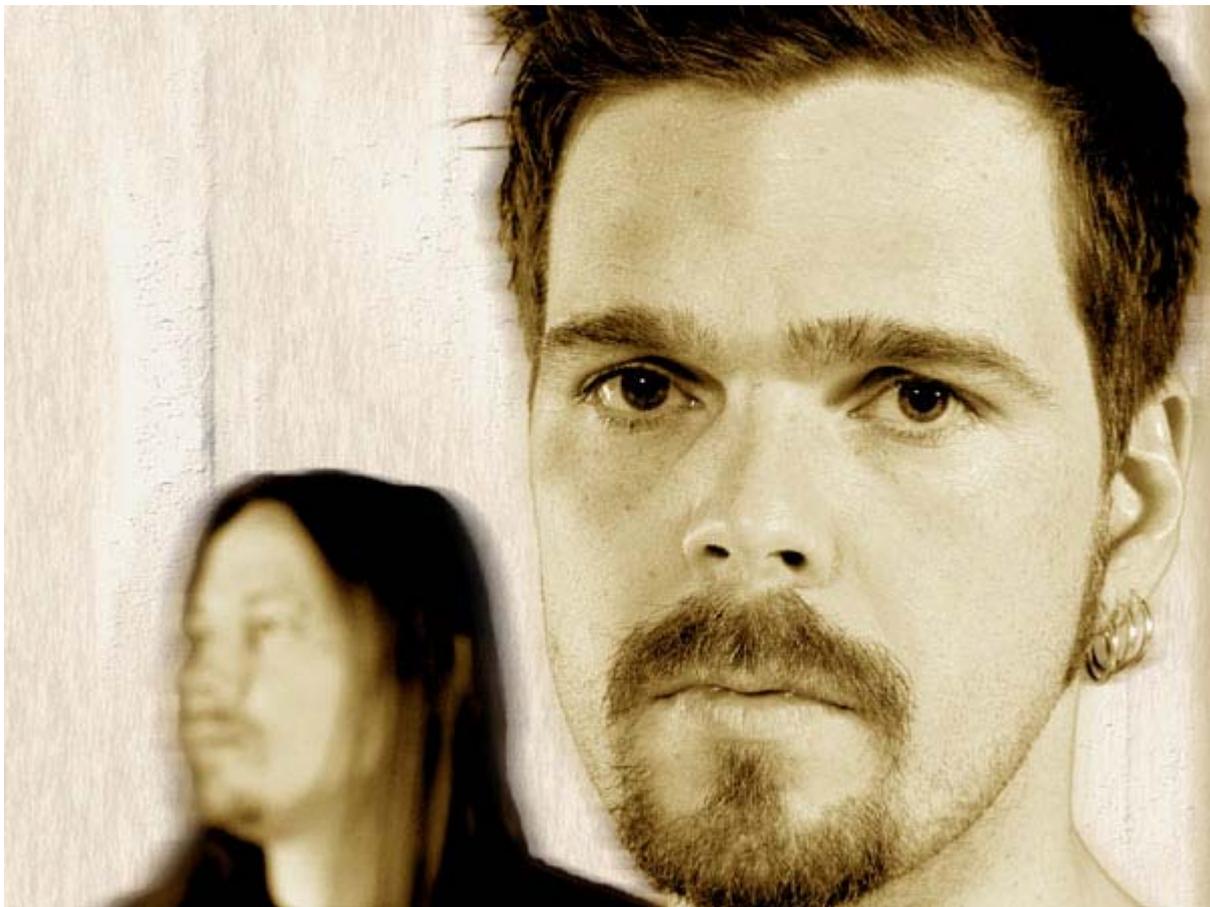


Can you tell me something about the brand new album "Solens Rotter" in the context of the whole Vintersorgian creation? I mean how you linked to the previous albums and where did you move...

We're the same but not. With every new album we try to explore new side of our musical visions and try to dig into different areas that we haven't really expressed before. But we still have a dense core, from which this is coordinated. So the next album will again be a bit different, even if I don't know yet how... It's a constant and ongoing process. We don't work from any given formula; instead we aspire a flow that's inside us.

You returned to the "Swedish-only" lyrics on the new album. In general, do you think that the everyday protection and propagation of the native language is necessary, or it will survive always?

I don't think that protecting languages really have anything to preserve them. It's only by talking the language it'll be protected. You can't govern it with laws... The ultimate thing is a language that everybody can understand – that would help to reduce the risk of conflicts.



ALDRAHN (EX-DHG, THORNS, DEATHTRIP)

DJ Astral Dog On Planet B8 - - 18

By Olivier Côté

*It's been a long time since we all heard of Bjørn Dencker aka Aldrahn or BIKJA, whose passionate invocations from **Kronet til Konge, For All Tid, Old Man's Child, Monumental Possession and Zyklon-B** to late-days **666 International, Thorns and The DeathTrip** still feel as fresh, edgy and open-minded as they were back then and now are. This is why I had to contact the man and take a chance to enter his present-day world views. All kinds of mental radars and chemical inspirations helped us to go through his memories as well. I feel it's good to go back in order to know where we're going. It's like psy trance, which is old-school tribal converted into innovative astral paths. Lucky I've been, because I honestly believe we both had a good time giving shape to our conversations. One of the most strikingly original Black metal vocalist out there, simple as that. - Doggy salutes to you all!*



Hey Aldrahn, how and what are you doing these days in your part of Norway? I hope all is well for you and your family! From what I can make out of your hometown pictures, I believe you live in a far retired place, surrounded by beautiful, rural landscapes and together with a dog's colony. I remember Yusaf saying that at some point in time you apparently moved far away; what led you there, and could we say, you know, that this was some kind of a

shift of mood in your life or something?

YOHO, I'm doing fine, thanks for asking. Yes, you're right about where I live. I've always dreamt about living close to natural surroundings. With few or no neighbors. Surrounded by the calm presence of nature. And just enjoy my self and my life in this kind of element. As I've always been a great fan of nature and spending time, whether it's in the forests or in the mountains. I truly come alive when I'm there. Life becomes richer and fuller. Existence becomes meaningful, and I feel like a totally fresh person with no trouble inside. It's the outmost freedom for me. And being able to do this with my dogs makes it complete.

So, my wife and I were lucky to find a house very perfectly located in a big forest area with the woods all around us, though it's also quite central as it's no more than about 1,5 km to the nearest facilities. Where we can buy what we want, where we got restaurants, entertainment, schools, library, etc. So I'm very happy with my life and very glad to have met a woman who shares the same interest for occupation and everyday life as I do. So you can say that, after our daughter was born and we felt the need of settling down, we really wanted to realize this dream, and get away from the city and all the things that the both of us find quite meaningless. I've lived in lots of cities over the years and I can only say that ::: FINALLY I CAN BREATHE.

By the way, before we get going, where is the name Aldrahn coming from and what does it mean? And also, back in *Satanic Art* era, why were you considered as Mr. Always Safe and Sound?

(Laughs) Funny you should ask that. Well, the name Aldrahn is taken from Old Norse language. Very close to the spoken language in Iceland. It's originally written without the H - Aldran - and it means DEATH. I took the name in 1994, added the - H - to give it my own touch, and it has been with me ever since. Concerning the Mr. Always Safe and Sound, it was a very ironic description of

me at that time of my life. I was constantly high on LSD, and as a result of that I was very uneasy, very visible so to speak in every aspect of my life. For example if I was standing in a subway tunnel waiting for the train, I could be dancing around people on the platform, singing and screaming for no apparent reason. Wherever I was, I was always gesticulating a lot, screaming and shouting like a demented overgrown baby (laughs). I believe I was a great deal of confusion and also a big pain in the ass for my surroundings, friends and family at that time.



I'm curious: now that you look back at yourself, what did you learn from LSD?

Hmm, I'm very eager to say nothing at all. But that would be too easy I guess. I think that the most important thing I learned from using LSD over a large period of time in my life, was that things aren't always what they seem. I mean that the world is endraped in illusions and cunning ways to draw people's attention away from the real thing. That underneath all the focus on money, politics, religion, etc., there's usually a greater picture and a nature that's very unsimilar to the things we take for sure, and the things we all call reality.

I've learned that you can never be too sure about anything, as anything might happen around the corner which you didn't expect. I've learned that people

who seem to speak the truth very often are lying, either to their surroundings, themselves or in the worst case: both. I've learned to interpret my surroundings in a bigger scale than I might have done if I didn't go through all those crazy moments. Hard to say these things. I've also learned that taking drugs can be highly destructive and very dangerous to the mind and to the body. It's all too easy to get crushed by these things.

Back when I did these kinds of drugs, I totally ignored that fact, as young people often do. Luckily I went through it all with few scratches. But that is not the reality for loads of people who try this out. I'm saying this in case there're any young readers out there reading this right now. Be careful in your choices, things aren't always what they seem to be. And you can easily be destroyed by something more cruel than you can possibly imagine.

You seem to have quite a close relation to the world of dogs. Are you like raising them only to sell them later on, or are they definitely part of your daily family? And only between the two of us, haven't they taught you how to develop some of your uniquely barking vocalizations (laughs)?

Most definitely!!! I remember very well the first dog I owned. I named him Pablo, and we actually became so close at times that it felt like we swapped personalities. I became him and he became me. I'm really not joking. It's a fact that we had something special going on, as very often he could sit on the chair watching me sniffing around in my apartment, though I've always been very touchy on smells and scents.

I was given the nick name BIKJA (slang for DOG) by my friends I hung around with, and Yusaf even came up to my birthday with two packages. One for me and one for Pablo. I opened mine and Pablo tore his open. And I got dog food and Pablo got a chess board. I laughed my head off. This was indeed intentional and a great deal of fun for Yusaf.

I've always been very fond of dogs. It began when I was very little, and my

uncle had a German shepherd that I played around with and became incredibly fond of. He was the nicest dog you'd ever come across. And he became my first true friend in life. Actually he is the very first thing I can remember. I've thought about it lot's of times and he is truly my very first memory as a human being. And I can recall all too well the day he died. He had accidentally chased a flock of sheep out on thin ice, resulting in them all falling through the ice and drown. Because of this, he had to be put to death due to the law. I remember I cried my eyes out. I was sitting above a newspaper and it was just soaked in tears. And even today I still cry like a baby when I think about my good friend REX.

Anyway, my dogs now are a big part of my life and I'm racing them to be my closest friends whom I also can show the same devotion to, as long as we are alive together. My life would lack quite a bit without these creatures by my side.



For the last year many old-school DHG fans have been discovering with delight your new The Deathtrip project on MySpace. Even though all the songs are presently displayed only with a demo sound quality, I think what I hear is for sure promising. I'd say, to make it short, that the music is really hypnotic after a while. Lyrically and vocally, how is The Deathtrip different from what you've done before? What kinds of emotions or atmospheres are you trying to convey within this particular project?

Thanks. Well, to tell you about that I first have to say that my way of writing isn't and has never been meant to transmit any just or absolute meaning. It is and

has always been meant to transmit feelings and moods in the sense of emotional recognition without logical thoughts. I write about what I think, and I think about my life, my surroundings and how it's all connected and bound together.

As for The Deathtrip lyrics I believe I write in a much more coherent way than I've ever done before. I'm trying to manifest a dark tribal, trancelike atmosphere, consisting of elements from the human origins, from the old ways of worshipping divinity. The laws and symbols of prehistoric times, where we were a lot closer to nature and the ideas we had of our existence. Before electronics, science and modern religion made it into something else.

I try to capture some of the darker sides of the TRIBAL SPIRIT. The spirit or the essence of ancient human history. I try to conjure the primal senses: animal nature combined with human nature to visualize the similarities. I also write a lot about things I will describe as pure fantasy and science-fiction inside my brain. Not to be taken too seriously, but to be taken as entertainment. At least that's what it is to me.

I'm often greatly fascinated by my own way of putting down words, and I often hum and laugh when I write, as it usually comes pouring out of me. I seldom use more than an hour writing each lyric. And as I write I can visualize what I write about and my whole reality becomes like the distorted circus of a mad fool.

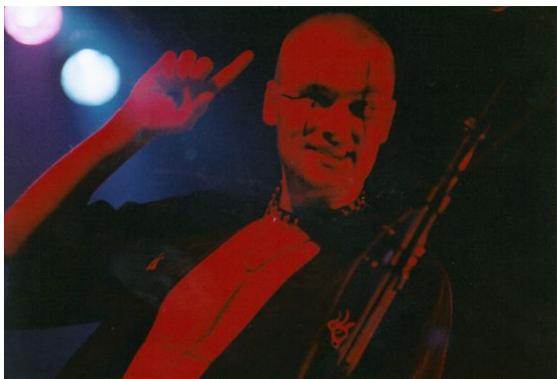
I really enjoy writing in this way. It humors me and entertains me a lot. And often when I read them a while after they are written, I find deep and profound details in them which I didn't recognize when I wrote it. This is of course very personal, and I don't expect other people to find or recognize the same things. But it seems like other people recognize things that I have little or no relations to when writing it. So it seems like people who read my lyrics enjoy it too, much in the same way as my self. And that's really something I'm very thankful for. It means a lot to me to get

all the wonderful feedback I get from all of you out there. And it really warms me to get such inspiring credentials from people I've never even met.

So, therefore I'll continue to enclose my lyrics in the booklets of every release I'm part of. This way they can hopefully continue to entertain all of you who like them. In there lies the whole message behind my lyrics.

Then, musically speaking, do you think The Deathtrip is like a road back in time to both *Kronet Til Konge* and *Monumental Possession*, or is it a lot more than that?

For me personally it's very much the music I would have continued making in DØDHEIMSGARD, if I were the only composer, and if Yusaf didn't infect the nature of the band (laughs). So, you can definitely say that this is like a continuance of *Kronet Til Konge* for me alone. But you have to understand that I am not the composer of the music in The Deathtrip. That's a man who calls himself Host. And as far as I'm concerned, he's a genius when it comes to composing this kind of "back-to-the-roots" Black Metal. So I'm very glad I met up with him, and started this cooperation, as I now feel that with this band I can express all the things I had in mind in the early *Kronet Til Konge* days, but didn't get the chance to. I feel very much at home in this picture of sound, and I'm really enjoying my self being a part of this construction.



Are you in the studio with The Deathtrip nowadays? I wouldn't expect you, being the singer and lyricist, to mix and master the album in the studio, but I'm pretty sure you do have a sound picture in mind. Will

you go as raw-sounding as on the demo, or are you expecting to head towards a more, let's say, well-produced approach? And isn't there already an album title?

We have been recording the album for the last three months. So most of the guitars, bass and drums are finished. Note that we don't have a drum machine on the album recordings. They are highly organic and are played by a man called Dan STORM Mullins. We just need to tidy up some parts, and then it remains for me to record the vocals. Hopefully I can start on that during the month of march. Snorre will be helping out as the engineer and co-producer, so we need to get our schedules synchronized. Soundwise we wanna capture much of the same feeling as on the demo songs, though try to enhance it a bit. It's very important for us to maintain the raw, naked, unpolished sound. We want the grimness to reach the bone (laughs).

We will, in addition to the album, release a cassette demo, prior to the album release. With low-fi sound and crappy black and white cover, limited to 60 copies, containing a bonus track, only to be featured on the demo. Plus a couple of new songs that we haven't put out on MySpace, and also a new vocal track on MAKING ME (one of the songs on the MySpace profile). The demo is called "DEMO 08". Very simple, the way we like it. And it is a treat for the old schoolers, and for everyone else who would want this nostalgic piece of item. Very limited supply, though.

The album will be entitled "DEEP DRONE MASTER". Hopefully we'll get a deal with a Norwegian label, as that would be best suitable. But none has yet been particularly interested, so we might sign on a foreign label.

We're in 1994 and Darkthrone are at their career's peek - how the hell did you get Fenriz involved on *Kronet Til Konge*?

I don't quite remember really. I think it was due to the company we shared at the ELM STREET ROCK CAFÉ (which was every BM person's place of gathering

back then), where he was a part of the conversations Yusaf and I had about the band. Whether we asked him or he more or less fell into the role by nature, I really can't say for sure. It's beginning to be a long time ago. But I do however remember well our rehearsals. Fenriz seemed to enjoy playing bass alot.



We were rehearsing in a VERY small room, with no air conditioning, and I remember how Yusaf and I stripped down to our underwear each time we rehearsed during the summer season. And how all the guys next door, who were people from Satyricon, Demonic and all others, got displayed a setting they seemed not to understand (laughs). It was quite a laugh! We did function well as a band the three of us. Though Fenriz left the band for personal issues, which I know nothing about.

It's never been clear as to who did what before *666 International*. To which extent did you compose music for Dødheimgard, from *Kronet til Konge* all the way up to *Satanic Art*?

Okay, I would have to say that *Kronet Til Konge* and DØDHEIMSGARD were very much MY devotion, and I composed about 80% of that album, along with writing all the lyrics and performing them. Gradually Yusaf became more and more involved. So at the time we recorded *Monumental Possession*, Yusaf and me had composed about 50/50% I think. Further on DØDHEIMSGARD became more Yusaf's devotion. I think that *Satanic Art* was the turning point where he more or less took over the ship. And from that day on it has been more or less his thing. Which I think is good, as I

don't know if DØDHEIMSGARD would have been an existing band if he hadn't. You see, when I came across the world of psychedelics, goa trance, psy parties and such, I became very consumed by it, resulting in me neglecting DØDHEIMSGARD very much. I think in many ways I laid it down to die. But Yusaf picked it up and kept it well alive.

Would you say you are a daring dancer or is it the more mental side of psychedelic goa trance that you feel at home with? I'm asking because in psy parties, there are people grooving, dancing and screaming everywhere, among which, however, you can find individuals with both their eyes closed, daydreaming and hypnotised from the inside but not physically moving very much.



I was all of them!!! Concerning dancing, I was against that kind of activity (as the juvenile black metallor I was), until it was Fenriz who introduced me to psy trance. When I then got that music under my skin, I started to dance like a crazy man. The sounds just entered my body like nothing else, and I was totally bewitched by it all. In a good way I have to add. I never knew that moving your body in this way to rhythm and sound could feel so wonderful and relieving. Being at one with the sound, just letting

the music enter me totally and move to the groove. It's just too much to explain. It has to be experienced. It's much in the same nature as having sex, I can tell you that.

Nowadays, when I listen to goa trance, I still get the dancing vibe, but not that often. Now it has become more something I listen to for the sake of the music mostly.

You previously told me that you wanted to get yourself a couple of turntables, in order to create your very own trance mixes. Has that happened yet? And do you think it could be pleasurable, by your standards, to act as a DJ and transmit your tribal mixes in psy parties?

I got my self a couple of turntables yes (Vestax pdx 2000), but I sold them again as very little psy trance records are being released on vinyl, and those that are, are also released on cd. I think it would have been great to mix psy trance for people if one was to get hold of the proper audience, as there are few people I know that listen to psy trance in Norway. Though it has always been a dream of mine to do so. Anyway, I would have to get my self a CD mixer, and there're always things to be prioritized when it comes to money. For the time being, I got enough as it is to spend money on so it will be a while until that would happen. But hey, what would life be if one didn't lust for anything or didn't have any passion?

Lust and passion, right. Well your freestyle and alien performances on *666 International*, one could argue, certainly made a major impression on a black metal scene which is usually more concerned by its juvenile evil shock-value than by artistic innovation, whereas you proved that experimentation and a wild eccentricity both have their own rights upon the darker forms of metal. What was your state of mind when recording such an out-there and emotionally charged album? There

even were rumors that most of your vocals had been promptly improvised in the studio; now, how true is that?

666 International was a very amusing record to be a part of and a record I'm very glad I've taken part in. It's very true that most of the vocals were highly improvised. I recorded one song per day over a period of two weeks I believe. And the performance was a result of my state of mind at that time. I expressed much of the things I had inside of me due to several years tripping on LSD. Listening to loads of psychedelic music, Devil Doll and experiencing years of psychedelic moments. And I wanted to experiment with my voice all that I could, as I found it totally uninteresting to sing in a more fashion-like black metal way. I



had too much going on inside, and I'm very glad I did it. I can now look back at it and plot out things I like a lot and use them in a more structured, and for me, functional way.

Do you remember people's reactions to what you accomplished on there? We know the magazine reviews, but both your friends and family must have been quite surprised (laughs)! This was a powerful record if there ever was one.

My uncle had a big laugh when he saw the pictures on the back and said he thought the music was cool. The rest of my family was more or less like everybody else: they didn't understand it.

I'm glad though, to see that the album has begun to grow in people's ears, as I remember on the 1999 tour with Dimmu Borgir, none of the people in the audience did seem to grasp any of it. We got the finger, people were shouting "fuck off" at us. And very few people seemed to appreciate it then. There was however a handful at every gig that did dig us. Four or five people that truly liked what we were doing, and stood out from the rest of the crowd. You know who you

are. Special greetings go to all of you from me.

Two years later we found you performing for and with experimental guitarist Snorre Ruch, Thorns mastermind, on his band's first official self-titled record released on Moonfog Records. Also present was, of course, Satyricon's famous Satyr whose vocals also took the lead on a few songs which were then compiled with some of your own vocal expressions. How did you get involved in the famous Thorns rebirth?



Well, I was living in a place called ÅLESUND at that time, a place far west of Norway on the coastline. I was studying to become a hairdresser there when I think it was Snorre who gave me a phone call, saying he had been in touch with Satyr about me as a vocalist, and whether I was interested in working with him on that album.

It was actually very convenient as Snorre and I didn't live too far from each others. By coincidence we had moved to the same spot of the country for school the both of us. Anyway, I said that I was interested and it didn't take long before we met with each others and started to work out some thoughts. Luckily we found the "Good Vibe" very quickly and became rather good friends, which is a friendship that has continued to grow

ever since. I'm very glad to be a part of THORNS and have become more and more dedicated to it. We share a lot of the same thoughts for the music and Snorre is a very nice and easy man to work with.

A new, upcoming Thorns album is in the works. Have you written all the lyrics this time around? Are there some specific themes, or let's say, mental orientations that you think you're going through along the way? Any new song titles you'd like to reveal? I'm sure a great deal of fans from all over the world really are excited about the upcoming album.

Yeah, I certainly hope so, as I think it will turn out rather well. Sounds to me like it will be entertaining for people who enjoy extreme music in general. I've written almost all the lyrics except two pieces that I've done together with Snorre. And without telling too much I would have to say that they are kinda violent, frenetic and transmitting mental disorientation. And I'm doing all the vocals this time.

As things have evolved and settled down, I am now the vocalist in THORNS. The rest of the lineup is also very altered. There's a new drummer and a new second guitarist. None of them have had any particular experience within the field of Black Metal before or metal for that matter. I don't know them all that well, but as far as I know they come from more settled musical backgrounds, such as Jazz and things like that. And when it comes to revealing song titles, I'm afraid that no such thing is yet set as for sure. The creation of this album is a very slow-moving process to say the least. I don't know how many times I've felt ants running around in my ass because of the tempo of this band. But I've had to learn that this is the way this band functions. So the more I stress down, the more I meet its normal pace and progress.

Alright man, let's all stress down our impatient expectations then (laughs)! How different would you say it is to work either with Snorre or with Yusaf? I mean, you've obvi-

ously got two very creative guitarists there!

It's really not that different. As you say they are both skilled musicians. I do however find the co-work with Snorre very appealing and comfortable, as the music is very straight-forward and right on. It's a more defined environment for me to be in, and that's very pleasant. It makes it easier to focus on what I'm doing. And the outcome becomes more stable and strong I think. But I wouldn't be surprised if Yusaf and myself shared path again somewhere in the future, making whatever kind of sound.

I know you have shared the stage presence with DHG last year. How did that go? Do you like performing live? Is this where you can act out the tribal spirit you were talking about earlier? The European tour you had with Dimmu Borgir in 1999, according to Yusaf, was a complete disaster. Would you also go as far as to say that?

(Laughs) Yes, in fact it was, by my knowledge, the worst tour I've ever heard of. (Laughs) Looking back at it now, it was also a very fun trip through Europe. Beside the live performances, which were pretty much like shit, we had a great deal of good fun on that journey. Lot's of great friendship, lots of laughter and fightings with each others. Nice sleep every night (never felt better than in that constant moving bus, like a cradle). Free food every day, without having to do the dishes.

But yes, unfortunately it's very true that the gigs themselves went to hell. I guess it was due to several issues. We hadn't practiced as a band in years, and we got five days to get into it before we set off.

And as for my self, I totally burned out my voice during these rehearsal days. So, I really didn't have any decent voice for one and a half month. I was whispering and having huge trouble with my voice throughout the whole tour. And that made it very difficult to rise any particular excitement on stage and of course also very hard to get any voice out to the audience. I actually didn't get my voice perfectly restored until six or seven months after we returned home. Anyway, that's something I could have easily been without if I had taken more care of my voice in the beginning. "One learns as long as one is alive".



As for stage performances, I really enjoy that when things come into place, when the band is well adjusted due to routines and things like that. Then I feel safe and I can express what I want without hesitation.

And that's really a great feeling. I do believe that I try to express my inner self on stage and the essence of things I think is important to me. Both the tribal spirit and the hidden human themes are definitely some of my high priorities.

Your image, so to speak, in the *666 International* booklet and on numerous stages among Europe, was something special to say the least! Was this yours and Yusaf's vision of what Dødheimsgard should be presented as? Does the image, in a black metal world, have any strong significance for you? Were there any guidelines at all? I always thought that Apollyon, without of course speaking against him, was a bit out of place, particularly in that more experimental era of the band.

Apollyon, or GYM POSE as I call him (gymnastic bag), was, I believe, the most traditional one of us. And I think he fit in nicely because of that, as DØDHEIMSGARD do come from a rather traditional BM ground. I can understand what you mean though.

I think that basically the image hasn't a strong relevance concerning the music. It's just clothes and hairstyles really. But I do find it rather funny to dress out and wear something that changes my appearance into something quite extraordinary. And on stage it does make a stronger impression of the band, their ideas and such. But what I mean is that you don't need fancy outfits or crazy textiles to make soulful music.



We didn't have any guidelines no. It started up with a gig we were playing in 1996 I believe, where it was unthinkable to dress up in corpse paint. Personally, I had gone a long way from where I did fancy that kind of tradition and, to me, very

boring style. So we had to come up with something else, and that's when it started. I remember I put on some kind of simple war paint and later on I started to paint my self in red, with flames coming out of my mouth. Later on, red facial paint with Chinese robes and all kinds of strange stuff I could find, all related to the image of red, as red is my favorite colour and I think it fits fine with black.

We discussed the meaning of your lyrics earlier on, but I would like to know a bit more about your collaborative friend FOG, with whom you wrote a couple of lyrics throughout the years, among which *Final Conquest* from *666 International* and *The Beast* from *Ravishing Grimness* probably are the most well-known. Do you still write with him? And do you usually write side by side or are you more like exchanging lyrical

snippets whenever you meet each others?

FOG is a guy I spent lots of time with on the second half of the 90's. We did alot of tripping together, partying and all that stuff. So, I guess it only became natural for us to write some lines together, as he is a good writer himself. Not a very metal person in particular though, but more a music figure in general, with strong roots in Hiphop and Rap.

I only wrote those two lyrics with FOG (as far as I can remember). He was very much into DØDHEIMSGARD and also a huge fan of DARKTHRONE. We shared lots of great times together, and I will never forget it.

I seldom write side by side lyrics with other people. It's usually a thing I wouldn't do. Unless it pops up something out of the ordinary which is exciting and something special. It usually works in the way that one starts to write a sentence or a verse and then passes it over to the other person, for example by mail. And then the other one gets his ideas and follows the lines, sends it back to the first one, and so on it continues until it's finished.

What about Dimmu Borgir? You seem to have been friends from the early days, as I remember you singing on their first album and also writing many lyrics for them back then. To tell you the truth, I even witnessed a 1995 concert where you were their frontman and singer. Now were you in the band? *Unorthodox Manifesto* is also a song you wrote with Sven Atle in 2003: in fact, do you enjoy what they've been up to?

Ah, Dimmu... Yes, I've known Stian, Kenneth and Tommy (Shagrath, Tjodalv and Galder) from way back when we were young Skaters listening to Dead Kennedys and Sex Pistols. Stian and I attended the same school class in highschool. We were good friends before any of us had even heard of Black Metal. So you can absolutely say that we have known each others for a long time. Together all of us eventually slid into the

field of Death and Black Metal. And I got lots of good memories from those days.

When Dimmu then was formed, I guess it was a natural thing for me to take part in some way. And the live gig you speak of with me as a front man was a gig in east Germany. I was only singing on one song though (OVER BLEKNEDE BLÅNER TIL DOMMEDAG). And it's a gig I remember well (laughs). So, no, I wasn't in the band as a line-up member. But still, I have taken a little part here and there on their releases, such as Unorthodox Manifesto and several other lyrics too.

I must say that I'm very PROUD of my old friends. Happy for them, and I truly think they deserve their success more than anyone else, as I know that they have worked harder for their cause than most BM bands have. For instance, when I and many other black metallers from the 90's began exploring drugs and alternative lifestyles, cracking our heads open every night, partying and ending up in an ashtray the day after, Stian and the gang kept on focusing on the band and their music.

I find many of their songs appealing to me, though it's not entirely MY thing. Anyway, that's rather irrelevant. I think they deserve the honour they get for their performance and dedication. Though I must say that I was very sad to see that they didn't give me the credentials I got the rights to on the re-release of STORMBLÅST, where I in fact wrote the title song plus one more (VINDER FRA EN ENSOM GRAV). I'm not mentioned anywhere as the writer of those ones. That hurts me, I must say.

Now that we're regressing in time, are you still in touch with Carl-Michael and O.J., Aura Noir's thrash conquerors but also ex-DHG mongos? I'm asking because it seems that after 666 *International*, all of you guys kind of lost sight of each others, at least musically so!

Yes, I believe we did fall from each oth-

ers. I really can't remember any valuable moments after that era. I'm not sure why. But speaking for my self, I moved rather far away, aiming for new things to experience. I guess I lost touch with them when I fled out of the capitol city of Norway, where I had all my memories with this gang. I got the impression that for lot's of people, especially people who are closely connected to Oslo from child-birth, it's like everything outside of Oslo is a nonexisting place. So if you move away to a more desolate place in Norway, people seem to think that you're either gone, or don't exist for some reason.

Anyway, moving away from Oslo was the best thing I ever did. That's when I met my woman who later on became my wife. Which later on led to the birth of my wonderful daughter child. And which has led to a life I'm very thankful for and a life I hold greater than anything else in this world.



And is your wife also into black metal? If not, she must have been quite surprised to

hear what her new beloved man was up to in his spare time!

Oh, my wife. She's called Camilla, by the way. No, she had no background in black metal or in any metal genre what so ever when I met her. She was more a hip hop/rap girl, with background from those things. And we connected nicely, much due to our dissimilarities, as I think we found each others very unique and interesting. We had the same thoughts about lots of other things in life. We could easily relate to each others even though we came from two so different worlds. Lucky for me, she's very much into the things I'm working with and very supportive. Not that she has too much interest for Metal, but she's interested in backing me up.



So, you can say that she wasn't at all surprised with me. In fact, I believe, I

was the more surprised one, that someone with so good understanding about things I found important in life could hail from a background such as that. Not that I look down at Rap and Hip Hop. But I always thought of that as rather superficial and not a very spiritual cult.

What do you do in life nowadays? Are you a professional hairdresser? I also heard that you were doing tattoos but I don't really know how true that is.

No, I never became a hairdresser, as it went to prove more and more that I had bet my money on the wrong horse. I did find the creative part of the profession quite interesting, so schooltime was ok. But when I went out in salons to put the skill into work and everyday life, I eventually began feeling that I was at the wrong place. I thought that it became too much vanity involved. What shampoo one should use for this and that condition, what colour to dye your hair with related to what kind of colour your eyes are and so on. It just became too much nonsense. And eventually I lost my interest in it and got out.

Later on I began to rehearse the tattoo art. I opened my own tattoo studio some years after that. But it didn't work out the way I had hoped for. So I put down the business, yet I still do some tattoos in between, just as a hobby thing though.

My income today is based on several things. Beside the music (which doesn't pay off too much) I work steadily as a support contact in my community, helping out disabled people with their daily life. And I also paint which contributes a bit to the money drawer.

I was wondering about something. We all know how black metal have been and still is, at least to some extent, related to a mostly darker form of self-expression, even sometimes a quite hateful, despaired, rebellious and destructive energy channeling. How can a man as happy and content as you presently are still feel the need to dive himself into such a decaying atmosphere? I

know you're not 16 years old anymore; therefore your 1994 vision of black metal must have changed and evolved. What is still attracting you back to this particular art?

It's who I am and what I know best. I've always been a part of metal music in some form. I think I need it as much as it needs me. It makes me focus, and relieves me from things that would become seriously sickening and hurtful if I didn't have it. Which I guess would ruin my life and leave me endlessly miserable and unhappy. I guess it's my channel in life where I can create a product of the darker aspects of my being, and present it as something entertaining both to my self and others. And at the same time I have lots of fun doing it. It leaves me with a great feeling of contemptment and confidence, knowing that I have accomplished something out of the ordinary. And that I'm capable of doing something that not everyone else can do.

The way it has evolved and changed since my early teenage years is in the sense of becoming more a thing I understand and can more easily relate to. Now it's much more a thing I wanna do more precisely and seriously.

It's like art to me now, and not some juvenile thing to mock society with, or some thing to be utterly deranged from because of not being able to separate things from each others. So to answer your question in short terms: Black Metal is one of the important things I need in life to keep going on.

Last week or so, Kvohst announced that he finally decided to quit DHG for personal reasons. Did you personally enjoy his performance on *Supervillain Outcast*? There have been people complaining about your absence on this album so I just wanted to know what the most concerned man here does think about his own absence.

I think Kvohst did a marvelous effort in taking my place. Concerning all the complaints about me not being there, I really have to say it warms me alot, and it

makes me glad to get all these "annoyed" comments (laughs). As for my absence, as you put it, I have many times wished that I hadn't left, but I did that because of something I thought was way worth more.

My daughter was born and I wanted to spend all my time and put all of my energy into her baby steps, instead of focusing on the band and traveling around the globe. Knowing that she and her mother were home alone without my support... I could always return to the music in some way, but I would never get back to that precious time in my daughter's life.

As many fans out there are starting to wet dream at night regarding an eventual reunion, well, I guess it's quite fair to ask if you would like to re-join your astral forces together with Yusaf in DHG.

As Yoda so gallantly puts it: "hard to see the future, always in motion the future is". I really can't tell, or predict anything about that matter. I'm very content with my place in THORNS and The DEATHTRIP though.

We have been doing this interview under the convenience of a webzine admittedly interested by avant-garde metal in general. What do you think you and your own breed of musicians have created thus far? Electronics are indeed a new driving force, but to me, it seems that we are even getting further and greater than both the eighties and the nineties together. Or do you think we'll never surpass what's been done? Are Thorns and DHG, for examples, re-shaping metal so to speak, and is this what avant-garde metal is all about?

Well I don't know about that. And I really can't relate to the term Avant-Garde Black Metal at all. It tumbles in my mouth when I say it. I don't really see why it has to be tagged so dramatic and advanced. To me it's still just Black Metal, but the genre has become greater and more evolved. It's the same thing anywhere else in the world. Everything

evolves, that's the fact of life. And nothing stays unaltered forever. Everything changes. But we don't call it an AVANT-GARDE HUMAN RACE because we have evolved from being stone agers or Vikings. We still tag ourselves as humans. And we don't say AVANT-GARDE CARS, even though cars have been modified and expanded greatly. I really don't like too much labels in life, and I think it's very unnecessary. It takes away some of the magic in things.



I think I've been one of the people who have contributed a bit to this kind of development within a small part of the world of music. Because of my diehard interest and devotion to metal, and Black Metal in general, along with all the others, I have made a difference in this small field of profession, which makes me strong and proud to think about.

And it is also a fact of life that everything has a tendency to repeat itself. But when it does, it does so in a slightly different way. Everything comes to a certain level of stretching, when it snaps and starts all over again. Just think about the jeans they used in the sixties, with the wide ending around the legs.

I remember that when I was 13 or 14 years old, they returned, but this time they came with the widening being more drastic. Up till then, the sixties jeans style had been gone for twenty years or so. So, I think that it's the same with all kinds of experimental and extreme music. It reaches a highlight, where it must stop by natural laws, and then return to its origin in some way.

I got your point and I would say it's interesting to see it this way, though I wish there were more black metal

related people who shared your views about these matters. I mean, it's always been only individuals who pushed further the genre, while hundreds of followers were recycling the same ideas over and over. Anyway! Thank you so much for your time Captain Aldrahn, it was as much an honour to get to know you better as it was a real pleasure to do so. As a finale, what was one of the craziest thing that ever happened to you throughout all these years of creativity and self-exploration, something that made you literally loose your mind for a while?

Well, I'm sorry if I sound boring, but like many others, my problems have been related to women. Falling in love with the wrong girls and things like that. Not being mature enough to deal with the situation, and letting it become loads of suppressed emotions. That one day can get down to such a heavy burden that it fucks you up badly. I think I've learned that there's only one thing which is worse than dealing with your problems, and that's not doing it.

Strange that so many mental and emotional disasters in life are related to women. The power they got to bring a man to his outmost despair... They are truly what life is all about. Without them I wouldn't have bothered getting up in the morning.



EPHEL DUATH

All You Need To Know About Pain

By Martin Cermak

Bands like this bring the light, search for the paths and push the boundaries of what is possible in extreme music. In case of EPHEL DUATH they do this with nobleness, intelligence, significant aesthetics and sense for every form of art... The "Phormula" album by EPHEL DUATH was an experimental sympho-black punch in the face, back in 2000. Its follower "The Painter's Palette" catapulted this Italian combo to the prominent position of the avant-garde metal platoon in 2003. The last regular release "Pain Necessary to Know" moved the band's expression even in the more extreme corners, the musicians emphasized the contours of such genres as noise, math-core and of course free jazz/fusion. The band's leader, main composer and guitarist Davide Tiso is as always very reflective and sensitive, what gives his

In my opinion the contamination with jazz represents only an interesting way to combine metal with another genre. Metal can really survive better if using such contaminations, and not only jazzy. There are lots of great examples of interesting fusions also with electronic, industrial, hardcore, noise, and others. I am trustful regarding the future of the extreme music; it's not yet a time to talk about an exhausted scene.

Ephel Duath had always a sense and talent for using the elements of the above mentioned electronic music, as well. In the "Palette" album we can hear some jungle or acid loops. The "Rephormula" album was full of programmed rhythms, instruments and sounds to make the appropriate atmosphere. There are also some great remixes with a dark and suggestive non-human atmosphere. And recently you even released "Pain Remixes to Know" as a drum'n'bass appendix to the last album "Pain Necessary to Know"...



art significant touches and impulsions.

You absorbed a lot of jazzy feeling, tricks and arrangements in your music. Do you think that it is a deal and destiny for the majority of the top quality metal bands that they start to tend (sooner or later) to combine metal with jazz?

Is it the right way how metal music can survive?

The remixes, for example, are in fact a great experience. It always permits us to approach to the Ephel Duath's music from a different perspective. What I really appreciate on them and consider as important is the complete twist of our musical structures: in these remixes they are more cold and cynic, have different colour and mood, even if the roots of the songs are the same. I hope that in the future there will be a possibility to repeat this experience, maybe with others musicians or DJs.

Does the electronic face still have some importance for Ephel Duath's music, or you are much more into the live instruments now?

Computers and synthesizers are an additional colour of our music, they haven't a main role, but they are really important to emphasize grooves and psychedelic stuff. We want to continue with these



expedients to offer our music more variety – it is also an interesting another way how to destabilize our sound.

Some of the metal fans are known by a bit lower tolerance to the others genres, for example electronic music or jazz. And from the other side, the fans of non-metal genres scorn and flout when it comes to the metal music; they consider it is something for primitives. Do you think Ephel Duath can help destroy these barriers?



Barriers are only a form of restrictions that people put in front of their eyes for

a no specific reason. Obviously it's not the right way to think about music. I don't see restrictions or limits defined by genres, so I think about my music always with a very open mind and attitude. I like the avant-garde metal bands and I'm into this side of metal since our beginning. For example the evolution of the bands like Manes and Ulver is amazing. It is similar to Ephel Duath – they started with strong black metal influences and ended up with so personal, recognizable and amazing new sound. I love the bands that reinvent their style and I think that this attitude is the only option for Ephel Duath as well. But, I only try to compose music to satisfy my desire to express myself. I don't have any ambitions to become a sort of guide for the others bands or fans.

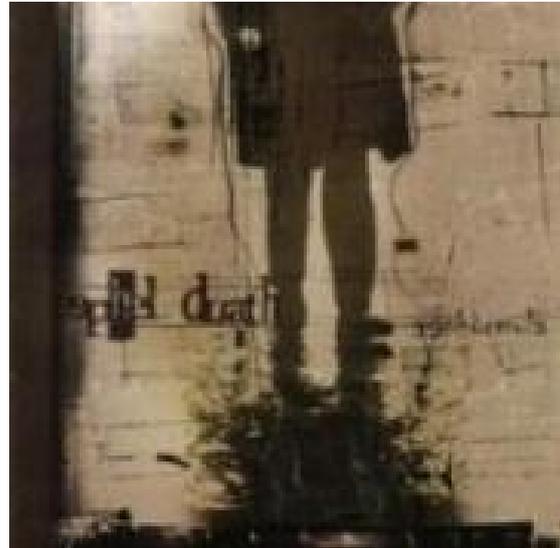
Let's start digging in your biography in the moment between the debut "Phormula" ("Rephormula") and the second album – "The Painter's Palette". It was with no doubt a crucial moment for the whole band and its direction. The former duo did split up; you gathered a completely new line-up and totally twisted the direction of Ephel Duath's music – from some kind of technical sympho-black metal to the original mix of jazz, fusion, noise, hardcore, metal, grindcore, mathcore, progressive and who

knows what else... How do you remember these times when everything was changing and moving?

After the "Rephormula" release I've started to compose new material with a great determination. In few months I wrote the guitars and the structures for six songs and recorded the new compositions in a small studio. The sound engineer said me that a typical metal drummer would be a disaster for this so various material, so he gave me a contact to Davide Piovesan, a jazz/prog/blues musician. I was in a very difficult period, crushed between the will to be bold and the fear to be not supported by our label for a so audacious choice. But I followed my instinct and in few weeks I was in studio with this crazy 47 years old drummer and a friend of him, a double bass player. Unfortunately the bassist left later, but his help has been fundamental: I understood that this was the right way to create something of new. In few days we found another great bass player, Fabio Fecchio, who had a funky/pop/fusion background, so the rhythm section was done. To find the right singer was more difficult, but after various auditions the line up was complete. After hundreds of hours spent in our studio together the work took shape.

comparison with the other members is also an exciting factor.

Can you enlighten a bit more the departure of your initial bandmate Giuliano Mogenicato who composed and recorded together with you the cult debut album "Phormula"?



We have been a great communion for a lot of years, but after the "Phormula" recording session, my bandmate Giuliano became completely confused regarding the Ephel Duath's future. He wanted to move the new sound to some "anti-metal" form; Ephel Duath in his concep-



Is it very different for you, if you compare the work in a duo and with the team of for example five people?

Work in a duo is easier; you have to control only two points of view. A lot of different processes are quicker. Moreover there is a possibility to create a sort of "magic" or "alchemy" between the two ones. That is difficult to find in a full line-up. On the other hand, the continual musical growth allowed by the constant

tion would be an instrumental band with percussion, cello and others acoustic instruments. I preferred to continue alone, because I thought he would destroy the spirit of the band. So I decided to create a full line-up to offer Ephel Duath a new brilliant skin, and also to give my music a chance for live exposition.

What are the main differences between Ephel Duath live on stage and Ephel Duath in studio?

Our songs in a live dimension are a little bit more direct and minimal (also because we play with only one guitar). We needed to adapt some parts for the live version and give them a different arrangement: It's a new and important aspect how to absorb our music and I love it. The response of the audience is really positive as well. They are usually a bit still, but they seem to appreciate and understand our music.

Let's go back to the "Painter's Palette" album, your second one. You play with colours on this album. It seems to be a creative fusion of music and visual arts, is it?

"The Painter's Palette" wanted to be a sublimation of the free interpretations and colours are, in my opinion, a perfect way to symbolize and express this desire. Have you ever notice how many various and curious effects have the view of the same colour on different sensibilities? During the composition, intimately, I have fused our music with pigments and, to fully express myself, I have reported it in the titles. I did choose the colours to combine them with songs following my senses, and not with a rational search. Also it is not a "guide": that's the reason for the black & white artwork. Nine rays of the colours that you are searching in these compositions would try to hit you; absorb them with the largest perception possible, and it will complete you the sense of our work.

All the booklets of your albums are very minimalist. It suggests an idea that you expect the fans with a lot of fantasy and imagination, who can complete the impression from your art inside their brains. Is the point that your music cannot be accepted and understood by the people without fantasy?

There isn't a formula to enter in Ephel Duath's music, also because there aren't things that need to be understood in our compositions. The only important thing is to feel what we create, and to have an open mind. People without fantasy would reach probably different musical inputs from the others, nothing else...

In your lyrics we find a lot of terms from the visual arts. Was it one of your intentions to show people how music can be directly connected and related to the others spheres of art, mainly the painting and the visualisation?

Terms from the visual arts and paintings that you can find in my lyrics have been used to create a closer connection with the concept around "The Painter's Palette". A lot of the images that are present in my words are fused with an artistic attitude that better defines my personality, moreover it could be considered also as a kind of a little tribute that I offer to the mysterious figure of the painter.



Which of the painters inspire you mostly?

My favourites are Chagall and Miró. They have offered a new dimension to colours, and their technical search has been really illuminating for my artistic formation. I love also Magritte, Dalí and Pollock for their innovative and crazy attitude...

Did you follow some artistic studies, besides being an active musician?

I was a student of the "artistic conservation" at the University of Venice, but I left the studies to compose and record "The Painter's Palette". But it doesn't mean I don't want to continue this parallel career; I'm really interested in various artistic fields.

How was the lyrical side of "Palette" connected to its musical and visual aspect?

The lyrics are really intimate, introspective and pure. They contain a lot of negative inputs captured by my personal life and filtered through images that I try to make poetic. The goal is to open these ones to all possible interpretations and to offer the listener/reader a more active role.

I can give you some examples: In "The Other's Touch", to express a sense of emptiness, I wrote: "View is overturning to this internal abyss when my withered leaves are burning and mirrors have nothing to reflect".

Sometimes the images that I use are also very direct and cutting – for example in "Ruins", to express the difficulties that I face being in contact with a lot of people when the sudden sense of fury guides my mind, I wrote:

"And in poor seconds the filthy figures surrounding me became obstacles. Intoxicated eyes, madly, are searching for the obscure calm, but the partial blindness doesn't relieve and viscid words are shoved to the fury: my hostile guide". My lyrics have a strong lenitive power and impact on me; they permit to me to understand a lot of different aspects of my ego.

Let's move to the (for the moment last one) album "Pain Necessary to Know". I can offer you a metaphor – on "Palette" you were a music painter, on "Pain" you are a music architect. Are you for?

I love your metaphor! I totally agree with you, the "Pain..." album shows my

deep interest about the various musical levels of songs. Moreover the rhythmical approach on "Pain Necessary to Know" (that builds and destroys oblique parts) contributes to the architectural mood present in the album.

When thinking about your evolution between "Palette" and "Pain" I had the following first impression: The newer album is more mathematic, while the previous has more colours. Where did you want to move from the "Palette" to the new one?

I wanted to compose an album with more dynamics, a clear no-direction and fewer messages fuse together. I'm still interested in the crossover side of the band, but now I'm searching to give life to real monolith music with a clear un-identity.

Are you familiar with the mathematic dimension of music? Not only that one subgenre (near to your expression) is called math-core, but also you use the word "vector" in your song titles. Mathematics is connected with the order, but your expression is also very chaotic (the first song on the album is called "New Disorder"). Do you feel that this tension between the precision/order and disorder is somehow basic for your thinking in music?

Every Ephel Duath song is born from a guitar skeleton that is composed with the most spontaneity and impulsivity possible. Math comes after, when I propose my parts to the rhythm section and we restart the whole structure's process. The mix between my absolutely non-theoretical attitude and the technical and deep hearted contribution of the bass player Fabio was one of the most interesting Ephel Duath's sides.

What do you mean about the current strong wave of the math-core, noise-core, jazzy grind etc.? Do you think it is really growing (and why)?

I deeply respect these genres and I consider math-core to be a very intelligent chance that the current metal scene has to evolve itself. There are nerves, chaos,

irony and tons of feelings inside: everything what the today's metal, related to this poor society, needs.



The "Pain..." album is more extreme in every meaning – more jazzy, more noise, more rhythmic etc. What pushes you to search and explore the extremes? Which others extremes do you see in your evolution?

I want to completely free our music from all typical restrictions of the genres. I try to offer Ephel Duath the freedom of contemporary music, destroying the song's classical structure and giving a new idea of the repetitions of riffs. At the same time I want to enlarge our public as much as possible: this is the challenge that I see for our future.

Although each of your albums is quite different, the last two are musically neighbouring, comparing them to "Rephormula". So I think you did successfully define your style. Can you turn back and try to sum up what is typical for the nowadays Ephel Duath, which elements of its current expression are the most important for you?

Till our origins, contrasts are one of the Ephel Duath's most important elements. In the first album we used to fuse together extreme metal and symphonic or electro stuff, with second one using jazz and metal, today we develop this factor in a full or empty way, with cries and caresses. Screaming help us to underline this will, it explode and immedi-

ately hide itself like a wolf in the forest. The well balanced fusion between these elements creates our style, and to emphasize this aspect I'm putting as much attention as possible to the dynamics and volumes.

Your guitar and its sound and production differ very much, album by album. The last recording has a very jagged, noisy, raw, nervous and a bit untypical sound. Why did you choose it and how did you reach it?

To record "Pain Necessary to Know" I have used the same amplifier, a simple Fender Hot Rod Deluxe combo, an old Boogie head, and an Orange head and cabinet. I tried to go to the roots of my guitar's sound, to the most natural possible, everything combined with a strong use of effects where necessary. You can clearly listen to the valve in my sound, at the same time the pick that touch the strings is on your face. I deeply love this sound, even if I will try to better my low frequencies, especially on live dimension.

You did choose a very uncomfortable sound and music "layout" of the whole recording. What is so attractive for you on this musical uncomfortableness?

In my opinion the possibility to create a personal way to think about the extreme music passes also through an apparent non-comfort.

Did the reactions on the "Pain" album somehow deeply differ from the reactions on "Palette"?

Reactions on "The Painter's Palette" has been simply astonishing. It was an ambitious album that permitted to the band to enlarge its public. In that period it seems that listeners of a very wide spectrum of genres appreciated the band! A horrible situation for me... *(Laughs)* The reactions on "Pain Necessary to Know" were more interesting. Today it's clear who loves us and who doesn't appreciate our jump into the experimental



side of music. Those, who love us, follow every Ephel Duath choices and changes of direction.

We spoke yet about "Painter's Palette" being closely connected to the visual arts; but how about the new album? The key word for this one is "Pain". Does it mean that this album deals more with the feelings, emotions, moods, states of body and mind?

New album is deeply in contact with my inner obscurity. Probably it has less artistic visualisation than "The Painter's Palette" due to the fact that its prevalent colour is black and the others are black's shades. Anyway I'm pretty sure that the new songs would be perfect with some minimal visual animation; if there will be economical possibilities, we'll try to do something in this direction.

The musical structure of "Pain" album seems to me more rational. Is it also a case of the lyrics, are they connected less with the artistic/aesthetic aspect and in the contrary more with the real world, ground, human deal etc.?

When I write the Ephel Duath's lyrics, I start from simple things that gravitate around my life, using a lot of images and metaphors. "Pain Necessary to Know" lyrics focus the attention to all the masks that we have to put on our faces to live our days. We use the figure of the medusa's tentacles present in the artwork to symbolize the title of the album. You can't say you know medusa, if you haven't a sign of its touch around your body. You can't say you have a distant idea of what is the better life for you, if you don't have the signs of pain around your thoughts. In my opinion "pain is necessary to know". The whole album has been influenced also by my new residence, Venice, and by its dirty water and strange temporal density. I fell to float and not to live here.

Three songs have "Vector" in the title. Which concept lies behind?

The "Vector's saga" starts from some inner thoughts regarding the necessity to change my impulsive side and to ponder every choice. I've connected this song with others two compositions created in the same period and in the same mood. It made an interesting combination.

Then the chronology of this trilogy has been destroyed to exalt the track list.

Is the chaotic face of Ephel Duath's music a reflection (a mirror) of the more and more chaotic world around, overloaded by information, impossible to catch easily?

My music is a concrete way to escape from the rules and models of this society that don't represent me. The chaos present in it reflects my personality that is, on the other hand, obviously influenced by the world around me.

We spoke yet about the building of the new line-up before recording "Palette". Unfortunately you had some line-up difficulties again. What is the reason that it is so hard to keep the band stable and fixed?



The singer Davide Tolomei left the band for personal reasons during "The Painter's Palette" promotion. It has been a very difficult situation because we were heading for the Norway's Quart Festival. We were forced then to rearrange the whole set list in few days.

Regarding our ex-drummer Davide Piovosan, it was impossible for him to continue with Ephel Duath. The band's economical situation doesn't permit us to live of our music; we are very distant from it. He understood it during the tour with The Dillinger Escape Plan and Poi-

son the Well: probably in that occasion he decided to quit us. We have given the final arrangements to the "Pain..." songs, recorded it in studio, and immediately after the drum sessions he wrote me a letter talking about his will. Unfortunately, it was not the end.

The bassist Fabio Fecchio left us in 2007. But we are ready now to explore some even more experimental dimensions of the music. I want to add something more... I put my life in this project. The band has become a sort of inner language for me: it's impossible to play with Ephel Duath not considering this particular. If someone realizes (for various different reasons) that he is not able to offer all his strength to the band, he usually leaves us.

Your band's image is very serious – ties, well cut lounge suits and shirts etc. Was there some connection between the evolution of your musical style and your dressing?

Since our beginnings we have tried to offer an elegant image to the band. It is connected to the sophisticated way how we try to create music. So it's not a choice related only to some concrete album or band's musical style in some period, but it represents the only way how Ephel Duath members can present themselves.

How do you spend your free time when you don't compose music?

My free time is usually filled with books, movies, art, alcohol and few others things... I love movies, especially the works of Kieslowski, Amenábar, Polanski, Antonioni, Joel Coen, Tarantino, Guy Ritchie, Lars Von Trier, Scorsese and Kusturica. In literature my favourites are Bukowski, Bret Easton Ellis, Chuck Palahniuk, Kundera, Tibor Fischer and J. T. Leroy above all.

THE AXIS OF PERDITION

Modelation Of The Absolute Uncertainty

By Martin Cermak

What the hell. British THE AXIS OF PERDITION are one of the weirdest formations that ever crawled out from the underworld. They absorbed different shapes of extreme music (be it black metal, dark ambient or industrial), processed and transformed it into their own original, non-human, excessive sound for apocalypse. It penetrates into the marrow of your bones and brings an instant anxiety. You need to live and survive this experience...

Our guide (whose words will help you, touch you, confuse you, enlighten you at one dash) is the multi-instrumentalist Mike Blenkarn. We spoke together mainly about their last full-length nightmare "Deleted Scenes from the Transition Hospital", but the fans can yet soon look forward the new terrible effort of The Axis of Perdition. You were warned...

THE AXIS OF PERRDITON

The overall artistic expression of your band is quite bizarre. What is the most attractive for you on this bizarreness?

Art in general that exists on a knife-edge at the furthest outreaches of acceptability tends to be both divisive and compelling, and offers great potential for manipulating and feeding off the preconceptions of the consumer to cultivate strong emotional and physical reactions. The bizarre side of The Axis of Perdition mainly derives from the joy of exploration into the unknown and to keep surprising and provoking reactions in us as much as anyone else.

I think the key characteristic in our music is a continuous conflict between repulsion and attraction, and we try to keep the music full of physical sensations and textures, make it an evocative environment that you could almost touch or taste (while wishing that you couldn't), but make it something that you can't help but explore out of simple fascination. The bottom line is that in order to

work with a fairly continuous set of materials and keep maintaining a strong feeling you just have to keep challenging yourself, and in Axis, the feeling is everything.

Are you studying, describing, and expressing the states of psychic abnormality and psychic diseases through your art? Your music sounds quite psychotic, no doubts...

The horrific mood of The Axis of Perdition's art is based on playing with concepts of psychological disorders, yes. Fundamentally, we're trying to suggest an environment where your perception is not to be trusted and you must continually question your surroundings and the integrity of your sanity.

By mixing up identifiable, accountable sounds in our ambient parts, like machine sounds, metal dragging, liquid flowing etc., and contrasting them with processed and manipulated sounds to create the hypothetical sounds of horrible, unearthly things, we're trying to present the listener with a "catch 22 situation": either accept that all the sounds are real, and let your imagination loose in constructing ideas of what could be making the stranger sounds, or decide that none of them are real, and have to question everything that you perceive. This mimics the kind of effect that some psychoses and disorders can have on people, and the deep dread and fear that can come with not being able to rely on your senses to tell you what is real anymore, which is undoubtedly very frightening.

If the listener is interacting with the music wholeheartedly then either approach should have the kind of unnerving effect that we're trying to create, but if you can accept the unreality and allow your mind to just run free with it, then I think that's a lot more enriching and you'll find the music more rewarding. The act of listening to Axis is definitely interactive and what you get out of the music is going to depend on what you bring to it in the first place.

How do you define normality?

Do you consider yourself as normal?

That's a tough one. I think a lot of people would consider it abnormal to dwell on the things that go into *The Axis of Perdition* as intensively and obsessively as we do, but I think to be able to appreciate the sheer power and inherent fascination of the things that inspire us is really a blessing. We're just really passionate about music and horror and doing our best to unify the two. To be honest, I think to just submit to the grey 9 to 5 routine that society tries to impose on you and stick to the blandest, most predictable and most contrived forms of lowest-common-denominator art that lots of people seem to be content with and consider to be the benchmarks of "normal" and "acceptable" is completely abnormal. We're in a wealthy and privileged society with all our needs essentially catered for, so people have no excuse not to find things to be passionate about and not try and challenge themselves.

Do you study your own "inside", your mind, psychic states etc.?

Definitely yes. What probably keeps *Axis* compelling to us and others is the fact that we're developing our work by trying to shock ourselves, explore our own fears and consciousness, and make ourselves feel the visceral sensations and emotions we are trying to create. We have to put faith in our own reactions and consistently try and intensify the impact the music has on us as listeners

ourselves – it keeps things very honest, instinctive and uncontrived. With this kind of music, as soon as you try and over-think and try and manipulate things too much, you can extinguish the spirit of it all too easily.

Can you tell me the main story behind "Deleted Scenes from the Transition Hospital", and how did you develop the basic idea...?

Essentially, "Deleted Scenes" concerns an unnamed protagonist, who wakes up in a dark, claustrophobic, derelict building that initially appears to be an abandoned hospital, and which he appears to be completely trapped in. Alone and completely unable to remember how he came to be there, his only choice is to try and explore the place and find the way out. The further in he goes, the darker, danker and more derelict the place becomes, growing filthier and more treacherous to navigate. He's not alone and that there are... things nearby, observing him, stalking him. Is the place even like a hospital any longer, is it becoming a distorted and horrific labyrinth that makes no sense and couldn't possibly exist in a sane reality? His mental state deteriorates, but he has to keep moving, to escape, and to find out ultimately what he's doing there, even if the knowledge destroys his mind. Why he's there, what he encounters on the journey and all the details I'll leave to your imagination. If we gave you too much information it probably wouldn't engage you as much.



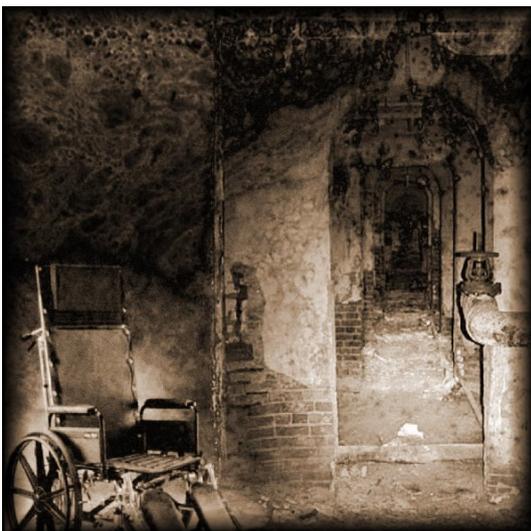
Are you inspired and familiar with the artists like von Trier or Lynch whose feeling (and the milieu or background, which they describe) is close to yours? The word "scenes" evokes the relation to movies.

Lynch, very much so. The lounge music buried under the static and noises at the end of "Pendulum Prey" is a

minor homage to Lynch's work, as you could probably have guessed. Lynch's attention to detail, the sheer emotional gravity of his films, uncompromising devotion to his art and a vision that can only be called breathtaking are all a great inspiration for anyone who takes their work seriously. Like Lynch though, you'll be hard pressed to get us to explain our work in too much detail, because the mystery preserves something that might be lost otherwise. I've also heard great things about Von Trier's "Riget", and that's on my list of things to check out.

From which state to which one occurs the "transition"? Is it something like from "being" to "non-being" (or another state)?

That could be one. The transition doesn't have to mean to move from one concrete state to another as much as to illustrate the process of continuous change, evolution and devolution. It could be the distortion of the human mind and body into something darker under the influence of The Axis of Perdition, equally it could describe how the apparent "hospital" illustrated in the story slowly becomes something else. It could be any change in your perceptions before, during and after listening to the album... We have our own explanations, of course, but who's to say ours are necessarily more valid than yours?



Do you work with your topics in a more abstract / transcendent way,

or in the contrary you catch (metaphorically) the real world?

We're interested in the real world to the extent that we can take inspiration from real derelict environments, real dark places, genuine psychopathology, psycho-geography, and urban mythology and the like. As for world problems, politics, and the black & white realities of life, we're not really concerned with that at all. Our work is set in an abstract, imaginative horror environment that behaves to the rules we set it and derives from film and literature in the like, so it's set in deliberate contrast to, and in preference to, the real world. The imagination is so much more fertile and rich in possibility, to keep our feet "on the ground" would be boring. I'm not keen on the word escapism, but it covers a lot of what I'm trying to say.

Are you interested in hospitals (or even mental hospitals, bedlams)? Did you visit these places to search for some inspiration?

Real exploration of derelict environments and recording found sounds on location is becoming a greater part of The Axis of Perdition all the time. To keep focus on creating visceral, textural sounds and stimulate ourselves there's nothing better than looking round such places. Derelict buildings, particularly asylums and the like, are just that evocative, exciting, enticing and fascinating that I could never see enough of them, they're just endlessly beguiling and powerful. Seeing a building in that state seems to intensify the emotion and atmosphere within it to such a degree that they're absolutely perfect backdrops for exploring the repulsion vs. attraction paradigm that I mentioned earlier. They're the postmodern equivalent of ruins, or like naturally evolving sculpture, and I think they should be celebrated as such, with respect rather than being cordoned off, hushed up and torn down by a society obsessed with new shiny things, pretending nothing exists but the bright and new and comfortable, unconcerned by learning from the changes that it's been through and the realities of urban decay.

The atmosphere of your songs is

sometimes quite eschatological. Are you interested in the human "last things", "end of the road", and life after death?

Our first album dealt with apocalyptic themes as much as we wanted to, our long term interests are in lower key, idiosyncratic, person-centred "stories". We're interested in death in the context of how fear can be promoted and cultivated by threat of death and especially about the intrinsic human fear of the unknown, of which death is foremost. So while I can say death is an important tool to The Axis of Perdition, we're focused on creating these frightening stories first and foremost so we use it as and when the story requires it, not as an object on its own.

Are feelings very important for you? I can feel fear, an abstract anxiety, incertitude and roughness in your music. Are your feelings coming from it?

It's ultimately fear in all its different forms and degrees of subtlety and uniquely different impacts that we're exploring. All our artistic concerns are bound up in stimulating it, presenting evocative scenarios and stories for the listeners to involve themselves in, and exploring dread and the unearthly through psychological and cinematic methodologies. We want the sounds to stimulate the senses and travel deep into the strange territories between repulsion and fascination. The other feelings you cite are things we'd consider within this broad model of fear, and the fear derives from this sense of psychological uncertainty, the constant need to question the evidence of the senses and the integrity of the mind, the descent into the chaos, darkness and confusion of what could either be a diseased mind or a nightmare world of genuine horror, or both.

Are you very familiar with the dark ambient and industrial music? Do you think that The Axis of Perdition is still metal music, or yet more non-metal? Sometimes I am not sure...

Axis is probably best described as a dark ambient band that uses metal as part of

a range of textures. The metal parts are developed and executed with an ambient sense of aesthetics and structures, emphasising continuous flow and maintaining mood rather than trying to satisfy pop sensibilities with catchy hooks and the like. The overall idea is to unify dark ambient and metal into a style that's both and neither. Most of the criticism we get is from people who are either unable to accept that we're not trying to win them over within five seconds with a fat riff and play up to their self-satisfied expectations and inability to deviate from comfortable patterns, or think that we're misguided to try and meld the genres like this and think they know better. Both are quite amusing – in fact the way millions of people in the world over think that an internet connection gives them instant authority on any subject is downright hilarious – but it's not something we waste too much thought on. It's not our problem. We seem to be getting through to some people though. If they say that they've really been affected and moved by our work, it is very gratifying and very humbling. Oh, and very weird!



Which bands and projects would you name as most inspiring for The Axis of Perdition?

There are loads of ambient stuff that has been important before and/or that is influencing me now though, too much to list. Maeror Tri's "Emotional Engramm" has always been a huge inspiration, though on the surface there are little similarities. It's a great album though, and most importantly it was my first ambient album and opened me up to a whole new world of musical possibilities. After that, Megaptera, Raison d'etre,

Sephiroth, and recently Atrium Carceri and Gruntsplatter have all played their parts.

In terms of metal, Emperor were an influence in the beginning, Blut Aus Nord have been a huge influence, and Meshuggah too, but mostly the more we've built up a body of work, the more we've derived inspiration and ideas just by reviewing our previous work and thinking about different places we can take the style that we've personally developed. Just recently I've been enjoying the Deathspell Omega, too, though whether this'll impact on the band, I don't know.

What do you think about the current so-called post-black wave? Your band is considered as one of the leading acts of this genre...

I think post-black metal is a pretty crap umbrella term, really. There's no unifying philosophy or style to the bands that get called post-black metal, and some (I put Axis forward as a particular example) have no relation to black metal anyway.

It just seems a lazy and unjustified way of tidying up what's perceived to be a cluttered scene, as if it were as simple as that. I think there's very little comparison to be made between any of the "post-black" bands; Blut Aus Nord is the only one that we feel any kind of artistic and aesthetic kinship with. I should think the others bands don't appreciate such comparisons any more than I do. These sort of meaningless and half-baked genre ideas are really something to be actively discouraged as much as possible.

A short idea about your musical future...?

We're just going to keep at what we've already been doing, as before, but trying to challenge ourselves, do everything better, and make the experience even more vivid and engaging and detailed than before. I do feel that we found about the right balance on "Deleted Scenes" with it being a straight 50-50 split between metal and ambient, so I suppose that's something that might stay the same.



DIABLO SWING ORCHESTRA

Dirty Dancing With Diablo

By Martin Cermak

The fresh young Swedish blood DIABLO SWING ORCHESTRA is one of the bands that cannot sink into average. If you hear them once, you either like them or hate them, but you cannot mess them with anything other. Of course, what else can you expect from the people who are able to combine elegantly such genres as swing, tango or flamenco with metal and opera. When listening to their songs on their debut album "Butcher's Ballroom", nothing is sure nor guaranteed, so you must be ready and alerted every minute. Just now, we will not yet dance with devil himself, but with one of his legates - the guitarist Daniel Hakansson...



Your music is quite a "wild mix" of everything possible; sometimes the particular components are very distant one from another. How do you manage it and stick together, so that the final result sounds coherent? Is it difficult to keep the consistent and cohesive expression if you work this method?

To make it work I think it is important to actually like these particular styles of music. Otherwise it can easily just become gimmick. We truly enjoy flamenco, swing and oriental music for instance and this is our way of showing our influences. The problem of making it work does not lie within writing the song, but finding a sound that fits them. So this was the most challenging aspect that we worked a lot on in the studio. I actually think we succeeded.

You work with the "retro" music styles and sounds. You have even "swing" in the name of the band.

What means for you those styles and retro atmosphere, what do you find there so attractive for you?

The swing tag is more connected to the fact that we make music to dance rather. Anyway, we don't use the different elements because of strive to be different, but because we simply enjoy them. We haven't set up any rules for something that we won't use. We are pretty open-minded and will at least try every idea that comes up once.



You use the operatic female voices (among others). Don't you have a fear that it will be considered as a cliché by the fans and reviewers, because of the overabundance and abuse of this kind of vocals in metal music (mainly in the gothic bands)?

When we started the band, we were unaware of the fact that there exist so many female-fronted bands in metal. Our influence comes from the different reasons. My mother was an opera singer in her youth and this connection to our music has nothing to do with the fact that many other bands use female lead vocals. But to be honest, I think we are one of the few that has a professional opera singer as a full-time member.

Generally how is your musical grounding? Are you metalheads exploring as wide as possible the others genres? Or in the contrary you started with something completely

different and reached metal face later?

I got an upbringing filled with operas and choir works. I wasn't paying too much attention at the time, but when I later got into music, it had clearly made an impact on me. I picked up the guitar when I turned 16 and few years later I "rediscovered" classical music and ideas started to take shape. We are all into metal however, in various forms, so I guess that's what ties us together musically.

How long time did "crystallize" the original musical style of DSO? Can you describe this process of taking shape and crystallization of your expression?

I cannot emphasize enough the impact the studio work had on our sound. It took a long time before we finally got a sound that fitted. Prior to the recording we sound more like a "garage-version" of ourselves; it wasn't until the songs had been recorded, we realized how special they sounded.

We didn't have any trumpets or flutes at the rehearsal, so we just had to imagine them at certain passages and it was a relief to finally get to hear them. We are certainly very pleased with the results of our efforts. We were all in all in the studio for about 12 weeks during a period of half a year. The humorous aspect of the music actually came to life in the studio and came very much from the fact that we enjoyed ourselves a lot.

What did you absorb from the Scandinavian musical and cultural background? Did you draw this typical Swedish melodic feeling or atmosphere?

Me myself have taken an impression from a lot of folk music around the world including the Swedish one. Don't know how we would sound if we were from another country but I'm sure the fact that Sweden has a good reputation for putting out quality music has helped us along the way.

You are with no doubt an innovative

band, in the best tradition of the experimental Scandinavian metal wave. What are in your opinion the current "needs" of metal music - what helps it to survive and evolve?

I think the vital is that people approach music for what it is. Progression in any kind of music is only natural and hopefully we can broaden some people's senses of what good music is. Genres are uninteresting and hopefully that mentality can spread more and more to the metal scene. That said I must say that the underground metal scene is as vital as ever with a lot of cool bands such as Unexpect, To-Mera and Stolen Babies. It seems like people are looking for something new and fresh and for now we seem to fill that void for them.

Do you have an idea what is your personal contribution to the scene?

I would hope that it would be that we influence other bands to incorporate all different kinds of elements into their music. And also that we can bring together people that normally don't listen to the same kind of music.

How did you reach the deal? Was it difficult, or easy? By chance, or through the hard work?

I spoke to the founder of Candlelight rec. Lee Barret on a forum and he expressed some interest to help us to find a deal. When he later became the A&R for Candlelight, he asked once again, if we want to come onboard. As for now, we have only a licence agreement with them and we'll see what the future has to bring, but we are very satisfied with the collaboration so far.

How important is for you the "image" of the band - costumes, design, setting/decor etc.? How do you work with it?

Since we play a sort of theatrical music, we can't show up wearing jeans and t-shirts for a show. It just won't suit the music. Our bassist Andy works as an art director and comes up with most of the visual ideas connected to our image/style or whatever it should be called.



Your biography is very nice - one of the best I ever read, with a really nice, uncommon story! Tell me - is this history a complete "fairy-tale" (very well written and narrated), a half-truth/half tale... or a truth?

Well, the answer depends on how much you know about Swedish history. The other official biography states that we all started the band to finance our mutual gambling addiction...

The conversation ends here, but the story just begins. Let's jump 500 years back...

The Diablo Swing Orchestra dates back to 1501 in Sweden, where history tells the tale of an orchestra that played like no other. With music so seductive and divine that the ensemble overwhelmed audiences all over the country, and people from all social classes took them to their hearts. Their performances rapidly earned a reputation of being feral and vigorous and gained the orchestra a devoted crowd that followed them around.

During the later half of the 16'th century the criticism against the royal crown dictatorial ruling had intensified. Gifts and tenancies had made the church extremely wealthy, and since the money merely was used to strengthen their power the discontent among the people was growing. To many people the orchestra presented them to a new view

upon things and a way to cope with everyday life.

The church witnessed how their influence over the people decreased and began to depict the orchestra as treacherous, saying their intentions were anything but righteous. The orchestras' extensive use of the prohibited tritonus interval in their music as well as their excessive lifestyles was facts that were not looked mildly upon. During church services priests slandered the music saying it was an insult to Christ himself. However, when this attempt to reduce the orchestras' popularity failed, the church began to use more desperate measures in order to regain its former power.

The Devils orchestra became the slogan they used and the members were accused of being everything from devil worshippers to the spawn of Satan. This catchphrase eventually caught on and became the popular name of the orchestra. When even these efforts shown futile the church ultimately framed the orchestra members for a murder and a ruthless manhunt began. The following two years the orchestra lead the lives of outlaws and were forced to perform in barns and outhouses, where only a strictly limited number of people were allowed to attend. Luckily generous people provided them with food and somewhere to sleep.

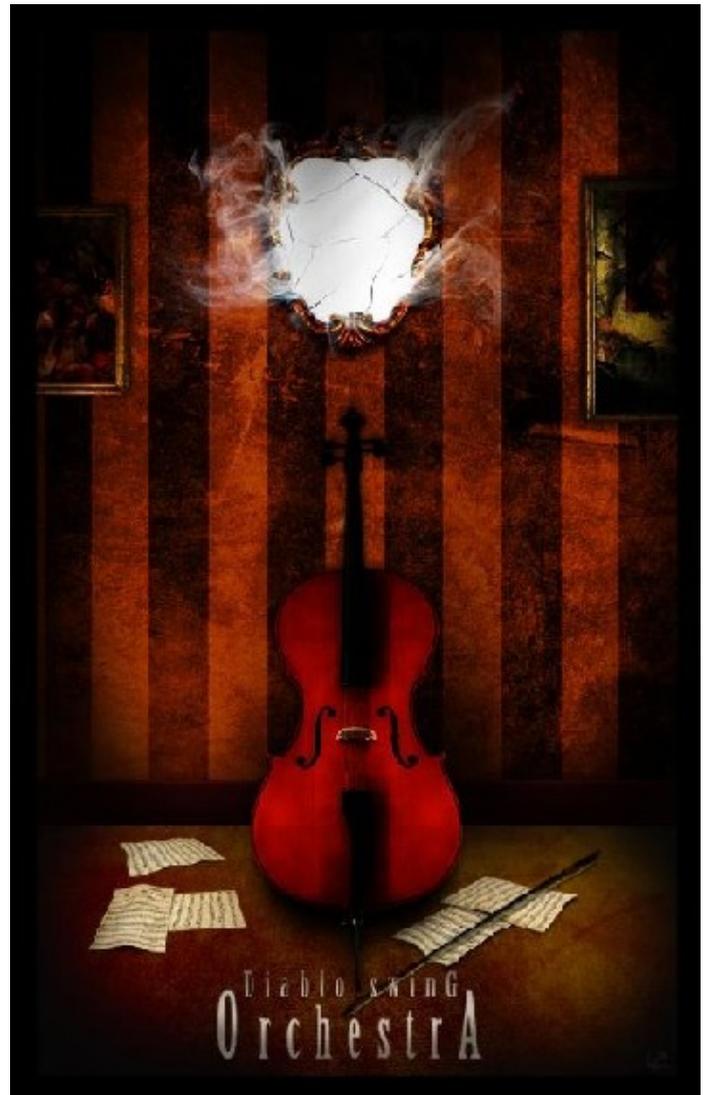
In order to capture the orchestra the church issued a reward to the person that could provide such information that lead to the capture of the orchestra. The sum was so large that the orchestra, tired and weary of living as fugitives, realised that it all had come to an end. They knew that sooner or later someone would reveal their whereabouts and the decided to go down in style.

But before doing so they all signed a pact saying that their descendants were given the task of reuniting the orchestra in 500 years and continue their work of spreading thought-provoking music. Six envelopes were therefore sealed and given to trustees of the orchestra to pass on to family members. They announced their final concert publicly as a grandeur finale. Thousands of people showed up and even though it was almost no one

who could actually hear the music, the massive sing-along of the crowd granted the performance to be the most talked about in history. Thanks to the huge amount of people the orchestra was allowed to play until their last song when armed guards finally managed to storm the stage and arrest the musicians. They were sent prison and later sentenced to death by hanging.

Stockholm 2003, by mere accident two of the original orchestra descendants meet in a music shop and began to discuss music. It later shows that they both have received a strange letter from some ancient relative containing instructions on how to reunite The Devils Orchestra. They both become very excited and though some genealogy they managed to find all of the remaining successors in a period of three months.

Unfortunate all of the original scores were confiscated and burned by the church back in 1503. So music-wise the new orchestra were left with no directions on what to play. After some meticulous discussions it was agreed upon that the music should be like a modern version of the old orchestra. Annlouice was chosen to front the band, her angelic yet powerful operatic voice was perfect to bring a bombastic feeling to the music. Pontus dance-influences and programming skills came in handy since the orchestra wanted the arrangements to sound a bit more futuristic. He shares guitar duties with Daniel who also is the main composer in the band. Andy brought some groove to the mix adding powerful slapping and funk-oriented bass licks, while Andreas's energetic drumming made sure the songs are driven and pulsating. Together with Anders, he lays the solid swinging foundation of the band. Johannes's theoretical knowledge and stunning technique combined with an emotive cello-playing style made him essential to the bands sound.



BAL-SAGOTH

15 Years Of Blazing Swords, Crimson Rain And Majestic Vistas.

By aVoid

*There is bombast, and then there is bombast. Epic, majestic, call it whatever - many try, most fail. From the British Isles comes BAL-SAGOTH, for a decade and a half over and over again setting even higher standards in narrative conceptuality and the aforementioned adjectives. "Too many trumpets". "Sounds like a comic book". The taunts have been many, yet none that may touch these infamous warrior kings. You may worship them, you may detest them, but one truth is constant - over their 15 years of existence, they have trodden their own singular path, fearlessly looking forward into the unknown, granting blissful wonders to those who dare to follow. In my search for illumination, I conjured up a spiritual connection to the ultimate driving force behind Bal-Sagoth, **Lord Byron Roberts**, and one of the masterminds behind the music, **Jonny Maudling**. (Additional queries phrased by Trident.)*

PREFACE:

RECOLLECTIONS AND FOREBODINGS

It has now been about 1½ years since *The Chthonic Chronicles* was released, and it has received great acclaim from many magazines (including this). It feels though as a sort of summary, gathering different aspects from its five predecessors, and at the end returning to Hatheg-Kla where *A Black Moon Broods Over Lemuria* once began. What is happening in Bal-Sagoth these days? Are you blissfully dreaming of the splendours of youth, or gathering forces to strike again when the stars are right?

BYRON: Well there are currently no firm plans to release a seventh album. That doesn't mean that it will never happen, it's just that we're not planning on it at any point in the immediately foreseeable future. There's certainly no shortage of inspiration or material, it's just that at this point in the legend of Bal-Sagoth (15 years old in 2008!) I feel that if there are ever to be any further albums, then a number of conditions simply **MUST** be right. One of them is that a really dedicated and suitable label must be ready and willing to release the work. I will never allow Bal-Sagoth to go down the "self-released" road, as that would clearly be a backward step, and would tarnish the mystique and reputation of the band.



Sure, that method might work fine for some bands, and good luck to them, but it's not for Bal-Sagoth. Any theoretical future deal that we sign would have to be tailored very specifically to the band before I even think of licensing any further material. At this stage, we can make our own schedule, our own plan of attack, our own strategy. We've proved that we're not some flash-in-the-pan band with a sell-by date. We're an enduring force in extreme metal, and we could potentially leave it another 10 years before we released another album, and we'd still find an audience for it. We will not bow to the pressures of the music industry or play exclusively by its rules. That's one of the prime Bal-Sagoth mandates. Another factor would be that the material would have to be 100% perfect and suitable before it's even considered for release. This band is an extreme metal band, I always envisioned it as such, and any future output would accordingly be extreme. Over the years, in certain respects, we may have lost sight of that directive somewhat regarding the music. There won't be any such compromise for any theoretical future material. Rest assured, we are watching... and waiting. If and when the time is right, we will let the world know accordingly.



I'm also working on various short stories and graphic novels based on my lyrics, which are being illustrated by the artist Martin Hanford. There are plans to publish those. And of course, in the meantime you may well hear new stuff from Jonny (keyboards) or Chris (guitar) not under the Bal-Sagoth name. They're not exclusively chained to Bal-Sagoth after all, so they could easily release side projects until such time as we think about the possibility of another album. Another plan is to do some shows in 2008 around Europe and the rest of the

world. We're certainly open to any offers from promoters who may be interested in booking Bal-Sagoth, so anyone can submit a proposal and it will be considered. So, basically we're currently not under any pressure to do anything and are ruling our vast empire unopposed.

Yes, you seem to have had some problems with record labels - your first three albums were released by Cacophonous (of whom no band seem to have anything nice to say), and the latter trilogy through Nuclear Blast, whom I believed you attacked pretty fiercely in a statement on your website a few years ago. What have the exact problems been (if you are willing to enlighten us)?

You don't seem to be the only band having issues with these two labels.

B: I can't remember attacking NB on the site at all... I might have been drunk! There were never really any major problems with NB. They left us alone to do our thing, which is always important. No, for the most part the labels did pretty much the best they could do (or were prepared to do) for us. The problems we've had with labels has been pretty much the standard stuff which most bands experience. Nothing new or out of the ordinary. Cacophonous was a small label with limited resources, who didn't like parting with money. I remember they made us use the same tape reels and record over the first album when we were in the studio for the second one, instead of just buying new reels! And NB was a big label with limited time to devote to us.

I think that NB could have done a lot more to promote the sixth album, particularly after it got such good reviews around the world. And the promotion in USA for it was practically zero. Also they didn't do anything at all to help us when Armageddon Music fucked up the Bal-Sagoth tracks on the Wacken 2004 CD. But whatever. This is all par for the course in the music industry.

You say that you have in certain

respects lost sight of the extremity in your music. Would you have wished the albums you released at the end of the century to have been more extreme?

B: Perhaps, but only in certain respects. I think maybe the third, fourth and fifth albums would have benefited from having a more extreme essence in the compositions and a more brutal, nasty edge to the music overall.

You use, among others, the term "avant-garde" to describe Bal-Sagoth's music. In the sphere of metal, how do you think this term should be used? What does it mean to you? How long have you used it? And the silly question for which the answer is apparent - what makes Bal-Sagoth avant-garde?

B: That was just one of many adjectives that has been employed to describe our material over the years. In truth, it's probably no more or less appropriate than any number of other descriptors or superlatives. I would suppose that the thing which makes us in any way avant-garde is that we have always striven to push the boundaries, take risks, and experiment boldly with our art. We never looked at what anyone else was doing, rather we always thought it was important to carve our own original and innovative niche. The passing of time and the judgement of history will ultimately decide whether or not we were successful.

Bal-Sagoth seems for some to be quite hard to get into. What advice do you have for those interested? Where is the proper place to begin exploring Bal-Sagoth? For many the Battle Magic album seems like an introduction (especially *A Tale From The Deep Woods*, which was the first song I heard).

B: Well I would recommend starting with the first album and moving to the sixth. Progress in a chronological fashion. Although the stories certainly aren't presented chronologically over the course of the six albums, it's still best to listen to them in the order they were

released, so that you can see the musical journey of the band.



OF MYTHOS & A GATHERING OF THE STRANGELY MALEFIC

Your canon of writings encompassing all lyrics of Bal-Sagoth and much more is a truly immense creation, rather hard to summarize in a few sentences for someone who is not the creator of it. Fortunately, you are the creator of it. Tell us, or at least tell those ignorant of Bal-Sagoth; what are your creations, this epic (to say the least) body of work? A brief overview?

B: Well, the world of the lyrics is a vast place, complete with its own history, cosmology, theology, evolutionary record, etc. It spans countless millennia, and the stories are roughly divided into several eras, including the antediluvian period in which all the "sword & sorcery" stories are set, the historical period which chronicles various ages of mankind up to and including the present day, and the future era, during which all the "science-fiction" oriented lyrics take place. All the stories are connected, all are different chapters of the same overall saga. The lyrical world is in essence built upon a foundation of denied primacy, and the underlying theme of the stories is at heart quite nihilistic. Certain ancient cosmic deities are recurring characters in all the Bal-Sagoth albums, and the six albums constitute a condensed history of this alternate universe, albeit being but a small part of a much larger body of work. I've written a newly expanded A-Z glossary of all the primary elements of

the lyrics, which will make everything much clearer for both the dedicated and casual reader alike.

Yes, when will that updated glossary be published? I've been waiting for it since 2001!

B: Yeah, sorry for the long wait! I'm just waiting for all the accompanying illustrations to be finished, and then I'll start deciding what format in which to make it available. Thanks to everyone for their continued patience!



The graphic novels you mentioned above has indeed been long awaited by the Bal-Sagoth supporters. Have you ever thought about publishing your works in standard book format, as a collection of short stories like the Silmarillion, covering all you have written?

B: Yes indeed, that's one of the projects I'm working on even now. It will be illustrated with a series of fantastic character illustrations by Martin Hanford, and will also feature some stuff from the artist Samuel Santos. Getting it all together is a slow process, which is why things have taken so long.

Let's move back a decade. The biggest step for Bal-Sagoth lyric-

wise seem to have been from the first to the second album, from a more standard metal lyric layout to the vast sagas of the Obsidian Crown for example. What happened in between? Were the stories already there or did your creativity explode in 1995?

B: Well, really it was just a case of finding out how much I could get away with regarding pushing the boundaries of structure and presentation. No other band had really done that "extra content" aspect of the lyrics in that way before, or at least not to that degree, and I wasn't sure if people would embrace it or not. (Some people still complain that they can't easily read along to the songs because there's so much additional prose in the booklets!) I wasn't even sure if the label would go for it. But they did. The stories already existed, but there's still a limit to how much you can fit into a 20 page lyric booklet, and I still had to cut out a lot of content from all the albums. I just figured that if I was going to tell these stories, I might as well do it in a way that was interesting and even challenging.

You are, apparently, extremely gifted in the using of words. For how long have you written? Do you only write things connected to the Bal-Sagoth universe?

B: I first started writing my own stuff when I was a kid, inspired by Marvel comics and similar things. Over the years I created a lot of my own fantasy worlds which were all linked to some degree by a common narrative thread. At university I continued with a lot of creative writing and just added to the whole mythos. What appears in the lyric booklets of the albums is only a very small percentage of the overall body of work. Everything I write tends to be set within the same alternate reality universe, albeit dealing with varying eras and periods of history.

Do you perceive any truth behind your fantastic ideas - antediluvian (pre)human civilisations interfering with evolution (as in Clarke), stellar

beings superior to man (as in Lovecraft), etc? Or are you as Lovecraft, a completely atheistic materialist channelling "ordinary" feelings and dreams into fantastic writing? Are there any underlying "political" values, beside the apparent anti- monotheistic ones?

B: Yes indeed, a great deal of my writings are inspired by my own beliefs concerning the true origin of mankind and the nature of the universe. There are countless great mysteries waiting to be solved, countless secrets waiting to be uncovered... we need only be wary of those who guard such ancient knowledge! Yes, certain political concepts are explored in the lyrics too, albeit in a very allegorical and veiled manner.

As a writer and as a vocalist, what inspires your specific outlets? I'm thinking more of the poetic side of your texts (such as *Of Carnage & A Gathering Of Wolves*) rather than the larger constructions of the Bal-Sagoth multiverse.

B: All my inspirations are summoned more or less from the same sources, regardless of the ultimate form or style which the work takes. Pulp sci-fi, fantasy and horror stories are primary influences, as are comic books and fantastic & imaginative media in general. Mythology, history, the occult, and science also provide me with a large amount of inspiration.

How and when did you start to read weird fiction? When did you began to write your own? And the natural following question, how and when did you get into extreme metal? What was it in these two (not too dissimilar) worlds that got you hooked?

B: I guess I first started reading weird fiction in the comic book format as a young child, and then graduated to prose stories from there. Comic books actually helped me to learn to read. If I came across a word in a comic I didn't understand, I'd look it up and learn it! Going from comics to the prose stories



was the next step in the education. I got into metal much later, during my early teenage years. My favourite kinds of metal bands were those that had fantastic and weird lyrical topics and themes, so certainly the connection was embodied in that way. Imagination, dynamism, excitement, power, horror... all these things should be present in both the best weird fiction and the best metal.

Please, tell us which are your favourite works of the weird and wonderful (any medium; short stories, novels, videogames, graphic novels etc). A completely arbitrary choice which one should not have lived without experiencing.

B: For literature (both prose and comic format), these are essential authors: Robert E. Howard, H.P. Lovecraft, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Jack Kirby, J.R.R. Tolkien, Frank Herbert, Clark Ashton Smith, David Gemmell, E.E. "Doc" Smith, Arthur C. Clarke. Any fan of fantasy, sci-fi and horror should have books by these masters on their bookshelf! Sure, you can read new stuff by contemporary authors, but you should always check out the legendary masters of the genre and experience the genius of the true innovators and craftsmen.

What do you feel about the underlying Christianity in a lot of mainstream fantasy? Both CS Lewis and George Lucas are/were open Christians, and I've seen horrifyingly messianic interpretations of both Aragorn and that little British wizard brat. The struggle between good and evil is of course older than Jesus Christ, but I at least feel that it has been slightly tainted by those who yield to the cruciform phallic symbol. How do you feel about that? Which side prevails in your Multiverse?

B: It's just an inevitable result of our monotheistic society that great works of literature should be in parts inspired by and interpreted from such a theological standpoint. However, the LOTR can just as easily be read and enjoyed from a heathen perspective as it can from monotheistic one. Tolkien summoned the vast majority of his inspiration from Northern European mythology, drawing particularly heavily from the rich wellspring of Anglo-Saxon heathen myth, which has a great deal in common with both Germanic and Norse mythology. Lewis also filled his Narnia books with iconic pagan creatures and suchlike. Similarly, Lucas deliberately made the concept behind The Force a very vague one, incorporating elements from many strands of world myth and polytheistic belief into his saga. Lucas infused the SW saga with elements as diverse as Zen Buddhism, European shamanism, Native American beliefs, Shintoism, the Oriental belief in the Chi, and much more.



I can't comment on Harry Potter because I've never read any of those books. In my own multiverse, the gods and cosmic entities are many in number, and the malefic ones invariably prevail. Many of the stories are told from the point of view of the villains, because after all a villain is just a hero with different motivations.

How do you incorporate other's creations into your own mythos? I'm referring to Stan Lee's Silver Surfer in *The Scourge Of The Fourth Celestial Host* on Power Cosmic and most recently Lovecraft's Cthulhu in *Shackled To The Trilithon Of Kutulu* on *The Chthonic Chronicles*.

B: The Silver Surfer song is a standalone piece, and is not considered to be part of the overall lyrical mythos. It's just a tribute to the creative genius of Lee and Kirby. Same with the Cthulhu song, as Lovecraft's work is such a great inspiration to me.

T: The theme of war is really strong in your lyrics. Would you consider yourself a war enthusiast, or is it the values like bravery and brotherhood, that seems to have been lost in today's world, that fascinates you about the whole theme of war?

B: I'm not a war enthusiast as such, but I've always been captivated by tales of wars, battles, campaigns, et al. The grand theatre of battle is such a rich and varied backdrop of adventure and excitement, replete with all the best and worst elements of humanity such as heroism, idealism, genius, brutality, betrayal, etc. The rise and fall of nations and empires is to me a fascinating subject, as is the impetus behind conflict and the mindsets of those involved. The skill of great strategists and leaders is compelling, as are the political and cultural elements which underpin war and the causes of war. For good or ill, humanity's history has always been shaped by conflict.

T: To what extent does the multiverse of Bal-Sagoth collude with our world? Is it completely external? I ask since you implement

events and cites of our world into your lyrics like Angkor Wat or the fire of 1666 that destroyed most of London back then.

B: The period of the lyrical universe which deals with the events of recorded human history is intended to be a sort of mirror universe to our own, an alternate reality which resembles ours in almost every respect. The idea is that it's a reality very close to ours, almost indistinguishably close, except for a few pivotal details throughout history. Many of the changes are minor, which a dimensional traveller familiar with the "real" course of history probably wouldn't even notice if he/she were to visit the lyrical universe, whereas some other changes/variations are considerably more pivotal. For all intents and purposes, the historical epochs of the lyrical universe are designed to be integrated seamlessly with the more blatantly fictional eras to form one contiguous timeline. When I write about real world events and places in the lyrics, they are essentially intended to represent the genuine articles, albeit existing in the alternate universe of the lyrical world.

There's been an upswing of mainstream fantasy and comic book related movies the last couple of years - Tolkien, Lewis, Stan Lee, Potter, Beowulf etc. Being a vehicle for quite elaborate fantasy/weird fiction writings, has this affected Bal-Sagoth in any way, and if so, how? Why do you think this has happened just in the last ten-or-so years?

B: Things tend to go in cycles in the movie world, and right now it looks like we're in the closing phases of the latest fantasy resurgence in cinema. Back in the early to mid 80's there was a similar fantasy boom, when the world was still basking in the afterglow of the revolutionary Star Wars event. Certainly the advent of CGI in the movie world in the last 15 years or so has allowed filmmakers to create fantastic worlds to a much more expansive degree than was ever previously possible, and many creators have taken advantage of this to present truly epic and immersive fantasy experiences.

This is all good, as it means that some of the world's best loved fantasy and sci-fi literary properties can finally be adapted



to cinema on the grand scale which they require. Whether it's movie versions of fantasy novels, comic books or game adaptations, the current wave of genre releases is certainly a glorious spectacle. The only danger is that the market will become saturated with a succession of poorly made projects which fail at the box office, which will ultimately mean studios will stop funding such pictures again. One thing that really bugs me is the current trend of remaking classic sci-fi and horror movies. I hope that's a trend that will soon cease.

*To spare the sanity of the frail minds of our esteemed readers, the chronicles are here abandoned... But do not despair, for soon the conclusion will come, with diabolic revelations and horrendous foreseings of the dim future, as **THE KEYMASTER RETURNS!***

Live photos (hooded Byron) taken in Helsinki, Finland, courtesy of Anna, moremetal.org. Thank you!

Thus follows the second part of the interrogation of the Anglo-Saxon kings of glorious battle magic and the

malevolently sublime... Bal-Sagoth!

AGAINST THE WORLD, AGAINST THE LIFE

Over the years has Bal-Sagoth fallen between genres, especially today when you seem to be too symphonic for extreme metal and vice versa. What would you choose, to belong to one group or remain an outsider?

Were you ever part of any U.K./Europe scene (considering the doomy aspects of A Black Moon Broods Over Lemuria and Gian Pyres' guest solo, as well as your early tours with Scandinavian black metal bands)?

Are there any bands today that you feel you have any connection to (considering the number of bands today combining symphonic elements with fantastic lyrics, no matter how cheesy they may be)?

B: From the very beginning it was always important for me to keep Bal-Sagoth as a very misanthropic, solitary and insular band. I deliberately avoided



close ties with other bands, and always tried to stay at the edge of any local or national "scenes" or genre classifications.

However, at its heart, Bal-Sagoth is a symphonic black metal band. It always has been, and always will be. Black and death metal were the primary genres which inspired me to create this band, and the core of Bal-Sagoth will always be such. However, over the years we often tended to stray quite far from that black essence with regard to the music, and along the way we apparently picked up a lot of fans of power metal and Prog metal. A great deal of that was down to the fact that I'm the only one in the band who really listened to black and death metal to any great degree.

For instance, Jonny who writes the music in the band, doesn't really listen to any black metal, and his favourite bands are stuff like The Police, Clannad, Tangerine Dream, etc.

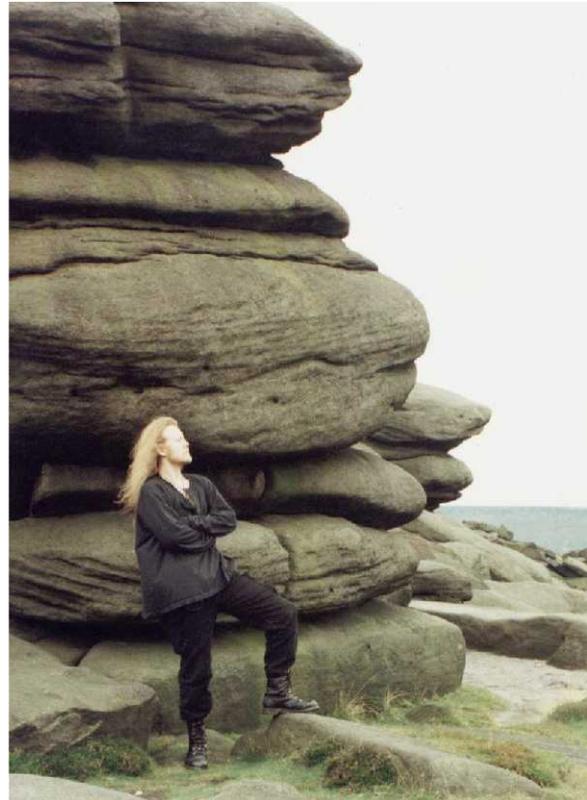
But whatever the case, I think such a diverse array of influences has certainly forged this band into the original entity which it is today, and originality was certainly always one of my prime directives and goals with Bal-Sagoth. As for whether we feel we have any connection to any current bands, the answer would be a firm "no".

What do you think of extreme music (metal) today? Is there anything worthwhile?

B: I don't really listen to any new stuff, I just tend to listen to my old favourite bands such as Bathory, Celtic Frost, Slayer, Morbid Angel, Sabbat, Deicide, old Metallica, etc. I remember that NB used to send me a box of new releases from their roster a couple of times a year, and 99% of the stuff was just absolute garbage. But I've heard some bits and pieces of new stuff recently, and there is some cool material out there. I read Zero Tolerance (UK's best extreme metal magazine) and some of the stuff on their cover mount CD is pretty good.

How has Bal-Sagoth been received through the years? Who understands, and who ridicules (since fantasy and science fiction

always has been a source of ridicule I suppose you unfortunately have had your fair share)? I suppose you have a strong core of supporters - what sort of people do you attract? Ordinary metalheads, fantasy enthusiasts, role-players...?



B: Our fan base seems to be made up of a combination of extreme metal fans, comic book fans, role-players, fantasy & sci-fi fans, history and mythology enthusiasts, and fans of epic movies and their soundtracks. Some people get into the band exclusively because they like the lyrics, the mythological aspect, and the fantasy/sci-fi imagery, and then they go on to discover other extreme metal bands as a result.

Other fans are attracted to the music initially and then discover an appreciation for sci-fi, fantasy and mythology accordingly. Our die-hard fans are very, very dedicated and take an intense interest in every aspect of the mythos. I would say that Bal-Sagoth has always been a band that has inspired extreme reactions either way, in that people either love us or hate us. There is seldom a middle ground! Certainly we've had our share of abuse over the years.

There are many people out there who simply just don't get this band, and they never will. For some people, it's just too idiosyncratic and off the wall for them to be able to understand it. These people invariably tend to be simple-minded and rather lacking in imagination, I've noticed. Some deluded people just don't like the idea that a band such as this even exists.

Much of the negative criticism seems to centre of what the idiots call "too many trumpets" in the music. Or that "it all sounds too happy". Other people hate the stuff because they think it's all too much like a cartoon or a comic book. Ironically, it's that way by design. I've always said that it takes a special kind of person to be able to understand Bal-Sagoth fully. Our fan base is an elite cult. Morons and trend-followers need not apply.



THE RETURN OF THE KEYMASTER: FLOURISH AND ALARUM

Please tell us of how a "typical" Bal-Sagoth song comes to life. What comes first? How does the creative work evolve?

B: OK, here's how the process goes. I call it the "synergy" method, as that's the best way to describe it. The lyrics are always written well in advance of the music being composed. However, the other members don't get to see the actual lyrics until well after the fact. Instead, I always prepare a conceptual synopsis concerning the narrative outline of the album which I then give to Jonny as a reference. This synopsis includes information on which stories will be

included on the album, what the required themes and moods should be, the general emotional essence a piece should convey, etc. For instance, for the song *The Fallen Kingdoms of the Abyssal Plain*, I told Jonny that I needed a piece which conveyed the feeling of a journey to the bottom of the ocean, down through the various levels of the marine depths, to the very sea floor where we would see the ruins of ancient non-human underwater cities.

Often the details provided will be much more extensive, as in the case of epic centrepiece songs such as the second chapter in the *Obsidian Crown* saga. In that case a synopsis will include much greater information, such as a broad outline of the events in the actual story, the key occurrences, what kind of music is required for a certain event, etc. We find this method generally works best. Often, after countless agonizing hours hunched over the keyboard, Jonny will just write something completely unconnected to any outline and present that to me, too. It varies. The good thing is that now, everyone in the band understands the Bal-Sagoth thematic parameters, and they instinctively know what compositions would or would not be suitable as Bal-Sagoth songs.

For instance, it would be utterly ridiculous if someone wrote a riff that sounded like a nu-metal or emo style song. That would clearly not be suitable for a Bal-Sagoth song. But stuff like that rarely ever happened, and for the most part, the synergy method has served us well. The process of refining and perfecting a composition then proceeds over a period of weeks and months, with any number of different versions of a song exchanged as MP3s, until everything ultimately comes together in the recording studio. And that's the Bal-Sagoth way of writing songs.

If you hadn't found the Maudling bros, where would you be today? Could you consider doing vocals in a band not connected to your writings, or are your visions always superior to your vocals?

B: I would have started Bal-Sagoth anyway, only with different people. I had

tried to get the project off the ground several times prior to meeting the Maudling brothers, but in each case the people weren't interested in the high concept. It's lucky that the Maudlings were willing to take the risk, because otherwise Bal-Sagoth would certainly have sounded completely different if I'd enlisted other people. But no, I wouldn't be interested in doing vocals in any band other than my own project. Jonny and Chris might go on to do side projects or solo projects, but I will always helm Bal-Sagoth exclusively, until the end.

Byron now having had his say for quite a while, I turn to the key-handling Maudling, often remaining in obscurity. When and how did you start playing instruments and composing music?

JONNY: I have musicians as parents and they sent me for piano lessons from the age of five. I didn't start composing music seriously until I was playing in bands at school. The composing aspect developed over time. My father lived

opposite a record store when I was a kid and he was constantly getting records given to him which I mostly played. They were soundtrack albums and classical stuff which I played religiously.

Where you into fantasy/weird fiction in any way before you met Byron?

J: Listening to Richard Wagner, Operas and Romantic era music opened up a lot of fantasy and mythology to me. Like say the ring cycle, most of which is Germanic based on myths. It was interesting reading up on that. Literature-wise, I was a fan of Tolkien, and during my teenage years I was into all of the fantasy films and adventure games of the time. My main interests were music, video games and science fiction. I was a big fan of the original Star Wars movies too.

How did Byron's concept strike you when you first came in touch with him?

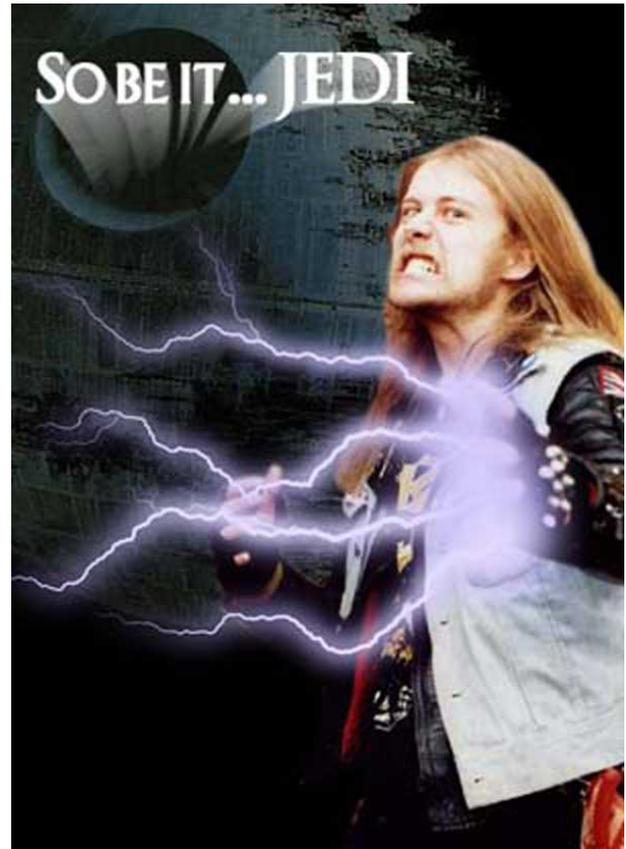
J: I was never initially made aware of any concept. When I first met him we



were a death metal outfit, aspiring to the likes of Morbid Angel, Carcass and Deicide, so the lyrics and stuff he had in mind didn't surface until later. We could never hear what he was saying back then anyway as our rehearsal sound and equipment was awful. He kind of kept his ideas to himself anyway. When we ditched those old ideas and became Bal-Sagoth, the majority of the music was written by myself with Byron doing handling the lyrics. We always work independently. On the first album we did bring odd ideas together at band practices, using old death metal riffs we had. I don't remember any stories being outlined as such. I used to read his lyrics at practices which he had written and was always impressed by his skills in English, but I didn't really know what it was all about. I often had to ask him what odd words meant. I had no idea what blazing fire jewels were, or where Valusia or Lemuria was. I'd never really taken lyrics that seriously, generally considering them secondary to the music, so I was more focused on getting compositions right. At the time I was just happy that we had found a front-man/vocalist that could take care of all that. He also brought image to a band which had an identity crisis. My lyrical claim to fame up to that point was a song called *Vikings* which I had written in a previous band, and it was pretty below par. When we found our style, probably around the writing of the *Star-Fire* album, the marriage between the music and lyrics worked really well, certainly beyond my expectations.

What would you have been doing musically the past 15 years if you hadn't been in Bal-Sagoth? Other bands? Concerning your extra-Sagoth activities, you've done some videogame soundtracks right?

J: Hard question, I have no idea, hopefully it would have been something in music. I've done a couple of games and soundtracks and stuff. I've always been into recording. I probably would have become a composer or worked in a studio in Sheffield. I really don't know.



What does the creative procedure look like from your perspective? What happens after you get a story/synopsis from Byron?

J: Byron doesn't give me a script or story or anything. We work independently. I write the music, do a rough recording, then send the track to him so he can work his lyrics to it. Most of the time, I don't want to know what the story is because I don't want to tie a composition down to something. It works better if I write the music and let him work out which story would suit. Obviously though, with some of the stuff, like the *Hyperborean Empire* part 3, or *Imperium* tracks, it works more like a film score with the reprising of themes etc. I take loose pointers from him, but not too much. He doesn't give me enough information anyway and I don't want it. Other times I may come up with something and say to him "I have this riff that sounds like a circus" and he'll say "strange, I have got a song about that, it's set at the Roman Colosseum and called *Circus Maximus*". I may write something that musically relates to a song done on a previous album because of key or style, like say the *Catacombs*

Of Ur track, and so we will have another chapter related to that story. On a whole though I have no idea what Byron is going to do until it is recorded. It works best that way.

Judging from the recent couple of albums your brother Chris doesn't seem so involved in the composing anymore. How come?

J: No that is incorrect, nothing has changed. Chris is always involved in the development, mainly with the guitar stuff. He is more of a rhythm writer for the guitar. Obviously being brothers we fight quite much over riffs. He finds arranging quite difficult so generally these days I do the bulk of it. Our writing styles have changed that drastically over the years that I cannot bolt on a riff to the song and make it fit anymore. So lately I've generally let him have the last song on the last couple of albums to do with what he wishes.

Where do all the melodies and arrangements come from? What inspires you?

J: Much of my early life was spent listening to soundtrack albums like Geoff Love and his orchestra and James Last. The former would take contemporary film and television shows and interpret them using a symphony orchestra with a drum kit, bass and electric guitars and analogue synths. I always thought this sounded great, and I guess that was always there at the back of my mind when arranging and writing the music. I generally do not want to repeat myself musically either. As each album is passed, it becomes more challenging to come up with new ideas while at the same time trying to stay on mark.

I guess with the keyboard "songs" on each album, I am not as restricted by the Sagoth style if you like. Generally inspiration comes from anywhere. Having an unhealthy imagination helps and constantly trying new things is what keeps me interested. You draw musical inspiration from everything that you have ever heard or learnt. As the writing style for the band emerged, I would try to steer away from it to keep stuff fresh.

I try to let the compositions reveal the style in another form rather than me saying to myself "Ah this is a Bal-Sagoth sounding song". I often trash compositions that do that in fear of repetition.



How do you respond to the negative criticism toward Bal-Sagoth? People thinking you have "too many trumpets", as Byron put it.

J: When you do something slightly different you are going to get criticism. To say there are too many trumpets is a stupid thing to say anyway. Do they mean too loud? Many big mainstream bands I could mention have copied this so called "flaw" and they get away with it.

I can see why people may have said it initially, and the first time I started using brass instruments, it made me nervous because I was the first in this genre if you like to do so. I knew it would raise a few eyebrows.

On earlier albums, the brass may have been a little too high in the mix for my liking. I wasn't satisfied with early mixes as I prefer the keyboards to be more of a compliment to the guitar rather than dominating. It should be a very integral affair, like an orchestra.

We would be doing something wrong if everyone did like it anyway. It was always my intention of creating something which was a bit different and new, because to me, that is the point isn't it? When you do that though, you are going to get negative comments and confusion. It sometimes interests me to read reviews from critics that find the stuff so outlandish, it's blatantly obvious

they have no idea what is going on, proving that it is too far removed from what they want it to be. There is never a standard criticism either, more or less every aspect of the band has been criticised.

You own and run a private studio, where you recorded The Chthonic Chronicles. Tell us a bit about that!

J: I started building the Wayland's Forge recording studio from old analogue equipment sold to me by Keith from Academy Studios where our albums used to be recorded. I wanted some half decent equipment back then for composing and testing ideas. The gear built up and up and soon I had a fully professional studio with more power than before. Later, when the studio went digital, I decided to make it available for bands wanting to record there as a kind of sideline. Ultimately the studio is used for composition and audio work. We recorded the Chthonic Chronicles there because of the freedoms it brought. The making of that album was an on-going process. I had quite a few problems with my then sound cards which started to die during the mixing process. Mixes I had done were inaccurate. As a result it became a very time consuming process realising that album. Byron again chose to do his vocals at our old studio again, I don't know why, maybe it was out of pride or trust in my abilities as I had never recorded him before, you'd have to ask him. I made sure though when I appended his vocals into my studio projects, he was as high as possible in the mix. I was sick to death of people saying "I can't tell what he's on about". If I could, I would remix every album, making the sound-scape bigger and settling the brass etc. Black Moon incidentally can only be re-mastered though because our first label (Cacophonous) thought it wise to use the Back Moons master tapes to record Star-Fire, by which saving money.

For those interested in technology - what equipment do you use for Bal-Sagoth? Hardware vs. software synths, effects, etc?

J: It depends. These days in the live environment I like to keep it as simple as possible. I just use a Roland Fantom X7. There isn't much time to be pressing buttons etc on stage, and I don't like it when bands mime or play along to backing tracks, so I've always tried to play the stuff for real. I will be using the pads on the Fantom to trigger sounds and effects however, but that's about it. In the studio I'm a real technology freak, and like to keep up on software synths/plugin-ins and new hardware. The technology for making music these days is a million miles away from what it was ten years ago, making life much easier for the composer. The song-writing still comes first though, and I spend a lot of time getting that right before I even think about what module etc I will use.

THE FINAL BATTLE: FORESIGHTS, AS GRIM DESTINY APPROACHES



Which Bal-Sagoth album would you consider your favourite, content-wise and sentimentally? Has the outcome of each album been as you envisioned and wished for, or have they been restricted because of lack of budget etc?

B: It's always very difficult to choose a favourite album, as I like them all for

different reasons. Certainly, with a larger budget, all of the albums could have turned out closer to the ideal concept that was in our minds as we created them, but even so, no artist ever attains that impossible perfection that they strive for, and that is ultimately a good thing, I think.

J: I'm proud of all our albums and what we have been fortunate enough to do, but looking back from a musical point of view, my least favourite album If I had to pick is probably Black Moon because I don't feel musically I was firing on four cylinders, I was kind of blind, in an unknown place testing the waters and I was an unconfident drummer. There are some great tracks on Black Moon though and initially I loved it. After that I love every album equally as I poured 110% of my soul into each one. It is always a surprise to hear what Byron has done with his placing of the lyrics to the songs as I am never there when he is doing it. The only thing that ever bothers me is the mix or the way something has been played because I know that the compositions are right. The mix and delivery is very important because if wrong you can get comments like the "too many trumpets" one. Joe Public isn't going to understand unless it's perfect. And if the mix is perfect and someone says to me "I don't like it" then they are basically right i.e. they really don't like it! I cannot sit down individually with everyone that hears our recordings and explain what is going on. I guess you get it or you don't and anyway the mix should explain it.

There is as of yet no follow-up for The Chthonic Chronicles planned, but still - have you got any ideas for new Bal-Sagoth compositions - themes, melodies, skeletal arrangements? Any idea of how it may sound, what direction it will take? The instrumental songs on The Chthonic Chronicles have some

electronic elements - might this be a new path for the future (not implying that Bal-Sagoth will turn cyber/techno metal, that is)?

J: I write music all the time, and the stuff evolves. Some of it becomes incorporated into the band, other stuff just gets saved for future/other projects or the like. On Chronicles, much of the elements on the instrumental tracks were of an old analogue nature. I have always liked synthesised sounds, and some of those abstract instrumentals leaned toward that direction, so it was kind of second nature for me to work with them. There is never any great scheme or plan to make something sound a certain way until the track is composed anyway.



Is the Legion Of The Black Moon still in activity?

B: Yes, although it was always more of an ideal than an actual concrete entity. That was just the name I gave to those who wrote to me to be added to the mailing list. I thought about turning it into a real fan club, with regular newsletters and everything, but I ultimately decided that the band didn't need that kind of thing. It still doesn't. The Legions are today, as they always have been, an elite group

of Bal-Sagoth supporters, united in their knowledge that they share a dedication to the peerless power of Bal-Sagoth. The Legions of the Black Moon are eternal!

At the end of January, you played two shows in Finland; your first visit to Hyperborea I believe. How were you greeted of these Northern warrior-tribes? Will you return to this part of Europe anytime soon (living in Sweden, I find this quite relevant...)?

J: We were greeted with great warmth and respect, and those shows were good

to play. I got to chat with many fans of the band after the gig and they were all very grateful we had made the effort to come over. I personally had a good time, and from what I saw of Finland, I found it a country of great natural beauty. There will be more shows in Scandinavia this year.

Speaking of live shows, you seem to have completely dropped the swords and stuff (at Wacken 2004 you blamed the German costumes for not allowing letting in a yard of deadly steel into their realms). How come?

B: We've reintroduced the theatrical element somewhat for recent shows. It's always been very, very difficult to get the other members to participate in the whole theatrical element. Over the years they just thought it was silly, but recently, they've finally started doing it more. So, there will once again be some of the old war-paint and stuff at future gigs. The theatrical element was never as extensive as people tend to think it was. One of the only problems of taking swords and axes to foreign countries is the airlines and customs. Maybe the situation is better now, I don't know.

Being a heathen metal warrior king, the question is inevitable... why did you rid yourself of the long hair?

B: The sentient mop crawled away one night while I was sleeping. It now rules its own Follicle Empire.

Have you found the Yellow Sign?

B: That glyph is not to be sought lightly!

A swarm of gratitude for answering these feeble questions... Blodu Ok Jarna! Blod och Järn! Thrice hail! Now, as the veils of mysterious fog surrounds us anew and the end of our séance is nigh, have you any ultimate inspiring thoughts of malevolent starry wisdom fathomable for us puny mortals to spare?

B: Many thanks indeed for these extensive questions. It's always very gratifying when someone is interested in our work, and we salute you. Greetings also to all the Bal-Sagoth supporters reading this.

Check out the official MySpace page at www.myspace.com/balsagoth, and also the official website at www.bal-sagoth.co.uk and www.bal-sagoth.com.

IMPERIUS REX! BLODU OK JARNA!

Live photo (keymaster+bass) taken in Helsinki, Finland, courtesy of Anna, moremetal.org. Thank you!



TECHNICAL PROGRESSIVE DEATH METAL

ERA 1: ORIGINS (1988 - 1998)

By Suleimann

This article will attempt to shed some light on one of the most vibrant and original metal the planet has ever seen. For ease of discussion, a wide spectrum of bands and sounds have been grouped under the umbrella term of Technical-Progressive Death Metal, whereas in reality there is no single genre that can cater to the variety of the bands mentioned here. I will also touch on a number of bands that helped shape the trends and sounds of the metal scene as a whole and thus affected the tech-death phenomena as well.

First, there was metal and hardcore, and metalheads saw it was good. Then there was the need for speed and evilness. Metalheads found it was great. Then came a seasoned breed of metal players who attempted to combine the speed and ferocity of speed metal/hardcore (Venom, Discharge, Motorhead etc) with the technical dexterity and odd structures of progressive and experimental rock (Yes, King Crimson, Pink Floyd etc). Thus was born thrash, and more precisely technical thrash metal (Metallica, Sadius, Voivod, Forbidden , Infernal Majesty, Rigor Mortis etc).



As the thrash scene morphed into the crushing sonics of death metal (Obituary, Entombed, Morbid Angel, Death, Carcass), it was inevitable that a new generation of metal musicians would infuse it with the same proficiency of technical chops and bizarre time signatures. This signaled the true birth of technical/progressive death metal.

The first warriors of this 'advance guard' were real innovators and brave musicians, who played against the grain, and had to withstand a ton of critical and commercial backlash for their headier leanings. But as the maturity and appreciation of the musical aspects of the death metal scene grew, they found a devoted but small following. The above description applies rather aptly to Atheist (who were doing their own technical and savage metal bombast from the beginning) as well as Death (who evolved from a more

proto-typical death metal outfit to a efficient killing machine of beauty and grace) along with the short lived Cynic (who nailed their cosmic metal sound in matter of a couple of demos and 1 album, setting a standard that remains till today). There was Nocturnus, a monstrous outfit combining great lead playing and synthesizers in their metal of death.



Though each of these bands sounded different from each other, they all had some features in common : a love of hypnotic morphing riffs with melodic leads galore, odd non-typical time

signatures, fantastic playing by all musicians involved, hints of jazz and progressive rock,

strange ambiences and non-conventional (for death metal) topics and to top it all off, a decimating heaviness of sound. Bands like Pestilence joined the club with winning albums (that lost more fans than they gained). A darker breed of the chop heavy death metal was inaugurated by the one and only Morbid Angel that allied frenetic odd playing, with positively diabolical imagery showing that there was room for technicality in traditional death metal.

There were other bands who walked paths all their own. Mindrot combined sludgy apocalyptic death metal with gothic melodicism and progressive tendencies to devastating effect but went under the metal radar and disbanded after three releases. Disharmonic Orchestra developed their sound to a surreal death/grind hybrid with an arty bizarre touch over numerous demos and EPs as well as three excellent albums before disappearing into obscurity.

Bands like Cannibal Corpse and Suffocation (though not technical or progressive) took the brutality and speed of death metal to ridiculous levels thus in turn making the second wave of tech-death do the same, except injecting it with the properties of technicality.

There was the Canadian abomination called Kataklysm, who in their enthusiastic mixing of spiritual and bizarre themes and love of chaos, unintentionally created two masterpieces of proto-tech death insanity. It is technical and progressive in its attempts to cross metaphysical barriers and sound limits as well as structural restrictions.

Gorguts came onto the scene with a unique sound all their own, and were not afraid to experiment in song-writing and riffing. Their experimentation peaked on *Obscura*, possibly the ugliest most bizarre death metal album ever. Meshuggah upped the technical thrash ante with their early groundbreaking work (stop start riffing galore and bizarre timing with odd leads) and that along with Cryptopsy albums like *None So Vile* and *Whisper Supremacy* (frenetically fast, technical and brutal death metal) ushered a new era of technical death metal, one where the brutality and speed was upped by notches, structures were all over the place and the sound became an all-encompassing sonic insanity.



Meanwhile the elements of melody and traditional as well as progressive metal took on a new context in the maiden worshipping death metal of Europe (particularly Sweden). The harmonized melodic leads, thrashy riffing, raspy vocals and pounding attacks were not very progressive in themselves but influenced a plethora of bands of the second era who took a step further to combine it with jazz tonalities and the non-traditional time signatures for some vigorous new sounds.

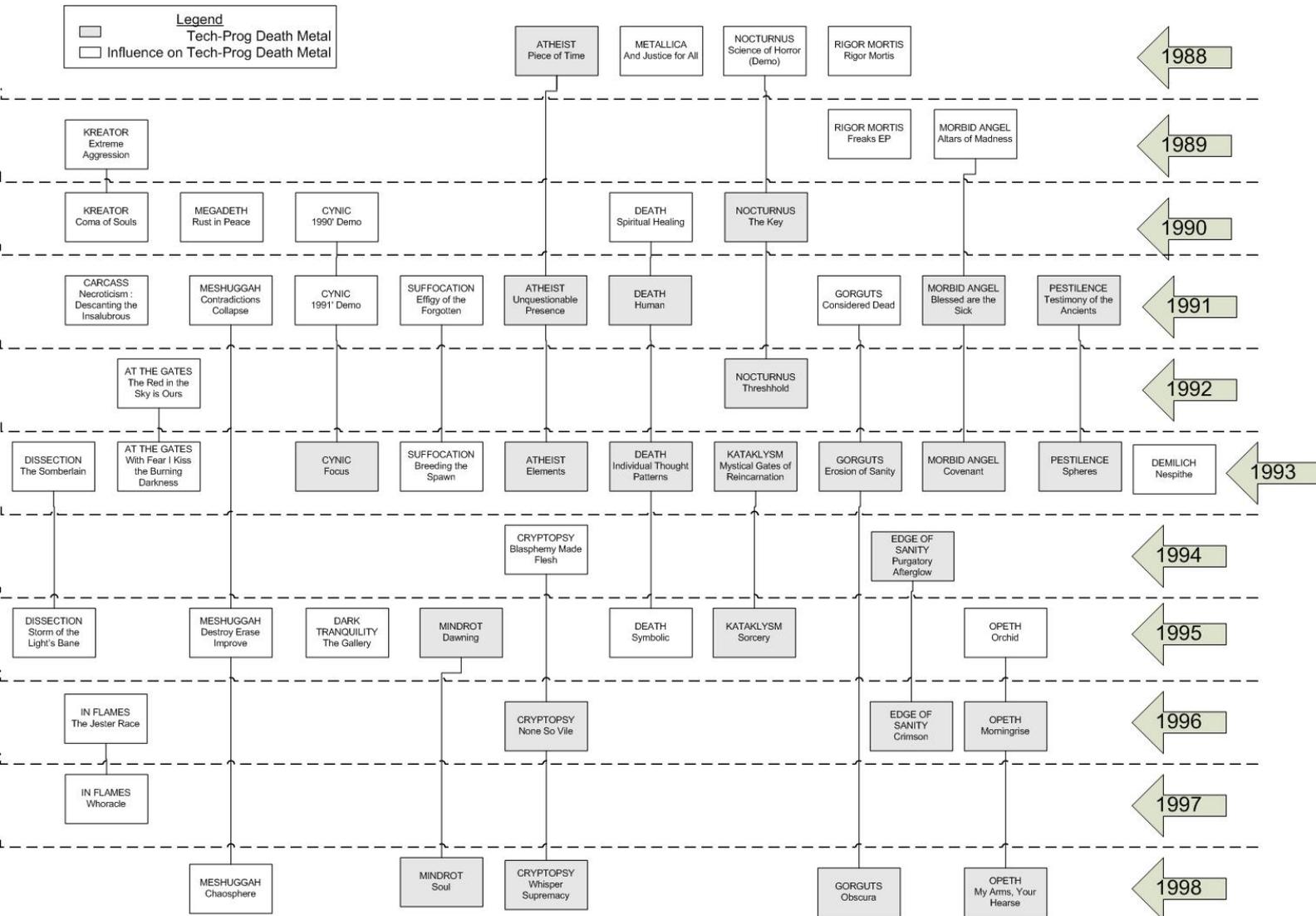
In summary, as the 90's came to an end the brutal and fast got even uglier and faster (*Deeds of the Flesh*, *Disgorge* etc as well as a barrage of grindcore), the melodic got even more so (*In Flames*, *Soil Work* etc to the point of no longer being remotely extreme metal), the progressive got even more so (*Opeth* almost starting a 70's prog rock revival, and *Edge of Sanity* attempting *Yes* influenced concept albums). All of this profoundly affected the development of technical progressive death metal.

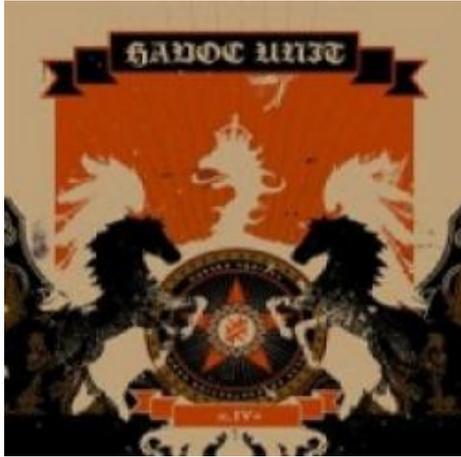
Enter Nile, Necrophagist, Origin.....

The second era will be covered in part 2 next issue.

To illustrate the sequence of sonic terrorism that defined the movement, below is a

simple timeline diagram representing the bands and albums for the period 1988 - 1998. Notice the releases in grey are technical / progressive death metal albums while the white ones are big influences on the genre without coming into it themselves. Note: The diagram or the article is in no way exhaustive and I would appreciate any feedback in terms of inclusions, exclusions or criticism.





HAVOC UNIT - H.IV+
(Hoarse Industrial Viremia)
(Vendulus Records, 2008– Finland)
Avantgenre: Machine Butcher Metal

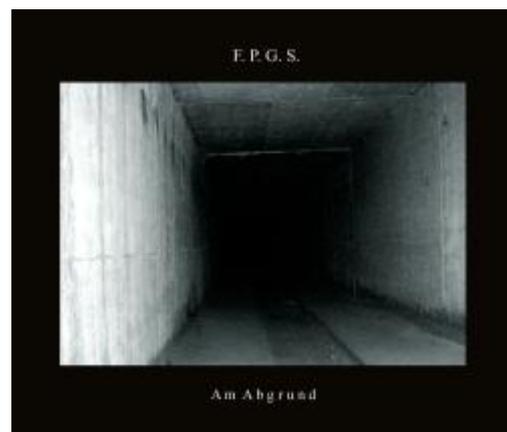
...AND OCEANS are dead. Yet, its members continue under the name of HAVOC UNIT. And a change of name is appropriate, for what these creative people deliver on "h.IV+" has nothing to do with ...AND OCEANS at all. Who thought that HAVOC UNIT would continue the kind of disco-industrial metal they celebrated under the old name on "Cypher" is terribly wrong.

Gone are the pleasant, danceable melodies and beats. The first track "Vermicide" jumps right in your face with really ugly industrial metal - raw, menacing and evil. A cyber-demonized version of MESHUGGAH or a slower, but heavier version of THE AMENTA – that's what comes to my mind when listening to HAVOC UNIT these days, with a sound directly from the factories of 21st - century-hell. As the tracklist implies, HAVOC UNIT's lyrics deal with the perversions of the last decades to batter them relentless back in the face of mankind. And battering is the word that describes their music best – The screamed vocals, the machine-gun riffing and the stomping of the machine-beats hurt and is definitely not for the faint-hearted who seek beautiful melodies. For that matter, even people who seek ANY melody will be disappointed. "h.IV+" is one big rhythm-monster with samples, menacing synths and some slower intermezzi; it is a spirit of wrath; the embodiment of the pits of the human psyche.

And for that, I love it. It is cold, aggressive and inhuman; much like DHG's "Supervillain Outcast". There is only one downside: it is a little bit unvaried. If you'd play me a track, I could not say which one it is, only that it is on "h.IV+". And I wouldn't listen to it the whole day, for I am one of these people who like a good melody once in a while. But then there is "Ignoratio Elenchi [Reversed Genesis]" to make up for it, which is, simply put, brilliant. That is mostly due to the voice of SOLEFALD's Cornelius, but not only that, the track has a dreamy and dark atmosphere which gives you goosebumps. It might be a bit unfair to say that this (and only this) track sounds like a SOLEFALD-song (and not only due to Cornelius' voice), but that's the way it is... And there also is "Kristallnacht [From Revolution to Reconstruction]", a soothing piano piece.

All in all, I am positively surprised. No, not really surprised, because I didn't know what to expect from HAVOC UNIT now in the first place, only that the name change must have had SOME impact on the music. It is surely interesting to hear HAVOC UNIT explore regions of acoustic brutality other than speed, for brutal it is. A perfect soundtrack for the devil's abbatoir, a mix of rust and blood.

Tentakel P.



F.P.G.S. – Am Abgrund
(Self-Released, 2007– Austria)
Avantgenre: Psychopathological Metal

This has been one of the sickest ugliest and most depressing albums I have heard in the last few years. Whether it's

the concept, the execution or some combination thereof, I don't know. All I know is that upon listening to it, one gets slowly but surely submerged in the dark waters of despair, alienation and self-loathing. And yet it is nothing like the two recent genres trying hard for said emotions : funeral doom and suicidal depressing black metal.

This avoids the hissy / necro (read crap) production as well as the plodding nature of the above bands. Instead, it goes for a thick and clear production that makes each nuance discernable yet harkens to the sound of more experimental death metal bands from the early 90's. The tempo shifts are many, as are the structural shifts in the four 'songs' on display here.

The concept involves the rather sad and pitiful life of a mentally unstable (and eventually suicidal) individual, who is besotted with psychological problems from an early age. As his experience with his environment grows, he is further plunged into neurosis and eventual suicide. The four "songs" essentially are chapters in a psychological case study.

Coming back to the music, we have some unique Black / Death metal with doom influences. I could find a reference point for the band's strange and disturbing sound. It has slow, dirgey sections, blast beats, weird interludes and hypnotic repetitive riffing as well as near technical atonal licks and riffs. Maybe, there are synths (its hard to tell when your drowning in filth). The vocals are a reverbed growl straight from the 90's DM underground, pierced with black metal shrieks. Though the first couple of listens find it hard to grasp at any hooks and song identifiers amongst the tracks, but repeated listens do reward with familiarity.

It is the atmosphere (oh what atmosphere)that makes this special. It makes the listener feel unclean and mentally unhealthy which is no mean feat if said listener is a metalhead. It suffocates one's positive emotions without resorting to cheap metal gimmicks. It crushes with negativity. There is almost the feeling that one gets

when watching badly depressing /downward spiral movies like Bad Lieutenant or even Falling Down. You feel like a voyeur of someone's destruction.

All in all, a welcome and original addition to the pantheons of dark depressing metal. A new modus operandi has been created. Amen for that.

Suleiman



MESHUGGAH – ObZen
(Nuclear Blast, 2008– Sweden)
Avantgenre: Meshuggah.

Again the machinery rumbles. The malignant cogwheel pulses anew at rhythms undecipherable to ordinary human senses. Mechanical war-beasts somewhere between the ravaging monsters of the early VoiVod albums and the superhuman sterility of Kraftwerk's Man-machines, devoid of human flaws and erroneous emotions, enlightened with a merciless bare-scraped logic, marching from their non-Euclidan dimensions. Or, the new Meshuggah album. Cold and antihumanly brutal, but with the melancholy of Fredrik Thordendahl's guitar leads haunting over this organized chaos like some wailing ghost of races extinct by their own inventiveness and greed - the same path mankind is walking down. Or maybe I'm just reading too much science fiction. Anyhow, Meshuggah has returned to the album format they've left untouched since 2002's Nothing (no, Catch 33 is not a full-length, it's a song divided into tracks with names, rather than a

collection with individual songs, which is what defines an album). They have refined and perfected their particular type of metal (see my review of Nothing for further explanations, or just listen to them while doing some head-counting), brilliantly infusing ObZen with all the traits of its predecessors - the black sludge of Nothing, Chaosphere's fierce attack, the thrashy catchiness of Destroy Erase Improve. Every snare hits like a jackhammer to the skull, each scream a monster tearing your face off. And the riffs... still as nonsensical as always; microtonal bends, impossible time-signatures, subsonic heaviness on a tectonic scale. Yes, it is more melodic than for example Nothing, if 'using more tones in a riff' equals 'melodic'. Someone might in lack of faith cry 'wimp-out! Cheesy bitches!', but I swear, the melodies only makes it nastier. ObZen has more 'face' than Nothing, but it's not a pretty, nor human one. Listen to the deranged epic nine-minute finale "Dancers to a Discordant System" - it's downright scary, far from the cosy tonality usually force-fed to us as 'evil'. No kidding, this is seriously dark, far from the humanities we usually encounter in this blessed world of metal. Initially, it seems as if the opening and closing triads of songs are the peaks of obZen, leaving the title track and its adjacent pieces in a slightly unfocused blur of massive yet rather uninspired Nothing-like riffs, a bit faceless compared to the other, quite progressive, tracks. They only needed some more time to digest, of course, after a couple of more sit-throughs ultimately unfurling their stark menacing splendour - the title track is particularly bludgeoning. Or why not the break and swift turn three minutes into 'This Spiteful Snake,' adding a new dimension into what would otherwise be the nadir of the album? I must also congratulate Meshuggah at finally using artwork that doesn't quite frankly suck - the first good-looking cover since their debut EP from 1989. The meditating man covered in blood is a symbol for what this album - and Meshuggah's lyrical theme in general - is about: in obscenity, the lowly human finds her harmony, her Zen. Thus the title obZen was a bit more profound than the first impression of a

cheap word game. A mistake many seem to do when dealing with Meshuggah, which I frown upon, is to focus on the physical and technical aspects. It is often the case of people worshipping them or despising them for the musicianship, rather than the musicality. Yes, they are of course skilled to a degree beyond most musicians, but still - the point of Meshuggah isn't how stupendously complex Thomas Haake's drum patterns are. It is the feeling, the inhuman - and equally antihuman - machinelike malevolent gloom and brute force that makes Meshuggah what they are. The odd time signatures and weird incomprehensible rhythms are means to achieve a certain goal, not the goal itself. It isn't technical for its own sake, and if you think so you're doing yourself - and Meshuggah - a major disservice, regardless whether you laude or taunt them. And while I'm at it, I thought I'd give some specific kudos to Mårten Hagström, the guitarist too often forgotten behind Thordendahl's and Haake's fame. Not to say that they don't deserve being hailed as master musicians, but it must not be forgotten that Haake rarely writes any of the music. It is Thordendahl and Hagström who writes the music, telling Haake what to play (mostly). He is indeed a damn monster behind the kit, but Hagström must not be overlooked as a major part of the creative core of Meshuggah.

If you haven't given Meshuggah a chance before, then ObZen is the place to start before back-tracking. If you don't like this album, there might be a big chance you'll never enjoy Meshuggah. Eerie (oh! the lead in 'Pineal Gland Optics!'), bludgeoning (oh! the opening of 'Bleed!'), and most of all dynamic (oh! the whole damn album!), this might very well turn out to be, if allowed to ripen for a few months, the strongest and most perfect Meshuggah release as of yet, elevating their legacy into new levels. But only time will reveal whether or not this is a fact or just the ambitious statement of an overzealous reviewer. Until then, just listen to obZen, at a seriously high volume, and prepare to be beaten into a bloody pulp.

aVoid



**BRAIN DRILL / ORIGIN –
Apocalyptic Feasting / Antithesis**
(Relapse, 2008 – USA)
Avantgenre: Monsters Of Tech-Death

In the year of 2008
After a rather long wait
Finally they arrive,
By grace of fate.

The two albums come,
With fireworks and fanfare.
They promise salvation,
To those who are aware.

The first, a record
By the outfit called Braindrill
The second, by Origin
Settings set to "kill".

Braindrill's release
a follow-up to the EP Parasites.
The new one is sick
and technically even more tight.

The production's even more crisp,
And the new songs sounds great.
Wonderful wankery, and

songs about killing and hate.

The imagery and packaging
are all brutal to the extreme
Its the playing and the structures
That makes this the cream of the cream

While you sing along to
Force Fed Human Shit
You can marvel at technicality
and at the musical wit

The older tracks and the new ones
gel together fine
Showing the band was mature
Way before its time

Moving on to Origin
and Antithesis's greatness
Its safe to say
That death metal is blessed

Blessed with the return
of cosmic brutality
And themes of a more
Universal reality

The ridiculous sweeps
and the triple vocal attack
Will reel you in,
There's no turning back.

The beautiful songs
and amazing rhythms
will take you to nirvana
and to hades with them.

The album is a winner
by the kings of the underground
and even has progression
With melodic leads and new sounds

But it remains Origin
Even in the epic title track
At nine minutes plus
It will still have you coming back

The album will leave you
Battered and dead
It is half-an-hour
But an aeon in the head.

So endeth my verses
About these new cd's
if you are into tech death
You need to get these

They do not compromise

The death metal atmosphere
Yet go so much forward
where others fear

There are no breakdowns
No boring parts
Just a frenetic insanity
Straight from the heart.

Here's to a really good extreme metal
year !!!

Suleiman



PIN-UP WENT DOWN / 2 Unlimited
(Ascendance Records, 2008 – France)
Avantgenre: Avantgarde*

Pin-Up Went Down are a new French duo...- let it start at the beginning. The whole story started with a myspace friend request. Nowadays I'm getting tired of them due to the continuous indie bands' request; wanting me to be their fan. And these guys just appeared from the unknown. Oh my god...another one *click*..... OH MY GOD!...so this is it. I was sceptic and became surprised like hell, that this is a great band. I asked them for a promo and they sent me one. Thank you!

...a new French duo consisting Asphodel, the mistress of female activities and Alexis who is responsible for all the instruments can be heard in their music – guitar, bass, keys, electronics, etc. The project started less than one year ago as Carnival in Coal split up and former live drummer Alexis Damien launched this new project, called that time Esthete Piggie. Soon he was joined by Asphodel

who can be known from Penumbra or Nowonmai. So I was surprised even more when I saw that big Ascendance Records banner on their profile, I couldn't believe in my eyes. Ascendance Recs. is a label with the aim of collecting the progressive, experimental or just talented acts having a female voice. It's a rather new label but already made deals with bands like Stolen Babies and unexpect. So the name may sound familiar to some of you. - Get to the band!

The name itself (which was created in the December 2007) evokes the era(s) of models who got into fashion and became covergirls posing in front of the camera. The words in the name can be considered as an oxymoron (up/down). And the second part of the name has the negative side, the final outcome is the fall of these beautiful creatures. The cover is unusual for an experimental/AG metal band but I suppose I just got used to weird, mindfucking artwork. I would say this is "mirror-avantgarde" quoting Tentakel P.'s Sigh review. It already gives a bit of music, it truly has a gothic line and this cover would perfectly fit a gothic metal band's album of high standard. Seeing it we will notice the cold, metallic colours. The second thing one sees the vase with a sip of dirty water and the flower. Flower, really? No. It's a piece of wire put in this glass vase...love is never easy. In the background a left hand's shadow can be observed trying to grab the heart which is created by mirroring the title's 2 to the left side. Contrary to the dominating rigid colours, the title is full of life and power with its bloody red appearance.



And the music. So as it is written before, it surprised me. The first bit of this mass was a song I have listened on their

myspace named *Nearly Dead Bat Make up*. Particularly, the vocals were the most interesting and outstanding. While listening to it I felt I am in a kind of wonderland. Asphodel is one of the most talented singers I have ever heard. She can sing rigidly, violently but on the other hand she has a definitive gothic background which teaches the girls to sing in a method can be recognized with ease (this style of singing can be heard near the end of the song). But. Yes...these butts. But she has a unique jazzy, though profile and another diverse which is something undefinable, smooth and soft disco styled one and not forget mentioning her childish one. And it's just the tip of the iceberg. I can't tell another girl who are able to sing in these ranges...and she combines it with continuous changing of the pitch. Alexis delivers aggressive guitars and drums along with male growled/shouted vocals. I would highlight one moment: under the bridge, Asphodel sings in her disco styled while Alexis growls in the backgrounds and the whole thing explodes as guitars and the shouted vocals come in to form the chorus.

Some lyrics have allusions to the various parts of (music) history. *Nearly Dead Bat Make up* also has a reference to the band Kiss and the people who believed them Satanists and Nazis. Another interesting part of this song is the very beginning, with the lyrics of "*Be (-shuuMuut-) obscene, be-be aggressive*". It's a reference to Marilyn Manson's *mOBSCENE* which has almost the same female lines originally stolen from Faith No More's *Be Aggressive*. (-shuuMuut-) = (shut up M arilyn M anson). On the other hand, some of the lyrics may seem absurd like *Pussy Worship* which is built around the question girls ask themselves: *What is it like being a man while having sex?. Only Some Shitty Chemical Stuff* explains love only as a hormonal procession. The lyrics aren't about one theme and message, they call up for situations, characters and images. Due to this, the music always changes differently and evolves, it follows the lyrics. There isn't a central style, except the rock and metal basics. *Pussy Worship* is like pussy pop-punk with a gospel-like inlay. *Only Some*

Shitty Chemical Stuff is an electronical, industrial metal song and first reminded me of the grotesque attitude to love presented in vocals and atmosphere one may know from the music of Rammstein. However, it becomes an acoustical ballad later.

To sum up Pin-Up Went Down's musical debut I must say I am extremely happy to know these two talented musicians with weird fantasies to turn them into reality. Their first album is surprisingly eclectic and delivered with overwhelming musical and vocal production, it's one of the most promising first-time debut releases of all time of avantgarde music. Not joking.

goth metal pop, with industrial and videogame, gospel, acoustic, rock, noise ambient, operatic, funky, indie, electronic, death metal, tropical, atmospheric, symphonic, trip-hop, jazz, latin, hardcore, soul, progressive, it you get must.

Revon



SEPTIC FLESH / Communion
(Season Of Mist, 2008 – Greece)
Avantgenre: Cosmic Dark Metal Epic

The masters are back from the dark abyss, and they peer deep into the darkness - inside and out - to bring you tales of blackest despair and death, crafted into some of the most majestic yet evil tunes ever put to record. The album lets rip with "Lovecraft's Death", a song that will have you headbanging away within a few bars after the intro, with great atmospheric courtesy of a full 80 piece orchestra and a complete choir section. The combination of crushing diabolical metal and authentic

dramatics works to great effect, as it does throughout the album. "Annubis" harkens to the melodicism of Revolution DNA with arrangements that will have jaws dropping, and somber choruses that you can hum during that special ritual killing. The choir/ blast beats juxtaposition of the title track gives Therion a good run for their money, and as far as I can see Septic Flesh are pretty much at the top of their game, making them peerless in their orchestral brutality. Spiro's growls are as demonic as ever, and here he proves he is a vocal force without match. Its great to know that Septic Flesh (like fellow countrymen Rotting Christ) continue to progress with each release yet never let go of the inherent darkness of the music as well as the factors that made their sound such a success in the first place.

"Babel's Gate" will utterly crush aside all pretenders with the power punch of death metal done right flowing on the wings of a string section possessed and choirs galore. It's always a pleasure to hear songs that one can remember as much as for the unique atmosphere as for the musicianship and choruses. "We the Gods" continues the trend of full throttle moody metal madness. This is a soundtrack to a movie about the Elder Ones in the act of destroying a mystical Sumerian civilization. It also has that special quality of creeping out listeners (under isolated conditions). Strange how just as the horror gets unbearable, a song like "Sunlight Moonlight" comes in, again showing the slower more melodic side of the band. How many bands can you name that can cover such a broad spectrum of sonics yet make it streamlined enough to write great songs?

"Persepolis" has a Middle Eastern yet Hellenistic twang to it that is now a patent with these guys. The mix is amazing, with the warmth of the string and brass sections nicely filling out (and in some cases leading) the thick, tasty extreme metal brew. The imagery conjured up is majestic and evil, yet never going headfirst into the penny dreadful theatrics of mid period COF or the extra cheese bombast of Bal Sagoth, instead being a force within the song.

The humming at beginning of "Sangreal" is again chilly, and the track explodes with symphonic grace and galloping triplets only to go into a wonderful harmonized riff based verse (dual vocals). "Narcissus" works as an album closer, the unique melodies swarming your head. I could go on and on, but suffice to say: Get it NOW!!

Like wine, Septic Flesh only gets better with age, and this is undoubtedly one of the best (comeback) albums of the year. With Origin also finally releasing a new record, this is going to be hell of a year for forward thinking metal. Combining the best elements of their rich discography, the Greeks have come up with a winner. Perfection!

Suleiman



TO-MERA / Delusions

(Candlelight, 2008 – UK)

Avantgenre: Prog Jazz Perfectionism

To-mera is one of those bands who have the profound ability to pick up the best their influences offer and form a great album, delicious to your ears, eyes and other scenes. Therefore I shall present you the way of cooking the best dish in the world: the soup a la to - mera.

The ingredients are following:

- 1/2 kg of musical skill
- 1/2 kg of composing skills
- knifetip of Dream Theater sound
- 200 g of Emperor influence
- 200 g of Opeth + Pain of Salvation
- (shaken not stirred)

500 g of complex rhythmical structures
100 g of jazzy female vocals
150 g of Debussyesque ideas
one Dilinger Escape Plan gig

The secret of building a great band lies in the last mentioned ingredient: the DEP gig where Julie Kiss and Lee Barret met. When the rest of the line-up was carefully chosen and cleaned from other musical ideas one can start recording. To start recording the Delusions album, one must add ½ kg of musical skills and 250g of complex rhythmical structures to the rehearsalroom and give it a good stir so it mixes completely and forms a great rhythm section of this bad. Furthermore, add a big part of the musical skills to the keyboardist, who is one of the brightest spots of this soup...sorry...band! In order to get the great guitars one must add the rest of complex rhythmical structures. When talking about the vocals one must realize that these are not the standard female vocals you can find in various gothic/prog bands, as Julie's vocals range from some very powerful passages to warm colored jazzy intermezzos.

A standard progressive metal album?! Not at all, mon ami. But why?! The taste this album leaves after consummation isn't the one of the typical contemporary Dream Theater albums: of shredding and boredom, but the one of technicality and atmosphere. Not just the mentioned, but the variety of influences found on this release range from Emperoric riffs, to free jazz (!!!) atmospheres. It's very hard to choose a highlight of this album, but I would dare to point to "A Sorrow to Kill", a very melancholic, but powerful track which will knock you off your feet.

For the best listening of this album I would propose a Bang&Olufsen soundsystem, in lack of witch you can use any good old Japanese sound devices, or you could experiment with a surround system. Listen loud, inhale the music, exhale perfection!

Ulv



SATANOCHIO /
Vagrant Matter Heritage EP
(Self Released, 2007 – Romania)
Avantgenre: Progressive Black Death

Sorry for being such a lazy bum, for this should have been reviewed almost 2 months ago. An intense little slab of noise, this will entrance from beginning to end. This is a big progression from I am Satanochio for it ventures further into the dysfunctional and unknown. The artwork and packaging is immaculate, and the lyrics are hateful while being witty and intelligent. The overall impression of the packaging is an intense and focused cross-over of arty death/black with the crust/grind aesthetic (especially the art and the lyrics).

The first two songs have very interesting structures and benefit from repeated spins, as they gradually show more of themselves. Gone is the relentless blasting of the past, and in its place we find a more chop heavy Satanochio. Nevertheless, it is still dark and aggressive as hell, just more textured, and therefore may take longer to get into, but once you are hooked, there is no turning back. The production is clear with a nice groovy bottom end yet individual enough to stand out from the hordes. The third track is a black metal acid trip, reminiscent of some of the more arty moments from the kings of early 90's black metal. Strangely the production on this track is also much different from the other two, with way more reverb and a more distant sound which wells in this context.

All in all it's a welcome addition to the Satanochio cannon and may come as a surprise to some fans of the older material. It is hard to wait for the massacre that promises to be their next full length album.

Suleiman



SLOUGH FEG / Hardworlder
 (Cruz Del Sur Music, 2007 – USA)
 Avantgenre: Manopeace

When I grew up, I was a regular reader of the German Metalhammer-Magazine. I remember reading the editorials of Götz Kühnemund and always wondered how his living room might look like and what he kept in the fruit bowl on the low table between the television and the couch. Same thing happened to me whilst listening to this album which actually should be considered 'avantgarde' only if hell freezes. Quite similar to the Amazon-feature "People who bought this also bought..." I can exclusively present to you a "People who listen to song #x also like"-image list. Enjoy. Visual feedback appreciated.

When I finished listening to the album David Bowies "The boys keep swinging" came to my mind.

Jonny Lignano

- #1 
- #2 
- #3 
- #4 
- #5 
- #6 
- #7 
- #8 
- #9 
- #10 
- #11 
- #12 
- #13 



VOLKMAR / Overture Macabre Demo
(Self-Released, 2007 – Australia)
Avantgenre: Evil Rock

A nice short demo that amply demonstrates this up and coming band's arsenal. This is an interesting exercise in rocking gloomy metal. There is a cloak of darkness over the entire thing, and rather than coming across like the whining and sad caterwauling of typical gothic metal, this sounds threatening. You know, like those bands from the mid-80's that had an undercurrent of violence in their taut guitar bass drum (and synth) setup. This also benefits from a sense of history as the band appears to have heard the 90's dark and black metal boom (Moonspell, Samael, Enslaved), besides the obvious bows at the altars of Sisters of Mercy, Bauhaus and Fields of Nephilim.

"Eyes Sewn Shut" begins the assault with driving backbone and rewards with calmer yet blacker mid-section before returning to the beat/ riff barrage. "Walk with Me" continues the gothic mosh, with a vintage dark chord progression. "Journey Below" shows another side to the band's sound. A bit slower, a bit moodier with an esoteric anthemic chorus you may find yourself humming at the next black mass. The guitars are simple and straightforward but perfect for the rather catchy and dark songwriting. When the crunchy noir-riffs are complemented with the spooky synths and the vintage drumkit, it is indeed an enjoyable spin, with the singer painting tales of horror, the occult and morbidity in his rather grim yet melodic

baritone, we have a little gem of modern goth. There are only four songs (plus one short horror movie mood piece at the end) but it gets the job done. I have heard that the debut album proper will have a much better production. If so, Vision Bleak et al should get ready for the competition.

Suleiman



UMBDAH / Trilobeth
(Self-Released, 2007 – UK)
Avantgenre: Metal Electrophernia

The man's proficiency knows no bounds. He is back with another amazing release, and to boot it could be his best work yet. Taking the bizarre twisting industrial extreme metal sound from his previous albums, Cal morphs it into a thing of dystopian beauty. This is musical insanity in its truest form. I will now dissect some of the album's hi-light tracks to try and get your feeble brains to comprehend the genius at work here.

A Zen Horizon - References some older Umbah material, but manages to be disturbing in its minimalism, which lends the occasional strange samples and the eerie background synths even more potency. The vocals are mangled by multi-stage processing in places, and the song structure will make most metal musicians weep blood. Strangely, despite the complexity, the main motif sticks like glue.

Beehive - This could be the lead video single in a world where MTV stood for Masticating Teleportation Visuals. A

massive track that shows Cal sculpting an insanely catchy tune, with some dark twining riffing and synthy rhythms that explode into rage and similarly back and forth. Great sense of timing and in no time this will have you shouting 'I think its a robotic beehive, I think Im only human left alive.' If there was any justice in the world, this could break into more mainstream metal since its the closest thing to accessible on this album, while remaining very much an Umbah song.

Mesoria a Larkara - Continuing this new-found vitality of fresh sounds, this sounds plain epic, and veers into sympho-metal territory (if the orchestra was conducted by Skinny Puppy). It rips through the heart of a million bands pretending artistic integrity via a couple of violas. The juxtaposition of discordant stop start riffing, rich synths, insane screeches, beautiful piano runs and squeaky violas will leave you breathless. I was thinking of Umbah progressing but did not expect this. Wow!

Sheep of Sad Fate - More upfront brutal than the other tracks, this shreds in classic Umbah style, but gain it has a doomy underbelly to the lightning fast grind death framework. Riffing is top notch all the way. And what is it with the drums? In most places it sounds like someone is actually playing/bashing a drumkit instead of programming it. This guy just rips apart digital drum programming. The atonal riffing layers attack and slay yet remain faithful to the song, and the outro is absolutely nuts, with the haunting sounds and funky drums.

Trilobeth - The heaviest song on the record, and an absolute head smasher of a track. The soundtrack to a mad alien-cyborg killing spree, this once again raises the bar for death metal, with its aggression, guitar work, structure and vocals.

To a Somber Place - A soundtrack to a non-existent 70's euro-art thriller, with some very authentic tones and textures. Takes cues from jazz and avant garde classic and takes it to new heights.

Torn Again - More overtly industrial than some of the other tracks, this is a disturbing looping morphing slice of insanity. Imagine Skinny Puppy and Controlled Bleeding jamming, and take it from there.

The tracks I have not mentioned are just as awesome, and it is hard to choose a favourite. In a nutshell, if you are already familiar with Umbah, prepare to be pleasantly surprised at the evolution, and if you are not, prepare to have your socks blown off and brains melted. As ever, the whole thing is available for free download at:

<http://www.umbah.co.uk/cybergrind/mp3z.htm>

I actually feel guilty for downloading it because it blows most of the albums I paid for out of the water. This is further proof that the best avant garde metal is still being created in the darkest recesses of the underground, and has little to do with monetary concerns.

Suleiman



SOLEFALD / The Circular Drain
(Von Jackhelln Inhuman, 2007 – Norway)

Avantgenre: Avantsampler

This is no real "new" album but a re-release of the fist SOLEFALD-Demo "Jernlov" from 1996 as well as a compilation of several artists contributing their versions of SOLEFALD-songs from over a decade. Due to the nature of this enterprise (different

artists, styles and so on) I'll take on this CD step by step.

Jernlov:

Being lucky to own the original tape, I was already familiar with the two songs that did not make their way to "The Linear Scaffold". Yet you can hear the trademarks that would later be used on aforementioned album: SOLEFALD's weird harmonies, the quiet interludiums (either clean guitars or synths, on "Sivilisasjonens Slør - Ravnens Fall" you have even a bagpipe) in exchange with screeching Black Metal. And then there is, of course, Cornelius' unmistakable vocal work which was great even back then. The only difference is that everything seems to have been remastered; the drums are more clear and louder and everything else is better audible as well. Oh, and "When The Moon Is On The Wave" contains an audio error, some kind of suction noise at 3:41 which has not been there on the tape.

The Circular Drain (in order of appearance, a review drawn in sketches):

Exorcise –

Red For Fire + Black For Death

A dark beginning. A cold, repetitive soundscape, erupting into a beat-inferno; cold, mechanical, impelling. An inhuman, factory-like void, focusing on the darker side of SOLEFALD and one of my favourite tracks.

*The Bombs Of Enduring Freedom –
Survival Of The Outlaw*

The driving (nearly jungle) beats of this track continue on the debris the last track has left behind. A wild rollercoaster-ride through the same factory, with the occasional samples of Cornelius' screams. A short pause with the clean singing part, and on we are again when THE BOMBS OF ENDURING FREEDOM throw us off the coaster suddenly and without warning. Another favourite of mine.

*Dj:!!j Lazare: Fluorescent
(The Total Orchestra)*

Just in time to be picked up by DJ:!!J LAZARE, which is - you probably guessed

- Lazare himself. One of the weaker tracks, starts with some kind of "gangsta's paradise" SOLEFALD-style and continues even worse with a kind of house-hymn and "Yeah, yeah" shouting. Not my cup of tea, although the track gets better to the end.

Havoc Unit: Sun I Call

The renamed ...AND OCEANS are behind this, and with an adequate and calm conversion of the intro of the Icelandic Saga. Accompanied by slow beats and the one or the other synth-intermission, this track does more than justice to the mood of the original version; HAVOC UNIT take their time and don't try to push it too far too fast. Very good job.

The Extreme Zweizz Fuckover:

There Is Need

Sorry but this is not for me. This is just noise. And I mean noise. No music, only soundscapes of brrrrm and wwwwwth and eeeeeek and woooooosh and btbttbttbttbttb... This might be art, this might be crap. I am not to judge it. I just don't like it.

Half Sherman : CK II Chanel no 6

"Survival of the fittes", jungle-like. A new atmosphere, a new more friendly approach to a strange and dark song. Yet not very much stays besides the the fact that HALF SHERMAN like to experiment with beats while focusing on one melody. Okay with me, but not very impressing.

Red Sector A: A Motion Picture

Does anyone remember The Descent (old PC-game) soundtrack? Well, this could have been on it. A very spheric version of the weirdest song on "Neonism". Calm, futuristic and great. Could under other circumstances be heard on Goa-parties in the chillout-zone. Recommended.

Havoc Unit: Bragi (Prayer Of A Son)

And again HAVOC UNIT. Darker, hostile, more impending and alien this time. A trip beyond the stars to corners where even Jean-Luc has not been before. Another highlight.

G.U.T.: When The Moon Is On The Wave

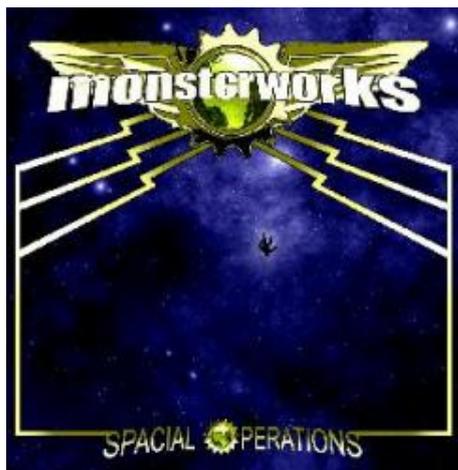
Last but not least the man himself:

Cornelius with his side-project G.U.T. (no, NOT the porn-grinders). A slow, dark and menacing version of Lord Byron's poem. And strangely the least electronic sounding track on this CD. This could pass as a slower, more relaxed version of the original track. Very good job as well.

Resumee:

Far more listenable homage to an important norwegian band than ULVER's exploration into the same regions a few years ago. The concept is the same, but where ULVER have dug out artists who think throwing canaries into a fan, record this, then playing it again backwards on double speed while doing the hoovering and record that AGAIN is funny, this tribute (except for ZWEIZZ who has probably no canaries left and PETA on his trail) is listenable and very well done for the most part. This is for the open-minded SOLEFALD-fan (which I guess you are anyway by liking SOLEFALD in the first place) and ventures into more electronic regions. But even then there is a fair amount of distortion for the average metalhead, and getting the hands on the "Jernlov"-demo wich only turns up so often on Ebay for high prices is a not a bad thing either.

Tentakel P.



MONSTERWORKS / Spacial Operations

(Self-Released, 2007 – New Zealand)
Avantgenre: Space Rebel Metal

Opening with a majestic intro that shows the band to be clearly influenced by

bombastic progressive hard rock, it explodes into the first song proper 'Firefight'. This lies somewhere at a crossroads between hevy devy metal (its a genre), 70's hard rock, melodic death metal and prog/power metal. A very fresh sound indeed, which is surprising how hackneyed the inspirations have become. This has a passion and a sense of honesty often missing in musicians and albums of such virtuosity. The vocalist is like a one man war between the aforementioned Devin (minus the reverb OD) and impaled Nazarene. Lovely atmospheric keyboards drench the proceedings but never intrude on the seriously riff-alicious guitars. Thankfully the leads avoid the dreaded Maiden syndrome as well as the abhorred pretty-ness or the Amotts. Instead the guitars and the organic song structures evoke the free flowing spirit of 70's metal (as on "November") and the classic (doomy) metal rumblings of "Stars Malign". This tranverses the entire classic and extreme metal spectrum in its 48 minutes, without once sounding forced or contrived. "Defenders of the Southern Cross" is another masterpiece but its all good really. Its great the way the same instruments (guitars, drums, bass, keys) and the same genre (metal) can still sound so fresh and vital, without resorting to non-traditional composition techniques. The way the band makes Lynrd Skynrd collide head on with Strapping Young Lad has to be heard to be believed.

This band has single handedly revived my faith in progressive metal, infusing it with an almost punk enthusiasm and a true sense of adventure. For those who have had enough of the navel-gazing bloat metal of Opeth or the sheer gay-ness of Dream Theatre, give this a spin to see what you have been missing. My only regret is that this could not be included on my AGM Top Ten. The way the free-bird-seque acoustics of "Lonely Crown" erupts into the raging wall of sound and how the composition continues will give any metal fan the shivers. "Paralellysis" is another heartfelt acoustic interlude leading to another monstrous track "Alliance". Overall the vocals are some of the most passionate I have heard in a while (though very

occasionally interspersed with a more generic growl) while the instrumentation takes the best elements of progressive and extreme metal (as well as 70's southern rock) and comes up with a winning mix. I could go on and on but suffice to say get it now.

This is a concept record, being something of an action-space-drama, but the cohesive concept is only the icing on the cake, because the music stands tall on its own. And finally the cherry on this monster metal sundae - its available for free download (hi quality mp3) directly from the band's site here:

<http://www.supermetal.net/Main.html>

Somehow its fitting that this is from New Zealand. You can almost smell the warp speed engine running on diesel and Fosters here.

Suleiman



PICA FIERCE / Pica Fierce
(Self-Released, 2007 – Norway)
Avantgenre: Thrashy Spaced Death
Metal

PICA FIERCE are a band from Norway, formed in 1999 and, as far as my researches have led me, have been and are not involved in any other band. There is always one more surprise in for you: A norwegian band without involvement in any other bands. Please read this sentence carefully and repeat it over and over, because I doubt you'll read it somewhere else soon again.

I found out about them when I was dealing with friend requests on MySpace, and though I normally don't listen to the various mp3's on the requesters sites this time I am glad I did. The great "Swan Song" was what I heard, and I was very surprised. This band labels itself Thrash? Okay, marginally that fits, but that was only one of the faces of PICA FIERCE I discovered. It turned out that after three demos PICA FIERCE were about to release their debut right at the time I contacted them, so I asked for a promo to find out more about these "Thrashers" who were able to write such epic songs.

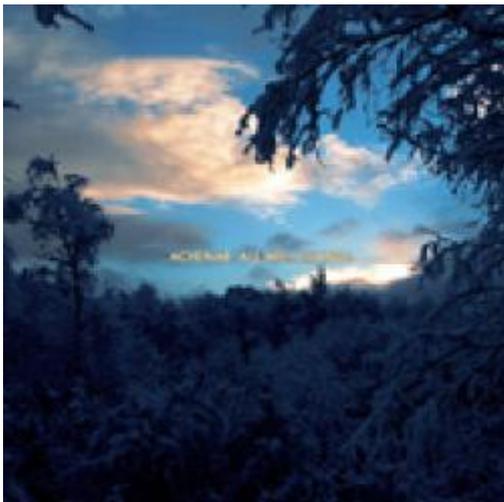
First things first: The technical implementation leaves no wishes unfulfilled. A great and moody green artwork, a professional sharp and clean sound from various studios throughout Sweden and Norway and skillful musicians. Overall an appealing presentation. A great presentation, if you take into account that the band had to do everything on its own due to the lack of a label.

Now on to the music. Yes, the basis is deathened (melodic) Thrash-metal, and it is maybe not as avantgardistic as I thought it might be while listening to "Swan Song" (which is by far the best song on the album), but nevertheless this has become a great album. It features mostly deep and shredding rhythm-guitars, a skill- and playful drummer who is able to do some intricate drum-patterns as well as straight attacks, a diversified shouter and a coequal adept bass-player. Yet, one flaw of the album is that sometimes the songs tend to sound a bit similar for my taste, and that is mainly when the band writes parts based on technical rythms with every instrument focusing on it with – at least for my taste-exchangeable melodies. But the moments when PICA FIERCE write based on melodies and not on rhythm, when they experiment (which they do quite often), make more than up for that. Choirs, Black-Metal screeching, distorted and disharmonic melodies, great solos, samples, and citing most of the Metal-genres (from Heavy, Doom, Death, Thrash to Black, Gothic, and whatever...)

create a steady vessel to float on the river of PICA FIERCE. Moments like in the aforementioned "Swan Song" (which remains my favourite song) come up every once in a while, great and epic moments. Sometimes (for example, the last song "A New Beginning") they even sound like SOLEFALD meets SLAYER...

PICA FIERCE get big bonus points from me for pushing one of the most conservative genres in Metal (namely Thrash Metal) beyond its boundaries, and for succeeding with the effort. I sincerely hope that soon some labels will show interest for them - with this album, they deserve it. Oh and did I mention: They are a norwegian band without involvement in any other bands. I just can't get over that. Would you believe that, please?

Tentakel P.



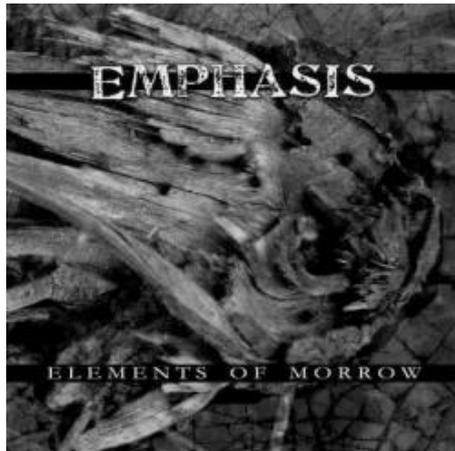
ACHENAR / All Will Change
(Earthen Records, 2007 – UK)
Avantgenre: Avant Garde Music

Just as I breathed a sigh of relief upon completion of the Cervix review, I looked at the Achenar album with some trepidation. Upon playing my fears were intensified as it begins with some interesting sample that are quickly overtaken by noise. As I was cursing and thinking that this was punishment from the boss (Chrystof) for something, it turned into some of the darkest arpeggios I have heard in while. I sat entranced as the sheer weighty atmosphere overtook me, complimented by suitably moody and strange synths.

The vocals are somewhere between chanting and choir work but suitably infused with a gothic sensibility. The textures are layered to a climax and a sudden stop, making "Survive Yourself" a very memorable first song (following the earlier intro mentioned "Origin"). The second track is much more insane, taking cues from Skinny Puppy and Merzbow. Yes it has some harsh frequencies and a ton of noise, but it also has a rather alien sense of songwriting, and at least a small family of crystal meth fed monkeys jumping all over the keys and buttons of a sampler. More bizarre and rather scary soundscapes lead to "Verify Me". In terms of atmosphere and sheer weight this smokes most of the dark stuff I have heard this year. The rhythms created out all over the record are pure genius, utilizing electro-industrial drumkits as well as all kinds of found sounds to mesmerizing effect. The lyrics are also sufficiently ambiguous yet threatening enough to maintain a near-constant mood of unknown fear. Songs like "Re-Everate" take the rougher sounds of bands like In Strict Confidence, and then rape them to produce alien-hybrid offspring.

Project mastermind, Scotsman Duncan Hemingway, proves to be a true expressionist of post-modern avant garde composition on tracks like the enthralling "Sojourn". It came to the point where I was actually looking forward to what madness each track would bring, and to say the least, it does not disappoint a fan of avant garde music. Honestly, even as a musician it scares me as to how a piece like "Let Us Help You" is composed, much less created. What sort of mental dichotomy leads one to be equally enthusiastic in making rhythmic barrage of noise and samples on one end, and the neo-goth brilliance of a song like "With Conviction" (infact a few places reflect the experimentation of euro-BM bands as they expanded their wings). It all ends with the alternately haunting and bitter sweet strain of "1+0=10". Highly recommended for anyone claiming to be into avant garde music.

Suleiman



EMPHASIS / Elements Of Morrow

(KU - RAC, 2007 – Croatia)

Avantgenre: Neon-nocturnal Post Metal
Dream Machine

Not avant-garde in the scene of groundbreaking sound architecture, but so spontaneous when approaching their music, a psychedelic and experimental manner packed in a post-metal sound. The music is calm, but screaming from the inside, screaming because of the fear what will the future bring....the music itself is played from the future; seconds before we know it, these simple sounds exist eternally, they are the part of yesterday and the sound of "now", they are the "Elements of Morrow" Free from lyrical intervention the music itself becomes the media through which the artist yearns to contact or common consciousness, and really the music is both individual and universal, it's a form of art given to you to finish, there may be millions of sounds like this in the universe, each finished form will be completely different. I almost forgot how a purely instrumental expression can be strong. The only intervention of human voice are spoken samples on the opening of the album and on the final track. The music ranges from some quiet ambient parts often enriched by guitar reverb and electronical samples. Even though the dynamics of these passages is somewhat lower, they remain as expressive and energetic as the rest of the recordings. Tranquillity and anxiety are the two keywords of this recording, the harmony between the "calm" and "disturbing" parts can be compared with waves of paranoia when dreaming, like some foreign voices and noises you hear when

sleeping but you just can't wake up. "Elements of Morrow" has a nocturnal aspect, not the romantic one of twilight and storm, but the nocturno of a modern surrounding, the burning pain of neon lights, empty hallways in the underground, dimly lit parks, and a few unknown people walking away....

The instrumentation is simple but strong, some keys and electronics occasionally turn up to enrich the atmosphere along with the mentioned reverb sound of the guitars. A great surprise is a very simple but effective drumming. Everything was played in order to emphasize the atmosphere of the music, not to turn your attention to the playing itself, that's why it is difficult to describe such a record only with words. Can there be a drawback on this record?! Well maybe the bass is a bit too silent in the mix, it's sound is dim so the drawback is maybe just my imagination, because the production of the record is clear and almost perfect. If you prefer calming music, if you prefer a music you can shape after your own will, this record will bring in a great new palette of psychedelic and melancholy to your senses....shape it after your own will....

*"Like we are masters of our world
making shapes that we prefer"*

Ulv





VINTERSORG / Solens Rötter

(Napalm Records, 2007 – Sweden)

Avantgenre: Disharmonic Force Of Gaia

I did not like the previous VINTERSORG-albums that much; for my taste they both were, compared to the first albums, a bit too far out in space both lyrically and musically. They were nevertheless good without question, but somehow they lacked something the first albums had. So I did not expect album-of-the-year-material when I bought "Solens Rötter". I expected a good album, not less, but also not more. And at first it seemed as if it was exactly that - a good album. Then, after listening to it some time more, I found that it was indeed a very good album. Something that I had felt was missing on the previous outputs of VINTERSORG was back; reminiscences of the good ol' times of "Till Fjälls" became obvious and some of its magic sparkled anew, together with some new elements. It seemed as if Mr. Vintersorg merged his "old" with his "modern" style; to join the positive aspects of his other albums so far (maybe added a bit of his experience with BORKNAGAR) to record "Solens Rötter". But SR is far more than a collection of all the elements that VINTERSORG is made of. If you know the band you know and you expect that you'll hear beautiful acoustic-guitar parts; Mr. Vintersorgs unmistakably clean voice as well as his growling and screaming; straight, blasting drum patterns as much as progressive beats which are sometimes on the edge of being drum-solos; calm melodies which interchange with impelling shredding

guitars; and last but not least the one or the other sample or sound-effect or other gimmicks. This time there is more to it; in every song there is something underlining which adds a magical note to the album. Sometimes with melodies, sometimes with effects and strange instruments (I could swear I heard a Marimba somewhere). There are flutes, bongos, synths, chimes, a harp, violins and more, you name it, it's probably on "Solens Rötter". I guess most of them are artificial (prove me wrong?) but even if the songs are stuffed with these elements, they don't obtrude themselves, you barely recognize them in the first place (hint: try listening with headphones, it's worth it). The melodies are calm, epic, monumental, simply beautiful. This is a positive album and I don't mean cheesy. Some of the melodies are really weird (best example would be the calm intermission in "Från Materia Till Ande" and the instrumental "Vad Aftonvindens Andning Viskar" which is gorgeously spaced-out) but that is what makes "Solens Rötter" unique; the approach to harmonies and disharmonies are seldom heard and somehow – enlightened. The only thing that comes to my mind which could be compared to that somehow is ILSAHN's "The Adversary" which could be called the Yin of the bright Yang that is "Solens Rötter" for both albums have a similar approach to brilliant compositions; ILSAHN's TA being the darker album. And now please don't make me explain the last sentence, just listen to "Solens Rötter" (best listen to "The Adversary" as well) and feel it.

Tentakel P.

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