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FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2014

*It was all lined-up and finalized.
Fifteen was a solid number.*

*I had three of my favorite albums being
performed for the first and only time ever.
I had Oliva to finish it off. He had agreed to
close it out with 'When the Crowds Are
Gone.' I was done. Good night.*

And you went and fucked it all up.

*You sold the show out. You not only sold
the show out, you did it within 30 days
It was the third fastest sell-out in
ProgPower USA history.*

I was awestruck.

*On behalf of Jen and myself, thank you.
See you next year.*

Glenn



SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2014

WITHEM - NORWAY - 2:00 TO 3:00
DIVIDED MULTITUDE - NORWAY - 3:30 TO 4:30
VOODOO CIRCLE - GERMANY - 5:00 TO 6:00
MASTERPLAN - GERMANY - 6:30 TO 7:45
PAIN OF SALVATION - SWEDEN - 8:15 TO 9:45
JON OLIVA'S PAIN - USA - 10:30 TO CLOSE

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FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2014

3:00-3:30 * STRATOVARIUS
4:30-5:00 * OVERKILL (UNCONFIRMED)
6:00-6:30 * MASTERPLAN
7:45-8:15 * JON OLIVA'S PAIN / ** LEPROUS

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2014

3:00-3:30 * PAIN OF SALVATION
4:30-5:00 * ORDEN OGAN / ** WITHEM
6:00-6:30 * SEVENTH WONDER / ** NEED
7:45-8:15 * VOODOO CIRCLE / ** DIVIDED MULTITUDE
9:45-10:15 * PAGAN'S MIND / ** DGM

* TABLE 1 LOCATED AT END OF LOBBY

** TABLE 2 LOCATED CLOSE TO LOBBY STAIRS

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ALL SESSIONS ARE STRICTLY VOLUNTARY AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE OR LAST MINUTE CANCELLATION. ANY CHANGE MADE TO THE SCHEDULE WILL BE ANNOUNCED VIA SOCIAL MEDIA OUTLETS AND POSTED IN THE LOBBY.

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LANE MILLER - JON OLIVA'S PAIN
MARE THOMAS - JON OLIVA'S PAIN
DAVE THOMAS - JON OLIVA'S PAIN
SEAN & ANGELICA GAHGAN - JON OLIVA'S PAIN
LEN GAHGAN & LESLEY HOLLENBERG - JON OLIVA'S PAIN
PAUL CASHMAN - JON OLIVA'S PAIN
DARLENE & DARIC GUTIERREZ - JON OLIVA'S PAIN
KIMBERLY DORRIS - JON OLIVA'S PAIN
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RODERICK ROSE - LEPROUS
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JANA HAGGARD - LEPROUS
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DAVID POTTS - OVERKILL
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STEPHANIE ROSENBLATT - PAIN OF SALVATION
CHRIS & TAMMIE WILLENBROCK - PAIN OF SALVATION
CHARLES MULLER - PAIN OF SALVATION
CRAIG & STEPHANIE WHEATLEY - SEVENTH WONDER
KYLE KAUFFMAN - SEVENTH WONDER
KRIS VONA - SEVENTH WONDER
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JON OLIVA'S PAIN

Interview with Jon Oliva
by Milton Mendonca

The one and only Mountain King takes time from his chaotic schedule of Trans Siberian Orchestra recordings to discuss his special "Streets" set with Jon Oliva's Pain at ProgPower USA, in one of the most emotional and entertaining interviews he's ever been in.

Jon: Mr. Milton, how is everything?

Milton: Good, Jon. It's a pleasure to speak with you.

Jon: Likewise. What's on the plate for this evening? I'm sorry I called you too early.

Milton: It's not a problem. I ran back home and put the groceries away so we're good now.

Jon: You are fast. You're much faster than I am when my wife orders me to do that. Are you married or happy? (mutual laughter)

Milton: Well, so far so good. I've only been married close to four years.

Jon: Ah, you're a rookie then. How old are you?

Milton: I'm turning 30 this year.

Jon: Ah, fuck off... (mutual laughter) I'd give my left nut to be that age again.

Milton: Well, they say when you've been married a while you don't need the left nut anymore, so... (mutual laughter)

Jon: You'll learn that soon. (mutual laughter)

Milton: So you're returning to ProgPower USA very soon with a very special show. But, I wanted to start talking about your latest addition to the camp, your new guitarist (who happens to be one of my best friends), Bill Hudson.

Jon: So you're telling me Billy is your friend?

Milton: We were just in Vegas two weeks ago.

Jon: I can't wait to torture him on tour and in person when he shows up for rehearsals here in Florida. (laughter) I just finally figured out our set list, so I dropped a shitload of songs on him to learn. "Alright motherfucker, let's see what you can do." (mutual laughter)

Milton: Well, all bias aside, I'm sure you're going to be well served in the six strings.

Jon: I will give that guy credit. First of all, Al Pitrelli is a huge supporter of him. I had Al down here last week and we were doing guitar tracks for TRANS-SIBERIAN ORCHESTRA. Al was talking about how much he thinks Bill is a great guitarist and how he's on fire. He's really good. I was like, "yeah, I know!" (laughter) I will tell you, he sent me a few videos of him playing some of the songs on "Streets" and I showed them to Paul O'Neill. Paul is a really scrutinizing, difficult guy. He said "Jon, don't lose this guy. He's the real deal." Bill plays Criss Oliva solos perfectly, and I mean no one that I have ever worked with can play Criss Oliva like Bill does. For Paul to say that too is huge.

Milton: I'm happy to hear that on a personal level.

Jon: The last time I saw him (Bill) a few years ago, I almost threw him down a staircase. He was drinking a bit in those days, and so was I. I was going to throw him down the stairs, but Chris Kinder talked me out of it. I'm glad, in retrospect.

Milton: (laughter) Very good. So let's shift the focus a bit now...

Jon: If you ask me if SAVATAGE is coming back together, I'll have to come and kill you.

Milton: (laughter) Ironically enough, just the other day on the ProgPower forum I asked folks if they wanted me to ask you anything specific. I told them that whoever asked about a Savatage reunion first, would win the "You Suck Award of the Year".

Jon: (laughter) I love that! That's great!

Milton: Is it frustrating to you that no matter how great of a JON OLIVA'S PAIN album you release, people always ask you to play older SAVATAGE songs?

Jon: It's very frustrating! I don't get it, because most of the songs I've done with JOP were songs that were going to be used in SAVATAGE anyway. On top of that, having all of Criss' material that I have made into songs and put into JOP records essentially means most of the JOP records were co-written by Criss Oliva. So it's like, "How much more SAVATAGE do you want? You have me singing my music and Criss Oliva's music together, but it's that name that's missing?" It frustrates me like a motherfucker. That's why the last album I did was a solo record. I dug up the very last of Criss' stuff that I had. And it's funny how the solo album did better sales-wise than the JOP albums did for whatever reason.

Milton: That's interesting.

Jon: Whatever, you know? I don't care. I am not doing this stuff for the money, you know? Right now, I'm rich. I made millions of dollars with TSO. I do it because I enjoy doing the music and I know it makes people happy too.

Milton: The solo album was great; very different than anything you've ever done. But, back to JOP. Every time I listen to one of the JOP records, to me, it's just like a SAVATAGE disc.

Jon: It is! If you look back on the history of SAVATAGE, there isn't one song on any album where I wasn't the major writer, ever since the band started. I get frustrated because I thought the SAVATAGE fans would be all over the JOP stuff. Unfortunately, it never got to the level that I wanted it to. But hey, it's okay. Like I said, money means nothing. In a way, TSO gives me the finances to be able to do JOP. Otherwise, nobody would've ever heard these lost Criss Oliva songs.

Milton: You mentioned that you used the very last material you had recorded of Criss'. You also lost Matt Laporte, your former guitarist who passed away a few years ago. Do you have any material that is unreleased of collaborations between you and him?

Jon: Actually there are a couple of songs that I worked on with Matt that never got released. Everything happened so fast when he passed away that I didn't know what I wanted to do anymore, or whether or not to continue the band. I did the solo record to buy me some time, really. I do have a few things that I will end up using in the future, however.

Milton: It'd be a nice tribute, in a way.

Jon: Yeah. Matt was a great guy and a great guitar player. He was a little cuckoo and I miss him dearly. Some of the stuff I have is really good material, but I just haven't had a chance to use it yet.

Milton: I don't mean to get too personal, but was there a sense of discouragement after he passed away? Did it ever feel like history was repeating itself again?

Jon: Absolutely! I couldn't believe this was happening again. When he passed away, it was such a shock. I had talked to him the day before he passed away. I think I was the last person to talk to him, actually. And the next thing I know, I'm getting a call from Paul saying that Matt was dead. I was reliving the Criss Oliva thing all over again. When Criss died, I also talked to him the day before he died and Paul was the one who called me to break the news. It was eerie how similarly things happened.

Milton: Wow.

Jon: It was heartbreaking. I was very close to Matt. He was a very big confidant of mine, a brilliant guitar player, and I thought it was very sad that he went the way he went. Unexpected, you know? So, that's why I did the solo record. I wasn't ready to look for a guitar player, nor did I know what I was going to do. I figured the solo album would be a nice way to pacify the fans, so to speak, while I figured it out.

Milton: *The reviews about the solo album were good.*

Jon: Yeah, it did very well. It was different and I play most of the instruments on it. Well, actually, "Handful of Rain" was more of a solo album than "Raise the Curtain." It had nobody but me, Paul and Alex Skolnick. The solo album had a few more people on it. Anyway, it gave me time to think about everything.

Milton: *Moving away from the solo album a little bit and going into ProgPower. You've been a part of the festival since 2004 when you played with Weapons of Mass Destruction. It was also the very first place you presented JOP to the world.*

Jon: Yes. The set in between two sets so to speak.

Milton: *What's so special about ProgPower USA?*

Jon: Well, I spend a lot of time doing festivals all over Europe. The festivals in Europe are always great. They're well put together, they have big crowds, etc.... it's always good. The only festival I've come across in America that rivals the Euro ones is ProgPower. Why? First of all, Glenn is a genius when it comes to that. He's a smart guy and I love him dearly. He's one of my closest friends and he can do no wrong. It sells out because he does it right. I've gotten lots of offers to do festivals in the States. I did that festival in San Francisco that tried to copy ProgPower. There were 200 people there. It was disappointing as hell! I asked myself, "What the fuck am I doing here?"

Milton: *(laughter)*

Jon: At Glenn's festival, the venue is great, the crowd is amazing and people come in from all over the world. He does it totally pro and that's why people keep coming back. But don't tell him I said all of these super nice things about him. (mutual laughter)

Milton: *I've learned more from him in this industry than I have from anyone else.*

Jon: There you go. The guy is smart. He can sell out this show easily. He can get the Banana Splits and Bugs Bunny to headline the festival and it's still going to do well. That's because people who fly in from all over the world know they're going to get a great show, a great venue and something that's worth their money. Now edit the part that I compliment him will you? (laughter)

Milton: *How did the idea of performing "Streets" come to life?*

Jon: It was a meeting between Chris Kinder and Glenn I believe. It was a private meeting without me. Then they showered me with money. (mutual laughter) No, in all seriousness now, I've wanted to do this for the longest time, and I figured the time was right. When I did the "Hall of the Mountain King" album tour in Europe, I realized "Ok, this can be done." So "Streets" has never been done before, ever. There are songs on that album that even SAVATAGE never played live, like "Can You Hear Me Now" and "St. Patrick's."

Milton: *That's so cool!*

Jon: Yeah and it's also a challenge! I decided to do it all in the original keys and my thing is that it's going to be as close to the original as possible. In rehearsal, we play it through the album. Then we finally started doing without it and we realized how perfect it sounds. People are going to be blown away! And, Bill is joining us on the rehearsals soon. He will slide right in and it's going to be awesome.

Milton: *Speaking as a fan, that has always been my favorite album by SAVATAGE. I'm looking forward to that very much.*

Jon: It will be a really good time, for sure.

Milton: *We have another concept album being played entirely at ProgPower this coming September, by a band called PAIN OF SALVATION. It's a very emotional album based on some really heavy life experiences. Their singer has told me that it will be difficult for him to play some of the songs, considering some of the themes and memories that it brings.*



Jon: You know, I have the same problem with some of the songs on "Streets".

Milton: *You read my mind; I was just about to ask you that.*

Jon: If you look at a song like, "If I Go Away", it was a song that was written before Criss passed away. If you listen to it, the lyrics sound like I am singing it to him. Every time I play that song, I have to hold back the tears. I get choked up. I have that same problem in certain things that I do.

Milton: *You know, now that you mention the song lyrics, I am thinking of some of the verses such as "Searching for the chord that I can't hear..." and I'm getting goose bumps.*

Jon: Exactly! It's well disguised, in a way. To me, the hardest part is the line "Staring down the long empty halls, your pictures on walls..." I have pictures of Criss all over the place. Even when I'm trying to do everything with JOP and all, it's just not the same as it was when he was there. It all relates very much. Next time you listen to the song, think of me and my brother. It sounds like me singing to him.

Milton: *Have you had many "what if" moments regarding your career if Criss were still alive?*

Jon: Milton, I have to be honest with you. That thought has come to me several thousands of times over the years. I know for one thing, SAVATAGE would still be together. I think Criss would be the main guitar player in TSO also, for sure. That's sad to me. The saddest thing is that he was just getting to his peak at the time. I thought guitar-wise, "Edge of Thorns" was incredible. We wrote the song around his guitar playing, highlighting him the whole time. I think he would've blown people away if he was alive. He was taken too soon.

Milton: *Indeed. But, moving along to something a little bit more positive, what would you say was your crowning achievement, or your "most proud" moment songwriting-wise?*

Jon: I hope people don't take this wrong, but for me the biggest moment was when I sat down with Paul O'Neill and wrote the first TSO album, the Christmass one. It sold over 9 million copies and all of the sudden we have a platinum record, and I'm like "God damn!" SAVATAGE was a known band, but we never





broke those kinds of numbers. We had maybe 300,000 copies for some records. All of the sudden, I'm in the millions and I'm like "Okaaay...?" (mutual laughter)

Milton: That's a huge difference.

Jon: And, I hated that first Christmas album with TSO. I said "Great, now I'm going to be known as the Heavy Metal Santa Claus!" (mutual laughter) I have to admit that Paul bribed me.

Milton: Really? (laughter)

Jon: I told him I wasn't going to do that shit. He said "Jon, I'll give you five thousand dollars cash right now if you do this record." I said "Okay. Let's do it." Then I turn around and the god damn thing comes out and goes #1 in America. At this point, it has sold over 20 million records. I looked up at the sky and told the Lord, "I spent 20 years of my life with SAVATAGE busting my ass and never really got where I wanted to. Now I spend three weeks in New York with this lunatic writing this Christmas stuff and I sell 9 million in one year? Thank you very fucking much..."

Milton: (laughter) Was there one particular instance with TSO that made you really say "Holy shit. I made it!"?

Jon: Yes, actually. I remember exactly when. It was plain as day. We did Madison Square Garden and I thought it was going to be a fucking disaster. I had no clue. I walk in and it's completely sold out. I'm standing at the sound board at a place where I've gone to see plenty of sports games in the past. Then, Al Pitrelli introduced me to the crowd and I got a standing ovation from Madison Square Garden. I was like "A-ha! This doesn't suck!" (mutual laughter)

Milton: That's awesome. I'm sure a lot must have gone through your mind at that moment, considering all of the years you spent with SAVATAGE playing clubs and all...

Jon: That was a big one for me. And yeah, it blows you away. We did Berlin last year and there were 1.2 million people watching TSO live. I'm sitting there watching it live on a webcast and the guy said "There's 1.2 million people here tonight!" I was like "Holy fucking shit!" It was huge! I couldn't believe it!

Milton: It's mind-blowing because TSO is, in essence, pure SAVATAGE.

Jon: Exactly! Except for Criss Oliva not being there, it is pure SAVATAGE. Ever since Paul came into the picture, it's always been me, Paul and Criss writing everything. When we lost Criss, it was me and Paul. SAVATAGE, after Criss died, was mainly TSO in training. We knew we couldn't replace Criss and we were going to do something else. The whole TSO thing developed from "Dead Winter Dead" and



"Wake of Magellan." I knew the stuff we were writing such as "12/24" was big, but under the name of SAVATAGE, it was never going to happen. Nobody in American radio would want it. "Eighties metal band, no thank you." I said "Look, we did what we could with SAVATAGE. Criss isn't here anymore. Let's move on." The nucleus was still Paul, me, Chris Caffery, Al Pitrelli and Johnny Middleton... all the same guys!

Milton: And the fans...

Jon: I wish I could give SAVATAGE fans more credit, but they didn't even want to bother reading the names in the TSO discs. "Oh, but it's not the same..." It is the same, you fucking morons!

Milton: (laughter) I always find it so amazing that TSO attracts so many people who don't realize that they're really watching a huge SAVATAGE concert!

Jon: Well, we noticed that the SAVATAGE catalogue has increased sales immensely over the last few years. People are realizing it and buying it now because of TSO. Now they're listening to songs like "Gutter Ballet" and "When the Crowds are Gone." "Chance" on "Handful of Rain" was the first real TSO song. Obviously "12/24" was the big hit, but it was on a SAVATAGE disc first. It was on "Dead Record Dead."

Milton: (laughter)

Jon: We have names for all of the albums. "Dead Record Dead," "Handful of Dick," "Wake in the Toilet..." (mutual laughter)

Milton: This is great. Are you considering taking some more SAVATAGE songs or records and redressing them as TSO?

Jon: Sure, we have looked into it. There's a huge catalogue of songs that could very well translate into TSO. "Chance," "Believe." There are some that we're looking at. We're working on a musical for "Gutter Ballet" with songs from that album and "Streets." We're trying to put that all together. We have a lot of good material; too much actually.

Milton: I know you're a big BEATLES fan. I recently saw "Love," the BEATLES Cirque du Soleil show in Las Vegas.

Jon: That is an awesome, awesome show.

Milton: It's the closest thing I've ever seen to TSO, to be honest!



Jon: I was blown away by that show. It shows that good music will always last.

Milton: You've written hundreds of amazing songs in your career. Is there any one song from another artist that you wish you had written?

Jon: God, just about 10,000. (mutual laughter) Pretty much every BEATLES song, "Strawberry Fields," "Bohemian Rhapsody" by QUEEN, BLACK SABBATH... Gee, Tony Lommi will probably kick my ass if I ever meet him. I've stolen so much shit from their band... (laughter) When I write, I draw on my influences a lot. You can hear it in my songs. BEATLES, QUEEN, etc.

Milton: I've heard some URIAH HEPP in your music, too.

Jon: I love them! See, you're young but you're not stupid. I love them. See, you're turning 30, you said? Fuck you. (mutual laughter) Nah, I'm only kidding. It's impressive that you know who they are, though. Those bands that I mentioned and DEEP PURPLE were the bands that Criss and I learned music from. We didn't go to music class; we sat in a little room and learned all that stuff by listening. I never got ruined by the books, you know what? "You have to do this to learn music." You know what? Fuck you. I'm not doing shit that I don't want to. (laughter)

Milton: In the same vein, are there any songs that you've written that, let's just say you're not too proud of? I know you don't think "Sirens" deserve that much attention...

Jon: Hmmm... maybe lots of them? (laughter) The lyrics to "Sirens" were about that book, The Odyssey. I hate playing that song. I told them I refuse to play it at ProgPower USA. It's my "Paranoid." If I don't play it, people get fucking bitchy! It's like I fucked their wives! (laughter) I love all of the stuff though. Certain songs, I just guess I played them so many times that I don't get the buzz off of them anymore, especially because Criss isn't with me anymore.

Milton: Understandable.

Jon: The guys that play with me always did those songs justice, but it's just not the same. It bothers me. You just do it because the fans want it, though.

Milton: So, Jon, this is the last thing I want to ask of you. Can you give a little message to the ProgPower USA fans that are going to see "Streets" this year in September?

Jon: I can tell everyone this: You will see a very special show. We're going to do something that has never been done before and I promise you that a) you haven't wasted your money. b) you're going to have a great time and c) I will blow you all away. It'll be flawlessly perfect. We've been working on it for a long time and I just can't wait to see everybody.

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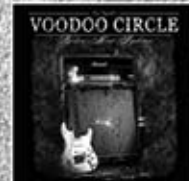


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STRATOVARIUS

Interview with Jens Johansson
by Greg Hasbrouck

Swedish keyboard virtuoso Jens Johansson chats about the two-time ProgPower headliner Stratovarius. Jens also speaks about his experiences rolling oranges with Yngwie J. Malmsteen, recording with Ronnie James Dio, auditioning for Dream Theater, and what it was like to go on tour with incomparable (if slightly disturbed) Ginger Baker.

Greg: Whenever I prep for these interviews, I do a lot of research on the person I'm going to speak with. Admittedly, your resume is pretty special. If it's OK with you, I'd like to approach this interview in chronological order.

Jens Johansson: OK.

Greg: You come from a very musical family. Can you talk about the role music played in your home as you were growing up?

Jens: It was always present. Because my father was a professional musician, I think my whole family had this sort of sober view of how this can be a very difficult job to support yourself with. Income is not very steady and it's not a normal day job. So it was stressed upon me and my brother (Anders Johansson) that we should probably get some proper backup plan or education, not end up like some musicians who are like, "Yeah, yeah. Fuck everything else. We're becoming musicians." (mutual laughter)

Greg: Being that your father was a jazz pianist, was he your first music teacher?

Jens: No, no, no. That's the thing. We didn't take music studies very seriously, me and my brother. It was sort of... if you ram something down somebody's throat, it's not as fun as if you gravitate towards it naturally. We took some piano lessons when we were seven. But we were allowed to quit when we found it boring. Later on, we started just playing anyway.

Greg: Once you began to gravitate towards music, did you seek out formal training?

Jens: Very, very little. Both me and my brother were on the same level on keyboards. We took piano lessons in parallel when we were seven or eight years old, and then we just quit. Then when we started playing in bands later on... I would say the formal training, it might have helped? But it was just stuff you would teach a seven, eight or nine year old. Not very advanced. The rest I just kind of picked up. Almost everybody I've played with have done it the

same way. For instance, Yngwie (J. Malmsteen) is the same way. He never took music lessons.

Greg: The roster of major players you've worked with is simply astounding. Is there any one particular musician that was a personal thrill for you to work with?

Jens: Well, almost everyone I've been working with has been a lot of fun. There was one guy, I also rather enjoyed talking to a lot, Shawn Lane. He was always fun. He had crazy ideas. He would talk about other things than music. Completely crazy things, like weird, artsy movies or how you should take spinal fluid from beavers, and you should inject it to (evolve) your thinking.

Greg: And the reverse question, is there someone out there who you would like to work with?

Jens: I don't know. Maybe more of the DEEP PURPLE guys. I've never done anything with IAN GILLAN or some of those guys. Stuff I listened to when I was little. I did one record with Ritchie Blackmore, which was a big thing.

Greg: There are three musicians in particular you've worked with, that I'd be curious to hear about your experiences with. Obviously, you began your career with Yngwie. As a listener, it always felt like you and he were pushing each other musically. Is that merely my interpretation of the music or did it feel that way to you as well?

Jens: It was definitely that kind of exchange. And he was constantly saying that he thought that he sucked and he was lagging. But you can do things on the keyboard that you can't really do on the guitar. It's kind of easier to play some difficult things on the keyboard naturally. You can play a scale very quickly if you take an orange and roll it across the keys. (mutual laughter) But when he use to complain, "Oh man, I suck", I use to remind him that, think about it, with guitar you have two motions that have to be done synchronously, but with keyboards I can take the orange and play the scale much faster than you. Of course, their different things, but we would talk about these kinds of things all the time. We would steal things from each other, or borrow, however you would say that. Actually it was a lot of fun. Those days are definitely something I would never want to have (to give up). It was a good thing to be young and in that situation.

Greg: And you had a fan base that was accepting of any boundaries you wanted to push.

Jens: Yeah, exactly. Of course, we had some arguments and stuff, like any band. But me, Anders and

Yngwie at least, we were also somehow very much on the same page and we stayed friends until basically we quit the band, me and Anders in '89. We were, most of the time anyway, on the same page, especially in the beginning.

Greg: And are you guys all still friends?

Jens: It degraded and then it got better again. It degraded toward the end of the 80s and then I got back in touch with him a few years later. Then, of course, he doesn't have a long memory. He's like, "Yeah, yeah. Whatever the fuck. I have some other guys in the band now. They're not as good as you, but they don't destroy things." It was like, no hard feelings at all... We are not so much in touch any more.

Greg: The second musician I wanted to ask you about is Ginger Baker. Can you talk a little about how that collaboration came about and what that experience was like?

Jens: I had this friend Jonas (Hellborg), who was also playing with Shawn Lane for many records, and he had this connection to Ginger. He had booked some gig in Sardinia, and it was like, "Hey, do you want to do a gig with Ginger?" (I said), "OK. Well, why not? What songs are we going to play?" And he said, "I don't know. We'll go up there and play something." It was that kind of gig. We just went up and jammed to the drumbeat. And apparently it went well, because Ginger didn't kill me. Apparently everybody thought it was great, because I didn't get on Ginger's nerves and he didn't get on my nerves. He can be a very, very difficult guy. At that point we also decided to make a record (Unseen Rain). It took like one day or two days. We would just jam to a groove. It's a very, very minimalistic groove album. And then we did a tour with this line up; me, Jonas and Ginger. And it was very interesting, because he can be extremely difficult. I don't know if you've seen this movie. They made a documentary.

Greg: I have. "Beware of Mr. Baker". I've always wondered if it's an accurate portrayal.

Jens: It's extremely accurate! That's how fucking grumpy he can get. He can get extremely, extremely aggressive and grumpy. For me, I was like awestruck. I've never seen anything like this. I mean, we didn't really have any problems. Well, maybe a few here and there, but nothing I couldn't handle. Compared to Yngwie, Yngwie was like a little lamb. An amateur. This is the real thing. He would do interviews and just completely berate the guy that was doing the interview. Maybe not hit them like he did in the movie. I guess he's just in a very, very bad mood very often. (mutual laughter)

Greg: The final musician I wanted to ask about, who's likely at the complete opposite end of that spectrum, is Ronnie James Dio. Can you talk about the experience of recording *Lock up the Wolves with Dio*?

Jens: He was a very personable guy, especially to journalists and fans. He was the radical opposite of Ginger. Maybe if you put those two together, you'd get a completely normal guy. Ronnie was very nice to everybody he had to deal with, but he wasn't a wimp or anything like that. He was a normal person in private. I'm not saying he wasn't as nice, he was just extremely fucking nice when talked to fans. Of course I learned a lot from him in a way, like, "These guys, you owe them something because they are yours fans." Something I still haven't learned properly. (mutual laughter) That was his approach anyway. He was the guy who would stand out the latest signing autographs in the rain. But how it came about? I don't know. I guess he fired his whole old band because he was frustrated. I think he wanted a different sound then what he had in the 80s... I think he just wanted to stay relevant. I think on the album that we made, he didn't quite find what he wanted. I think the label thought it was going to sell better than it did, so right in the middle of the tour he just decided he was going to join (BLACK) SABBATH again. So nothing really more happened with this line up. I think later on, he still kept searching for that sound and I think he found it. A couple of years later he made *Strange Highways*. It's really fucking cool. That's the kind of stuff I think he was looking for when he was making *Lock up the Wolves*, but there was still too much 80s baggage. He was searching for the lost chord in his head, but he didn't quite find it in 1990.

Greg: You joined STRATOVARIUS in 1995. It seems like that must have been a comfortable fit, given the similarities between Yngwie and Timo's (Tolkki) style.

Jens: Well, I like that kind of material. I like the songs. As far as fitting in the band, I don't know. I just did it thinking, like the songs and they're willing to pay, so I'll do this. And they said, "You need to join our band." I don't know. Like, "If something happens, give me a call. Of course I can't guarantee you that I won't be doing something else." But then what happened was, it actually became very successful. Then of course I blocked out time for it. Then a year and a half later, Ronnie Dio called me. I actually had to say, "No. I can't, because I'm with this other band and they are good friends of mine and everything is rolling on very nicely." I sort of felt like I had found my place in a way, instead of going back to California and doing DIO stuff. That was kind of sad in a way. But I think he did OK without me. (mutual laughter)

Greg: It's strange how life works out. It sounds like if the timing had been just a little different, you might have been a member of DIO or possibly DREAM THEATER?

Jens: Yeah, that's true. But DREAM THEATER, I don't think I was quite good enough. Of course, there are cultural and philosophical things too. But I think they were looking for someone a little more technical. Like I said, I didn't have the super classical training really. I'm more seat-of-the-pants. Maybe it sounds like I know what I'm doing, but I really don't know what I'm doing. Which is OK. But maybe that wouldn't have worked with that band. I played with them for a few hours. It sounded pretty OK. They're nice guys.

Greg: Can you talk a bit about the evolution of STRATOVARIUS' songwriting process, especially as members have come and gone.

Jens: Timo Tolkki, the guy who hired me, left the band in 2008. Since then, we've had a very strange approach, where everybody is deciding what songs go on the record. Like we sort of vote on it. And I think so far it's worked. We've made three albums this way and each album became better than the previous album. So it's an interesting approach. I don't know exactly how it's going to work with the next album. We are still writing to make the next one, whatever it's going to be called, and whenever it's going to be coming out. So now I'm just basically a voting member and a writing contributor. And of course I do interviews now, because the other guys are too lazy! (mutual laughter)

Greg: Are you at all surprised, that after all this band went through in the middle of the last decade, that STRATOVARIUS is still alive and kicking?

Jens: A little bit, because it's been a few moments when it was very close to complete collapse. But I'm not super surprised.

Greg: The reason we're speaking today, is because STRATOVARIUS is headlining ProgPower XV in Atlanta. The U.S. has been something of a strange market for your band. Despite success in so many parts of the world, you haven't enjoyed that same level in the U.S. Given your wide breadth of experiences, you're probably a great person to ask: why do you think the U.S. market is so different?

Jens: I think there are a couple of reasons. Marketing, first of all. European markets in the 90s were fragmented. It was before the Euro, before the European Union was properly in place. Every label has to have a local department, which made it more difficult to wash the entire continent over with trash like Britney Spears, techno or rap or whatever. It

meant that smaller plants could thrive. From the middle 80s to 2000, the big labels were sort of dictating the direction music took in the states, because they followed each other. All of a sudden there was grunge, and all of a sudden there was R&B, and all of a sudden there was rap. It seemed like if you were a small plant, there were all these elephants fighting over the dollar. And they were huge elephants, and they could do it; they could drown one side of the continent to the other (in crap). Whereas in Europe, it was so fragmented that one label could not control the whole territory.



Then what happened around 2000, broadband internet connections were much cheaper in the states than they were in Europe. People started file sharing in the states much earlier than in Europe, and that also killed a lot of smaller plants. If you're Britney Spears or somebody like that, you still survive because you have the size. But if you're a small band all of your US album sales disappeared. You had a unified market, you had dollars from California to Connecticut, and you could say, "Hey, I'm Universal Music. I want to put crap across the whole fucking country. All your radio stations, on Monday, you start pumping this crap out." Because everybody speaks the same language, everybody uses the same money. Whereas in Europe, you couldn't have Universal UK dictating what happened in Italy, because the culture is different, the money is different, the language is different.

Greg: I read on your web site that you're a self-professed "computer nerd". I'm curious on your take on the impact of technology on music.

Jens: I think it's a little bit too early to tell. So far, for the music I've been involved with it's a terrible downside. Very much so more in the states, and in some more marginal territories, sales have just dropped to zero. I mean, how many records did we sell in Argentina?! The joke is, "We sold one, it's just been copied and copied." You can still go to Argentina and play of course, because when you do the venue, they still can't break into the venue and listen for free. There's still some control there, people still pay for what they listen to. I'm not bitter or anything. I realize that if it's there, people will take it.

Greg: You've been involved in a number of side projects. Are there any that you're particularly proud of, that you would love to see gain a wider audience?

Jens: I don't know. There's a couple. Around '95 me and my brother did this one record with Allan Holdsworth. That one turned out kind of interesting. It's so different from what he normally does. It was called *Heavy Machinery*.

Greg: You've done so much with music. Is there anything more you still want to accomplish?

Jens: Just keep on doing it I guess. That's the only goal I have.



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PAIN OF SALVATION

Interview with Daniel Gildenlöw
by Milton Mendonca



One would think it would be easier to convince Daniel Gildenlöw to have an hour long interview for ProgPower USA than to perform "Remedy Lane" in its entirety. To everyone's astonishment (and Daniel's amusement), things worked out the exact opposite. After months of trying, Daniel finally discusses the two very special ProgPower USA sets, the future of Pain of Salvation and sheds some light on his lyrical universe.

Milton: Hi Daniel! How's everything?

Daniel: I'm pretty fine actually! Enjoying a little time off on a nice sunny evening.

Milton: It feels like it was easier to convince you to play "Remedy Lane" live than to schedule this interview.

Daniel: (laughter) I know. I was telling Johanna, my wife, the same thing. It should be easier now with Skype and Facetime and everything, but I guess I just get socially awkward sometimes. Not that it was the case with this, but still. Once I get started on an interview, eventually I feel ok about it.

Milton: It's kind of like that old saying to the wife, "But hunny, I promise that as soon as we get started, you'll get into it and enjoy it." (mutual laughter)

Daniel: "Just trust me on this. Go with the flow." (laughter)

Milton: Yes! And "It'll be over before you know it!"

Daniel: Maybe we should avoid that title for the interview. (mutual laughter)

Milton: Anyhow... PAIN OF SALVATION is returning to ProgPower USA after 10 years.

Daniel: I'm going to trust you on that. (laughter) Oh wait, it was the set where we let the crowd pick the songs right?

Milton: Exactly!

Daniel: Yeah, one of those shows where we looked at the setlist at the end and we say "Ok, why did we do this!?" (laughter) But it's a healthy thing I think.

Milton: I guess so! But anyway, it's been a while and obviously a lot has changed in both the band and personal lives. However, in a way, it's like we're going back to that time period, as right around that same time period, you released

"Remedy Lane", and you're now playing it on its entirety.

Daniel: Exactly. It was two years before.

Milton: There you go. What was the first thing through your mind when you received that infamous email saying "Hey, how about "Remedy Lane at ProgPower USA next year?"

Daniel: Well... (laughter)... I think I had the same feeling that I get sometimes when I'm onstage. We have our setlist, our game plan so to speak. And then someone from the crowd calls out one of those songs that you're like "Yeah, you wish!" (laughter) It's such an insane idea that deep inside you just want to ask the guy "Really? You really think that sounds logical? Honestly?" And of course they don't know at any given moment in time any inside feelings, thoughts or whatever we're coming from at that point. Sometimes when they call out a song, I know that it can be a song that I've never ever played with this current lineup before. I'm not even sure that everyone in the band has even heard that song! (laughter) Or we're just coming from a situation where we haven't been able to meet for a really long time, for instance. So we basically have agreed on setlists online or via text messages and such. So think of that scenario, where we didn't have a chance to really meet up. Then at the next show, someone calls out a song that we haven't played for years or something. I think that was the same kind of feeling when you asked that question. I was like "Yeah right. Oh. Wait. You are actually serious?" (mutual laughter)

Milton: I'm loving this already.

Daniel: The first thought was "No, that's impossible." That album especially is not an album that's very... live-oriented so to speak. The songs individually are live-fitting, but the entire album from start to finish wasn't really made to be performed live. Most of the other bands who do the kind of stuff we do put a lot of instrumental parts in their music and stuff. When I think of "Remedy Lane", I don't think like "Ah, we should do that live sometime!"

Milton: Until along comes a crazy person with a crazy idea...

Daniel: (laughter) It's like watching Citizen Kane the first time. And I have to be honest, the only time. (laughter) It's very particular. It's not the kind of movie that I'll put on when I want to watch a movie. "Remedy Lane" has that sort of feel. It's so far from easy-listening, I guess. Very specific album for specific moments, to me.

Milton: Not to mention the huge emotional "cargo" that comes along with it.

Daniel: Yes, for sure! But I know in interviews back

then people were using the word "catharsis" to describe the album, for instance. I think that it's a fair description. I think I was blissfully ignorant about using all of these heavy emotions to form an album. I think it was an intentional ignorance of the consequences so to speak. When you do something creative, I feel like you have to go down that road. Otherwise you'll just stop before you get anywhere. But afterwards I noticed that it was difficult for several different reasons performing those songs live.

Milton: Can you name some of those reasons?

Daniel: Of course. First of all, it's because you have to invest emotionally every time and when it's that close to home, you don't want to stand there and just perform it. Especially with that music, you don't want to just perform it for the sake of performing. So when you turn something personal and intimate into a creative output that's available for other people, you're in a way giving those sentiments away and they turn into a thing of its own.

Milton: So kind of like objectifying those emotions...

Daniel: Exactly! You know that you not only created this "special form" for those emotions, but you also deprive yourself of the true memory. They start blending together somehow.

Milton: So instead of thinking about the original experience, you start thinking about the song you wrote about it.

Daniel: Exactly, you sort of think of both at the same time. And you're repeating it so much that it's like... It's like being on vacation. You take 10 pictures with your camera that are very specific and very thought-through moments. The essence of your vacation, your 10 most intense moments while away. You take the juicy parts, so to speak. Normally, you'll keep the memories of the vacation. And maybe once in every 5 years, you'll take those photos out of the closet and take a look at them. Now if I take those pictures and look at them every week starting the day after I return home from that vacation, it won't be as impactful. You get burnt out, and I think that was the most unexpected problem that I had with "Remedy Lane". The years following the release just made me feel like I was unable to keep my own integrity view on that period because I was burnt out. It's not like it turned into something I don't feel for anymore, but yeah...

Milton: Is this where I apologize? (mutual laughter)

Daniel: No, that's the thing. I had that first reaction like I told you, but after a while, it sort of sank in that I'm not where I was in those years anymore. It feels like it's time to take a look at those pictures again. (laughter) It feels like a good moment. We've done the "Road Salt" albums and took that vacation away from the first four albums, especially "Remedy Lane."

Milton: Did you feel like you needed some time away from those?

Daniel: Yes. I feel like it was absolutely necessary and healthy in many ways. Not because of the content on the album, but musically you go through phases. It's also tough when you're in a band. A band is like a family. As you start evolving, you need to distance yourself a little bit from the past.

Milton: Does that have a direct co-relation with the fact that you had a big lineup change a few years ago, and you could simply say "Ok, new band, new direction.?"

Daniel: Well, not really either. The lineup we have now is fantastic. For me, it's... hmm, let's go to physics now. (laughter) It's like the first stable state. I'm trying to convey what I'm trying to say in words but I don't have the vocabulary in this language.

Milton: It's ok, neither do I. (mutual laughter)

Daniel: It's like when an atom becomes unstable and then it needs to go through many phases before it goes back to being stable. And I'm sorry if I sound like I'm losing breath, but I'm escaping a wasp at the moment. (laughter) Anyway, eventually it finally REACHES ANOTHER stable state. I think that's what PAIN OF SALVATION has been doing for a few years. Trying to find a new home, in many ways. So I don't think it's so much about the lineup. "Road Salt" was my way of making my musical circle complete, coming from the seventies and having that music with me somehow. It felt alright to revisit that time period. Leo (Margarit, drummer) for instance, when he joined the band, he loved the old stuff and I wanted to do this seventies "earthy" and "rooty" thing... (laughter)

Milton: So how do they feel about possibly revisiting the older "style" of PAIN OF SALVATION?

Daniel: I think they're all pretty enthusiastic about it and looking forward to it a lot.

Milton: And what comes next, since you wanted to complete your musical circle, so to speak, with the "Road Salt" albums? Do you try to plan ahead of time with the direction, or do you just let the music take you wherever it goes?

Daniel: I think I'm a little bit of both. I want to plan and I usually have a direction set in the back of my mind. But I also know based on experience that it's never how it happens. For me it's just so important that when I'm recording and on stage especially, that I feel honest about what I'm doing. I just want it to be natural and feel passionate about what we're doing. So even when I made plans that were fairly detailed, when it comes to really pinning everything down, it'll end up with something that I feel passionate about once we're there. And I know those things may change so much along the way. I'll take it as it comes. I think I just have different folders in my head with different material and once we start working on an album, we'll start looking into those folders and decide what fits together. I'm sure at some point, like I said, something that doesn't necessarily fit will show up in the middle of it and it'll just be great.

Milton: Sounds to me like you're not completely shutting the doors to the "old PAIN OF SALVATION".



Daniel: Well, right now... and this might change, but at this point right now I feel like the direction that seems the honest way to go and that I feel passionate about is going back to the "harder" style. But also incorporating something very important from the most recent music. I would say that the earlier albums have a surface-level complexity. As a musician and as a very engaged music listener, you will hear the complexity much more clearly than on the later albums.

Milton: There's a certain "soul" to the newer material though that's different from before.

Daniel: Yes, and that's something I definitely want to keep. I want to keep the grittiness. I think if today I were to re-do some of the first albums, I would dial down on the melodramatics a bit. It's just a matter of where you are in your life, I guess. I feel like I'm ready to go back to that universe of the first albums, but not with those exact colors, so to speak. I want to find a balance between the "old" and "new". Lately I've been visiting the roots of "me" through PAIN OF SALVATION. I think I'm ready to revisit the roots of the "public" PAIN OF SALVATION now.

Milton: I think a lot of people will be happy to read this. I was ready to go back to the ProgPower USA topic, but I like where this is going.

Daniel: Exactly! The interview is flowing well and you don't seem to be following a list. "Question number 1!" Answer. No follow up. "Question number 2!"

Milton: (laughter) Those suck!

Daniel: It's like I say "So I then lost my leg in the middle of the forest, in an explosion..." and the guy asks, "Ok, what was the recording process of the last album like?" (laughter) I was doing an interview one time I think in Japan if I'm not wrong... and I asked the girl something during the answer, kind of like "Define what you mean by..." and she just nodded. Then that awkward silence would take place. (laughter) And then she would ask the next question. Halfway through it, I realized that she wasn't fluent in English at all. She just studied how to ask the questions and that was it. From the questions you could never tell, but the linguistic knowledge was very poor. It was just like reading bad words. (mutual laughter)

Milton: I interviewed you back at ProgPower V at the lobby of a hotel. I remember us talking deeply about the concept and lyrics of "Be". Not exactly a conversation for third graders... And out of the blue some dude wearing a PANTERA shirt or something randomly standing there, listening to the conversation, then completely interrupts your answer and proceeds to say that he completely disagrees with your opinion on importance of lyrics, and how "yeah, if I like the music, I could give a shit what the song is all about."

Daniel: (laughter) I remember that interview just because of that.

Milton: I'll never forget your face looking at the guy and going "Uh..huh." (mutual laughter)

Daniel: I understand that though. I just can't relate to it. For me, even from an early age, the music that I listened to, the lyrics were always important to me. I know lots of people who agree with the PANTERA guy though.



Milton: And since we touched on lyrics, what would you say your favorite PAIN OF SALVATION song is from a lyrical perspective forgetting all about the music.

Daniel: I have a few that would pop to surface, if that's even an expression. I do like "King of Loss" and "Kingdom of Loss". We have different ways of liking lyrics, you know what I mean? Sometimes you have lyrics that you're proud because you feel that you managed to... they have a nice and very thought through architecture which sort of has all of these level and layers and conveys a very complex message. It's very complete in a way.

Milton: How about a more simplistic song such as "1979"?

Daniel: That's one of those songs where you're using that surface level, a very simple story of boy-meets-girl. Once you start looking at it, it's really about how society changed. That's the sub-layer, the story I wanted to tell. An individual growing up and leaving that "magic" behind so to speak.

Milton: "The world seemed a little more honest" is the line that always jumped at me.

Daniel: On every PAIN OF SALVATION song, there are key-phrases. That's the one in this song. It's a phrase that you connect to more than the rest of the song. I always put a little emphasis and invest in that phrase when I play it. It's almost like letting that subtle anger and frustration come out through it.

Milton: And finally, what can we expect from the two upcoming shows PAIN OF SALVATION at ProgPower USA?

Daniel: Well, I want to make two very different types of shows. You'll have "Remedy Lane" which will be sort of the old school fan type of event. There's a track list that you can't really change. I want to make some small shifts and surprises here and there, but it'll be great. The Midweek Mayhem show will be what I normally want to put into a show. Nakedness, and I don't mean physical nakedness necessarily (laughter). I guess we're going to shift the intimacy and the proximity to the audience on that show, so to speak. I can tell you for sure that these two shows will be the most special shows we'll ever do in North America. I can't wait for them.

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Malpractice at Their Absolute Best

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SEVENTH WONDER

Interview with Andreas Blomqvist
by Greg Hasbrouck



Bass player extraordinaire Andreas Blomqvist speaks about Seventh Wonder's special ProgPower performance of Mercy Falls, Tommy's role in Kamelot, and the future of these Swedish prog masters. Andreas talks in details about the long journey towards the new record, how that journey was similar to following up Slayer's Seasons in the Abyss, as well as what lies on the road ahead.

Greg: If you would, talk a bit about how you got your start with music.

Andreas Blomqvist: I kind of eased my way into it. I found an old guitar lying around, my sister had got a few years earlier and nobody used, so I just started noodling with that. And it was a good way to get out of sports at the time, so I just thought I'd try that path instead. You know how it usually goes, you find some of your friends that also do it. You kind of do that together and you spend time trying to write music and learn stuff off of each other. I guess I was fifteen, sixteen years old. So I didn't start at a very early age and I didn't pick up the bass until I was eighteen.

Greg: Because you got your start with a six stringed instrument, is that what led to you playing a six string bass? Or did your bass playing evolve from four strings, to five, to six?

Andreas: No, actually not at all. Guitar was never really... I was always more of a songwriter back then and I never put the time in required to be any good at the guitar. I was singing and I was writing the music back then. Bass players were hard to come by. I spent the summer watching a Cliff 'Em All video with Cliff Burton from METALLICA; very early years. And I had a BLACK SABBATH video with Geezer Butler, and also two (IRON) MAIDEN videos. Just watching those kind of proficient bass players, all of them finger style players. This was the mid 90s mind you, so everybody was using a pick at that time and the bass was unintelligible in any music. You could not hear it at all. I figured man, I've got to bring this back. I can do something fun with this. So I got a four string bass and started getting stuff off of the old Kill 'Em All album, and that's really how I got started on the bass... And then as I left more of that METALLICA, MEGADETH, SLAYER type of metal, I was introduced more to DREAM THEATER and SYMPHONY X, those types of bands, and also some more power metal stuff. It just seemed like all those players were using a six string bass. And again, no one else was doing it, so it seemed cool.

Greg: Aside from Cliff, who were the other bass players you found yourself drawn to?

Andreas: I view my bass playing as B, C and A, D. The first thing that happened was definitely Steve Harris, Cliff Burton, to some extent Geezer Butler. There are some passages, still to this day, from "Phantom of the Opera" with IRON MAIDEN or "Stanger in a Strange Land" that I still think is the sweetest bass playing. Plus, in retrospect, most of it is really not that advanced. So it was a really good school to begin with. After that, my more formative years turned me into the player I am today. Definitely Marcel Jacob, formerly of TALISMAN and YNGWIE (MALMSTEEN), who I had the privilege to take private lessons with for about two years. So that really shaped my playing. And even though he was a pick shaped player, I still think that his tone, his vibrato and the way he writes stuff is still unprecedented within the world of rock or metal bass playing. That was incredible for me. And also the (first) bass player of SYMPHONY X, Thomas Miller. I never see anything written about him. I rarely hear people singing his praise, which I think is unfortunate... I get a lot of praise for doing stuff which is pretty much what he did, five, ten years earlier. So those two guys, Marcel Jacob, Thomas Miller, certainly helped me a lot down the path of my playing progressive metal.

Greg: So when you write, do you do so using a bass? Or do you go back to the guitar for that?

Andreas: Almost always I start with a bass. Almost always, because I'm more comfortable in that instrument. I would sit around and noodle with things and then land in some kind of atmosphere or feeling. If I know that I need to write a guitar part I would write that on guitar. Most of the time if I write keyboard parts... chord-wise I'll just work them out on the bass, but melodies I find myself going to the piano that we have. Because it just lends itself to approaching melodies in a slightly different way, because the finger style is totally different. Don't get me wrong, I cannot play the piano. I totally stink at it. But if I have a melody, I can kind of figure that out. If I have a chord progression I can kind of make that happen on the piano. Definitely starts with bass, but I definitely use the other instruments when I play. In terms of drums, when I program it's just by ear, which means that it's kind of odd. Most of the time the poor drummers will kind of have to interpret it. From a drummer's perspective it's like, "I don't have three arms here."

Greg: In all the years I've been interviewing musicians, no one has ever said they begin with the bass as the initial building block in their songwriting. Do you feel that's what helps give you guys

your own sound? I mean melody is melody, but you're approaching with a slightly different perspective.

Andreas: Oh. That's one of those questions that's difficult to answer. I would argue that, aside from MR. BIG and maybe TALISMAN, there is no other rock or metal band, this side of the seventies, where a bass takes as much room and space as it does in our band. That of course is intentional. I was the driving force, I set up things, I gave us the name, I write a lot of the music, so of course for me, that type of recognition, if I devote time and energy to create something, write something, practice like crazy, then do it, I want people to be able to hear it.

That's always been there, it's always gonna be there. Unfortunately I was too adamant about that on the first album, which is why it sounds like there are no other instruments except bass and keyboards. You grow and you learn, I was in my early twenties. I definitely think coming from this approach will make it sound a bit different. When I learn stuff that Johan (Liefvendahl) our guitar player sends me, it's a lot trickier than the weirder stuff I would come up with. You have your own licks, your own fingering and your own comfort zone and it just ends up being your way of doing things. So the more that I write things, the more that style is going to be prevalent.

Greg: So when Johan writes, it pushes you outside your comfort zone?

Andreas: Oh yeah. Totally. Before we got SEVENTH WONDER together I was called up by our previous drummer (Johnny Sandin) to audition for a band they called MANKIND. It was more like power metal, some progressive elements, but more like STRATOVARIUS, YNGWIE MALMSTEEN type of stuff, and I sucked! I couldn't do anything, pretty much. I had a pretty fast right hand since all the IRON MAIDEN things. Play through Live After Death in that tempo with just a two finger style, as I did back then, and you'll have a pretty good working speed. So I was pretty comfortable with that. I couldn't do any of the licks they showed me, I didn't know what a scale was, I had no clue basically. Being with Johan at that point, that really taught me so much. There are very few things that I've spent more time with than things I've been given to play by either our keyboard player (Andreas Soderin) or Johan the guitar player. That's how you grow, you play with other musicians.

Greg: I'm always surprised to learn just how many "progressive" musicians have no formal training. I've begun to wonder if formal training, learning to play by the rules, dulls a musician's creative nature in some way by shackling him with rules. If you had it to do again, would you even bother pursuing formal training?

Andreas: I would be speculating on a situation I've never been in. If I was to guess, if I was to gather a band, I would want one of the chief songwriters to be formally trained and the other to not be. I think that would be the fire and ice, turning into lukewarm water as they say in Spinal Tap. (mutual laughter) Really, the fire and ice thing, (where you have the unorthodox things coming in, but you also have... sometimes you get stuck. And either the guy with no training can throw out, "Let's do this." And you're like, "Whoa... that works!" But sometimes you can lean on some musical theory and say, "Given this chord progression, given the key change that

we're about to go through, this would, in theory, be a good passing chord." So I think it's definitely a very useful tool. If I had to go through it again, I would probably do it the same way I did. The only regret I have was not starting with music a lot sooner, because it would have helped my ears a whole lot.

Greg: is there a story behind the band's name?

Andreas: Not at all, not at all... First we were called NEVERLAND, for a period of time. But that was taken. So we just had to come up with a new one. I brought a list of four or five ideas and the band chose that one. No real story.

Greg: Do you consider SSEVENTH WONDER a metal band or do you prefer to avoid genre tags altogether and just say, "We're a rock band"?

Andreas: That's so funny. That's a really good question that I actually spent some time thinking about this very morning. Five years ago? Totally, yeah. Definitely a prog metal band. I just got a Sonos music system installed at home. There are two stations; prog metal and prog rock. And I just realized that when I play the prog metal (station), it's more like OPETH, and lots of thrash and death.

I totally don't mind that, I love death and Chuck Schuldiner's stuff, so it's not an issue of that. But I find myself going back more and more to listen to more prog rock stuff, like TRANSATLANTIC and RUSH. We were never a mean and grisly type of band. People use to compare us to EUROPE on steroids. The foundation has always been, for me and Johan at least, to play 80s metal. That's what we grew up with, that's our love, that's our comfort zone, that's where we came from. We didn't come from YES, RUSH, KANSAS, GENESIS, that background at all. We kind of came into that genre through SYMPHONY X and DREAM THEATER. So we never really got to experience the root of that. So I think that what we bring in is the old metal stuff, or hard rock as it was probably more called back then, or New Wave of British Heavy Metal, all that 80s stuff, WHITESNAKE and what not... But then it terms of just being musicians... we'll play together and we'll throw in some tapping, because it's fun to play and you want to challenge yourself and make it sound cool. That's really how the progressiveness came in. And then with Tommy (Karevik)... he has no background in hard rock at all. He sang in a school choir and listened to Michael Jackson and maybe some QUEEN. We've driven countless hours together. We would be talking about something and we'd be like, "Yeah Robert Plant or Ian Gillan..." And he'd be like, "Who?" He doesn't share our background at all. So that's what brings the pop stuff into it. But the philosophy has always been, if we remove all the bells and whistles, like kicks and trades, the neck long runs or tapping arpeggios, throw all of that away, we want our songs to be good songs if you play them on an acoustic guitar.

Greg: I know you guys are working on a new album. Can you share a bit about how it's progressing?

Andreas: This thing has been plagued a lot. I still vividly remember when we were waiting for METALLICA to follow-up The Black Album or SLAYER to follow-up Seasons in the Abyss. We were like, "What on earth could ever be taking these guys four years?" Granted, these people did music full-time. They had less of an excuse than we do. We always pushed it... we threw out four albums in five years, and pretty complex stuff. We lived in the studio.

Everybody's relationships broke up. It was pretty horrible. After Mercy Falls... we had some success. We were getting to play larger venues and we were kind of thinking that it was about to catch on and we'd get picked up by a booker or something. And then we sort of forced it through with The Great Escape in 2010 and nothing really happened. That was a bit of a letdown. And in that time, I moved to California, our old drummer Tommy and I got picked up by KAMELOT. I came back in the spring of 2012 and we got right back at it, but we had a new drummer and we had to get that chemistry going again. Tommy was out writing the album with KAMELOT and touring constantly. And the last couple of albums Tommy and I have done a lot of the planning and lyrical concept outlining together. That was really the new way we were working. So while he was out of it, I found myself stumbling... We have lots of music written, which is usually what takes us a long time. And then it takes an equally long time to arrange the stuff. But we have it written, pretty well arranged and recorded in demo version, for pretty much enough to fill an album. So I think the main bulk of that work is done. So now when we were called up by Glenn (Harveston)... actually, I think I contacted him, we got to do this whole Mercy Falls concept thing and do the live DVD. I want that to be as good as it can humanly get. So



we're devoting ALL energy to that right now and we finished the other song ("Inner Enemy") in between, and we did the video. We felt like we had a responsibility to give people something. Right now our 100% focus is to show our "A" game to Atlanta and do one hell of a show there, that will surpass anything we've ever done. But when we come back, we're going to pick up the axe again and getting going full steam ahead. We're going to spend the remainder of the year probably just touching up on everything, figuring out what goes in and what's scrapped. And I would anticipate we would press record shortly thereafter. So I do not dare speculate on a time just yet, because it's all hinged a lot on whatever Tommy's KAMELOT schedule is, which to us sometime can be pretty random.

Greg: Because KAMELOT is a full-time gig, was there ever the thought, "Hey, I love Tommy and I totally understand why he has to pursue this, but maybe SEVENTH WONDER needs a different singer"? Did you ever entertain that idea?

Andreas: Yes and no. You got to support something like that. I think that he is a unique talent and for more of the world to hear more from him, I think is a good thing in general. So that's a given. Of course it will bring in some new fans to us, which is also a positive thing. But on the other hand, sure, the flipside is if we cannot deliver anything then all of that was kind of for nothing. It's not an easy question to answer that way. Do I see a SEVENTH

WONDER without Tommy though? No. I can't say that I do. He's become such an integral part of what we do... I think it would be very difficult, and this isn't tooting my own horn here, it would be very difficult to get another do what Tommy does. Even he thinks that singing our songs are almost too difficult. I cannot see it happening. I think we'd have to do something entirely different to be honest. But I mean, that's not something we've talked about, that's not something we discussed. Sure, this has dragged on forever. I can totally sympathize with everybody who's saying, "Screw those guys, this is taking too long." I totally hear you. It's just that, you've got to put everything together. Everything from Johnny leaving, me being abroad, KAMELOT coming in, a new drummer. Maybe that will help to at least provide some understanding to why it's taking so long. I think we're going to make one heck of an album this time. And to anybody, who by the way, is looking at this new video and thinking, "What, we're going to do three on here?" The second that song wasn't released much earlier is because we really struggled getting it to be three minute and thirty seconds. You don't want to throw a video on YouTube with six minutes of guitar solos. Even though that's what we're like and that's totally going to be on the album. So don't be put off by that, it's intentional. Just indulge in the melodies and what's in there, but we're definitely not going to stop being prog band and there's going to be some epic stuff on the album for sure.

Greg: You mentioned that in 2010 you had your sights set on that next level, but that it never came to fruition, due to a number of circumstances. With everything going on with Tommy, with everyone getting older, with all you have going on in your professional career, have your goals changed? Do you still have that idea in your mind, that you want to take this band to the next level?

Andreas: Wow. That's kind of a profound question to answer right now off the cuff. Of course, everybody is in a completely different place in our lives than we were in 2008. Most of us have kids, so we're definitely in a different place, where taking a one-off gig in Romania and riding our bikes there doesn't have the same appeal. That's totally true. I think that if someone would give us even some money, to do more of what we do, I think we'd jump on it. I love producing an album the way that we did, for instance when me and Tommy sat through and I was executive producer of the Mercy Falls album. I love that! We put so much time and energy these fifteen years into creating that, it's really a big part of who we are. So given a chance? Sure, we'd jump on it. But do we have the energy to actively pursue that if it's not handed to us? Well, maybe not to the same extent, no, especially with Tommy being out and about so much.

Greg: You mentioned earlier there were a number of boxes you wanted to tick when you began this journey. What boxes are left?

Andreas: There are a lot of people who want us to play "The Great Escape" live, that song, that thirty minute song. I wrote that, well 95% of it anyway, when we were expecting our first child, so it's very special to me. I would also like to go on a larger tour. We've been out on five gig mini tours. I would like to have experienced a thirty gig tour at some point. You know, being on a Nightliner and going coast to coast. I'm not sure if we're going to get a chance to do that. That would be the next box to tick I suppose.



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OVERKILL

Interview with Bobby "Blitz" Ellsworth
by Greg Hasbrouck

Singer, metal icon and fellow Jersey boy Bobby Blitz takes some time to discuss Overkill's longevity, surviving metal's collapse in the 90s, and the band's approach to burying the competition on stage. Along the way he discusses the new album, the value of experience over chaos, and the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Greg: *It's funny, I speak with so many German and Nordic musicians that it actually feels strange to be speaking with a fellow Jersey guy.*

Jens Johansson: Oh, no shit? That's why we understand each other. We don't even need to really talk to do this interview. If they're brothers out there and we're brothers here, for sure we're cousins of them. And I think that they received many accolades for the starting of a specific sound unto themselves, geographically or locally, and it became recognizable. It was thought of locally and acted globally, and the world accepted it. But I think one of the things that happened on the east coast, that was quite markedly different was, because of where our cities are located with regard to New York City, that we had access to the world, just in our city. And we had access to every blossoming music scene. So what ended up happening with the east coast bands, the thrash scene morphed out of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal and New York punk, and even the British punk that came to New York, and a hardcore scene that was developing simultaneously with the thrash scene. So I think that we became kind of a blend of what our city had to offer. Whereas the west coast sound was a blend of each other's approach to a style of music that had been created.

Greg: *Speaking of Jersey, let's start there. So much is made of the Bay Area thrash scene, that the scene here on the east coast is often an afterthought. I was wondering if you might talk a little about the east coast scene and what it was like to be on the other side of the country from where the attention was focused.*

Bobby: That's a good question, because there are marked differences, but for sure we're related, cousins let's say. If they're brothers out there and we're brothers here, for sure we're cousins of them. And I think that they received many accolades for the starting of a specific sound unto themselves, geographically or locally, and it became recognizable. It was thought of locally and acted globally, and the world accepted it. But I think one of the things that happened on the east coast, that was quite markedly different was, because of where our cities are located with regard to New York City, that we had access to the world, just in our city. And we had access to every blossoming music scene. So what ended up happening with the east coast bands, the thrash scene morphed out of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal and New York punk, and even the British punk that came to New York, and a hardcore scene that was developing simultaneously with the thrash scene. So I think that we became kind of a blend of what our city had to offer. Whereas the west coast sound was a blend of each other's approach to a style of music that had been created.

Greg: *I never thought of it like that. It's an interesting take on how the different styles developed. Can you talk a bit about your songwriting process? Is it still mostly you and D.D. (Verni)? Or have Dave (Linsk) and Derek (Tailer) begun to contribute as well?*

Bobby: Primarily it starts with D.D. and ends with me. But these guys are in the band. It has to go through these guys. And Dave Linsk has got a great understanding of the word "heavy" and "contemporary" and "over the top". So it does go through him and he changes parts and he writes different parts and he suggest harmonies, and obviously writes all his own leads and adds bridges. So of course it goes through the band, but probably starting with D.D. and ending with me. It's funny that you ask that question, because we were talking about recording and writing while we were doing background vocals. It was toward the end of the project and he (D.D.) said to me, "Isn't it funny how when we were kids everything seemed upside down? You needed that chaos to make a song happen, and you needed to be angry at anything, even for the sake of being angry. And now you need everything in place." And I said, "Now that is experience." That's understanding where it came from, what the elements that were needed to be in there are, but having experience enough to recognize them later on. But I think that's the big difference. Before there was chaos for the sake of chaos. Now it's chaos that is spawned from the experience.

Greg: *That's interesting. I've always maintained that it takes a certain anger to create great metal. And where it seems like so many of your contemporaries have lost that edge, OVERKILL never has. I'm curious what fuels that fire for you guys. Where does that intensity come from? And has it become more tactical or is there still an angry element to it all?*

Bobby: Well, I think it's a degree, but I think probably more tactical. But that's really more second in the pecking order. The first element of business is understanding who you are. We don't know where we go, unless we know where we've come from. Where we've come from though that has changed, is still an integral part of ourselves. I don't want to get all "Nietzsche" on you. (mutual laughter) But the idea is that if that stays a part of you, then it's easy to be able to use the experience to a tactical design of something. So I think that when it comes to OVERKILL there is no identity crisis. And we obviously don't pay attention to what contemporaries are doing from the standpoint of songwriting. We pay attention more from the standpoint of fans. So I think that right there, we're paying attention to our own house. So our tactical formula now works for us, because we remember those days, but now we inject it with the experience that we've gained over all these years, therefore being able to keep it at that high level.

Greg: *I think OVERKILL is one of those bands like AC/DC or MOTORHEAD, in the respect that your fans don't want the band to evolve album after*

the album; they just want another OVERKILL record. As a musician, is that a good thing or does it ever feel limiting?

Bobby: It's funny. I've been told something similar to that before or heard similar statements presented to me. But I think from the inside you don't think of it that way... If I talk about experience, it means I'm obviously open to learning new things. If I'm open to learning new things, I think I'm progressing or changing or morphing into something else. When we get into the writing mode, the recording mode, trying to create something out of nothing, we're never starting with nothing. We're starting with something that has been a part of us for a three decade period, especially D.D. and myself. So you really think that you're learning, therefore because you're learning, even though you work in a box, you seem to push the walls of that box out every time you go in the studio. When you get the results you say, "Ahhh, you see! I knew it was going to be so different." From the outside they're saying, "Thank god! It's an OVERKILL record." But from the inside we're saying, "Oh man! Look at that! Look at what we just did! That's so different for us." (mutual laughter)

Greg: *On that topic, I've had the pleasure of hearing the new record. It's excellent. What I think makes it so captivating is it's pure OVERKILL, but delivered with even greater precision. And I suspect that's the experience you spoke of; using all you've learned to refine the sound to an even finer degree.*

Bobby: For sure. And that may be the difference from record to record. It may be minute to the average listener or even the fanatical fan. But to us it seems like, "Huh, that seems like a step to the left" or "That seems like a step forward." I notice on this record, I notice that there are different elements that make up OVERKILL and that we've exposed as many of them as we could. Whether it be that punky or rock n roll feel or that traditional metal feel or New Wave of British Heavy Metal or thrash or groove. Man it's all right there, it's all there in ten songs. When I look at Overkill and I say, "I really love The Electric Age, but it was really a thrash record and it came across as two-dimensional", it doesn't mean I don't like the record. It means that's the way I perceive the record to be. This one I perceive as wider, as more eclectic. Internally I see a move between The Electric Age and White Devil Armory.

Greg: *Speaking of your perception of your back catalog, do you personally have as favorite OVERKILL record?*

Bobby: Oh sure. I associate certain things with

times of my life. And usually the times of my life have something to do with a personal feeling; accomplishment or failure. Something happened to me when that song was happening. And that's where that song gets elevated in its status to me. Whether it be a song like "Long Time Dyin'", whether it be a song like "Necroshine", whether it be the ability to really get into the first groove song I ever wrote, which was a song called "Skullkrusher", my part of "Skullkrusher". Lyrically finding that groove in there. But whether it be professional or personal those songs get elevated based on what was happening around me. Maybe when I wasn't behind the mic or when I wasn't at the desk with pen and paper, or these days computer, to finish my part of the song. It was about what was going on in my life and that song will forever be attached to that event.

Greg: *Are there any songs that are especially personal on the new album?*

Bobby: You know, what I did on the new record, my wife likes to call it "the cleansing". I go through this period of time and get rid of all this stuff that's been penned up between records. I guess I'm lucky I can be involved in ten over every two years, because then I can at least expel this stuff. But this was more of a cohesive cleansing, where I tried to put into character someone who travels. And what I was trying to get across, through this traveling entity... it wasn't about the end, it was more about the journey to the end. If you can't enjoy the ride, you can't enjoy the destination. That was probably the biggest part of this with regard to any kind of a special feeling I'm going to remember through time about it. If I started off for instance with the song "Armourist", it's really about lonely self-denial. The only sound louder than the roar is the madness of the loneliness inside your head. But by the time the destination happens and he's gone, he realizes he enjoyed the ride by stripping off some of the negativity.

Greg: *Listening to you speak, I get the sense that everything you do has a purpose. Is there a meaning behind White Devil Armory?*

Bobby: It's a thread. And that's what we call it. We say, "What's the thread? What's the first brick?" And D.D. was writing with the first brick, with this word "armory" in his head. It was just that simple. I could tell. He never had to say, "This is the thread". He just mentioned it so many times that I knew that this was what it was and I started messing with that. He was on the other end of it sending me images of armories, their strength, how ominous they are, and how dark yet light they can be. And I just started messing with it until I came up with something that sounded like a Robert Rodriguez/ Quentin Tarantino movie. (mutual laughter) You scratch it out and it's creation unto ourselves. I know it's a word in his (D.D.'s) head when he's writing a lot of these riffs and giving them to Dave. And he's telling Dave this word. Dave is thinking that word while adding to the song. And I'm over here writing lyrics with that word in my head and I scratch out "white devil" in front of it and I think that somebody is calling Harvey Keitel because we need a "cleaner". (mutual laughter). And I'm going, "Oh my god. The imagery that's going on in my head. I just turned the pure into absolutely polluted." So it was unto ourselves and just creation for the sake of creation.

Greg: *One of things I'm interested to hear your perspective on, is the collapse of the genre in the 90s. Through all of it, OVERKILL persevered. Was there ever a time when you considered calling it a day? Or did you feel as though you had a dedicated enough fan base to survive it?*

Bobby: It was never discussed. We started managing ourselves right around the start of the collapse, when the major labels kind of turned their

back on this. I've always likened that to not being the worst thing in the world, because they say you can't go home, but you could go home. There was still an underground. And the beauty of that is the purity in the underground, and you're unaccepted if you don't have that purity. And we always did, regardless of having some street level credibility and some major label input, we still had underground credibility. So as the scene collapsed for many who just wouldn't open that door or maybe didn't have underground credibility, for us, to some degree, it thrived. We were in a room of a thousand thrash bands on Friday. By Monday, after the weekend, there was eight standing. So you said to yourself, "For god's sake, there's a hell of a lot of room in here and there's still a hell of a lot of hungry people in the underground." So it wasn't the easiest thing to retain a deal or to stay with a company for an extended period of time, but the companies existed and I think our hunger existed and the hunger in the underground existed.

Greg: *When you speak, I can hear the passion you still have for all of this. How do you keep it from becoming a job and maintain that intensity and passion?*

Bobby: Well, you know something? It is a job. But that doesn't mean you can't have passion for your work. And I think that's the key there, and I think that comes from our backgrounds. You're were kind of brought up in the same area, so you have relatively the same social values I grew up with, the

nis none with it. The thing for me is, I still get really high off doing shows. So "Elimination", "Rotten to the Core", songs like that in our set, are not downers for me. All they are, are steps to that risk-taking song, whether it be "Armourist" or "Bitter Pill". I suppose everything is just how you look at it, and maybe I'm just lying to myself, but I believe the lie. Kind of like Kurt Vonnegut's "Mother Night".

Greg: *I love it. A couple of Jersey boys talking Nietzsche and Vonnegut.*

Bobby: A couple of Jersey boys lying to each other. (mutual laughter)

Greg: *I've been going to see you guys for years and you never fail to bring your "A" game. I'm curious if there's ever been a live band that's pushed even you guys? Made you think, "These kids are bringing it, we need to ratchet it up to an even higher level" or maybe even just energized you to be on tour with them?*

Bobby: Well you know, I agree, we always try to bring our "A" game. I think that's been developed over years. We didn't all sit down in 1984 and say, "We're going to bring our "A" game every night." It just so happened. As time went on, sure there was competition. And somewhere in there it changed from competition to, "I love this competition. I'm going to bury these motherfuckers." And if you start thinking in those terms, you start playing



same type of parents and what they kind of instilled in us. It's always one of the beauties in this part of the States that I see, and it's because I've lived here my entire life, it's eclectic and it's got great work ethic. Even white collar guys have blue collar work ethic. And it's a fantastic place to test your metal. And if you can, and you can succeed here, I think you can find that joy and that passion for work.

Greg: *With regard to maintaining that constant intensity, does it take more mental energy to perform the set standards nights?*

Bobby: It's a good point because, you know (sigh)... You heard the "sigh" right there? (mutual laughter) The new stuff is always really exciting to do because there's a risk in the new stuff. Because it's brand new and you're not sure. I look forward to the first live performance of Armory because it will be the first one. "Rotten to the Core" has been played eight thousand times and "Elimination" six (thousand). Do I like the energized feeling from doing it? Absolutely. Could I do the song in my sleep? With my eyes closed and my thumbs in my ears? Absolutely could. So with regard to risk, there

every show like it's going to be your last show. If you're playing every show like it's your last show, you're going to have success at really high levels. I think it takes the risk factor of failure out of the equation, with regard to band performance. You can fail with regard to production, that someone gets hurt, that the equipment blows up, that the place has been evacuated by the police. But you're not going to fail based on your own presentation. And I think if you take that from show to show and you build on that, you actually start believing that lie too. You're going in to win. You're going in to bury the competition.

Greg: *You've had a very successful musical career. Is there anything, you still want to achieve?*

Bobby: That's a good question. You know, I don't even know if I'm goal-oriented. It's all kind of come along in time. It was never hit upon. The bell didn't just ring. It was a process. I always think in terms of, doing this is the most successful thing that I could ever do. I do believe that if there are any goals, they'll reveal themselves.



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MASTERPLAN

Interview with Roland Grapow
by Greg Hasbrouck



Masterplan leader and Helloween alum talks about finally playing the U.S., his love for Grand Funk Railroad, and being told he should give up the guitar. During the conversation we delve into Masterplan's lost years, the enigmatic Jorn Lande, and reclaiming his Helloween material.

Greg: Can you talk a little bit about how you got your start in music?

Roland: A long time ago, when I was twelve, around that period I was getting more and more into Rock music. I had a lot of friends in the house where I was living in Hamburg, my family house and they were listening to URIAH HEEP, DEEP PURPLE. Those kind of things. After a couple of months, when I was already getting use to this kind of bands there came GRAND FUNK RAILROAD, the Live album, from '71 I guess. I was totally blown away by this kind of sound. More or less, I was the only guy I guess. Not too many people liked GRAND FUNK in Germany, Hamburg. So I loved this kind of energy, and this kind of, maybe "look" of Mark Farner and how he played guitar singing, acting on stage. This kind of wild thing. For me it was the first kind of Metal or Rock band which was really catching me in that way. So I thought, I want to be like this guy or this kind of band. So I started playing guitar when I was 12 and I was very inspired by Mark Farner to do that.

Greg: As you began playing, did you seek out any formal training or you self-taught?

Roland: It's a funny story. I had the guitar already lying in the apartment of my parents. It was a present of my dad, he brought it from East Germany, GR. We always had to... how do you say? Putting some money in country or GR. Because every day you pay something like 30 D-marks. The problem is you couldn't buy anything good there. All the products are terrible in the past. He thought maybe he buys a guitar for me, which was acoustic, very bad guitar. And I was fooling around with it. He just found me in front of the mirror acting like a poseur (mutual laughter). I couldn't play guitar at all. But I was very interested. He said, "Let's do it like this. You should learn some Folk songs, some nice German Folk songs." That's not the way. I made an agreement with him. He sent me to the music school in Hamburg and after six months the guy told him, "Please take him away. He's not talented." To be honest, I didn't like the songs and I had real problems learning from reading music. I didn't feel it, so what's the point to read something? And I was in a class of ten girls and five guys, so I was always sitting in the back, very shy, twelve years old. So father said, "OK. No problem." He didn't

want to pay any more. And it was quite expensive, to be honest. I felt very ashamed and I wanted to learn the guitar and I did the rest on my own. I just said to myself, I want to show this teacher that he's wrong. So I was learning from old vinyl records. Then, when I was fourteen and fifteen, I had more contact with Rock guitar players from Hamburg and I learned from them. By 17 I was pretty good.

Greg: Were you ever tempted to go back to that music school and find out if that music teacher was aware of your success?

Roland: (laughter) No. I didn't even remember who that was to be honest.

Greg: Obviously no one would confuse any of the music you've composed with that of GRAND FUNK RAILROAD. Was there some Metal record or performance that influenced you towards a more aggressive style of playing?

Roland: It was still in the middle of the '70s; there was no Metal. Not really. I was getting more into the melodic style. I was very, very inspired later, after Mark Farner, by Michael Schenker and Uli Roth. I was a big fan of the SCORPIONS. I saw the SCORPIONS when I was sixteen, two or three times, in smaller clubs. They weren't so big at that time. And I thought, man, these guitar players are amazing! I never saw something like that live before, you know? But the solo playing of Michael Schenker and Uli Roth was very inspiring to me. I was very influenced by them to be honest. When I had my first professional band, we did albums on vinyl, called RAMPAGE and if you hear my old solo playing it's very melodic, it's very, very tasty. Nice vibrato. Eddie Van Halen was already coming. But he was too good. I didn't know how he did it, all that technique and tapping. Then I also saw DOKKEN in Hamburg. First, first very beginning of DOKKEN. I think before they did the first album. I saw them in Hamburg in a small club. Then I saw George Lynch on stage and I was like, "Fuck!" Now I get frustrated. What's this guy doing? Then there was ACCEPT. And in the middle of RAMPAGE there was already the first Metal bands coming, like JUDAS PRIEST and SAXON. I went to the concerts, I saw both of these bands playing. So that's the style we wanted to meld together.

Greg: I won't spend a lot of time on it or ask about any of the gory breakup details, but I've always been very curious what it's like to join an established band and replace a prominent member. Can you talk a little about what it was like to join HELLOWEEN and replace Kai Hansen?

Roland: That's a funny story because I didn't know

the band. I was not impressed at all to be honest. I was coming from this melodic style band, with a little SAXON, JUDAS PRIEST Metal sound. I got the phone call from somebody who knew me and Weiki (Michael Weikath), so he was just making the connection happen. Then I sat with Weiki and he's the same guy. He has the same tastes like me. We really have the same roots of the '70s good bands. Then he invited me, he played me just the soft parts of the HELLOWEEN material, to be honest. So he knew it could be tricky for me, because he knew I was the older guy, much older than (Michael) Kiske. Then I was already 28 or 29. And I thought, OK, man, this is a very good singer. I've never heard somebody singing like this. Of course I knew QUEEN-SRYCE already. But for a German guy from Hamburg I was very impressed. Then he played me "A Tale That Wasn't Right", "I Want Out", and "Dr. Stein". That's it! Oh, maybe "Eagle Fly Free". I love these songs. It was great material. Later I heard Walls of Jericho and thought, "What is this crap?" (mutual laughter). I didn't like it at all, to be honest. I didn't like the singing of Kai, I didn't like the guitar playing so much. But I liked the band so much and the chance to come to the music business. And I was impressed that Weiki liked me so much. Because he saw with RAMPAGE like nine years before, on stage for a couple of shows. That's why I got the chance. But I was getting into the music. It took one or two years. In the beginning we didn't do any albums any way, but when we did Pink Bubbles (Go Ape), I was already with three in the band, because of all the trouble with Noise Records. But in the beginning I was really warming up to it. I played it live. I was really falling in love with it.

Greg: Assuming you hadn't already played any large shows with RAMPAGE, was it at all overwhelming to jump right on stage with such an established act?

Roland: RAMPAGE was not so famous. We sold, worldwide, maybe 3,000 albums. We played a couple of festivals, but never any big stages. But when I went with HELLOWEEN, the first show I did was Salt Lake City (Utah) with ANTHRAX and EXODUS. It was amazing. I went on stage and I was so nervous! Of course we had big stages then, always a couple thousand people. After that we had four weeks tour and two weeks rehearsal in America... Los Angeles, in a rehearsal room. Because I was just able to play a one hour set. And then we went to Japan. That was really exciting, because it was 4,000 seaters only for HELLOWEEN. We did three or four shows in Tokyo alone. And a lot of press! It was like a dream come true, to be honest.

Greg: OK... so let's talk about MASTERPLAN. First off, you're often categorized as a Power

Metal band. Are you comfortable with that description? Do you see your current sound as different from that broad genre tag?

Roland: I don't know. It's hard. I don't see us as a typical Power Metal band. I think HELLOWEEN was a band like that. But we have more elements. There's still a lot of HELLOWEEN elements; from the double bass playing, the arrangements of some guitars I learned of course in HELLOWEEN. But I always try it more in a clever way, not so typical. Even if we have some heavy songs like "Sail On". Especially the first album, we have more material like this, or "Wounds" from the second album. "Heroes" of course. But I always try not to get too kitsch-y, like Weiki's style. Of course we have a lot of HELLOWEEN elements. I learned a lot from them. I'm really happy about it. But still, it's a lot of Hard Rock stuff, WHITESNAKE, John Sykes' style. I like heavy guitars. I came very late to BLACK SABBATH, but I love this style as well. I think I learned it on The Dark Ride sessions. There's this "Escalation 666" song, a lot of people love it, some hate it, because it's very, very far from the HELLOWEEN style. But I love it. I listen a lot to Thrash music. I'm not trying to get it so much into my style, but I love to listen to it. I'm not listening to stuff which is similar to MASTERPLAN, at all. Because I keep my head totally free of all that.

Greg: Can you talk a bit about the band's song-writing process?

Roland: Basically, I'm always searching for some inspiration. Mostly I'm inspired by keyboards and drum beats. I never write a song just from a guitar riff anymore. It's too boring for me, you know? I'm always searching for something interesting for MASTERPLAN. When I write a couple of chords and sing to it, I don't have the fantasy... how do you say it? I like the fight between the keyboards and the rhythm guitar. I don't like when we play the same. So he always should have something different and I play something different. A lot of bands come into my studio and they play... no interplay between each other. Like filling the spots, the gaps. Not play like DEEP PURPLE did, all of them plays the same... and even they didn't do it all the time. But most of these bands make that mistake, they just make a big fat song, everyone play the same. I don't like it. I'm always searching for something which makes it more interesting.

Greg: As the founding member of MASTERPLAN, is it difficult to balance allowing new members to contribute, with trying to remain true to your sound?

Roland: It's not easy, for sure. It's not easy. Let's say for the last album, all the songs were more less written thinking Jorn (Lande) was still a member of the band. That was a bit complicated when we found out we had a different singer, one week or two weeks before recording the album. A couple of songs could be written in a different key because Rick's (Altzi) voice is much nicer sounding when he sings in a higher midrange or higher voice. So the trick is, if I would have known it before I would have used a lower key in the songwriting, a couple of notes lower, so he can get an octave higher. Now we have a stable line up. Now we can start from the beginning and make all these things right. I'm pretty open for ideas of all the new members. I'm especially looking forward to get a lot from our drummer Martin (Skaroupka). I'm very close to Axel (Mackenrott) as [we're the] main songwriters. I'm searching still for one guy who's more, you know, filling the gap of Uli Kusch. Because Uli had a lot of, let's say, sixteenth triplets kind of drum beats, which is typical drummer writing songs. And Martin has it as well, but last time he came too late to the band. He has one song on the album, but it sounds more like CRADLE OF FILTH kind of songs. Now he knows he should write for MASTERPLAN. I'm really looking for this kind of relationship... For the vocal

parts I definitely have to work very close with Rick. Because Rick is really not the kind of guy like Jorn, delivering tons of material. So I have to work a little bit closer with him. That's the kind of thing I see on myself, to take care, that we're not drifting too far away.

Greg: I've read where you've talked about the fact that you feel the departure of Jorn set the band back, especially with playing live. Can you talk a bit about that?

Roland: That is the plan. We've done already a lot of shows. I don't even remember how many. We still have a lot of festivals in front of us, like ProgPower of course. Even in May and June we have three festivals in one weekend. So it's really exciting to see that we play Wacken. We still have plans for after ProgPower, maybe South America. And now we just announced a little part of the tour, I think nine shows we'll do with EPICA in Europe... so we're adding and adding tour parts. We did already this year and last year, more than the last seven years.

Greg: And if you had to do it all over again, would you have went a different route initially? Would you have started with a different singer?

Roland: It's hard to say. Definitely, it was really difficult with Jorn, because the communication was hard; his view about what is right what is wrong. He always wanted to just play the biggest stages with MASTERPLAN. He never wanted to make a small tour, like he's doing with his own band. So he's going through all the shit with his band. Now we're doing the same because we lost the time. I mean if you don't play in six years... the whole market is different. It's not that strong anymore. We just came back from Japan... the amount of people coming to the show gets smaller and smaller. We'd play before in China, which was nice because it was a big festival, between five and ten thousand people. Which is nice. But you'll see sometimes, you play in Moscow and just two hundred people come in a town where twelve million people live. It's a bit frustrating. Especially Japan, which has always been a good market for HELLOWEEN and MASTERPLAN, and after seven years I see the difference between five hundred last time and now we had two hundred. But it's still fun. We have a good team.

Greg: You'll be playing ProgPower 15 in September. Were you aware of the festival before Glenn reached out to you? Had he reached out to you previously?

Roland: Oh yeah. Many, many offers. Many, many years. We've been in contact with him already since 2005. But I always had to say, "No. Sorry." Because of this former singer. But then when he was out of the band he played with the JORN band. (Laughter) I said, "OK. Maybe he likes America." It's always been a big dream to play the ProgPower festival.

Greg: I can tell you, a lot of people are looking forward to your first ProgPower appearance.

Roland: That's really nice to hear. We're excited as well. That's for sure. I hope we can get the filming material. Because we're also planning making a DVD of many, many festivals we did this and last year. And finally we want to present the fans some live material from MASTERPLAN.

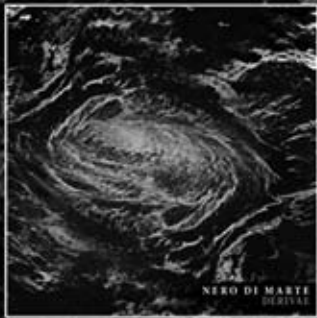
Greg: And are there plans to release a new album any time soon?

Roland: Not really. Because the plan was, this or next month, to start (writing) new material. But we have no plans of releasing something different. Because, like I told you, the DVD. And that's something I have still to talk with our record label, AFM. We're working on a new record deal, because after five albums the deal is more or less done. They still have one option. But they want to make a new deal, for the next five albums or something. So I want to talk with them about getting a bit more time before the next album release, maybe middle of next year or something. In the meantime I want to release this DVD. And maybe, my dream is, all the material I wrote for HELLOWEEN. Songs like "The Time of the Oath", "Mr. Ego", "The Chance", and of course "Dark Ride" and this kinds of songs, but with our MASTERPLAN lineup, and Rick singing, and maybe I sing some higher stuff, like Kiske stuff. Make it more heavy. Because HELLOWEEN is not playing any of this material. Totally ignoring it. So I think it's a bit wasted. A lot of people are asking why we don't play some HELLOWEEN songs from the past that I wrote. And I always say, "MASTERPLAN doesn't need it." We've had such a good start. But why not? I wrote it. Why ignore it?

Greg: Finally, you've accomplished a lot in your career with both HELLOWEEN and MASTERPLAN. What goals would you still like to achieve?

Roland: I still have the big hope that we can reach a higher level still with MASTERPLAN. It's still a long way away because we lost a bit of direction; we had lineup changes. I'm still happy with every album I did. The biggest wish now is getting really back to the start, like we did on the first two albums. I love Jorn so much, that I don't want to talk bad about him, but he always didn't like the kind of HELLOWEEN parts in our music. He never liked the fast double bass stuff. He said, "It's typical German." What's wrong with that, you know? So we lost a bit of this kind of thing... and that's what I want to make on the next studio album. If we can back to some nice, old, inspirational parts, when we did the first MASTERPLAN album. I was still a HELLOWEEN member when I wrote it. So you see, I was just inspired by The Dark Ride and all that kind of experience in HELLOWEEN... now we went always more Hard Rock-ish or Blues oriented, and we want to get back a little bit. That's what I'm really looking forward to.





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LEPROUS

Interview with Einar Solberg
by Milton Mendonca



Heralded as one of the most unique and innovative metal bands of the last decade, Leprous is returning to ProgPower USA for a second time on their own. Vocalist/keyboardist Einar Solberg opens up about the process of making truly inventive music, his hatred for music labels and his admiration for anti-eaters.

Einar: Hi Milton! How's everything?

Milton: Good buddy. How are you?

Einar: Very good. Ironic how we have finally been able to connect when I'm now in a country with a 13-hour difference. I'm in Japan with EMPEROR.

Milton: (laughter) What matters is that we're talking! I'd love to go to Japan someday.

Einar: It's really something special out here. Very characteristic, there's nothing like it. It's very different from all other countries even though they got a lot of American influence through the years. I'm having a bit of a hard time though because I'm a vegetarian and most of the food here has seafood and such. But I'll be okay.

Milton: Well, I come from a place where not a whole lot of options for vegetarians exist, so it could be worse!

Einar: I know! As a matter of fact, it was in Brazil where my brother quit being a vegetarian. He lived there for six months and said there was literally nothing for us. I'll have to suffer through whenever I make it down there with LEPROUS.

Milton: You said Japan is a very unique, characteristic place and it seems we've come full circle, as LEPROUS is known for those exact traits.

Einar: Very true, even though we don't have as much American influence as Japan, though there are American bands that have inspired us too.

Milton: I just heard the other day a band that lists LEPROUS as an influence here in the States. A band from Chicago who seems to be one of the openers for your upcoming show up there.

Einar: Ah, that's very cool. You'll have to send me the name of the band later on so I can check them out. It sounds like we're getting older then, bands being influenced by us. (mutual laughter)

Milton: You went from being one of the young,

fresh, new bands in the scene to being a bunch of old influencers is just a few years.

Einar: (laughter) That's why we now keep getting new musicians to join LEPROUS that are younger and younger. That way we have one foot in each layer. (mutual laughter) Actually no, the age thing has been just a random coincidence.

Milton: So, to further into the subject of growing and maturing... You played ProgPower USA back in 2010, and then as IHSAHN's backup band in 2011. A lot has happened since your first experience in Atlanta in your careers. How different is it going to be this time? What's 2014 LEPROUS compared to the one before?

Einar: Well, I think we're just going to watch videos from the last time and do exactly the same thing since people were really happy back then. (mutual laughter)

Milton: The epitome of progression! (mutual laughter) Hey, it worked for many bands before!

Einar: No, but in all seriousness, a lot has happened for LEPROUS since then. At that time, all we had released was "Tall Poppy Syndrome." I remember watching some videos of that show actually, where we were playing new songs at the time. Songs that would come out on "Bilateral" eventually. In the video we say "We're going to play a song!" and I can hear someone in the background say "But I wanna hear Tall Poppy Syndrome stuff..." (laughter) Now people don't scream that anymore.

Milton: (laughter) I bet!

Einar: I think "Bilateral" was our most career-changing album. We went from being nobody approximately to having a certain name in the prog scene at that moment. We got signed by InsideOut and everything. "Coal", which came out after gave us much more attention. It happens with every album we release, more attention in general. I think we've also made clear that every time we release a new album, people should expect something heavily different from the previous one. And they expect it now. We're finally getting the fans to be as we want them to be. (mutual laughter)

Milton: The plan for global domination and humanity manipulation is coming to fruition!

Einar: Yes, finally! (laughter) I think really, it's all about expectations regarding the music. I think people would truly be disappointed if we didn't change from album to album and just released the same thing, or something very similar to the last album.

Milton: Hearing people claim for "Tall Poppy Syndrome" for instance... shows me that metal fans can be very resistant to bands trying out new things and changing their sound so to speak. They're always very...

Einar: Nostalgic?

Milton: Yes!

Einar: Absolutely, I agree with everything you say. Metal fans are not the most open minded at least in my impression. I think in general, they are a bit like soccer supporters. They decide something they like, and that's it. They can't explain why they like it, but they like it no matter what happens. It's getting less and less like that with the newer generation though. It's more of the guys who were younger in the 80s and 90s for example. This nostalgia factor affects them a lot more. It's very hard to please those people, actually. Which is why I am happy that we have our feet in the prog scene. We can reach more people this way, even though we're maybe heavier than most prog bands. It's much easier for us to make fans in that scene since they're more open minded in general. As I always say though, people should stop this genre bullshit thing and just listen to music. It doesn't matter the style, just listen to what appeals to you. Don't pretend that you like or don't like something just because it's labeled this or that.

Milton: You mentioned that prog fans are usually more open minded than metal fans. But it seems to me that "prog" really lost its meaning. I don't really know what "prog" means anymore. Some people say it has to do with actual progression of the music, where as others describe it as "weird music" or "non-conventionally-structured music." What's prog after all, and is LEPROUS a prog band?

Einar: I think first of all, if only most people would spend as much time creating music as they spend categorizing or talking about music, I think the scene would be much cooler today. But anyway, I think it's just a matter of definition. You can call LEPROUS a prog band and we're comfortable with that. We don't care about "scenes" or where we belong. People do, though. So in a way it's like "Alright, whatever. If you want us to be a part of that scene, fine. We'll be a part of that scene." I absolutely don't care about genres at all. First there was the music, and then the genres instead of first the genre and then the music. You see these guys going "Ok, I'm going to make a Thrash band!" No! Make a band and see afterwards what you sound like! Don't decide ahead of time what it's going to be like because you'll just end up copying someone and do something completely unnatural so to speak. To be a bit harsh, there are wolves and there are sheep. (laughter)

Milton: Based on that comment though, I feel like I need to ask something. You've established that no LEPROUS album will ever be the same as its predecessor. There is a fine line between evolving and doing something different for the sake of being different. How do you avoid falling into that hole?

Einar: Without avoiding it. That's how we do it. We don't think about it because otherwise it would be unnatural to us. If you are open as a person to the environment around you and the things happening in your life, then you will evolve as a person. And when you evolve as a person, you evolve as a songwriter. It's a different stage in your life. If you stop calculating everything to the smallest detail and let yourself free, which basically is what creativity is all about, that's when you'll see a natural evolution.

Milton: You're throwing out the formula in other words.

Einar: Exactly!

Milton: Seeing it "turn into Coal..." (mutual laughter) See what I did there?

Einar: I'm very impressed!

Milton: Where do you think the "labeling" of music has come from?

Einar: Well, I think labeling is something that originally came from music journalists. There's nothing wrong with labeling, I just don't think it should be done by the musician. A journalist, however, has a reason to do it. His story is in writing. You have to read something to be able to make some kind of relation with it. I think people overcomplicate music a lot. And I also think some people do that so they can appear more intelligent than they really are. (mutual laughter)

Milton: I think not just music, but art in general find those people overcomplicating them.

Einar: Exactly. We had the surrealistic period, where you just had no boundaries or rules so to speak. That's kind of how I approached the artwork to "Bilateral". I just kept throwing my ideas onto the cover that feel into my mind.

Milton: I love the anteater.

Einar: Yes! I've always had a very strong relation to the anteater.

Milton: They are somewhat common where I grew up. I remember seeing one early in the morning once when I was playing soccer with a cousin of mine. I see some things moving behind the bush and the next thing I know there's an anteater running across the property! (laughter)

Einar: That's amazing! I'm really jealous! (laughter) Anyway, sorry to digress.



Milton: It's okay. The irony of the whole thing about people over-complicating things, is that by avoiding this planned over-complication, LEPROUS winds up composing some of the most complicated music ever!

Einar: (laughter) Well, thank you. In regards to that, I think especially on "Bilateral" it was more apparent. We felt like we had to try many different things. At that moment, we were looking for our own sound, so hence it was a bit all over the place. We're still searching a bit for our true identity as a band. I do think "Coal" is more of an identity-shaping album than "Bilateral" though. I feel like we're going to sound closer to "Coal" in the future, even if that means some people aren't going to be too happy. "Bilateral" doesn't appeal to me as much anymore when I listen to it. (laughter) And "Tall Poppy Syndrome" just sucks to me now. (mutual laughter)

Milton: It's funny because you hear so many musicians saying "Oh, I like all of my albums; they're like my children." You basically just kicked two of your children out of the house. (mutual laughter)

Einar: Yeah, "Tall Poppy Syndrome" has been out of the house a long time ago. That's just because I don't like my vocals on the album. I wasn't mature enough vocally and I hate it when I listen to it because it makes me think that I could've done so much better.

Milton: I remember thinking that the biggest progression on "Bilateral" was the vocal aspect. I said that you were now in the big leagues of vocalists. A lot of reviews said the same thing, that you became this whole new monster!

Einar: Thank you very much. You know, when I did "Tall Poppy Syndrome", I thought I had done a great job. I have a feeling the same thing may happen in five years when I think about the stuff I do now. (laughter)

Milton: So as it is a LEPROUS album, "Coal" sounds very different than the other two. It's a lot more melancholic and dark, not too all-over-the-place crazy like some songs on "Bilateral". What sparked it? How much of the sound in that album is a reflect of say your personal lives at the time?

Einar: Very much so. I went through one of my most emotional years in my life when we wrote that album. So it was like an emotional roller coaster in a way. It was a really challenging year. In a way, it was easier writing the music. (laughter) That's funny about us artists, it's easier to write music when you're feeling down. When you feel up and happy, you just end up doing meaningless stuff. "Yeah! Let's go to the cinema!" (mutual laughter) For me, "Coal" is a much more emotional album, where "Bilateral" was just more playful. We also had a lot of trouble keeping the band together at the time of "Coal". You know we went through a couple lineup changes and stuff. So it just felt like a really hard period for the band, and for me as well on the personal side. Probably the hardest so far.

Milton: A lot of fans don't realize how difficult it is to maintain a band the size of LEPROUS nowadays. And I say that both from a financial and interpersonal relations standpoint, so to speak. You and I know very well that fans sometimes tend to think that just because a band has success and is signed to a label, they have an easy, happy life. Can you shed some light on the reality behind that?

Einar: Yeah, of course. We are in a point in our career where yes, we have almost taken that step out that we needed, but not quite there yet. Yes, we have debts because we were willing to do what most so to

speak and it shows that our sacrifices were worth it.

Milton: I understand. Not a lot of bands take that road.

Einar: We're still not earning any money, not a single penny. Our performance fee has grown, but so has the production value of the show. We try to show the fans what we really think is a perfect LEPROUS show. At least we're not losing any money either, so we can start paying our debt back and whenever that's finished, we can start actually earning money from it.

Milton: LEPROUS is very brave in the sense that you seem to go a bit against the norm when it comes to touring. Most bands wouldn't try a US tour, as small as it is, on their own like you're doing after ProgPower USA. You have done this in the past in Europe as well, where you just chose to go on your own and not depend on a bigger band, pay a buy-on to a bigger tour, etc.

Einar: I think there's a balance to everything. We've never done anything in the US and we honestly don't know what to expect. The most obvious thing for us would obviously get on a tour with a bigger band. Right now we couldn't afford it though. In Europe, our label wanted us to continue to do support tours. But we thought that a support band will rarely ever be able to present your package in complete, your full show, etc. Our show will be just like watching a trailer of a movie. The balance thing, for instance, without mentioning any names... I know some bands have been the constant support band. And they were really good but people will never take you seriously if you're only a support band. In a way, sometimes it's very smart to appear to be bigger than you are. (laughter) People seem to take you more seriously the bigger you are. It worked very well for us. When we did that, we started getting more offers from European festivals.

Milton: Public perception is a very important thing.

Einar: Absolutely. When you're a support band, you have to fight three times as hard to earn people's attention. They usually don't care because they're not there to see you. I don't care myself - a lot of times I wind up ignoring the support bands. With all that said, I must admit that we couldn't have gotten where we are if it wasn't for the support tours we did before, with AMORPHIS and THERION in Europe. Quite strange combinations musically. It was not our normal audience obviously, but we managed to get some offers those fans converted. (laughter). But don't worry, we'll do support tours in the US too and it will all work out ok for us.

Milton: I don't have a single doubt that things are going to happen big time for LEPROUS.

Einar: Ah, thanks. It's nice to hear people that are more confident about you than yourself. (laughter) In all seriousness, I agree with you objectively. I think that if things continue progressing at the rate they're progressing now, I think it'll be very cool. It'll be very nice to get to that point. If we continue like that in the next 10 years, suddenly we'll be able to live off very well from it. It's tough to look at things subjectively though. It's how us humans are built, I guess.

Milton: What do you expect about the US shows?

Einar: I have absolutely no expectation from it just because I don't know what to expect. I have a bunch of mixed emotions about it. We'll be doing our best no matter what happens - whether it's playing for 10 people or 500 people, we're still going to do the exact same thing and make the best out of it. I'm really excited about doing the shows.

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VOODOO CIRCLE

Interview with Alex Beyrodt
by Greg Hasbrouck



Super-group Voodoo Circle is the brainchild of guitar wizard Alex Beyrodt. Alex took a break from his touring schedule with Primal Fear to discuss the origins of Voodoo Circle, his appreciation for the ProgPower family, and his love of the 'Snake. Alex also talks about the future of D.C. Cooper.

Greg: Can you speak a little about how your musical journey began?

Alex: When I was like thirteen or fourteen years old, I saw a German guitar player on T.V. and he was really famous by that time. He was an instrumentalist. He was playing only on one string. I said to my mom, "Hey look, he's playing only on one string. I can do that better. I want to have an electric guitar." This is actually how it started.

Greg: Did you ever take lessons?

Alex: No. I'm completely self-taught. When I was a little child my grandma had a piano, and I remember any time I visit her, I just sat at the piano and played melodies and started composing my own little pieces, when I was five, six, seven years old. So I've always had interest in music and I've always been able to create a melody on every instrument I could get my hands on. So I think that's a natural given talent I have. Actually when I started guitar playing, after one year I thought, "Well, maybe I should take some lessons." It's funny. A neighbor, he is a really good guitar player. I went there, we sat down, he put the sheet of music in front of me and he played this little kinder melody. I looked at him and I played it back. And he said, "No. You have to watch the sheet." And I said, "Yeah, but I just played it." And he said, "Yeah, but you have to watch the sheet." And I said, "No. I don't. I just played what you played." So that was the one and only lesson I ever had. (mutual laughter) Now I'm a little bit older and sometimes I wish I could play these really great

classical things like Bach and Mozart, because then you need to read music, because it's too difficult. But I got along well, so I'm pretty happy.

Greg: As a guitar player and a songwriter, who were the musicians who inspired you?

Alex: That was definitely Ritchie Blackmore (DEEP PURPLE, RAINBOW). You can hear that in my playing. I'm a big Blackmore fan and I love all the classic rock stuff like RAINBOW, DEEP PURPLE, LED ZEPPELIN. That's where I come from. I love (Jimi) Hendrix, I love the blues. That's basically my roots.

Greg: What inspired you to start VOODOO CIRCLE? And what led you to choose the musicians you chose?

Alex: Actually, I remember exactly how I started it. I started playing many live sessions in small clubs several years ago, with really famous German musicians. They sold millions of albums only in Germany. But whenever they had free time they would go to a club, to a bar, and just play. I got invited and I really enjoyed it. It was jamming like crazy. Sometimes you play only one song for one hour, and the crowd loves it. It's very musical and very inspiring. I did that for a while and then I asked the main guy, I said, "Hey, I know this singer, David Readman (PINK CREAM 69). He's a friend of mine. I would like to invite him to the session." He said, "OK. Bring him." And David came to the session and we played... it was unbelievable. After that, I remember David slept in my house and we drove back to my home, and while I'm driving I turned around and I said to him, "Hey David, you know what? We really should start a band which is able to jam and play these classic hard rock tunes. You have the voice, that bluesy voice, and you cannot show your bluesy style in PINK CREAM 69. So let's start a band." And he said, "Yeah, why not?"

By then, I had already written twenty or thirty songs in that direction. But I never thought to release it. I thought I was just expressing myself and writing music, because I always feel music and I have to write, otherwise I'll explode. So this is actually how the band started.

Greg: *Can you talk a little about how you compose? Does it all start with the riff? Is it a melody in your head?*

Alex: It's actually both ways. Sometimes I just pick up the guitar, noodle around, play a little bit and I have a great riff and I record it and start working on it. Or sometimes I drive in the car and I have a great vocal line and then I sing it into my iPhone, so I won't forget it and work it out later.

Greg: *Whenever you read reviews or fans discuss various bands, they always compare bands to other bands or label them as being in this genre or that genre. How do you see VOODOO CIRCLE's music?*

Alex: VOODOO CIRCLE is meant to be a child of DEEP PURPLE, RAINBOW and WHITESNAKE. And when I read that in a review I actually am happy, because that means I did it right. I have no problem when people say this sounds like RAINBOW. Yeah, it does! It's suppose to. (mutual laughter) It's suppose to sound like DEEP PURPLE meets RAINBOW meets WHITESNAKE. Because they are great bands and some of them don't exist anymore or don't write these kind of songs anymore. So hey, there's VOODOO CIRCLE and we do it.

Greg: *And it feels like the band is getting bluesier as it evolves. Would you agree?*

Alex: Absolutely. The band is going bluesier and each album we've recorded has a different influence. The debut album, I think, is more in the neo-classical direction. Then the second album, Broken Heart Syndrome, was more into RAINBOW. The third album, More Than One Way Home, is definitely very SNAKEish. I couldn't agree more, it is more bluesy and I intend the next album... I'm going to keep the bluesy elements in VOODOO CIRCLE, that's for sure.

Greg: *Are you one of those guys who's always writing? Have you already begun carving out songs for the next album?*

Alex: I'm constantly writing. Since I play in so many bands, I write in different styles also. But it feels the most natural to me to write the songs for VOODOO CIRCLE, because that's what I really feel and that's who I really am. Like I said, I constantly write songs and I already have, I think around thirty ideas and recorded demo tracks for the next album.

Greg: *You mentioned that you're involved with a number of bands. At this point, which one do you consider your primary project? Perhaps PRIMAL FEAR?*

Alex: I am a professional musician. Whenever I am on stage, on tour with PRIMAL FEAR, this is my priority. Whenever I'm on tour with VOODOO CIRCLE, it is my priority. I give priority to the band I work with in that moment.

Greg: *You've recorded with PRIMAL FEAR on their last two studio albums. Have you begun contributing more as your tenure has gone on?*

Alex: On Unbreakable there are a couple of songs I wrote... on Delivering the Black there's no songs from me and that's because during that time, when Mat (Sinner) and Magnus (Karlsson) started the songwriting process, I actually recorded the SILENT FORCE album. So I was not able to write songs for PRIMAL FEAR, because I gave priority to SILENT FORCE in that moment.

Greg: *What is the status of SILENT FORCE? Do you anticipate a follow-up to Rising From Ashes?*

Alex: The last album received very good reviews all over the world, so why not? Why not keep it alive?

Greg: *Much like you have a special chemistry with David, I felt you and D.C. Cooper also had a special chemistry. May I asked what happened that led to the end of that collaboration?*

Alex: It's actually pretty easy. D.C. received the offer to join back ROYAL HUNT. He actually called me and asked me what I think. And I told him, "You should do it. You should re-join ROYAL HUNT, because with you they have the most success and it's the best what you can do for your career." And we both agreed on that. And of course, then he started to be really busy with these guys, which is totally OK and normal. And by then, I was having problems in my private life. I went through a divorce and I moved to the Canary Islands. Everything went wrong down there, so I had to move back. So I was really busy to reinvent my private life. He was busy with his life, I was busy with my life, and when it came to the point to work on a new SILENT FORCE album I contacted D.C. and we talked about it. But we couldn't agree on the terms for a new SILENT FORCE album. So I said, "OK. Let's still be friends and you go your way and I'll go mine." And that's totally OK without any hassle or bad vibes.

Greg: *As long as we're talking about bandmates, you and Mat are in a number of bands together. How did your relationship begin with Mat?*

Alex: I first met Mat in 1985 when I was recording an album with my band at the time. I needed an acoustic guitar and the producer said, "Oh, I know this guy. He can borrow you one." So I borrowed a guitar from Mat. And then it happened that he sung some choirs on the album. That's when we first met. We didn't keep contact. But then in 1988 my band was playing on a newcomer festival. It was a contest, and actually SINNER were representing the jury. We won the contest and they were relooking for a new guitar player. After the show they approached me and asked me if I would like to have an audition. I was a fan of the band actually. I had all their albums. I knew all the songs. And of course I said, "Yes" and I had the audition. We've worked together since then.

Greg: *So you're playing ProgPower XV. This will be your third time at the festival. Do you have any memories from your previous visits?*

Alex: I have very good memories about it. I love it. It's like a big family. People come from over the world. It's very well organized, great sound system, great crew. I love it. I love being there. The fans love the music over there, they travel so far. It's like a Mecca for hard rock and metal. And I'm really looking forward to playing there this year with VOODOO CIRCLE.

Greg: *Currently VOODOO CIRCLE doesn't have any shows lined up before ProgPower. I'm curious, how do you guys approach the preparation for these one-off type festival appearances?*

Alex: Actually, it's pretty easy. We get together for a tour, two days before the tour, everybody is prepared, we play the songs, we jam and we work it out and then we go on tour. It's actually the same with every band I play with. It's the same with PRIMAL FEAR, it's the same with SINNER. We have two days of rehearsal, then we go on tour.

Greg: *And when you do your preparation, before those two days of rehearsal, do you have to go back and relearn those songs or do you just know them and can play them on queue?*

Alex: Some of them I can just play out of the blue, but most of them I have to sit down and relearn and see, "Oh, what I have I done here? How did I do that?" Because it's so much material, through all the years with all these bands, and it's impossible to remember it all instantly.

Greg: *Are you a fan of the type of music that's generally performed at ProgPower?*

Alex: No. I don't listen to metal at all actually. I stopped listening to metal many years ago. I don't want to offend anyone, but to me, it got boring. All these bands, they all sound the same, they all have the same look... that's also the reason I started VOODOO CIRCLE. I figured, there are no bands playing that type of music anymore and I can't find any kind of that music, so I have to do it myself... You know, there are so many people out there that love PURPLE, RAINBOW and WHITESNAKE. Millions of people. And they have no idea there is a band and it's called VOODOO CIRCLE and we make exactly that kind of music. These guys, they are probably my age, so they have family and they don't read the magazines anymore and they probably don't Google bands. They just stick with their old habits and listen to their old records. But there is a new band and it's really hard to find these people, so they will know about VOODOO CIRCLE. I don't know how I can make this, but I will keep trying.

Greg: *It must be incredibly frustrating when you know there's an audience out there, who would be very receptive to the music you write, but there just seems to be no way to make them aware of it and no clear method for altering that dynamic.*

Alex: It is really frustrating. Especially the last album. Every WHITESNAKE fan in the world would probably die for that album if they would know about it. But yeah. There are limitations in marketing and there are limitations in marketing budget, so I have to live with it, but it is frustrating.

Greg: *You mentioned you don't listen to metal. What do you listen to?*

Alex: Right now I love Joe Bonamassa and I dig him so much. I love Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Bonamassa, Rory Gallagher. All the good old stuff, Hendrix. I love BLACK COUNTRY COMMUNION. I love the EAGLES. Stuff like that.

Greg: *The question I always like to wrap up with is, what goals do you still have left for music? You've done so much over your career. Is there still something that stands out that you want to accomplish?*

Alex: I am a lucky guy. I've played with so many great musicians, also because I do the Rock Meets Classics thing. I've played with Ian Gillan, I've played with Glenn Hughes, I played Steve Lukather, Paul Rodgers, Alice Cooper. I've shared the stage with and played their biggest hits. And that is something I cannot think of any other musician in the world who did that. And that is something I thought would never happen to me. So I'm really thankful for that. I would love, really love to play with David Coverdale. That's my goal.



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ORDEN OGAN

Interview with Sebastian Levermann
by Greg Hasbrouck

Singer, guitar player, songwriter Sebastian "Seeb" Levermann takes some time out of his hectic recording schedule to discuss the rise of Germany's Orden Ogan. Seeb talks about the advantages of guitar playing over martial arts, his desire to grow the band in the U.S., and why Orden Ogan was a better band name than the alternative.

Greg: I know we've tried to do this a bunch of times, and I know that you're very busy in the studio, so thank you for making it work.

Sebastian: Yeah... it seems to be the most difficult interview of my career so far. (mutual laughter)

Greg: Hopefully the actual interview won't feel that way.

Seeb: You know, when I haven't spoken English for quite a while, it just takes me just a little bit to get into it again.

Greg: That brings up a question I hadn't thought of asking. Is it ever strange writing lyrics in a second language?

Seeb: Honestly, I think it's even more strange to write in German. When I try to write lyrics... everything sounds really stupid. I think it's because we're all used to listening to English music. One of the problems, as we are not native speakers, we have some problems with having the right feel for the words sometimes. That's why I often use native English speakers, like friends of mine from America, and ask them if they can help me... give them the lyrics and let them check and double-check.

Greg: Can you talk a bit about your path with music, both your voice and your guitar playing? And which did you develop first?

Seeb: I basically always wanted to do martial arts when I was a child. My mother was saying, "When your grades in school stay good, you can go to the gym and do martial arts." And then a friend of mine started playing the guitar and I was like, "Hmmm... let's think about this. Getting hit in the face or playing in a band?" So yeah, maybe I should do the guitar playing thing. We started out quite early. I started playing guitar when I was 12 or 13. Basically, the singing thing came from the need of having a singer when we started the band. Basically there was just nobody who could do it. I sounded terrible in the beginning. It took me quite a lot of work and some years later.

Greg: With respect to the guitar, did you have formal training or did you teach yourself?

Seeb: No, I had formal training in the beginning, like for two years. But it was just the basics, you know? I've always been a really creative guy. I started straight away to do other things on the guitar, just tried out a lot of stuff. Today it would be easier, because on YouTube you can find a lot of these tutorial videos, people showing how to play the guitar.

Greg: And what led you to this style of music?

Seeb: It's a really funny thing actually. I listened to Metal already when I was in Kindergarten. Back in the days I used to go to camp. There were all these heavy metal guys running around with IRON MAIDEN shirts. I was always into monsters and horror movie stuff, even when I was a child. There was a certain fascination with this stuff. And I was like, "That shirt looks cool. What is the band?" And one of the guys said, "SEPULTURA." I think SEPULTURA Arise was the first metal tape I had and after that ...And Justice for All. I think still today, SEPULTURA Arise is one of the greatest thrash records ever made. Maybe I just had good luck with this particular record.

Greg: I've read a number of things online about the origins of the band's name. Can you clear it up once and for all?

Seeb: We used to tell interviewers different stories about the name. I think it was quite funny for the most part. But our management and the record company said, "You know guys, you should really tell those people what the real name of the band is, because everyone is getting more and more confused." (mutual laughter) Here's the real story. "Orden" is the German word for "order", with monks, you know? And "Ogan" is old Celtic for "fear". Basically it's the "order of fear". The alternative would have been "ANGEL TEARS". So basically, ORDEN OGAN is a terrible name for a band, but ANGEL TEARS would have been even worse. (mutual laughter)

Greg: I know you're currently in the studio recording the new record. Can you talk a little about your songwriting process. Is it all you? Is it collaborative?

Seeb: The last record was basically just me. In the past, I would still say I had the most part of it. But we had no other choice with *To the End*, because we lost three musicians, Ghnu, the keyboard player Nils, and the bass player Lars (Schneider). The new guys were just coming into the band and just getting started. I think new musicians always need a little

bit of time to really get into the band. With the new record it was something different. I did a lot of stuff with our drummer Dirk (Meyer-Berhorn). He's not playing any harmonic or musical instruments, just the rhythm thing, the drums. That's interesting because he always has a completely different view. Also our new bass player Niels (Löffler) contributed one, almost complete song to the record. Which makes me very happy because I don't like being the dictator.

Greg: I understand. However, as an established act, people have expectations of what an ORDEN OGAN record should sound like. Do you worry at all about how new members will impact that sound?

Seeb: No. I don't worry about that because I respect their musical abilities and they respect my abilities as a songwriter and as the head of the band. So if somebody comes in with an idea and I don't think it fits, I will say, "No. We don't do it." And they're all fine with it. So they basically show me ideas, show me songs that they are working on and I will say, "Yeah, let's think about this, let's delete that." That's why I don't worry about that.

Greg: You noted you lost a significant number of members prior to the writing of *To the End*. Do you think that's why it's more of a straight forward record than *Easton Hope*? And by "more straight forward", I simply mean less layered, less bombastic.

Seeb: I absolutely agree with that and I appreciate your view of things, because a lot of other people didn't get that at first. It absolutely was our intention to go in that direction with that material. Because we just wanted to do a really straight forward, in your face metal record. And I still think it has got a lot to offer musically. I still think that *To the End* is not a really easy listen. There's still a lot of stuff happening in the songs. The new one, which we're working on right at the moment, is even a little more in that direction, even more simplistic. There's still orchestral elements, there's still choirs, but a lot of the songs are a little easier than they are on *To the End* or *Easton Hope*. Basically we started to scale that back a little bit. *Easton Hope* is an interesting record, especially for musicians or people who really want to go deep into the music and listen to it, and do nothing but listen to it. We had songs on the *Easton Hope* record where we had twenty six different parts in a seven minute song. And if you're not focusing on the music totally, than it's very likely that you just don't get it. That you just don't understand what's happening there. I know we can write these seven minute monsters, prog monsters, but the truth is easier songs just work better for fans in the live situation. I think the

approach is not to say that we're writing "easier songs", but that we're focusing a lot more on choruses on this very new one now.

Greg: It seems the formula is working. The last record hit #41 on the German charts. Were you at all surprised by that? Or was there a sense that you had been building towards that?

Seeb: You've got these trend charts, so you can see that it could possibly go there one week before. So it was not that surprising. It was not like a call and somebody saying, "You guys are #41." It was more like a call and somebody saying, "Yeah, you are really at #41." I have to say, that back at that time, I was so busy with doing other stuff and interviews and whatsover that it was more like, "Well, OK. Great." Then I had the time to be shocked. On the other hand, we also didn't have the time to do a party or something like that. We should have done that. We've been working on the band for some years now, as you might know. It always keeps getting bigger and bigger. From time to time you're missing the moments where you can just sit back and really enjoy that and see what you've reached.

Greg: Now that you've hit the charts, do you feel a level of pressure that you hadn't previously? Maybe from fans? From the record company? From yourself?

Seeb: I had been asked that a lot in the interviews before the To the End record and I absolutely did not feel any pressure at all. If there's a chart entry or a lot of festivals and fans or whatever or not, we would do this just for us still. But with this one, I have to say, "Yes", I did feel some sort of pressure as I have the feeling that basically everybody is looking at us at the moment, but it is not a problem for me... Now as all the demos are done, I'm pretty confident that it will turn out to be a strong record.

Greg: Do you have an idea yet when it will be released?

Seeb: Yes. I think it will come on the 9th of January (2015).

Greg: And do you have an album title yet?

Seeb: It is not 100% confirmed, but I think it will be Ravenhead. Not because of the head of the raven, because it's about an abbey that is on a mountain and the ravens are flying over this abbey. It's also connected with a story of some sort of witch with black hair that is buried in a lake, in front of that abbey.

Greg: You guys are playing ProgPower 15. Were you aware of the festival before you were invited by Glenn (Harveston)?

Seeb: Yes we were. We were talking to our booking agent for years saying, "We have to play there." (laughter) And Glenn was like, "Yeah, I like the band. Maybe next year."

Greg: Is there any additional excitement or anticipation that comes with your first U.S. appearance?

Seeb: Yes. Absolutely. I'm also really looking forward to that because the show is going to be recorded. So that is always great for bonus material or for a DVD release. I think it will be great. It's not my first time in the states. I've been in the states with a band called SUIDAKRA from Germany. It was 2009. It was a really, really great tour. It was really a lot of fun in the states. The audiences were, for the most part, really great. And I have really good memories from that tour. That's also one reason why I'm really, really looking forward to being in the states with my own band for the first time.

Greg: The band has a distinct look - almost post-apocalyptic. How did that come about?

Seeb: It was just for this record. It's a "lose concept", I like to have at least a lose concept for the records. I don't think it's too good to have a complete concept record, because it can be very limiting at times. The To the End record plays in this post-apocalyptic, time age scenario. We shot the video for "The Things We Believe In" first, and the guy who had the outfits for us, that we're wearing in the video, was like, "You know what. I can do stage costumes for you guys as well." And we were like, "Yes. Why not?" But we will be going back from that to another outfit on this record.

Greg: Finally, do you have goals in mind that you're striving toward?

Seeb: The interesting thing is that the biggest goal already is achieved, from my point of, because I'm already able to make my living out of the band. I can pay my car and my apartment and stuff like that. There's still a lot of things that we did not reach. We're, for the most part, unknown in the states. I think it's a great country for metal bands. My opinion, from what I saw on the SUIDAKRA tour... I mean there are a lot of people that are saying, "The USA is dead for metal. Don't focus too much on that. You don't sell records over there." Blah, blah, blah. I have to say, I had a completely different impression when I was on that tour. Of course, we're still not the biggest band in Germany either. There's still some way to go to headline a festival like Wacken. But I don't like putting myself or the guys under too much pressure. It was maybe different when we were a little younger. But meanwhile it's like, come on, let's just do what we do and what we can do, and what happens, happens. And what does not happen, does not happen.

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DIVIDED MULTITUDE

Interview with Christer Harøy
by Greg Hasbrouck



How does a band get invited to Prog-Power USA? Simple... just release the promoter's favorite record of 2013. Norwegian guitarist and songwriter Christer Harøy sits down to discuss the evolution of Divided Multitude, what's next for the band, and plans for a new Teodor Tuff album.

Greg: So, how did the show with KAMELOT go last night?

Christer: Oh, it was really great. It was a good audience. It was like 500 people I think. It was really hot and really crowded. It was really cool.

Greg: Does DIVIDED MULTITUDE get a lot of opportunities to open up for bands in the genre when they come through your part of Norway?

Christer: Not really. But when bands come to

Trondheim we try to get the gigs. We've played with CIRCUS MAXIMUS and PAGAN'S MIND and all the Norwegian bands.

Greg: Let's start at the beginning. Can you talk a bit about how you got your start with music?

Christer: My father is a musician, so we had loads of guitars back home. I just started playing some chords and some melodies, when I was seven, eight I guess. Then I started to play the drums. I did that till I was like twelve. Then I started to play guitar again. And I always wanted to play in a band, so when I was like fourteen, fifteen we started a band, a cover band, playing JUDAS PRIEST. That's really how it started.

Greg: So you learned everything by ear? Guitar? Drums?

Christer: Not any formal learning. But my father showed me the chords and stuff because he's a guitar player himself. And a bunch of friends taught each other in a way.

Greg: Was there an album or a performance that inspired you to pursue music?

Christer: It's hard to pinpoint one, but when I heard Master of Puppets album I was like, "Wow! This is amazing."

Greg: As someone whose music training was more organic than formal, were there any specific guitar players you modeled yourself after?

Christer: It's kind of a mish mash. I've always liked the riffing guitar players like James Hetfield, Scott Ian and Dimebag Darrell. I love those guys. But I also love Steve Vai and Joe Satriani of course. So it's kind of a mix. But I try not to model myself. Just do my stuff and see what happens.

Greg: Can you talk about how the origins of DIVIDED MULTITUDE?

Christer: We were just a bunch of friends, talking about starting a cover band really. Playing some OZZY OSBOURNE, and talked about playing (inaudible) and stuff. So we just met to have a rehearsal and we ended up jamming on some riffs. In a way, it just turned out to be a song. And then we thought it was very cool that we had written our own music, so we just continued doing that.

Greg: One of the things that struck me as I began to research your band, is that the lineup has remained intact for twenty years. That's a rarity these days. What do you attribute it to?

Christer: The bass player is my brother. (mutual laughter) The keyboard player Eskild Kloften, we've known each other since we were kids. We're just good friends and like to play in a band. And Sindre (Antonsen) the singer is also a really good friend.

Greg: *Is there a story behind the band's name? Or did you simply like the sound of it?*

Christer: It's both really. We thought about making it a paradox in a way. If a multitude is divided it's no longer a multitude. So that was the idea behind it.

Greg: *Is it intended to speak to the style of the music as well, as that particular paradox seems appropriate for the music you play?*

Christer: Yeah. It kind of reflects what we're doing. But we don't try to think too much about how to write music, just come up with riffs, put it together as a song, and shape it to the thing we think is coolest. Throughout the twenty years we have changed a bit, our vision of how music should sound. In the beginning, we'd had like fifteen riffs. Let's do them all in a song, and the song was like ten minutes long. But now we try to keep it more effective. You don't need that many riffs and that many themes in a song, just keep it effective and keep the attention of the listener really close.

Greg: *What does your writing process look like these days? Do you write together or is it more based upon file sharing?*

Christer: Me and Eskild have our own studios at home, so record a sort of demos and send around. And the rest of the guys listen to it and they come to the rehearsal room to work them out, to find the changes that must be done. Maybe add some stuff or take away some stuff from the ideas. So basically me and Eskild come out with our ideas and share them on MP3s and the guys listen to them and we meet in the rehearsal room to make a song out of it.

Greg: *Looking at your discography, it would appear you released full length albums in '99, 2001, 2002 and then not again until 2010. Was there a reason for that substantial layoff?*

Christer: One of the albums was just a demo I sent to some labels to shop for a contract. The reason for the delay is, the label we were signed to, Elevate Records, went out of business and we had to start all over again. We were low on motivation, played just a couple of gigs a year, didn't write many new songs and I played for a number of years in a band called TRIOSPHERE at the same time. I left TRIOSPHERE and just got the band together and said, "Let's make a new album."

Greg: *So at this point in the band's career, are you just taking it album by album, or do you have something of longer term strategy?*

Christer: Now it's more long term. With the new label, we work with a label called Fireball Records, it's a Norwegian label. I run the label and the guitar player in a band called TEODOR TUFF, he (Knut Lysklætt) owns the label. We run it together. We work with Nightmare Records, and we have great companionships with loads of other records and distributions. We will do it this way.

Greg: *Let's talk a moment about TEODOR TUFF. I love your debut album. Are there plans to do a follow-up?*

Christer: Yes sir. We have recorded some demos. We're thinking about releasing a single, maybe in September and hope to have the album done by December.

Greg: *Do you find that it's similar in style to the debut, or do you find that you're going in a different direction?*

Christer: No. It's the same thing I think.

Greg: *One of the things I'm always curious about, when a guitar player and songwriter splits his time between two bands, when you write a riff, is it always obvious which band the riff will fit best?*

Christer: Some riffs could have been used in both bands. But I think DIVIDED MULTITUDE is maybe a bit more aggressive and a bit more heavy. But it's really got some similarities in both bands, so I could have used some riffs in both bands.

Greg: *So let's jump back to DIVIDED MULTITUDE. Feed on Your Misery got really good reviews. Were you happy with how the record was received?*

Christer: Oh yeah, really, really. We were really excited because we thought the album was good, the production was good. We knew this product was good for us and we wanted to just push it as far as we could with touring and making videos. The reception of the album was really good.

Greg: *And apparently those good reviews paid*



off. I came to learn of it because Glenn (Harveston) posted on the ProgPower forum that it was his favorite album of 2013. So I guess it's no surprise you're playing the festival.

Christer: We've always dreamt about playing this festival. For years we've been trying to get there. This year he really liked the album and he sent me an e-mail and asked me if we wanted to play and I said, "Of course!"

Greg: *It sounds like you were aware of the festival prior to being invited. Do you head in with any specific expectations? And I know it's your first time playing the U.S., does that hold any significance to you?*

Christer: Oh yeah, oh yeah. We're really, really excited. We're really looking forward to it. We've heard so many good things about the festival. Every band that's played there has said, "Oh, ProgPower USA is so amazing! Last night I talked to Elize Ryd (AMARANTHE) and she said, "Oh? ProgPower USA? You guys have something to look forward to." Everyone is saying that. Also the guys in FATES WARNING said, "Oh yeah, you got to go!"

Greg: *So when you play a festival like ProgPower, which tends to feature a lot of musicians at the top of their game, are you aware of that in the back of mind? Do you put any pressure on*

yourself to bring your "A-game" or does it never even enter your mind?

Christer: Yeah, of course. But when we hit the stage I'm really, really focused on sounding good as a band. I forget it's for an audience. Of course, I'm really aware when you play festivals with guitar players like (inaudible) or Jorn Viggo (PAGAN'S MIND), those great guitar players, you have to be really, really good to make an impression, or at least don't fuck up. (mutual laughter)

Greg: *Do you have a timeframe in mind for the next DIVIDED MULTITUDE record? Or are you sort of alternating between DIVIDED MULTITUDE and TEODOR TUFF?*

Christer: At the moment I'm doing both. Also Eskild, the keyboard player in DIVIDED MULTITUDE, has recorded two demos already, so we hope to have a new album out early next year. It's kind of 20th anniversary and we want to have an album out and play some festivals. And maybe even re-record a few old songs as well.

Greg: *As bonus tracks? Or are you hoping to introduce people to material you felt might have been overlooked?*

Christer: I'm not sure how to do it yet. It may end up as bonus tracks. Some of the material from the first album are great songs but have a lousy production.

Greg: *At this point, what do you see as the big hurdle into getting DIVIDED MULTITUDE to that next level or to wherever it is you want to take this band?*

Christer: Our goal is to make albums, tour and hope it grows bigger and bigger. The industry is really hard these days, because nobody buys the albums and everybody wants everything for free; so it's hard to get money for touring. Luckily in Norway we have some funds, and now we have a big loan in the bank as well. We made a great tour with FATES WARNING in October.

Greg: *You mentioned the current state of the record industry. Do you feel as if there's just too much music out there and that the market is oversaturated?*

Christer: I don't know. Maybe. Because it's really easy to record an album and get it out on the internet, on iTunes or Spotify. You don't have to be on a label. So everybody can release an album. It's also a good thing, I think. You can have access to all this music. But I'm old school this way, I buy CDs still.

Greg: *What goals do you still have for your music? What, if anything, do you still want to accomplish with music?*

Christer: Yeah. There are so many things I haven't done yet, that I want to do with music. I want to tour the U.S. of course and I want to tour South America. I've heard that is real cool. And I also want to play in Asia. I've never played there either.

Greg: *Is that something you consider a more far off goal something think may be on the horizon?*

Christer: It's on the horizon.

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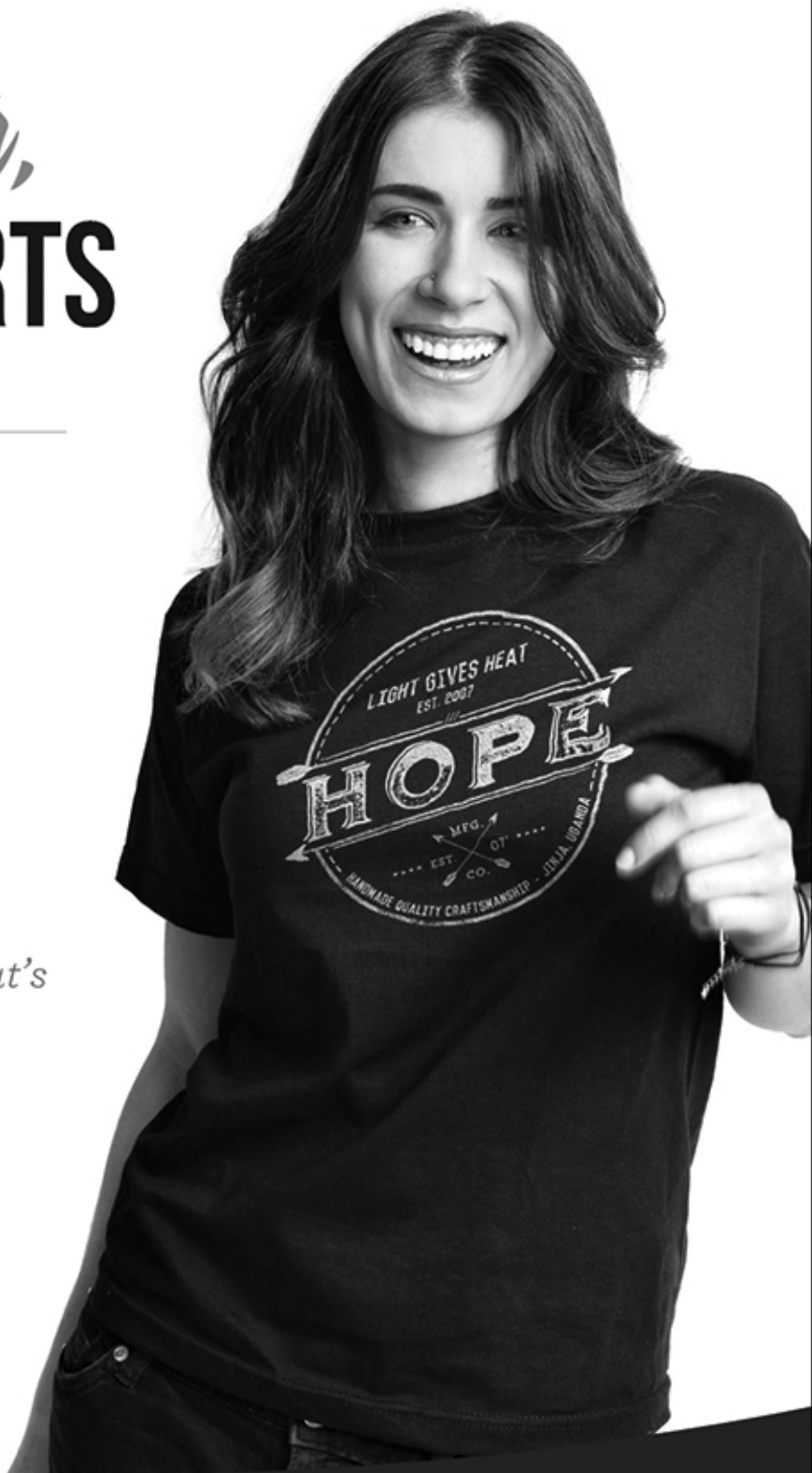
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NEED

Interview with Ravaya and Jon V.
by Greg Hasbrouck

Greek import Need will kick off the Friday night festivities with their first U.S. appearance. Before doing so, Jon and Ravaya take some time to discuss the meaning of "Orvam", how touched they've been by the connection fans feel to their music, and reveal the startling warm up techniques of Jon Oliva.

Greg: To start out, can each of you talk a bit about how you began your musical journey?

Ravaya: I started playing Classical guitar, but wanted to be in a Rock band. So I got my first electric guitar and started writing songs. That's basically it.

Jon: For me, I got really late into the game. I use to listen to music a lot as a kid. Hard Rock and Heavy Metal, stuff like that. But I got into a band, quite by accident, at the age of twenty. A friend of mine was looking for a singer, and I had never sung in a band before or anything. And I thought, "What the hell? Let's go to practice and see how it goes." I started from there on.

Greg: At any point, did either of you seek out formal training? Or is everything you do by feel?

Jon: For me, I'm completely self-taught. I've never had a vocal lesson.

Ravaya: I practice all the time, because I suck at guitar (mutual laughter). So I practice all the time, but I'm struggling with the instrument.

Jon: What has worked, over the years, is advice from other singers. Be it well known singers, that I've met, people I admire, or fellow singers that sometimes they throw some piece of advice and they go, "You should try this or that." And I find that some of these things stick with me and some don't, but that's how I've found several tricks or ways to sing better.

Greg: Is there one particular piece of advice that's been particularly useful?

Jon: A few years back I use to do a warm up exercise that Jon Oliva taught me. I use to hold my tongue, with a towel, and sing. It warms up your vocal chords. It's funny. A few years later I was at an after gig party with Messiah (Marcolin) from CANDLEMASS and he said, "I use this very cool warm up trick that Jon Oliva taught me. Do you know him?" (mutual laughter) But yeah, that's a trick that's stuck with me throughout the years.

Greg: Can you talk a bit about how NEED came together?

Ravaya: I was in this band called DEADMAN'S TALE. Two of the guys from that band went on to form WASTE FALL. I was basically stuck; me and Anthony (Hatzis) our keyboard player.

I wanted to do something, so I recorded this demo called AVOIDINME. Basically there was no activity after that. I had written most of the music for The Wisdom Machine. I wasn't looking for members, but I was just hoping that somebody would show up. I had this deadline in my mind; if in six months I find no one, then I get all my guitars and burn them. (mutual laughter) Seriously. And then Jon and I were in this theater production, and the one thing that stood out was he was wearing a FATES WARNING shirt. So he listened to the song and was like, "Let's do this, let's do this." We started NEED.

Jon: That was nine years ago. We started working on the songs from the first album. We found the members. From then on we have been partners in crime.

Greg: NEED seems to be one of those bands that drives reviewers crazy, because you're impossible to neatly shoehorn into some larger genre. How do you like to describe the music you write?

Jon: On the label of our first CD they required a label from us, so what we thought at the time, but now it seems a little stupid, we wrote "Modern Metal". It has actually no sub genre at all. Just Metal, but in a modern way. We play how we want to listen to Metal nowadays. No attachments to the past. Of course we use the influence from the past, but we wanted to play something that sounds contemporary. I guess that now we fit into the more progressive kind of sub genre, but not in the typical way.

Ravaya: At one point they thought we were Nu Metal.

Jon: Because we had some sections that reminded of DREAM THEATER, parts that reminded of GODSMACK or MACHINEHEAD. That made the reviewers crazy.



Greg: You've alluded to the evolution in your sound and there's a huge evolution between Siamese God and Orvam. While I hear some more modern influences, perhaps some NEVERMORE influence on Siamese God, I would say the new album is more traditionally progressive.

Jon: How would you describe our music?

Greg: That's tough. Right off the bat I'd call it "progressive". But after that I'd be lost, I'd just be making shit up to be honest with you. It's hard to say. Which is refreshing.

Jon: That's what we've always thought. It's why we've never followed any formula to write music. That was always a compliment to us, not to be able to categorize (our music). From what I have read from reviews and what people have told us. It's not in a bad way. It's not like we just throw random pieces of influences together; we just try to blend it in our own way.

Greg: What does the word "Orvam" mean? Is it a Greek word? Is it an English word I've never heard?

Jon: If you read the verse, it's mávros. Mávros in Greek means "black". But our album is not black, it's Orvam. It's the reverse of black. It's not black. It's not white. It's Orvam.

Greg: And do you see it as a concept album or is it more reflective of your headspace at the time of its writing?

Jon: It kind of reflects the whole mood that we were in during the composing period. It's not a story from start to finish. It's not a concept album in that sense. It has a similar mood between songs.

Ravaya: For me it's a course of someone or many people, or a way of thinking, and it progresses... there's a screen with no resolution. Which is bad from a screenwriting point of view, but whatever. But the sure thing is that we have many (inaudible) with this album, and I think we're going to have to work through it on our next release.

Greg: You're playing ProgPower 15. In this case, one band's misfortune is another band's good fortune. Had Glenn been in touch with you prior to THOUGHT CHAMBER's cancellation?

Jon: Glenn sent me an e-mail a couple of months before that... When I got Glenn's e-mail, I forwarded it right away to Ravaya. I said, "Check this out. This guy is the promoter of ProgPower and he said he really loved the album. That's awesome!" After that we had a couple of e-mails back and forth, and he said mainly that he was really interested in the band and that he was thinking of having us on the roster for the 2015 edition of ProgPower... Then a couple of months later he sent me an e-mail and

said, "I have a spot open. Are you interested?" And we were crazed out of our minds!

Greg: This will also be your first U.S. appearance. Is that a big deal for you guys?

Ravaya: We've been talking a lot about this. We said, we don't know what's going to happen in the future, but surely this has got to be the high point for our band. If we do this and nothing happens after that, it's still something. And for us it's the most anticipated moment of our band life.

Greg: What goals, if any, do you have for NEED?

Ravaya: Our biggest goal is to be in the moment and make music that we love, and stay healthy and continue to make that music for as long as we can, come whatever may.

Jon: For me it's always been about playing the songs that express you and be able to perform.

WITHEM

Interview with Oyvind Larsen
and Miguel Pereira
by Milton Mendonca

What happens when you take the brainchild of one of the most promising melodic prog metal bands to come out of Europe and mix him with an even more impressive array of musicians? Great music, of course. Oyvind Larsen and Miguel Pereira talk about conceiving Withem, their anticipation of playing ProgPower USA, and most importantly, Progressive Barbecuing.

Milton: Hi guys, it's a pleasure to speak to you.

Oyvind: Hey Milton, long time no talk. We have gypsy boy Miguel on the line too. (laughter)

Miguel: Hi there Milton.

Milton: I apologize for being late, but nice to connect finally! Oyvind, you're returning to, as you called it last time, "The land of the holy donuts."

Oyvind: (laughter) That is right!

Milton: How does it feel to come back this time with WITHEM?

Oyvind: Exciting and scary at the same time! It's like going on a date with the hottest chick in the world. It's very exciting and nerve-racking.

Miguel: I think the US is like second home for him. He's always there on vacation, so I'm sure he's been sleeping with this hot chick already. (mutual laughter)

Milton: How many times has it been, Oyvind?

Oyvind: I think about six times now. I love it there. The culture, the food. Especially the junk food. Last time I was in New York. I love going there and eating as much as possible. You remember our chat about the food last time right? (laughter)

Milton: What stuck in your mind from the last trip to Atlanta at ProgPower USA with ILLUSION SUITE?

Oyvind: I remember everybody being very nice. Very different from back home because everybody is so "incredibly" over there. I remember hugging people all the time, hanging out with everyone, people being super friendly. It was very heartwarming. When you play shows in Europe, at least the ones I've played up here, people are a little more distant. At ProgPower USA, it feels like everyone wants a piece of you, which is cool. Everybody likes attention. (laughter)

Milton: That speaks volumes about the ProgPower USA community, I think. It shows that it's not just a random group of 1,200 people going to see some music. People really care.

Oyvind: Absolutely! It was so cool to see the poster that the community makes with everyone's photos on it. Maybe I should send my picture this time around. And our signing session was super cool as well. Lots of people!

Milton: That's great. You are coming back with a different band this time around. In our interview a few years ago, you were still very excited about the future of ILLUSION SUITE at the time. Needless to say, something happened along the way and gave birth to WITHEM.

Oyvind: Well, to make a long story short, it didn't work out between us in ILLUSION SUITE. I wanted to move forward. Let me think of how I can say this without talking shit about them. (laughter) I wanted to play music with people that had the same appetite to music that I have. I wanted everyone to be on the same page there. It wasn't the case. So I had been in a studio project with Frank, WITHEM's drummer and we clicked right away. He played drums in a band called DIMENSION ACT. He was the kind of guy I wanted to work with. I loved his work attitude. We decided to try for something else. Our singer was a guy who I had always wanted to work with. It just worked out from there.

Milton: You also had Andreas from SEVENTH WONDER record bass on the album.

Oyvind: Yes, which was great and not so smart at the same time, because we knew it'd be damn near impossible to find a bassist that could pull off Andreas' playing. But one day, I was walking down the street and saw this gypsy all dirty laying on the ground in his own piss. The moment I laid my eyes on him, I knew I wanted him in the band. He actually could play bass too! Right Miguel? (mutual laughter)

Miguel: That's me, the proud one! (laughter)

Oyvind: In all seriousness now, I received an email from a friend who was talking about this Portuguese bassist he knew and was looking for a band. He sent me a picture of him, and he was the very typical Portuguese guy with a beard and a mustache.

Miguel: The mustache is what keeps me Portuguese. (laughter) I had been looking for a band since I moved to Norway, really. I wanted to find a progressive metal band as it's the style I've been playing for many years and that I love. It was very natural for me to apply for the job with WITHEM when I found out they needed a bassist. The audition went great, the guys and I got along really well. We all have the same type of sense of humor and that's very important when you spend so much time together. For me, it's like a dream come true to play great music with great people.

Milton: Must be quite a feeling indeed to have things change over night so to speak.

Miguel: Yeah, it's fantastic. I have always worked as a freelance musician and always just played whatever that paid. In Portugal, the progressive scene is narrow, to say the least. I never had a chance to play the music I enjoyed. I have been able to combine the best of both worlds with WITHEM: playing in a serious, touring band while playing the music I love at the same time.

Milton: How did you guys hook up with Ken at Sensory?

Oyvind: Ken was one of the

guys we sent the material back and forth to, and kept him updated at every step since he was interested from day one. We had other label options as well, and at the end we went with the best option in my opinion. Ken gives me hell when the best something wrong, and I like that. I almost deleted Skype because I wouldn't dare talking to him. I was hiding from him. (laughter) I knew Ken a bit from earlier too, since our friends in CIRCUS MAXIMUS were signed to him as well. He also makes good ribs, I hear. Every time he posts his food pictures on the internet, I want to lick the screen. (mutual laughter)

Milton: It's all about the progressive BBQ style.

Oyvind: Yes! But a progressive rib, how would that work? You take a bite and at first it's sweet, and then as you go deep into the meat, the flavor changes? (mutual laughter)

Milton: I think you also have to change the number of chews with every piece of meat.

Miguel: Let's not forget the poly-chewing. Two with the right side, then one left, and so on. (mutual laughter)

Oyvind: You start eating your rib, and when you get to the halfway point, all of a sudden it grows and gets bigger again.

Milton: For sure. So new band, new album... aside from the obvious, how is it going to be different for you to be at ProgPower USA?

Oyvind: Well, for me it'll be a little scarier this time around. The comments that we hear from people, from Glenn... We have a lot to live up to, and we haven't done too many live shows. It's a little nerve-racking but we just have to do our best to deliver a good show. It's scary and exciting. It will be the highlight of our career so far, without question. When that email arrived, I remember very well. We were at rehearsal actually. Miguel had just joined the band the week before and I had been discussing things with Glenn for a while. I said "Guys, I got this email from Glenn. Not sure what it really means. Miguel, can you read this aloud for everyone?" (laughter)

Miguel: The same night I went to look through the festival's history as far as bands who have played. I realized that I will be the very first Portuguese musician to ever play ProgPower USA. I was damn proud! (laughter) I should inform the Portuguese media!

Milton: And finally, what can the ProgPower audience expect from WITHEM's show?

Oyvind: The only thing I can say is that we're just going to do our absolute best. Bear with us as we're a new band, but we'll give all we can for sure.



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